

MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE



To / Destinataire	Members of Corporate Services & Economic Development Committee	File/N° de fichier:
From / Expéditeur	Councillor Alex Cullen, Bay Ward	
Subject / Objet	Dec. 1/09 CS&ED Committee meeting - Grant School and St. Thomas School reports	Date: 24 November 2009

At the December 1/09 meeting of Corporate Services & Economic Development Committee you will be dealing with 2 reports that affect communities in my ward - the former Grant Alternative School (2720 Richmond Rd.) in Queensway Terrace North and the former St. Thomas Catholic Elementary School (9 Leeming Dr.) in Crystal Beach-Lakeview.

Grant School

In the case of Grant School, you will recall that this school was declared surplus by the Ottawa-Carleton School Board in 2007 and that the City, under the direction of City Council and pursuant to the Policy for Surplus Schools, purchased this site (along with Bayview School, another school site declared surplus by the OCSB in 2007). At that time the Centre multi-services francophone de l'ouest d'Ottawa (CMFO) approached the City with a proposal for community use of this site and building, and began developing a business case to assume responsibility for the use of this site and building. This report proposes the next steps to for CMFO to finalize their business case and submit it to the City for evaluation and report back to Committee and Council on the viability of their business case.

I support the recommendations in this report. It is my expectation that CMFO will have a robust business case to submit to the City regarding this site and building. Should, however, this prove not to be the case, then the report proposes to consult with the community on possible community uses for this school site prior to any disposal or redevelopment. I concur.

I believe, however, that the CMFO business case will prove the value of the City purchasing this site to retain in public hands this community asset, as their programming proposals will meet the needs of the growing francophone community in Ottawa's west end.

St Thomas School

However, the second report regarding the St. Thomas School site has a very different proposed outcome which, in my view, does not meet the intent of the City's Policy for Surplus Schools.

Here staff are proposing to purchase only a slice of the school site from the Ottawa Catholic School Board, which will allow the OCSB to sell the balance of the property for development. I do not support this recommendation and will be proposing an alternative (Option 2) that is discussed in the report.

Given the timelines of the motion by the OCSB adopted on September 24, 2009 to dispose the St. Thomas School site and the requirement for the City to indicate its interest in purchasing the site by December 24, 2009, there has not been sufficient time for the City to consult with the community on potential community uses for this site. However, as can be seen from the staff report, the Crystal Beach-Lakeview Community Association has been aware of the potential disposal of the St. Thomas School site and has proposed a number of community uses, under the expectation that the City would be following its Policy for Surplus Schools and would be purchasing the site. Unfortunately staff has not had the ability to assess these or permit the community to investigate further. However, staff do recognize that there is a recreational programming deficiency in the Crystal Beach-Lakeview community, and are proposing the possibility of constructing a community facility at Maki Park (which abuts the St. Thomas school site) to address this need, for an estimated cost of \$3 million. However, there is no budget or capital program for this project(!).

In my view St. Thomas School fits the City's Policy for Surplus Schools perfectly and should be purchased by the City. Its land abuts Maki Park (a City park with an existing 2-room community building - Maki House) and would be a valuable addition to both greenspace and sports field space. The St. Thomas School building has a gymnasium and has classroom space that can be converted to other community uses (including child care) or rented out to a private school (interest has already been expressed by two private schools). The Crystal Beach-Lakeview community, as acknowledged in the staff report, does have an existing deficiency in recreational programming. My view is that the City should purchase the site to retain it in public hands, and then assess what community or other uses could be made of this site, as it did with Grant School and Bayview School.

Staff indicate, in their report, under Option 1 (purchase the site), that the likely cost of acquiring the site is \$3.6 million, and suggest that upgrading the school building could cost another \$1.4 million, for a total estimated cost of \$5 million (this would be debt-financed, as it qualifies as a land asset). However, staff also have provided another option - Option 2 (purchase the site, retain part and dispose part) for an estimated cost of \$3.5 million, where part of the site and building (including the gymnasium) is retained and the remaining part of the building demolished and part of the property sold to recoup the City's costs. The last option - Option 3 - is the staff recommendation, which is to buy a small slice of the site and build a new community building for \$3 million in Maki Park (the school board to sell the balance of the site for re-development).

Should CS&ED Committee not favour purchasing the complete site for community use (which would be my preference), then I would support Option 2 - purchase the site, retain part and dispose part. It provides more land to be added to Maki Park than the staff proposal, it retains the school gym and some meeting/activity space at the same price as building a new community building, without squeezing Maki Park as the staff proposal would do. It demolishes the older part of the school that would require costly remediation, and it re-coups part of the City's cost. And it retains a significant portion of the site for community use, and helps address the recreational programming deficiency for this community. Further, it would be consistent with what the City has done in purchasing Grant and Bayview Schools.

You will be hearing from the Crystal Beach-Lakeview community their strong support for retaining this community asset, and I hope you will listen to their concerns. I hope to speak to you about this important community matter leading up to the CS&ED Committee meeting on December 1. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Alex Cullen

Councillor, Bay Ward

cc: Kent Kirkpatrick, City Manager; Steve Kanellakos, DCM City Operations; Aaron Burry, GM Parks Recreation & Cultural Services; Gordon MacNair, Director Real Estate Partnerships & Development; Dave Donadson, Manager Realty Initiatives & Development; Diane Blais, Committee Co-ordinator, CS&ED Committee