

NANAIMO LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BUSINESS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC MEETING
ACTION SHEET

DATE: June 8, 2022
TO: Business Committee
FROM: Mark Walsh, Secretary-Treasurer
SUBJECT: LRFP – North End Consultation

Recommendation:

The Business Committee recommends that the Board of Education of School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) approve and adopt the following recommendations:

- 1. That staff draft proposed boundary changes for Cilaire, Rock City and Departure Bay Elementary schools (with the potential of other minor boundary shifts) that would shift students away from Departure Bay, for review and approval in principle, followed by community consultation and implementation for September 2023. Any students currently enrolled in Departure Bay may retain their seat in the school (as well as younger siblings), or they may transfer to their applicable catchment school as per determined boundary changes.*
- 2. That the District continue to apply for an expansion at Departure Bay in the 2023-24 capital plan with the intention of replacing portable usage at the school. Such an expansion would not be intended to expand the capacity of the school beyond 400 (the current enrollment of the school) but is intended to remove the portables at the site.*
- 3. That the Board direct staff to prepare for the re-opening of Rutherford Elementary School and the redrawing of the boundaries of McGirr, Randerson Ridge and Frank J. Ney (with the potential of other minor boundary shifts) with an opening date of either September 2024 or 2025 as determined following the district's confirmation of enrollment early October 2022.*

Background:

On February 23, 2022 the Board of Education directed staff to begin a [consultation process](#) with respect to current and future capacity issues in the school district's North End. As the Board will recall, this process began in order to address capacity issues at Departure Bay Elementary in the short term and to address future growth and limit portable use for schools throughout the North End over the long term. This Action Sheet is intended to provide the Board with an overview of the feedback received from our communities as well as a status update and recommended next steps to address the concerns raised during the consultation process.

The consultation document can be found [here](#).

What We Heard

Overall, the community was supportive of the Board's proactive planning with respect to capacity and some clarity was sought with regards to the district's enrollment projections. A number of trends did appear in the community feedback. For instance, there was significant support for the reopening of Rutherford among current parents in the district. There was also support for maintaining the anticipated additional seats in French Immersion.

In addition, there were concerns raised by individuals who could be impacted by changes to boundaries in any of the scenarios. Specific boundary changes were out of scope for the consultation, but the Board should be aware of the importance of the issue when proceeding.

The general feedback from the various opportunities is as follows:

Email feedback

- Reopen Rutherford
- Focus on virtual learning
- Do not reduce the French Immersion program
- Not enough gym space at Dover Bay
- Keep Hammond Bay French Immersion only
- Dual track Hammond Bay to relieve pressure at surrounding schools
- More before and after school childcare options
- Departure Bay catchment area changes (wondering if they will be able to stay at DB)
- Parking at Departure Bay needs to be better
- First Nations government require different level of consultation as per their rights
- Re-open Woodlands school to relieve pressure on surrounding high schools
- Parkwood catchment should not change per scenario 2. Keep these students at Randerson Ridge

ThoughtExchange feedback

- Reopen Rutherford
- Need more sports fields
- Add turf field at Dover Bay (or in North)
- Expand Departure Bay
- New school in Linley Valley
- Have school a reasonable distance to homes
- Expand French Immersion
- Keep Hammond Bay French Immersion
- Open Dufferin for French Immersion
- Change catchment boundaries
- Walkability
- Build new schools

Virtual Open House (April 25, 2022)

- Reopen Rutherford
- Stacking scenarios (e.g., reopen Rutherford and build new school in Departure Bay)
- How are walkability scores determined?
- Hammond Bay is not walkable
- Why is Rock City not being discussed to alleviate pressure at Departure Bay/surrounding schools?
- Need better parking at Departure Bay
- Keep Hammond Bay French Immersion
- Do not reduce French Immersion at Hammond Bay
- How to incorporate Green Thumb development for capacity issues
- Better projections

Updates

Since the beginning of the consultation process staff have been monitoring enrollment trends in the area closely. While the longer-term growth projections are supported by development, our shorter-term projections were impacted by COVID, and our elementary schools are currently on the low side of anticipated enrollment growth as projected by the district. It is also important to note that our longer-term projections have been based on confirmed student enrollment on September 30, 2020, not the 2018 projections (for the 2022/23 year) reflected below that anticipated inflated growth at that time. With regards to capacity pressures, Departure Bay was the only school in the district to require an additional portable in 2021-22 and is also the only elementary school requiring an additional portable in 2022-23. The district has attributed this to three factors including: continued COVID hesitancy, higher housing prices and delays in construction.

While still early, current registration numbers are softer than anticipated and the North End, while still increasing, looks to be on track for lower enrollment in September 2022 than our short-term projections indicated. Typically, our actual enrollment at this time of year is closer to our projections however, at schools with a more transient population, we would discount this trend as we see significant enrollment in the summer. At schools such as Frank J. Ney, Randerson Ridge and Departure Bay we are generally closer to estimated projections by late spring.

North End - Enrolment Projections for 2022/23^[1]

School	Baragar Systems Enrollment Figures			NLPS Figures	
	Sept 2018 Projection for 2022/23	Sept 2019 Projection for 2022/23	Sept 2021 Projections for 2022/23	2022/23 Projection	Actual Enrolment on April 29
Cilaire	210	161	166	163	172
Departure Bay	384	414	410	410	398
Frank J. Ney	485	435	426	425	410
McGirr	482	414	433	433	435
Randerson Ridge	392	483	483	483	453
Rock City	397	358	334	332	330
Seaview	307	254	264	262	261
Uplands Park	349	306	302	306	311

^[1] Baragar projections guide the district on a short-term basis. The district's longer-term projections are based on development trends and are aligned with regional planning data and are intended to illustrate longer term trends for the district. Those projections can be found [here](#).

In addition, part of the impetus for the consultation in the North End was optimism that the Ministry of Education and Child Care would support an expansion of Departure Bay in the capital plan response letter issued by the Ministry of Education and Child Care in March of 2022. A requirement for final approval of such an expansion project would be reviewing the options set out in the consultation process and this feedback would have been necessary to proceed.

Finally, the impact of the expansion of sick leave benefits due to the *Employment Standards Act* have impacted the Board's budgetary flexibility. Essentially, much of the revenue from the additional growth in enrollment for the 2022-23 school will cover those expenses rather than being available for ongoing operational expenses such as a school opening.

Although current enrollment is trending slightly soft, the district continues to predict significant growth over the longer term in the North End. With this potential lag in short term growth and failure to receive support for an expansion, the Board has additional time prior to implementing any decision it makes.

Recommendation 1:

That staff draft proposed boundary changes for Cilaire, Rock City and Departure Bay Elementary schools (with the potential of other minor boundary shifts) that would shift students away from Departure Bay, for review and approval in principle, followed by community consultation and implementation for September 2023. Any students currently enrolled in Departure Bay may retain their seat in the school (as well as younger siblings), or they may transfer to their applicable catchment school as per determined boundary changes.

Rationale:

As our community suggested, the district should rely on multiple strategies to address capacity. This proposal would not only begin the process of slightly shrinking Departure Bay over a period of 8 years (the time it takes for a cohort to move through the school) it could add to Cilaire, one of our few schools where decline has, and may continue to occur. The impact of a boundary change would not serve to address the projected increased enrollment at Departure Bay in the coming years, but it could limit the size of a potential expansion at Departure Bay.

Recommendation 2:

That the district continues to apply for an expansion at Departure Bay in the 2023-24 capital plan with the intention of replacing portable usage at the school. Such an expansion would not be intended to expand the capacity of the school beyond 400 (the current enrollment of the school) but would be to remove the portables at the site.

Rationale:

This recommendation, combined with recommendation one is intended to limit portables at the school while recognizing that even shrinking Departure Bay's catchment by reopening Rutherford may not completely address capacity issues. Specifically, Departure Bay is already approximately 100 students over capacity and further green field development in the Golden Oaks and Stephenson Point area will continue to grow enrollment.

Recommendation 3:

That the Board direct staff to prepare for the re-opening of Rutherford Elementary School and the redrawing of boundaries of McGirr, Randerson Ridge and Frank J. Ney (with the potential of other minor boundary shifts) with an opening date of either September 2024, or 2025 as determined following the district's confirmation of enrollment early October 2022.

Rationale:

The district received significant feedback in support of re-opening Rutherford. It serves to limit the use of portables in the North End, can allow Frank J. Ney to shift east to capture Departure Bay students as well as shrink McGirr, limit growth at Randerson Ridge and/or allow Randerson Ridge to capture green field and in-fill growth around Turner Road and potentially Green Thumb. It would also likely create some flexible space on schools in the short term.

However, it is important to note that such a reopening will involve significant consultation. The previous catchment is unlikely to mirror the revised catchment and may encroach on McGirr and Randerson Ridge in a manner that could create lengthier walking routes to Rutherford than their previous catchment schools. Further, consultation would also need to address scenarios such as whether the school would open as a K-7, or incrementally as a kindergarten, grade 1 (and possible 2) that would then expand by a grade level each year over a number of years is an issue for consideration.

Questions include (but not limited to):

1. Would attendance be voluntary or would students be allowed to stay in their current schools despite a change in catchment; and
2. If so, would there be a student population to make Rutherford sufficiently robust.

Finally, there is a significant financial impact of opening a school. Following the first-year outlay (supplies, desks etc), student enrollment growth across the district should cover the ongoing costs of the facility, however, the impact of the *Employment Standards Act* sick leave benefits as well as slightly slower enrollment growth mean that the reopening will result in a need for financial resources. In other words, the district would need to set aside accumulated operating surplus if available or reduce services in another area of the district's operations in order to transfer them in support of the school opening.

Based on these factors, while staff are recommending the re-opening of the school, the date of the re-opening should be determined following the final count of the September 2022 student enrollment. This would mean that a reopening in 2023 is not being recommended and the discussion would be whether the September of 2024 or 2025 would be more appropriate given enrollment trends and the potential requirement to reallocate district resources.

Conclusion

The North End consultation has been a great success for the district. Not only was our community engaged, but the district has also illustrated our commitment to transparency and consultation. Ultimately, a new school in Linley Valley was unrealistic and despite the dual tracking of Hammond Bay being “on paper” a superior option, the desire to maintain and enhance access to French Immersion was a strong message from our community and is reflected in the recommendations.

We note that if the Board proceeds with the recommendations there will be significant work ahead, however, the results will align with the feedback of our community and will serve the growing region. We also acknowledge that the timing of the implementation of the recommendations (particularly the re-opening of Rutherford) may not satisfy all our community, however, it reflects a balance of facility needs while ensuring fiscal prudence as well as time for the implementation to be well thought out and result in a viable long-term solution to our North End capacity issues.

