

School District No.36 (Surrey)

SUNNYSIDE ELEMENTARY POSSIBLE SCHOOL CLOSURE PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING MARCH 5, 2009

MINUTES

Introductions were made for District Staff: Mike McKay, District Superintendent; Wayne Noye, Secretary-Treasurer; John Ormond, Assistant Superintendent; Kerry Magnus, Associate Director, Business Management Services; Umur Olcay, Manager, Facilities & Demographics Planning.

Introductions were made for School Board Trustees: Laurae McNally, Chairperson; Shawn Wilson, Vice Chairperson; Rene Masi, Trustee.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the possible closure of Sunnyside Elementary school.

The Board is open to hearing your comments, concerns or recommendations and has not made a final decision. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to dialogue with the Sunnyside community and ensure that the options have been explored, your questions answered and comments recorded.

The Board motion was read.

The motion was made February 12, 2009, and starts the public consultation process. There is a minimum period of 60 days for consultation with staff, the Parent Advisory Council and the community. The consultation period can go until the end of this calendar year, with a final deadline date of December 31, 2009. However, it may be in the best interest of the school staff, parents and community to have a timely decision.

Six options are currently being explored:

1. Renovate and expand Sunnyside for Regular Program and Montessori;
2. Replace Sunnyside for Regular Program and Montessori;
3. Keep Sunnyside for Regular Program and move Montessori to Jessie Lee or to new school Site #202;
4. Keep Sunnyside for Montessori Program;
5. Close Sunnyside and move Regular program and Montessori to new school Site #202;
6. Close Sunnyside and revise catchment west of Highway #99 to Jessie Lee while regular students east of Highway #99 and Montessori students will go to the New School – Site #202.

The option recommended by District staff that continues to meet long term requirements is Option #6, to relocate both Regular and Montessori students east of Hwy. #99 to a new school site #202 on 28th Avenue just west of 160th Street. We are looking to build a new school at this location.

Please provide your comments on the yellow comment forms and return them to us or the Principal as quickly as possible. Your comments will be included in information binders prepared for the Trustees.

The issues at Sunnyside include traffic (difficult for pick-up and drop-off); enrolment growth on the east side of Hwy. #99 and decline on the west side of Hwy. #99; and facility audits at 35% (Annex) and 42% (Main Building) of what they should be.

Question: What is going to happen to this land here?

Answer: The current process is a 60 day consultation for possible closure of Sunnyside Elementary. A completely separate consultation process is required if Sunnyside is closed and if the Board wishes to dispose of the building or the site.

Question: Being somebody who lives next to this school ground, if it was turned into residential, there would be a drop in property values. What will the School Board do to compensate home owners?

Answer: Boards of Education in 2009 are very constrained with regard to disposal of property. There are now requirements that the District must use “ARES” (Accommodation and Real Estate Services) to look at what other uses inside government that the school or site could be used for.

Question: What is the School District doing to ensure the safety of those students who will have to walk to school across a highway?

Answer: This was discussed at the consultation meeting with the Parent Advisory Council. It is recommended that the City of Surrey be approached to provide sidewalks and safe crossings.

Comment: In terms of traffic, I don't see that as a huge issue. What I am concerned about is the value of my property. I don't want to have townhouses built on this site.

Question: The other side of the highway is not fully developed. Will we still not require a school here? Could you change the catchment?

Answer: As for growth on the west side versus on the east side, we anticipate enrolment decline on the west and growth on the east of Hwy. #99. There won't be enough students in the long term in the area around Sunnyside to sustain this school.

Comment: There is new development here and a constant turnover that would keep the population here. Families are moving into this area which will keep it viable. It is a long way to walk to the new school, and we are concerned about more development on that side of the highway.

Questions: Are school buildings only built to last 50 years?

Answer: There are a few issues at the Sunnyside school which District facilities staff have tried to mitigate. Drainage is a major problem. We are now building schools with new sustainability and energy efficiency initiatives. New schools are more cost effective to operate over the life of the building.

Question: Are you still able to build on this site?

Answer: Yes, building on the Sunnyside site it is still an option.

Question: Do the majority of currently enrolled students live on the west side of Hwy. #99?

Answer: Approximately two thirds of the population at Sunnyside is Montessori. The remaining one third is Regular Program: The population of Regular students from the west side of Hwy. #99 would likely fit at Jessie Lee.

Question: From the west side of Hwy. #99, how do you get to the new school site?

Answer: Access to Site #202 is via 152nd Street and either 32nd Avenue or 24th Avenue.

Question: Wasn't the original recommendation to replace the building on this site or renovate?

Answer: The Ministry process requires a two-phase Feasibility Study that looks at all reasonable options with a life cycle analysis of those options to determine the best option. The option of building a new school is a better choice from a life cycle cost point of view than renovating the existing school.

Question: What year was the original approval made?

Answer: The Ministry approved "in principle" a renovation/replacement of Sunnyside Elementary in the 2006/07 Capital Program with subsequent delay to August 2008 for Project Agreement.

Question: If Option #1 is to be considered, what does expand mean?

Answer: "Expand" refers to an addition to the number of classrooms.

Question: Would it be an option to bring in another program like French Immersion to the school? Could other options be considered to save the school?

Answer: A 7th option may consider another District Program to fill up Sunnyside, however, if you spread the resources too thin, then you can't accommodate the Program.

Comment: I recommend that we rebuild the school on this site for Montessori or neighbourhood program (Option # 2).

Question: Is there room to expand at Jessie Lee? It could become be pretty full when students from this catchment go there.

Answer: Right now there are 8 empty classrooms with room for approximately 200 students at Jessie Lee.

The Ministry has approved this project in principle. Sunnyside is not a school that is sustainable in its' present state. We now have the technology to build schools that will last. Sunnyside needs to be dramatically renovated or replaced. A new building starts to look more sensible. If replacing it then, where does it go? We have heard a lot of concerns about it being close to King George Hwy. and 152nd Street. Some of you have said this is not a big deal. It's helpful for us to hear your comments. We are now getting wider perspective on what is important to you.

Comment: I think that for most of the people who chose to live in this area, the reason why people are taking their kids out of Sunnyside is because of the uncertainty.

Question: On the GeoSchool map, how many kids are shown in suites?

Answer: School aged children are registered by address. If it is a legal suite, the students are indicated on GeoSchool.

Question: When was Sunnyside full?

Answer: Morgan and Rosemary Heights' catchments were, at one time, all part of the Sunnyside catchment. It was a much larger area prior to Morgan opening in 2002 and Rosemary in 2008.

Comment: I would like to see this school continue for all the families living here, without having to cross a highway. New houses in this area are going to be marketed to younger families.

Response: There has to be enough kids coming to the area to support a school in this location. Enrolment trends predict the need. Growth is going to be primarily on the east side of the highway and the area west of Hwy. #99 will decline in student population.

Question: Has Sunnyside’s enrolment dropped because of the reduction in their catchment area?

Answer: Most of the Morgan and Rosemary Heights development is new development. The kind of rural area that Sunnyside has historically supported remains somewhat stable.

Question: Regardless of what happens to this school, is Site #202 already approved?

Answer: Site #202 is on the Board’s current Capital Plan. It has not been approved by the Ministry yet. If Sunnyside remains, the new school at Site #202 would be smaller, and the approval may be delayed for a few years.

Question: Do you have money for one or the other?

Answer: There is only money for the currently approved project. There is no funding for a “second” project. If Sunnyside is renovated or replaced on site, no new school would be built on Site #202 at this time.

Question: How motivated is the District to sell this property for financial reasons?

Answer: Not at all. There are many restrictions that the Ministry has placed on the sale of property.

Question: Would it be more likely that they will want to develop the property for educational purposes?

Answer: If the Sunnyside site were to become vacant, a second, completely different process would be initiated to determine the fate of the school or site. Other government agencies would be involved (ARES/Ministry of Education).

Question: Will we be meeting again?

Answer: There is a possibility for future meetings.

Question: Can we make a recommendation that a sign is placed out in front of the school when a meeting is to be held? The whole community needs to know about these meetings.

Answer: There was an advertisement in the local newspapers and notice placed on the SD36 website. The Public Meeting was noted in the last two school newsletters, and emails were sent.

Question: If we increase the traffic around here with more development, where will our kids play?

Answer: This concern will be addressed in a separate process requiring public consultation. If Sunnyside were to close, it will require Ministerial approval that the site is not required in the future for educational purposes.

Question: If the school closes, won’t it attract a bad element that we don’t want in this area?

Answer: Subject to the consultation process, the building could be used for something that may benefit the community.

Question: Is it possible to close this school and build on the lot behind?

Answer: Yes, it would be difficult, but not impossible. The area would have to be cordoned off. The location of the existing school buildings limits the options for building a new school on this site.

Tonight we are gathering the neighbourhood perspective on the possible closure of Sunnyside Elementary. When the Board makes its’ decision, it will make it with full information. The Trustees will understand the footprint of the school, traffic routes, and potential impact on the community.

Question: What about the noise issue if we were to build a new school here?

Answer: It is not ideal to build a school on the same site as a fully operational school, however, it has been successfully accomplished at other school sites. Examples are White Rock Elementary and Surrey Central Elementary.

Comment: My son is in Montessori and my concern is purely selfish. I believe that the best thing is Option #6. Regardless, we need to know what the decision is so parents can make a decision as soon as possible.

Laurae McNally thanked all for coming. The Board of Trustees would like to hear your concerns. We have no hidden agenda. We try to do the very best we can for the community.

Please send in your comment sheets.