



Dundas Works Roundtable #7: EDUCATION IN DUNDAS

Tuesday, March 26th, 2019 Salvation Army, Dundas 7-9pm Minutes Rev.0 - April 7th, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Bob James welcomed the group and introduced the guest speakers, Trustee Phil Homerski of the HWCDSB and Trustee Paul Tut of the HWDSB shared their thoughts on the current status of education in our Ward, the challenges ahead and how we as citizens can be more involved. We had approximately 40 citizens in attendance. Five groups discussed: 1. How can we ensure that our local schools stay open? 2. How can we most effectively make use of schools as community hubs?

Key Points

- Schools are the centre of our neighbourhoods. They provide safe environments for our young citizens to learn and socialize, and provide valuable public space for the community.
- Funding for education is forecasted to become leaner than ever with underutilized schools at risk of closure.
- Smaller schools encourage parental involvement, walkability/bikeability and reduce busing.
- We cannot keep schools open if they are underutilized. To increase utilization, schools need: 1) students during school hours and 2) community use outside school hours. Both 1) and 2) above need to take place before ARCs/closures become necessary.

1) Students during school hours

Dundas has an aging demographic and is lacking in housing affordability, both of which leads to fewer young families with children. Dundas needs to create more affordable housing, to bring young families to fill the schools and also create a vibrant, complete community. This work requires municipal/provincial commitment.

2) Community use outside school hours

Schools should be multi-use facilities that are community hubs, like the future Greensville Hub. After school hours, they are ideal for daycare, community sports, clubs, and arts. Yorkview Elementary has successfully partnered with a daycare and St. Augustine Elementary is planning to do the same. Community partnerships should be sought by exploring community needs, for instance church space (churches are facing declining membership, also) or space for seniors. By partnering seniors and children together, it leads to beneficial interaction between the generations.

Identifying suitable partnerships for school hubs requires a business plan and security considerations. A committee or advisory group could facilitate this process.

Community involvement and collaboration is key to keeping schools open. Citizens need to advocate and be proactive to keep schools open. They need to share ideas with each other, with the schools boards, the trustees, and with municipal and provincial representatives.

SUMMARY OF TRUSTEES' REMARKS

Phil Homerski, HWCDSB (Margot)

- -if will be a difficult year due to gov't "trying to find efficiencies"
- -also, all collective agreements up for renewal by this fall
- -w.r.t. Dundas, we need to ensure we have students to fill the spaces, St Bernadette is at capacity, St. Augustine has declining enrolment which will be offset by child care facility to be opened there soon
- -need schools to remain as hubs (even if they close, like Sir John A. and Robert Land)
- -concern about Dundas' "aging" demographics, which means fewer students
- -he spoke with Arlene about continuing viability and need to attract young families

Phil Homerski – Separate School Board Trustee (Jim's notes)

- There were only 2 people in attendance that were Catholic rate payers.
- This will be a difficult year for all government services as the government looks to find “efficiencies”.
- Special education/special needs students need extra funding – so there is a worry about how funding cuts will affect these students.
- All collective agreements for education are up for renewal this fall so the government is making its recent announcements about funding as “positioning” for the upcoming negotiations.
- There are centrally bargained-for contracts as well as locally bargained-for contracts coming due.
- The Separate Board has only two schools in Dundas – St. Bernadette is at capacity; St. Augustine’s has shown a slight decline in enrolment.
- As a result, the Separate Board is looking for alternative uses for St. Augustine’s. Coming soon will be a childcare organization using space in the school.
- Phil thinks that schools should be hubs in the community.
- His concern for Dundas is that age-wise we are among the oldest populations in Hamilton. So we need to be able to bring in young families without losing the “heritage” feel of Dundas.
- Can we market Dundas as a great place to raise kids?

Paul Tut, HWDSB (Margot)

- he welcomed Alex Johnstone, Chair of HWDSB
- uncertainty due to funding cuts
- frustration with getting info from provincial level
- community activism is key (like meeting tonight)
- must look to partnerships to utilize older facilities
- no school closures at this time and no ARC date set at this time, currently a moratorium on closures
- Greensville Hub is coming despite delays, it could serve as a model for community hubs
- Sir John A also to be a community hub and could serve as a model
- HWDSB has expressed their displeasure with provincial cuts and autism program changes

Paul Tut – Public School Board Trustee (Jim)

- “Lots of uncertainty out there” relative to funding.
- Information sharing with the Education Ministry of this government is not like it used to be. Information is not as forthcoming as in the past.
- He feels the Board has good professionals who care about education. He feels planning is very important now that there is so much uncertainty.
- Dundas has seen school closures over the years.
- This type of engagement – i.e. the Roundtable – is a great format for getting in front of the issues.
- He is not aware of any school closures planned for Dundas. But the province has not said anything yet.
- He reference the Greensville situation as an excellent example of a partnership to share assets.
- His priority is to get the new Greensville school open as a community hub.
- They are also trying to get other hubs established in Hamilton, i.e. Sir John A. MacDonald HS
- He feels the current focus on the costs of the autism programs is very wrong.

Q&A with Trustees (Margot)

- Attendee David asked what is hub in Greensville? Paul called on Alex Johnstone to give answer
- Attendee Brian Baetz stated that "expressing displeasure" is not enough, we have lost 5 schools already, we cannot afford to loose more, pop of Dundas has increased in recent years, need to be tough about this
- Attendee Rich Gelder suggested that Brian could consider putting his name forward when ARC announced to be a strong voice
- Attendee asked what policy is for community groups using school space, Alex J answered and also suggested the board's website for policy and rental rates. Phil answered that the Catholoc board is similar
- Attendee Carol Moffat commented that previously, schools ran night courses for adults, which seems to have disappeared.

NOTES FROM DISCUSSION GROUPS

Questions for consideration:

1. *How can we ensure that our local schools stay open?*
2. *How can we most effectively make use of schools as community hubs?*

Table 1: Bob, Tanya, Chantal, Theresa, Jean, Scott

Notes taken by Chantal, transcribed by Bob

- Community Hubs are seen as a way of keeping the schools open
- We need more families moving in (but there is a problem of affordability)
- Money remains a problem. One person felt that the real focus has to be on the teachers and the kids, and the middle bureaucracy could be cut, since there is already too much bureaucracy in the system.
- We need to have only one school board. A lot of money could be saved in this way.
- But how do cuts impact the number of students? There was an analogy drawn between large stores and schools: the larger ones are more inefficient often
- We need to fight for what we have, and avoid being targeted because we are small(er)
- We must support public education, so we don't have to pay for private education
- Expand adult education, partly to fill the spaces, even during the daytime. Other spaces would be for community needs.
- ideas: adult learning; rent out spaces for other uses; convert to housing. This is public land and needs to remain public
- avoid setting up community hubs that duplicate other organizations in Dundas. We NEED more kids
- political action to keep the schools open
- Money and sometimes graft has influenced the costs of school construction. We had a discussion about whether this was caused by the unions.
- Dundas needs to be a more complete community, as well as a more affordable community, to attract new or younger families.
- liked the idea of the schools offering child care
- the churches are having similar problems with decreased "enrollment" due to the congregations aging. Possibly some opportunities for cooperation here.
- Noted that Dundas is thought of as an affluent community. But there is poverty in this town as well
- Housing affordability, zoning issues, tiny houses. Perhaps community centres could include affordable housing?
- Seniors' recreation needs are a concern in this community, since we have a large number of seniors here. The idea of having seniors and children together was endorsed by all of us as a good idea, for both age groups.
- We agreed that heritage aspects of schools also needed to be kept in mind. E.g. Dundas Central as one of the oldest schools in Ontario.

Table 2: Rich Gelder, Peter Hutton, Carol Moffat, Phil Homerski, Dan Bowman

Notes compiled by: Rich Gelder

How can we ensure that our local schools stay open?

- We can't ensure anything but we CAN make a lot of noise. We lack the legislative authority.
- One participant's children went to catholic board. Public board had a lot of small schools. Is it an agenda to get rid of smaller schools to realize efficiencies?
- Believes that schools are communities.
- Efficiencies are being realized at the secondary level and wants schools at about 1100 kids. Pleasant Valley had to be expanded and a level added. Now schools are operating at half capacity. Boards have an incentive to sell property to the highest bidder. (Phil doesn't seem to think that's a pressure from the board to sell property for money).
- Dan sees Dundas with potential growth. Peter suggests student numbers might go down. Demographics are such that families are having fewer kids, there are fewer places for development in Dundas and that it is expensive for young families to buy here.
- Phil suggests that Dundas is a microcosm of what is happening right across Canada. We can't be building schools for the populations that existed in the past. That isn't the best use of taxpayers dollars.
- If there isn't the student population, we have to figure out how to keep the buildings open so that community programming can happen.
- If Dundas were to lose another elementary school, we would lose programming.
- Peter. Getting the city to coordinate a plan for population change. Eg. night classes. People are "running around in silos". Peter works in seniors and sees a local senior centre bursting at the seams. and the community is looking at facilities to cater for all.
- Carol: she is the one who had mentioned night school. Amalgamation (both school board and municipal) has made it difficult for communities to identify need. Seniors are prevalent.
- Also, is it desirable to lose two schools and build a new one? Or fight to keep existing schools open even if the buildings are older.
- Also, is it acceptable to expect kids to be bussed, if we are to have fewer schools further apart? Perhaps gone are the days where kids walked and biked to school; more are getting to school in either cars or busses.
- Both schools potentially on the chopping block have a large footprint, including large playing fields.

2. How can we most effectively make use of schools as community hubs?

- A demand for 55+ for light physical activity.
- Also demand for arts programming, music and language instruction (much of which is provided by the church community).
- Much is available through DVSA - for those who can afford it. We need to expand the accessibility component. Can this be accomplished through the schools?
- Dan: community HUBs to him means newcomers to Dundas and even Canada. Some schools run science clubs and other after school activities.
- Eg. there is a teacher running Italian classes for anyone that wants to listen.
- Basketball clubs.
- Outside use of the playgrounds. We should encourage use of the schools. Flip side, use of schools at inappropriate hours. As we allow use of outside facilities, we need to make sure there is policing and security.

Table 3: (Brian, Rashne, Leo, Jim, Noor, Art, Juliette, Paul Tut for last half), compiled by Jim Sweetman

How do we get prepared now for upcoming ARCs?

- We should consider media coverage – articles in the Dundas Star and Spectator about community needs
- We need to make people aware now of education issues
- School Boards and citizens – as they see enrolment declining, need to start to partner to create a hub. Start the partnerships before the crisis
- The inter-generational transfer of assets is enabling young families to afford the expensive housing costs of living in Dundas
- Look at the Scandinavian models – the community engaged the school board and “forced” them to share their assets with the community.
- Great recent example in Hamilton where a school was made available to a group celebrating Pakistan last week (?)
- Use the schools like hubs in advance of any ARCs
- We need to meet with the Trustees more
- Hold meetings in the schools, i.e. Yorkview, to raise their profile across the community
- Ask the Dundas Star to cover School Board meetings
- Consider a sub-committee like Dundas Rides to prepare for the ARCS
- Engage the “mothers of school kids” in Dundas
- Invite our provincial government representatives – Sandy Shaw and Donna Skelly – to our meetings
- Get involved in parent councils in the schools
- Establish a Dundas Advisory Council for the trustees

Table 4: Paul Tutt (first half), Carol, Phyllis, Tom Malcolm, Paul #2, Jack, Tony, Margot (compiler)

1. How can we ensure that our local schools stay open?

- very important to have community contacts and connections and to voice our concerns to our trustee and to the community at large
- need partnerships i.e. daycare at Yorkview to make use of underutilized space
- no schools are currently underutilized (per Paul Tutt, HWDSB)
- concern that St. Augustine may close
- how are school population projections made, they cannot always predict accurately
- schools as hubs important to increase utilization
- after school programs important to use space and provide leisure/activity for children
- concern for keeping older facilities open if they are outdated/below standard or if they are under capacity, better to have up-to-date full schools
- Dundas has focus on senior developments so we won't be attracting young families, need to attract young families, therefore will need to focus on affordable housing, this will also lead to a balanced community
- collective bargaining is very strong and may be outpacing other wage groups, so costs are increased
- technology: how much is necessary, again costs may be too high
- partnerships needed, Dundas community should facilitate partnerships...have a working group...need imagination and collaboration amongst community members
- bring generations together i.e. retirement facility next to schools which leads to beneficial interaction for both young and old, decrease isolation of seniors, respect and learning by youngsters, buddy system where seniors and students read together

2. How can we most effectively make use of schools as community hubs?

- bringing seniors and children together, not only enhances utilization of space but it is also excellent for social connections
- partnerships with other groups like YMCA, daycares, seniors, Dundas Community Services
- important that partnerships are a good fit for successful sharing of spaces, construction considerations, security i.e. police checks for people and physical barriers
- funding a consideration (business plan) to make partnerships viable
- may need a group i.e. Dundas Community Council that can identify partners

Table Discussion High Lights:

1. Dundas needs to attract young families to fill our schools and create a balanced community.
2. Dundas needs more affordable housing to attract young families.
3. Goal is for up-to-date schools with full capacity, not out-dated under-utilized schools.
4. Schools as hubs important for utilization of space and also for positive social interaction.
5. Identifying good potential partners for school hubs is critical to success and may require a group i.e. Dundas Community Council to facilitate.
6. Community involvement and collaboration is key to exploring path to keeping schools open. Citizens need to share ideas with each other, with our school trustees, our elected representatives.

Table 5: Tim Leslie, Alex Johnstone..... Notes compiled by: Tim Leslie

Question 1: How can we ensure that our local schools stay open?

Attract Young Families to Dundas

- affordable housing options
- zoning to allow all existing houses to have a second unit with no bureaucracy
- encourage refugee families to live here (higher proportion of children)

Schools must become community hubs and multi use buildings

- incorporate seniors centres into schools
- Continue to work in being a welcoming community

Encourage Smaller schools to remain in communities

- smaller schools in the centre of local neighbourhoods are the centre of the neighbourhood
- smaller schools encourage parental involvement
- change zoning of Schools so they can't be turned into housing developments

Ensure School has Programming

- if local school school population is declining and school is in a central location then special programming can help boost numbers

Ensure school portion of building is 90-100 % full

- Building does not have to be just school but can have other compatible uses

School Buildings need to be owned by the community

- School Board should be users of buildings, not owners

Question 2: How can we most effectively make use of schools as community hubs?

Identify schools at risk of closure

- school board keeps detailed records on their website of how full schools are

Identify compatible uses to make them a community hub

- this must be done before an Accommodation Review Committee (ARC)....once this has been announced it is too late
- by being proactive you are much more likely to succeed
- get list of compatible uses from school board
- let groups know that space in a school is available ...advertise for submissions
- need permanent parents
- do a community needs assessment (in cooperation with your councillor)

Dundas needs more recreational facilities

- schools need to be more available to casual recreation- weekly community access
- should be allowed without booking
- now they are too expensive and difficult to access

Dundas needs more seniors facilities

- combining schools with seniors centres
- finding activities that seniors and children can do together is mutually beneficial (ie community gardens)