Becoming Sustainable – Facilities Plan Update
Special Business Committee Meeting – November 24, 2015
Information Package
Why the need for the updated plan?

The original 10-Year Enhanced Facilities for Learning Plan (EFLP) relied on substantial funding from the Ministry of Education for rebuilds.

- Currently, there is no provincial funding for rebuild projects.

Dealing with capacity issues will enable the district to become sustainable and support further efforts for facilities renewal.

Capacity Utilization

- Enrolment trends have shown a consistent and steady decline over the last 13 years
- Currently, there are 2,000 empty seats
- Reducing excess capacity enables the district to become sustainable and become eligible for Ministry Capital funding for facilities renewal

Becoming Sustainable

The structural deficit will continue until action is taken to reduce expenditures or develop new revenue streams. The district must continually look for efficiencies and new opportunities to maintain sustainability.

This plan focuses the necessary reductions away from student learning and instead on empty seats and buildings.

Unless addressed, both educational and operational challenges will continue to affect the district’s ability to invest in the improvement of student learning.

There is an unrestricted surplus of $2M (one-time funding). Staff recommends that this surplus be directed to support learning through investments such as:

- technology
- teaching resources

Facilities Renewal

The Ministry’s capital funding priorities are:

- Safety (Seismic)
- Maintaining existing assets (Routine Capital which includes electrical systems upgrades, energy management, health and safety, mechanical and roofs)
- Rapid Growth (Increasing Enrolment)

Districts must also ensure they are managing schools to optimal utilization.
To meet the Ministry’s Capital funding priorities, staff recommend the following:

- Cilaire – conduct a study to identify how to proceed in the central Nanaimo zone
- Rutherford – addition of a wing to Frank J. Ney
- Ladysmith – conduct a study to identify how to proceed with Ladysmith area schools
- Woodlands – advance the closure of Woodlands to June 30, 2016
- NDSS – create an NDSS Advisory Committee to recommend ideas for the future development of the NDSS site

**Communication**

The Board of Education has received input through a 60-day community consultation process on proposed changes to facilities and programs. Information was sent out through a variety of mediums:

- Sep. 2 – report from the Special Board Meeting to announce public consultation
- Sep. 22 – letter sent to school principals to share with school communities
- Sep. 23 – district news sent to all staff members
- Sep. 24 – information sent out through social media
- Sep. 28 to Nov. 1 – radio and news print ads
- Oct. 2, 9, 15, 23 – website link set up and information package sent to principals to share with school communities; posted on social media
- Oct. 5 – online survey

Several meetings (community consultation, information, stakeholder, public presentation, Board) – October to December 2015.

- Oct. 5, 26 and Nov. 9 – Aboriginal Community Meetings *information meetings; also invited to Stakeholder Meeting Nov. 5*
- Oct. 6 – North Cedar Intermediate/Woodbank Primary
- Oct. 8 – Rutherford Elementary
- Oct. 13 – Frank J. Ney Elementary
- Oct. 15 – District Skills for Life *information meeting*
- Oct. 20 – Woodlands Secondary
- Oct. 27 – District Programs and Learn@Home K-7 and 8-12
- Nov. 4 and 5 – Public Presentation Meetings
- Nov. 5 – Stakeholder Meeting
- Nov. 10 – Ministry of Education Meeting *Capital Funding Information*
- Nov. 18 – Special Business Committee Meeting *Board received feedback from facilitator*
Nov. 24 – Special Business Committee Meeting (*Board to receive recommendations from staff*)

Dec. 1 and 2 – Special Board Meetings (*Board discussions on school consultation – continued Dec. 3 if necessary*)

The Superintendent and Aboriginal Administration attended three information meetings with Aboriginal partners. These meetings were intended to discuss the Facilities Plan Update to ensure all Aboriginal partners were aware of the process for consultation.

Partners were also asked if they required other forms of consultation input specific to their needs. At the end of all meetings, Aboriginal partners were satisfied with the process and would include their input as per the consultation process.

**South Zone** (Cedar Area Elementary Schools)

Staff recommended the consolidation of two elementary schools. The amalgamation will:

- Reduce annual operating costs by approximately $500,000
- Avoid future capital expenses
- Provide a vibrant K-7 school
- Create capital assets for future consideration

**What we’ve heard from the community**

- Less walking on busy roads to get to Woodbank
- Woodbank was originally built as a K-7 with Kindergarten suites and smaller spaces designed for primary students
- North Cedar is a larger facility and larger property
- Once amalgamated the school will provide a vibrant K-7 program with stronger programs and PAC
- The community has a general readiness for change
- Woodbank was the preferred option for the amalgamation

**The full report from Public Consultation Facilitator**

**Staff recommends**

- The amalgamation of North Cedar and Woodbank into the Woodbank site as of September 2016
Rationale

- Built as a K-7 school
- Seismic concerns at North Cedar
- Asset management benefits
- Lower start-up and future costs at Woodbank
- Provides greater savings

North Zone (Rutherford Elementary)

The original 10-Year EFLP called for a rebuild at Rutherford Elementary. Information from the Ministry of Education indicates there is no funding for rebuilds at this time.

The proposed closure of Rutherford is more about asset renewal than capacity utilization.

Staff recommended the closure of Rutherford Elementary. This will:

- Reduce annual operating costs by approximately $500,000
- Avoid future capital expenses
- Establish Rutherford Elementary as a capital asset for future consideration
- Relocate Rutherford students to enhanced facilities within their own community

What we’ve heard from the community

- Need for a catchment review in this area
- Students need the ability to walk to school safely at a reasonable distance
- Real estate trends not accurately represented
- Overcrowding in receiving schools will limit access to library, gym, music room and playground equipment
- Concern about the loss of neighbourhood school

The full report from Public Consultation Facilitator
Scenario #1 – Status Quo

The potential annual savings achieved by closing Rutherford Elementary is $500,000. Should Rutherford remain open, not only will this savings be lost, but a further $2M will need to be expended to deal with existing building deficiencies. The $2M does not extend the building’s useful life.

To extend the long-term lifespan of Rutherford will require a further sizeable expenditure, yet to be determined.

Scenario #2 – Close Rutherford and construct an addition to Frank J. Ney

The potential annual savings achieved by closing Rutherford Elementary is $500,000. The cost of building an addition to Frank J. Ney is estimated to be $5.5M. While the district will propose to cost-share this project with the Ministry of Education, it is unclear what the final cost will be to the district.

For capital projects, the Ministry of Education typically requires districts to fund 50% of the cost. If the district were to finance 50% of this project, the district’s share would be $2.75M.

By closing Rutherford, the district will:

- Save $500,000 in operating costs
- Avoid spending $2M to keep Rutherford open
- Invest $2.75M for an addition to Frank J. Ney

Closing Rutherford would result in a one-time net investment of $750,000 ($2.75M – $2M) and an annual savings of $500,000. This plan also limits the requirement for future capital upgrading over the next 20-30 years.

Staff recommends that:

- The Board approves the closure of Rutherford Elementary School within the next two years
- The district works with the Ministry of Education in cost-sharing the construction of a new wing at Frank J. Ney Elementary
- The Board approves, in principle, the shift in catchment for Rutherford students to Frank J. Ney, McGirr and Randerson upon closure of Rutherford
- The Board refers the Rutherford property to the Asset Management program to remain until the Board consults on future use

Rationale

- Facilities renewal
- Room at neighbouring schools to accommodate potential increased enrolment from new housing developments
- Opportunity to continue conversations with the City of Nanaimo and the Regional District of Nanaimo about improvements to transportation and walk routes
Closure of Rutherford in June 2017 will allow sufficient time for the school consolidation working group to create supportive transition plans.

**District Elementary Skills for Life**  
(K-7 Rutherford Elementary)

The District Skills for Life (SFL) program students at Rutherford are transported from all parts of the district – capacity of 12 students. Staff reports recommend that this program be located in a more central location.

Staff have investigated other facilities and recognize there is space and wheelchair access at Georgia Avenue Community School. Student enrolment forecasts suggest Georgia Avenue would have excess space for the foreseeable future, and would be a suitable location for the program.

**Comments from parents**

Staff held an information meeting with District Skills for Life parents, October 15. Here is what the parents told us:

- The proposed new site (Georgia Avenue) is a newer facility with updated equipment in the classroom
- Georgia Avenue is in close proximity to a wide variety of walkable community opportunities (grocery store, swimming, skating, parks, water park)
- Loss of staff a concern
- Smaller facility at Georgia Avenue

**Staff recommends that:**

- The District Elementary Skills for Life program relocate to Georgia Avenue Community School. (September 2016)

**Rationale**

- Central location for student accessibility
- Better access to recreational facilities
- Close to Secondary Skills for Life program
- Newer facility
Distributed Learning is a choice within the K-12 public school system that responds to the unique learning needs of students. It is also part of a commitment from the Ministry of Education to provide flexible educational options.

Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools has two such schools:
- Learn@Home K-7 (located at Departure Bay)
- Learn@Home 8-12 (located at NDSS)

For some time now, staff at Learn@Home K-7 and 8-12 have considered the benefits of amalgamating under one roof separate from other “bricks and mortar” schools.

Families have also supported the idea of amalgamating the two schools and believe it will provide many advantages for students, as well as for the growth of the personalized learning model.

What we’ve heard from the community
- Currently, not enough room for the program to flourish
- Expressed the need for better staffing and administrative support, counsellors and access to facilities
- Proposed changes would provide a better facility, space and stronger focus on flexible learning
- Greater opportunity for program growth
- A well supported, flexible program could compete with private schools
- Mount Benson was the preferred option for the amalgamation

The full report from Public Consultation Facilitator

Staff recommends:
- The amalgamation of Learn@Home K-7 and Learn@Home 8-12 into the Mount Benson school site as of September 2016

Rationale
- Increased space will allow for future growth of Learn@Home K-7 as well as the Departure Bay Eco-School
- Allow for future growth of the Distributed Learning model
Critical mass which increases programming and support options

Increased sense of belonging for students and parents

Greater ability for teachers to collaborate

Smotherer transitions from Grade 7 to 8

**Central Zone Secondary** (Woodlands Secondary School)

Woodlands is located in the middle of Wellington and NDSS geographically. There are currently capacity issues and excess space in all three schools.

This creates inefficiencies in staffing, class compositions and difficulty in creating staffing for student support.

The consolidation of Woodlands into Wellington and NDSS will:

- Reduce annual operating costs in excess of $750,000
- Avoid future capital expenses

- Allow for enhanced programming
- Create greater classroom efficiencies
- Create greater support for both Woodlands and receiving school students

**What we’ve heard from the community**

- Low morale, loss of momentum and staff transferring out due to proposed closures over the years
- Concern that the timing had changed from original proposed closure
- Loss for central Nanaimo community
- Tough transition for students
- Worried about the loss of scholarships and bursaries
- Greater course selection and stronger electives in larger school
- More extra-curricular options in larger school

The full report from Public Consultation Facilitator

**Staff recommends that:**

- Woodlands Secondary School close June 30, 2016
- The hockey academy be relocated to NDSS
- The soccer academy be relocated to NDSS
- The beach volleyball academy be relocated to NDSS
Rationale

- Declining enrolment
- Facility condition
- Location within other secondary schools
- Students would have access to more electives and senior academic courses
- More options for alternate learning placements
- More full-time teachers and staff to support students

District Programs

Reviewing the central zone capacity utilization in Nanaimo has created a concern about inefficiencies in staffing, class compositions and difficulty in allocating staffing for student support.

A review of central Nanaimo secondary school’s district programs may help create equal student distribution. Most of these programs currently occupy NDSS and could be relocated to help maximize capacity utilization.

What we’ve heard from the community

- Strong attachment to French Immersion (FI) at NDSS
- Rejection of other possible locations for FI
- Potential of student withdrawal if FI program moved
- Concerns about transportation, robust electives, advanced academics
- Suggestions for the development of an arts academy and relocation of sports academies to John Barsby
- Minimal input regarding other district programs

The full report from Public Consultation Facilitator

Staff recommends that:

- All consultation information and data regarding district programs be shared with the NDSS Advisory Committee for further recommendation as it pertains to the development of the NDSS site

Rationale

- Allows for Woodlands transition to settle
- Allows for Cedar enrolment to settle
- Allows for greater input into discussion of NDSS and John Barsby learning focus for the future (Skills and Trades, Academies, French Immersion...)
Actions Required

All school closures require a School Consolidation Working Group (SCWG) to oversee the various aspects of the transition planning process. The SCWG process will also be used for any motions moving forward with the Learn@Home K-12.

The following actions will be required if the Board proceeds:

- The reopening of Mount Benson school site. (September 2016) *(motion only)*
- The relocation of Learn@Home K-7 to Mount Benson. (September 2016) *(motion and bylaw)*
- The relocation of Learn@Home 8-12 to Mount Benson. (September 2016) *(motion and bylaw)*
- Closure of North Cedar Intermediate School. (June 30, 2016) *(motion and bylaw)*
- Closure of Woodlands Secondary School. (June 30, 2016) *(motion and bylaw)*
- Relocation of the Elementary District Skills for Life Program from Rutherford Elementary to Georgia Avenue Community. (September 2016) *(motion)*
- Closure of Rutherford Elementary School. (June 30, 2017) *(motion and bylaw)*

Closing Comments

Decisions made about school closures are among the most difficult decisions a Board of Education will have to make during its term. NLPS cannot continue to maintain partially-empty buildings, and must heed the demographic and budgetary realities. Eliminating excess space reduces operating costs and allows the district to reallocate resources to strengthen the focus on teaching and learning.

Failure to consolidate schools will have a significant negative impact on student learning across the district in the foreseeable future.

Appendices

- [Updated Facilities Plan (Years One and Two)](#) (Years One and Two)
- [60-Day School Consultation Detailed Timeline](#)
- [Facilities Plan Update Findings](#) – Prepared by Facilitator Meaghan Cursons, November 18, 2015
- [Public Consultation School Information Packages](#)
  - North Cedar Intermediate and Woodbank Primary
  - Rutherford Elementary
  - North Zone Corridor
  - Woodlands Secondary
  - Learn@Home K-12
  - District Programs
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [10-Year Enhanced Facilities for Learning Plan - 2013](#)
- [Enhanced Facilities for Learning – A Ten Year Plan](#) (Dr. Player Report 2013)