

No answers at last meeting ... silence ... hopefully I'll do better this time ...

My son attends here ... but I am actually not here "fighting for his school"

No emotional "save my school ... save my neighborhood" speech

Two reasons why I am here:

- I do not like processes that purport to be transparent, open, consultative ... that are not
- Wembley is a heritage building, in a community that seems to place little or no value on heritage, it would be a shame if the only reason we lose this building is because of a flawed process with a pre-engineered end

Start with a qualifying comment:

My remarks are not intended to criticize the people involved in this process. I acknowledge completely that there is significant volunteer effort from the community in these processes. I also acknowledge that generally someone is left unhappy when the big decisions are made. My comments, and criticisms, are about the process ... not those individuals tasked with the difficult task of making this work. I seek only to make sure that an informed decision is made based on all right facts.

First ... the process ...

- After first meeting ... clear ... they're going to close the school
- Missed second meeting, can't speak to that
- Third meeting, when I saw "the options", I couldn't stay silent

At that meeting ... I made 2 comments and asked a question ... (contrary to the way the minutes noted my participation)

- Reminded everyone that a question from 1st session was asked but not answered as far as I knew ("how did this happen" (vs. Alexander P.S.))
- Options – terrible (more on that in a minute) – 2 or 3 options really
- While there were detailed (meticulous) costs to repair Wembley presented at session 1 – at session 3, no cost for preferred option offered – I asked, "Is there any idea of what those costs are?"
- My comments were neither acknowledged, nor answered – in fact the silence was kind of deafening!

Let's spend a minute on the options ...

- If the options presented included "close Wembley and transfer students to 2 other underutilized, non-PTR schools" I could get to where this process seems to be going easier ... and I probably wouldn't be standing here
- Instead, I saw the weakest list of options I think I have ever seen in an analysis
- When the only "strength" of requesting money to repair the school is "better than status quo" I can't help but think that the fix is in
- When one of the options proposed actually has no strengths, making it technically worse than status quo, I have to wonder who is vetting these options for reasonableness
- But WOW ... the option to add onto Princess Anne has two pages of strengths and a couple of token weaknesses! The weaknesses don't even mention that former walkers and bike riders would be faced with crossing the infamous "killer crossing" a couple of times a day. And, it appeared to be such a good idea that it could be proposed without even knowing the total cost of the solution. Gee ... I wonder where this is going?
- (I must say ... I was quite surprised to learn that Princess Anne is also a PTR school ... I don't remember that fact being discussed and it was not noted in the options.)
- I was left to conclude that someone must have suggested that there was a need to make up at least 8 options to demonstrate some attempt at due diligence ... but you have to admit this looks really weak

The process since 3rd meeting

- May 12 – The engineering report was requested - On May 22 – We were told that the report would be made available – but not until May 29th – We were however invited to come and look at it
- Jun 3 - schedules permit "a viewing" at Board office – but copies not allowed??? – referred to FOI process – that's not a very open and transparent process ...
- Supposedly, there is another report out there that deals with why Wembley can't be expanded and why Princess Anne is the preferred option ... I am sure we would all really like to see that report
- Meanwhile – some stress in getting interested community members an invitation to a School Council meeting – suggested that the Board office involved in clearing the request!?
- No minutes from 3rd session until last week – why such a delay for such a simple task?

- In those minutes, my question not answered ... contrary to Ministry and Board Guidelines on this process – both of which call for unanswered questions to be answered with the Minutes
- So far (Until tonight?) there has been no information on the rationale or process for choosing Princess Anne over Wembley – both PTR schools
- So far (Until tonight?) there has been no sense of a process at other end .. what do Princess Anne parents and the surrounding community think of the option?

So ...

- with no answers to the first question I heard someone ask at the 1st session
- and no answer to my question a month later,
- a really weak set of options for the community to consider,
- and the apparent defensive shell that those involved with the process seem to be in

... I decided late last week to take one more stab at this.

Ministry Guidelines state ...

“The guidelines recognize that, wherever possible, accommodation reviews should focus on a group of schools within a school board’s planning area rather than examine a single school. These schools would be reviewed together because they are located close enough to the other schools within a planning area to facilitate the development of viable and practical solutions for student accommodation.”

Rainbow Schools website:

Two guiding principles:

1. To ensure that all students continue to have access to the best programming possible in quality school facilities.
2. To reduce surplus space.

Rainbow Policy and Procedures Manual states:

“Whenever possible, accommodation reviews should focus on a group of schools within the board’s planning area.”

This begs 2 important questions:

The option analysis offers potential impacts on Adamsdale, Landsdowne, MacLeod, (Copper Cliff?) and Princess Anne schools, and the “strongest” option (in someone’s opinion) radically changes Princess Anne, so why would the accommodation review process not include all these schools, or a minimum, Princess Anne? Would this not be particularly appropriate given that Princess Anne has also been labeled PTR?

When there is no surplus space involved, does this not further indicate the need to do a wider review of options and recommendations since the only remaining guiding principle for the Board to even be considering this is for students to have the best programming and facilities?

Wembley in not an empty school ...

- Demographic trend is not extreme for this neighborhood. Your own report states “This is an older neighborhood that is renewing itself as new families with young children continue to purchase homes in the area.” This would not seem like a situation that speaks to significant declines in enrolment.
- The reason that was given why Ministry funding was not provided to Wembley for repairs in 2003/04, was that there were excess pupil spaces within 8km in the surrounding schools. Yet, we have heard at the meetings that most if not all of the other schools in the Wembley catchment area are at capacity. How many excess spaces must there be before maintenance funding will be declined to a school?

Towards a Solution

- I recognize the problem ... same problem I encounter in my day job ... too many assets, too many needs, not enough money.
- If the start of this process included a declaration “we need to consolidate schools to save money and build better facilities for our students” ... I probably wouldn’t be here.
- What I heard was ... this was NOT about closing Wembley, this was about dealing with “the situation” that the Board finds themselves in ... and by extension, we find ourselves in.
- Yet it appears to me that this is all about closing Wembley – but within a doctored up process.

For ease of response, I have put the questions in print, hopefully assisting in the transparency process.

1. Why is this review about a single school, contrary to Ministry guidelines and Board policy?
2. Are there still excess pupil spaces TODAY within 8km in the surrounding schools and if yes, where are they? *[Note: When I presented, I indicated that this question was no longer relevant and later sought clarification of the change in Ministry policy during the question period.]*
3. What are the details on Princess Anne option costs? What is the total amount proposed to be invested in Princess Anne, including costs to resolve the current PTR status of that school. Is it appropriate that these detailed amounts were not considered when the options were developed?
4. What do Princess Anne parents think of the plan ... have they even been consulted?
5. Will a proper option review be done that reflects accurate information, and real impact on the whole community – Wembley's and beyond?

I know that this is the 4th of the required 4 public meetings, but I submit that it might take another public meeting or two to get this right.