

Parents urged to fight for student spaces

By KATE GILDERDALE
In spite of blizzard conditions outside, St. Mark's gym was packed Thursday night for a public meeting on overcrowding and the need for an extension to cope with rapidly increasing enrolment.

Mayor Fran Sainsbury pointed out this community has shown its ability to fight, citing the airport and landfill site as examples.

She addressed the problems of being a small community in a rapidly growing province.

"Our population is 17,700 now. In 2,000 it will be 25,000 and 30,000 by the year 2,011. Dulverton alone has brought in 1,500, and groundwork for that was laid 15 years ago. We still don't have a school."

Mrs. Sainsbury noted provincial policy is a major roadblock. "There has to be an occupancy rate of at least 80 per cent in new developments before a school will even be considered", she said. The Ministry would not look at a new school until 400-500 children were housed in portables.

"The only way to correct the situation is money, and most of your tax dollars go to the province, not the municipality. You are going to have to fight hard," said the Mayor. "Small municipalities are not a priority with the government."

Nine portables possible

Monica Foley, guild member, presented the positive side of the funding problem first. She pointed out as a result of making their presence felt at board level, the school was granted \$50,000 for improvements such as new carpets, blinds and books.

However, Mrs. Foley said to keep up with growth, more space was urgently needed. "The school was built over 20 years ago with an enrollment of 257 students. In 1986 there were 339 students with five portables on site. In the current school year there are 371 students with six portables and projected enrolment for September is 410 with the possibility of nine portables."

Mrs. Foley then gave a slide presentation on the effects of portables on students, which showed facilities in the main building were inadequate for the present enrollment and that,

among other problems, the portables gave students a sense of isolation from the school.

Quality education

In conclusion Mrs. Foley said: "At St. Mark's we believe in quality education. It is really important we provide the best for our children. We have limited resources and we need the extension now."

Lucille Linton congratulated parents on such a strong turnout. She explained why funding was such an acute problem.

"The growth in York Region is the largest in Canada and this is the fastest growing board in North America," she pointed out. "By the mid-1990s we will have doubled our current rate, going from 15,000 in 1975 to a projected 75,000 by the middle of the next decade." Ms. Linton noted most other boards were not growing rapidly and this made it more difficult to convince the province of the urgency here.

Maintain standards

"This school needs that addition to meet provincial standards," she said. She urged parents to keep up pressure at every level to achieve this objective.

According to figures presented by MPP Bill Ballinger, \$1.7 billion is needed to cover education needs in the province in 1989. The minimum required to cover emergency needs is \$700 million, but the actual projected dollar amount for the year is \$300 million.

"We realize in Ontario we are running way behind capital needs," said Mr. Ballinger. He noted allocations for the York Separate School Board will be

announced at an April Meeting with education Minister Chris Ward.

Competition for funding is fierce according to Mr. Ballinger, not only from other schools but also from other areas, particularly health care which now accounts for one-third of the budget.

50 per cent

"For 1987 the increase in capital allowance was 50 per cent higher," he said. "We are trying to catch up, but it's not easy."

Mr. Ballinger encouraged parents to keep writing to the minister. "Smaller communities have a tough time getting higher on the priority list. We are dealing with 10 years of under-funding."

In response to a question from the floor, Lucille Linton explained the basis for funding priorities.

"Funding is based on looking at all the current needs and how each school would be affected if funding were denied." She cited situations in which some schools would be forced to adopt a shift system if funds were not allocated. "These situations are a higher priority than schools with portables," she explained.

Ann Pride, President of the Parents' guild told parents Bill Ballinger and Lucille Linton had been very supportive of St. Mark's. To support their initiative she urged parents to continue writing letters, and to keep up pressure on the ministry with phone calls.

"In our next newsletter we will be publishing a number of phone numbers and we encourage you all to keep calling

them," she said. Mrs. Pride suggested parents contact the ministry before April 1st, when Mr. Ward will announce spring funding allocations for the York Separate School Board.

Lobbying vital

The message that came across clearly from all speakers on Thursday night was sustained lobbying is vital to give the school a voice at the provincial level, and there seems little doubt the school's representatives are working hard to make that voice heard.

Mrs. Pride introduced Principal Barbara Bodkin, guild

member Monica Foley, Board Trustee Lucille Linton and Mayor Fran Sainsbury. Area MPP Bill Ballinger, who was due to speak, had been held up and arrived during the meeting.

Mrs. Bodkin praised the St. Mark's parents for their initiative in setting up the meeting. "St. Mark's has an excellent, strong and articulate guild," she said.

She pointed out teaching has changed greatly in the 22 years since the school was built, and that programs such as special education put even greater pressure on facilities at the school.

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