



**The Board of Education of School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)
March 27, 2014 Special Board Meeting - Tolmie Boardroom, 556 Boleskine Road**

MINUTES

Present:

Trustees Peg Orcherton, Chair, Bev Horsman, Vice-Chair, Catherine Alpha, Tom Ferris, Elaine Leonard, Michael McEvoy (6:50 p.m.), Diane McNally, Deborah Nohr, Edith Loring-Kuhanga

Administration:

Sherri Bell, Superintendent of Schools, Debra Laser, Secretary-Treasurer, Pat Duncan, Associate Superintendent, Dave Pitre, Associate Superintendent, Katrina Ball, Associate Secretary-Treasurer, Seamus Howley, Director of Facilities Services, Nita McBurney, Recording Secretary

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m.

Chair Orcherton recognized and acknowledged the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, on whose traditional territories, we live, we learn, and we do our work.

Chair Orcherton thanked everyone for attending. She acknowledged that this has been a difficult process and that a decision would be made regarding Sundance this evening.

A. COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING

A1. Approval of the Agenda

It was moved and seconded:

That the March 27, 2014 Special Board Meeting agenda be approved with the following addition:

C. Proposed Sundance Elementary School Facility Closure – Notice of Motion

Motion Carried

Chair Orcherton stated there would be five minutes of time allotted to each speaker and that Mr. John Balogh, Sundance parent, would open and conclude the presentations prior to the Trustees making a decision on the relocation of the Sundance program.

B. COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

John Balogh, Sundance parent, thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for all of their efforts, expressing that this is a manufactured crisis as the government refuses to fund public education while it continues to fund private education. He acknowledged that closing a school is the most fundamental thing that a Board has to face. He feels that Sundance provides a program that doesn't exist anywhere else.

Kira Antonik, Sundance parent, presented a short video about Sundance and its students. The video depicts Sundance students speaking about how much their small school means to them.

Pat Carrico, former Sundance parent and teacher at Victoria West, read a letter from her son, Nick Blasko, who credited Sundance for the success he has had in his adult life and his career. He felt that the school should be kept open at whatever cost, adding that he acquired the majority of his skills at this school – imagination, creativity, communication, acceptance and tolerance. He urged Trustees to find savings elsewhere and to allow Sundance to continue at its current location.

Ruth Nicholl, neighbour to Sundance School, read the District's mission statement, referencing the words "a responsive and safe environment" as they relate to Sundance. She stated that they have lived one-half block from Sundance for 27 years, that the children playing have been a deep part of their lives and that the school is unique. She asked the Board to find the savings elsewhere.

Angela Wignall, Sundance parent, stated that there are a number of children who do not fall into designations. She praised Sundance staff for their ability to supervise students. She added that the school supports complex needs; it has no bullying, supports expression and accepts difference. She believes that Sundance is an ideal school for her son.

Mary Rose, former Sundance parent, stated that Sundance does it differently due to the nature of the school and that it does not make sense to consider closing Sundance.

Benjamin Alto-Bond, Sundance graduate, stated that Sundance is a school that is incredibly accepting of everything. He was homeschooled prior to attending Sundance. He said that he learned so much from Sundance and that the school has had a lasting effect on him. He felt that it would be a mistake to close Sundance.

Marianne Alto-Bond, former Sundance parent, felt that one could not put forward a better example than her son, Benjamin, noting that there is an expectation of inclusion, tolerance and collaboration at Sundance. Everyone is welcoming. She stated that the students have a unique opportunity because of the teachers, the school and the school's multi-age groups. She added that the Board is facing an impossible choice that is not of their own making; however, the Board has the power to say no and to let the provincial government know that it is more about values, commitment and community than about numbers.

Maggie Bird, Sundance parent and special education teacher in the District, has a son in grade 4. She expressed that everyone at Sundance understands her son and knows how to help him. Her son has been provided with comfort, allowing him the confidence to make many friends. She questioned whether her son's needs would be met somewhere else.

Lucy, Grade 5 Sundance student, stated that Sundance is a great, bully-free school where all students are friends with each other; they all have lots of chances to be a leader because the school is small, and everyone feels comfortable. She is concerned that the students will all be split up if the school closes.

Jasper, Sundance student, is a Trans boy, who stated that he can be who he wants to be and that he does not have to care about being a boy or a girl or whether he plays with the girls or boys. He finished by stating that everyone gets along at Sundance.

John Balogh, Sundance parent, stated that he has talked as a facilitator but would now talk as a parent. He commented that generally society cherishes sameness and wants those with differences to hide them. He said that he never worried that his son would be bullied when his son came out as a Trans boy as this school offers a safe and caring environment. He asked the Board to please vote to keep Sundance alive.

Rachael Hainal, Sundance parent, has a son in Grade 4. She expressed that this school has not only shown her that it is an incredible place for learning but that the parent community has been very supportive of her in her fight with cancer. She feels that Sundance has completely changed her son in terms of him being able to read, write and wanting to attend school. She concluded by saying that this school needs to stay open.

Tahlia, Sundance student, expressed that Sundance was the 'bestest' place it could ever be and that the school leaders, staff and teachers are really nice. She hopes that the school will be kept open.

Simeon, Sundance student, said that he has been attending Sundance since Kindergarten and it is like a second home to him.

Ruth MacIntosh, Sundance parent, stated that her family chose Sundance when she was a single parent. Eighteen years and three more children later, they are still at Sundance. She said that transitions can be difficult especially for vulnerable students. She urged the Board to keep Sundance open.

Chris Meglic, Sundance parent, stated that being at Sundance has changed his child's perception of school such that she does not want to leave school when he goes to pick her up. He stated that a lot of children may not fit into the mainstream which is why schools of choice exist. He recognizes that enrolment is a concern and suggested that raising awareness could increase the enrolment by one or two more classes.

Nicole Baker, Sundance parent, said that her son is in grade 2 and is very bright. She stated that she was a 99% scoring student in a bigger school setting which she disliked. She noted that students love to go to Sundance which will inspire life-long learning. She added that she is a single parent, and like a lot of other Sundance parents, has built her life around this school. She finished by acknowledging that the Board has a tough decision to make.

Jordan, Sundance student, whose mother spoke on his behalf, stated that her children have experienced three school systems and that she was pleased to see the options available when the family moved to Victoria. They chose Sundance because their one child struggles with anxiety and they wanted a school where their child would feel secure, would not get lost and would not have to change schools again until middle school. She indicated that they are open to seeing Sundance turn into something larger. She believes in public education and acknowledged that Sundance is not the best school for everyone but it is for lots of students.

Sean Purtle, parent, with a son in Grade 2, acknowledged that none of the Trustees want to close the school but that they will make a decision for which they will be held accountable. He understands what Sundance costs and believes that other options should be explored to keep the school open.

Debra Swain, Sundance teacher, has been at Sundance for seven years and stated that Sundance is a unique place to teach where kindergarten to grade 5 students learn and play together comfortably. She hopes that the Board will reconsider closing Sundance.

Allison King, Grade 4/5 teacher at Sundance, said that she believes in small schools and that children learn best in small environments. She stated that she will be a good teacher no matter where she goes but that she is a better teacher at Sundance. At Sundance, she knows who she will be getting in her class next year. She asked the Board to try to make the right decision for everyone.

Kira Antonik, Sundance parent, stated that she was there to represent the voices of the 628 people who had signed the petition asking the Board to protect Sundance. People from all over the world have signed this petition as they believe in small schools.

Sam, Sundance student, whose mother spoke on his behalf, thanked the Board for considering their many voices. She acknowledged the difficult decision before the Board and encouraged the Board not to close the school but rather to look at other options.

Gary, Sundance grandparent, stated that his daughter chose to purchase a home close to Sundance School. He expressed that Sundance is unique and at the heart of the community and must be saved.

Rachel, Sundance parent, stated that her daughter began attending Sundance in Kindergarten. They have found Sundance to be an inclusive, accepting, safe and supportive environment.

Ryan, Sundance parent, stated that he feels very fortunate for his daughter to be able to attend Sundance. He added that Sundance should be studied as a model program for educating students in a community of families.

Joanne, out-of-school care leader at Sundance, stated that she has made some observations from working at Sundance. The school invites the child to grow in a caring environment. Sundance students demonstrate values, listening, caring and being empathetic. The students, parents and school really believe in those values and they make the world a better place. The children have high expectations of those caring for them and they advocate for themselves and demand respect and attention. Sundance sets students up to succeed.

Peter, Sundance parent, stated that given the discussion of the value received from Sundance serving its special population, the decision should be to keep Sundance open.

John Balogh, Sundance parent, thanked those who had stayed for the entire meeting. He acknowledged how hard this is, that people are passionate about their school, adding that all the people in attendance are willing to work with the Board to save Sundance. An option that appeals to the parents and students is the idea of turning Sundance into a Nature K to 5 school. He noted that the District is in a competitive educational environment and that there are opportunities for students to attend small, private schools. He asked the Board to work with them to try to save the school.

C. PROPOSED SUNDANCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FACILITY CLOSURE - NOTICE OF MOTION

Trustee Loring-Kuhanga presented her motion stating that the parents requested this motion in order to be clear that the Board is closing a school.

It was moved and seconded:

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| That the Board of Education of School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) close Sundance Elementary School as of July 1, 2014. |
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Trustee McNally stated that she wants the children and parents to know that this is about closing a school.

Trustee Alpha said that she will not vote to close a school. As a teacher, she has found that some students find larger schools overwhelming and as such there is a need to provide smaller learning environments.

Trustee Loring-Kuhanga stated that she supports Sundance School. As a Trustee, she made a commitment to each student's success and to remember the most vulnerable students.

Trustee Ferris noted that the initial motion was for the Board to approve the relocation of Sundance. This was the motion that people had in mind and this is the motion he would prefer to support; however, if the parents want this, then he is prepared to support this motion. In the last 15 years, the District has demonstrated improvement and student needs continue to be met. Given the budget implications, it is very difficult to sustain small schools at the cost of the rest of the students in the district.

Trustee Nohr stated that she believes in neighbourhood schools and that she supports Sundance. She will be voting against the motion.

Trustee Leonard stated that she understands why this motion was put forward but from the Board's perspective, the original motion is preferred as it is possible to move a program. Schools within a school do work. The District does have a structural deficit. Given increasing cost pressures and declining enrolment, everything cannot be sustained.

Trustee Horsman stated that Sundance can rise again at a new location. The Board is committed to making this choice available.

Trustee McNally stated that the motion was brought forward to have a clear conversation about what will happen.

It was moved and seconded:

That the Board of Education of School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) close Sundance Elementary School as of July 1, 2014.

Motion Defeated Unanimously

D. PROPOSED SUNDANCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FACILITY CLOSURE AND PROGRAM RELOCATION DEBATE

Trustee Ferris stated that he believes the Sundance program could be moved to another location very successfully.

It was moved and seconded:

That the Board of Education of School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) approves the relocation of the Sundance Elementary School program to Lakehill Elementary School and closure of the current facility effective July 1, 2014.

Trustee McEvoy thanked everyone for their thoughtful interactions. He noted that the infrastructure was built to accommodate the baby boomers for an enrolment of 33,000 that is now approximately 18,000. People are now having much smaller families. As Trustees, they have to make responsible decisions and consider the impacts on all students. Trustee McEvoy stated that he is a huge supporter of choice and he believes that this is an opportunity to keep the Sundance program alive, which will be why he supports this motion.

Trustee Horsman stated that she will support this motion as she feels it is the best alternative and the Board now needs to put their energy into making Sundance work. Trustees have an obligation to submit a balanced budget.

Trustee McNally stated that she will not be supporting this motion because of what she has heard from the parents.

Trustee Loring-Kuhanga stated that she will not be supporting the motion as she felt that the relocation discussion was actually about closing a school.

Trustee Alpha stated that she believes that Sundance is not a program but is a school of choice that needs to remain at Sundance, and so she will not be supporting this motion.

Chair Orcherton thanked everyone for their presentations and noted that it is very difficult to deal with the emotional aspects of this issue. She, however, has to think about all 18,590 students in this District.

Trustee Ferris thanked everyone in the community who came out to the meeting.

It was moved and seconded:

That the Board of Education of School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) approves the relocation of the Sundance Elementary School program to Lakehill Elementary School and closure of the current facility effective July 1, 2014.

Motion Carried

For: Trustees Ferris, Horsman, Leonard, McEvoy and Orcherton
Against: Trustees Loring-Kuhanga, McNally and Nohr
Abstained: Trustee Alpha

It was moved and seconded:

That the Sundance Elementary School Facility Closure Bylaw No. 14-01 be given all three readings at the Board meeting on March 27, 2014.

Motion Defeated

For: Trustees Ferris, Horsman, Leonard, McEvoy and Orcherton
Against: Trustees Alpha, Loring-Kuhanga, McNally and Nohr

Since the motion to give the bylaw all three readings at the March 27, 2014 meeting was not carried unanimously, it is considered defeated. Therefore, only two readings can occur on March 27, 2014.

It was moved and seconded:

That the Sundance Elementary School Facility Closure Bylaw No. 14-01, being a bylaw to close Sundance Elementary School, Facility No. 61008, located at 1625 Bank Street, Victoria, B.C. V8R 4V5, effective July 1, 2014 be:

Read a first time this 27th day of March, 2014;
Read a second time this 27th day of March, 2014;

For: Trustees Ferris, Horsman, Leonard, McEvoy and Orcherton
Against: Trustees Alpha, Loring-Kuhanga, McNally and Nohr

Trustee Orcherton thanked everyone for attending this evening and for being respectful. She stated that the third reading of the bylaw would be conducted via a poll vote the following morning March 28, 2014. She added that if there is a way to address the issue of transportation, it would be considered. She said that the Board will work with each family as they go through the transition to ensure that the needs of the students have been met.

D. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved and seconded:

That the meeting be adjourned.

Motion Carried

The meeting adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

CERTIFIED CORRECT

Chair

Secretary-Treasurer