

EDUCATION: Mould problems forced closure of Our Lady of Grace in Aurora.

Separate board considers new school building

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

York Region's Catholic school board will lobby the provincial government for funds to finance construction of a new elementary school in Aurora if the costs of repairing the condemned facility continue to skyrocket.

The doors at Our Lady of Grace school have been locked since May 14 after the region's health department ordered the building closed following the discovery of 10 strains of toxic mould.

Despite the fact a recent community survey revealed 85 per cent of parents polled want a completely new school, the board began the lengthy process of rebuilding the school last month, beginning with the removal of the interior and exterior drywall panels, plus all of the brick encasing the building.

However, separate board chairperson Elizabeth Crowe said their approach may change if estimates from various contractors begin to exceed the \$1.7-million remediation price tag from the project architect.

It would cost about \$3.5 million to erect a new school, added Crowe, since the cinder block core structure surrounding the gymnasium is salvageable from the 13-year-old facility.

"With our current estimates, we are still going ahead with the remediation," Crowe said. "But if it starts to be close to the cost of a new school, we can petition the government that it is derelict."

"We have always compared the costs of the remediation versus a new school and we have always considered the possibility of tearing down the school and rebuilding around the gymnasium core. I can sympathize with the parents because I am not in the school and I don't have my kids in the school."

In September, staff and students from Our Lady of Grace will occupy the former Oak Ridges Public School. They spent the final six weeks of school at Seneca College in King City, but Garrock Hall is not available this fall.

Talk of a new OLG school is welcome news to school council chairperson Charmaine Barker.

"This is a very different message from the school board than the one we have been receiving for the past two months. Funding is still a big issue, but this is an absolute turnaround," Barker said.

"I would think that if the remediation costs go past \$2 million, you build a new school around the gym. There is nothing wrong with the gym because it was built as a permanent structure."

Meanwhile, the Catholic board has already drawn the ire of at least one Oak Ridges resident after one of four portables they transported to the temporary holding school forced area children off one of the school-yard diamonds.

Sly Cachia said four teams from the Oak Ridges atom baseball division have games scheduled at the school every Tuesday and Thursday evening, but the league was forced to cancel games and find another diamond after one of the portables blocked the third-base line on the field closest to Yonge Street.

Yonge Street.

"I have lived here close to 50 years and I have seen a lot of ball players down there compete in a well-established league, but putting that ugly portable there is one of the most ignorant things I have ever seen," Cachia said. "I've never seen an incident like that in all my life."

"There's a lot of room to put those portables, they didn't have to put it on the ball diamond. It's open space out there and that's what people are crying for in this town these days."

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