

THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF HORTON

HORTON PUBLIC SCHOOL

January 26, 2005

There was a meeting of the Horton Council and the Parents Council of Horton Public School with Marjorie Doering, Trustee, held on Wednesday January 26, 2005. Present were Deputy Reeve Bob Hall, Councillors Dave Bennett, Don Eady and Bob Kingsbury. Also present were Sandra Beimers, Joyce Inglis, Earl Newberry, Kim Eady, George Thompson and Colin Campbell from the Parent's Council and Marjorie Doering, Trustee from the Renfrew County Board of Education.

1. Sandra Beimers was appointed Chair for this meeting.
2. CALL TO ORDER

Ms Beimers called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

3. CLOSURE OF HORTON SCHOOL

Ms Beimers reviewed questions that her group had sent to the Board Office and Mrs Doering discussed the answers.

\$600,000. allocated in 1994 for capital improvements, which included a multipurpose room for Horton School. This has not been constructed. Mrs Doering said that a multipurpose room appeared in a ten year forecast in the mid 90s. This forecast list is reviewed each year by the Trustees and the Ministry of Education reviews the list from time to time and provides funding for items they feel are important. Mrs Doering said that when the closure process was completed in 1993 and Horton School remained open, she spoke with representatives at that time, George Thompson and Susan Nicholas, who suggested that a multipurpose room and a library were not important if it meant that the school remain open. Mrs Doering recalled at that time the School Board offered to keep Victoria School open but rename it as Horton Public School and only students from Horton would attend. Mr Thompson said that the group, at that time, carried out a study and agreed to turn down the offer of Victoria School. He added that Horton expansion was the only capital project from the 1994 list that was not funded.

Mrs Doering reviewed the major capital expansion. Eganville had an expansion, Queen Elizabeth in Renfrew had an expansion based on the number of students in the school and the forecast of the students that would be coming. She also discussed how the Province announced to the Board that they were going to build a new school in Killaloe and Arnprior, even though these were not priorities to the Board.

Mrs Doering said that at the Consolidation Review this time the Board agreed that there would be no school enlarged through the use of Portables and no increase in transportation time for students. In October 2003 the Board decided to look at the enrollment trends and operating costs to see where they could save money i.e. energy costs. In May 2004 the Municipal Reeves were invited to a Board Meeting in Pembroke to hear of the upcoming Consolidation Study. In the Fall of 2004 the Board started their feasibility studies. They reviewed what impact closing one school would have on other schools. They toured the schools in each family area and the outcome is the possibility of closing seven schools in the County. One of these schools is Horton Public School.

In 1993 almost half of the Trustees supported closing Horton, however, when the decision was made to keep it open and close Victoria, the Board made good use out of Victoria School for alternative education classrooms. The budget forecast is not good at this time, they are short over a million dollars, their only alternative is to cut Special Education Programs, or reduce the number of schools that are open. Mrs Doering explained some of the programs that they could not cut back on.

Mr Thompson asked how the Renfrew Board compares with the Toronto Board for Special Education, as the Toronto Board has more new immigrants to educate under the Special

Education designation. Mrs Doering said all funding comes from the Province in "envelopes". You spend the money for that allocation only for that purpose. Renfrew County does not get an envelope for "English as a second language". Mr Thompson said he has come to realize that if you do not have some one speaking up you do not get ahead and Horton is losing out because their Parent Council remained quiet during this process. He suspects that if Horton closed we could be the only Municipality in Ontario without a school.

Earl Newberry commented that people in the large cities are moving out to the country, paying as much as \$40,000. for a lot to build on, so they are living in the rural area and want their children to be educated in their own area.

Councillor Bennett noted that the Board is short one million dollars and the easy way is to close schools. Is the cost saving still there in ten years if schools are closed? He noted that the Province suggested amalgamations would offer savings. These savings never materialised. He asked if the Board is also looking at cutting administration, as well as closing schools? Mrs Doering said over the last ten years they have reduced the superintendents from four to two, there have been ten people reduced in the Plant Side, there has been a reduction in technology staff support and there has been more consolidation with the Separate School Board.

Colin Campbell asked why we do not qualify for rural funding? Mrs Doering said that the Province has a set criteria which we do not meet. Members of the Parent Council asked how much lobbying the School Board is doing with the Province to change the criteria? Mrs Doering said the issues of the Board including rural funding are always in the local newspapers. You have to select your battles. She reviewed the rural funding process. The County gets the same amount per student for grants as Ottawa and Toronto get. Ottawa and Toronto have the advantage of "English as a second language", plus more students in their schools. Larger schools reduce operating costs.

Councillor Eady noted that twice in the last four years the Province has lowered the amount of taxes collected for School Boards (reduced the tax rate) by upwards of 20%. Has the Government increased money going to the School Boards in that time period? Mrs Doering said that they have equalized the funding across Ontario and as we do not have a large assessment base the County has benefited.

Mrs Beimers noted that Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy wrote to the School Councils noting that there will be an increase in rural funding. Mrs Doering said that in the first year of Minister Kennedy's mandate he issued notice that no schools were to be closed, but they did not increase funds to help the schools to be maintained open. Because of Horton's proximity to Renfrew we would not be eligible for classification as a rural school. Switches have happened in the County due to changes in the school funding criteria.

Councillor Bennett asked if we have the dollars in actual operating costs for Horton School and what the operating costs are forecast to be? Mrs Doering said that we can have a copy of the information she has. When the Board started the Public Consultation process they looked at the schools that would be eligible for closure. They did not know if other schools could handle the extra students, boundaries could be adjusted, but the Consultation did not support this.

Kim Eady asked if Horton would fill Queen Elizabeth? Mrs Doering said yes. Kim Eady asked if there would have to be a school built in five years if one of the schools was full? Mrs Doering discussed the situation in Calabogie. The students there had the choice of going to McNab, Admaston or Renfrew and the students choose Renfrew.

Colin Campbell asked if Horton was on the option list for Calabogie? Mrs Doering said no. She added that Horton had three options – Central, Queen Elizabeth or a portion near McNab Township to go to McNab Public School.

Councillor Eady referred to the 80% occupancy criteria. He noted that it has been proven that getting bigger does not solve funding requirements, noting that the City of Ottawa is always getting bigger but costs are still rising.

Mrs Doering reviewed the capacity at Horton School. Their records show that the capacity of the school when built was 171 students. Occupancy at this time is 54%. Colin Campbell added that the maximum students the school ever held is 131 students and questioned the 171 occupancy number.

The group questioned the criteria for capacity. George Thompson asked how the capacity criteria worked? Mrs Doering reviewed the criteria – 80% or higher receives extra operating money from the Province. Capacity under 80% does not get any benefit. Mr Thompson suggested that the criteria of 171 students must be based on 30 or more students per classroom. Now with a smaller number of students in classrooms the capacity of 171 would never be reached. Therefore the capacity criteria should be lowered. Mrs Doering suggested that this question be asked of Lisa Kuehl at the Public Meeting to be held February 10, 2005, at 7:00 p.m. at Renfrew Collegiate Institute. Mr Thompson suggested that the Board has to adjust for today's standards of smaller classrooms. You cannot start out with the old criteria and use it with today's standards.

Kim Eady noted that the schools where children are being relocated to would require improvements. How will this work with the finding? Mrs Doering said that with one less school they would have funding to look after the improvements that are needed. Less buildings to divide into the total funding envelope creates more money for each remaining school.

Deputy Reeve Hall suggested that it was too bad that this group did not have all the data the Board has compiled so it can be reviewed. Mrs Beimers asked how the Board can say doing this is in the best interests of the children. She knows of people who moved to Horton so that their children could attend Horton School. There has to be some value to a small school which is not a numerical value. The child's identity is going to be lost in a larger school.

Councillor Eady asked if the Board has looked at the school yards at each school, or are they just looking at the inside of the building? He suggested that Horton School has a superior property. Mrs Doering said what they are looking at is a shortfall of over one million dollars. The only option to consolidating schools is to cut programs. She noted that due to Horton School's small size they are benefiting by an extra teacher position, which is to keep classes from getting into triple grades.

Joyce Inglis noted that this is not necessarily a concern as in double and triple classes the older students help the younger students. Children are not sitting waiting for the teacher to get back to their grade. Mrs Doering said one less teacher means larger class size.

Mrs Beimers suggested why not change the school boundaries or close the school which required the most improvements? Joyce Inglis asked if Horton School is a sub-standard school why would the Board put students into another sub-standard school? Kim Eady suggested that the Ministry raised the standard of the school each year to show up smaller schools that cannot meet the standards. This should be taken up by the Board to the Ministry.

Earl Newberry suggested that the Board should be tough on union contracts and the number of students that should be in a class room. He noted that in the private sector management is tough with unions and unions accept reductions to keep their job. Industry is telling unions what the job rate would be.

Mrs Doering discussed the bargaining process – not much control over spending in this process. Deputy Reeve Hall said the Board needs over one million dollars, therefore, proposing that the real estate be reduced. Horton will then be the only Township without a school. This should be marked as a unique situation and students should be brought in to fill the school, in order that a school be kept in Horton.

Mrs Doering noted that in the Consolidation Process not all areas have expressed this concern. Deputy Reeve Hall said that in other areas there is more than one school so it is not an issue. Students are not moving out of the area. Horton is a Community Centre. We should examine and respect this uniqueness.

Councillor Kingsbury noted that he is very familiar with maintenance and he knows that if the school has more children there will be increased maintenance for the school to be responsible for – therefore increased costs.

Kim Eady asked what cuts will affect the students in Horton as the parents and other groups supply the programs i.e. swimming, ski school etc? Will they know which programs will be cut across the County before a decision is made to close schools? She added that the parents need to find out all these details as the parents only discovered that Horton may be closed, six months ago, when the Board has been talking about consolidation for over a year.

Mrs Doering reported that the consolidation process started publicly when the Reeves were invited to attend a meeting in the Spring of 2004.

Councillor Bennett noted that the shortfall is over one million dollars – where is the shortfall coming from? Mrs Doering said the shortfall is in Special Education and in maintenance grants.

Councillor Bennett asked how much would it cost the Board to keep Horton School open for the next five years? Mrs Beimers looked through the reports she had, it appears it will cost \$810,000. over ten years to operate Horton School which is \$81,000. per year. Councillor Bennett suggested that if the boundaries were changed to bring more students into Horton from other areas to a level of 110 students there would be no extra costs to the school.

Mrs Beimers said that there is a School Council in every school who should have been receiving information from the Board directly and not have been expected to read this information in the newspaper.

Colin Campbell noted that there is this one million dollar plus shortfall, the Board is trying to save money, however, he has noticed all the other schools that are remaining open seem to get new boiler systems etc in the last years but schools which are on the block did not get any upgrades, why is this? Mrs Doering said the population projections started dropping fifteen years ago. The reasons the schools were updated was the Province provided special upgrade funds over a period of one and a half years. Ms Kuehl, at the School Board, could provide information on the “recap” list.

Councillor Eady suggested that the lack of enrolment is because the School Board amended the boundaries so that more students could go to the larger centres. Mrs Doering said the boundary issue was in the past when Horton people in RR # 5 wanted to attend Town Schools. Cotieville students never attended Horton School they always went to Renfrew. George Thompson noted that Thompsonville never attended Horton.

Councillor Bennett suggested that if the boundaries are changed to require Horton children to go to Horton school, the school would be at its 100% capacity. Deputy Reeve Hall asked who has a vote on the seven closures? Mrs Doering said that Board staff has input through reports but the Trustees are the only ones who make the decision. Deputy Reeve Hall asked if we have convinced Mrs Doering to change her position? Mrs Doering said that her concern is that if there are no closures – what will we cut in our programs? The children will get equal or more education i.e. music if they are in town.

Earl Newberry said all he hears is cut, cut, cut. He does not hear any interest in the parents' concerns or comments. Mrs Doering said that the Board is concerned about what is best for the children through this consolidated process. Kim Eady said that if the Board has every bit of information they need to make a decision why go through this public consultation process? Mrs Doering said the Province requires the closure process to be public.

Kim Eady wondered what we can do to keep the school open?

Councillor Bennett noted that the decision is a political decision. If we present the information in a pleasant and feasible manner we have a fifty/fifty chance to keep our school open.

Mrs Beimers noted that we are still waiting for data from the School Board. Mr Newberry noted that he is aware of schools in other areas that were kept open. Mrs Beimers asked when is the Board going to stand up to the Government criteria to say that we will not close schools? Mrs Doering said that the Government does not tell the Board to close the schools, they just do not give any more money. Mrs Beimers said that the Parent Council needs to know what programs will be affected if the schools are not closed? Mrs Doering said public consultation was about giving the best education the Board can give to a student, not about closing schools. There are not enough funds generated from the Board to keep Horton School open.

Councillor Bennett added that if this group can prove to the Board that there are no cost savings to close the school – would Mrs Doering reconsider? Mrs Doering said that there are savings if the school is closed. Councillor Bennett said that if we use the Board's data and reverse them and get students to come from other areas, the enrolment would increase to 110 students and this would change the numbers dramatically. Mrs Doering said all the vacant data is based on a family of schools, the capacity rating is based on the Renfrew family of schools not just one school being Horton. In the Renfrew Family of schools the capacity is down.

Councillor Kingsbury said that we are only concerned about Horton. Councillor Eady said that he attended a one room school house with eight grades in it. In high school the best students came from the country, both academically and in sports. This must still be the case today.

Mrs Beimers noted that the boundaries are a big issue. She is aware of people who want to come to Horton but cannot cross the boundaries. Mrs Doering said that is why the School Board bases their decision on Family of Schools and the capacity in the Family of Schools.

Earl Newberry asked where do the parents' concerns come in? Parents have concerns that they want small country schools. What boils down to one million dollars for our kids? The people are going to fight this. The parents are concerned that the students in town have more knowledge on drugs etc than the rural schools and they want their children to be educated in the rural schools.

Deputy Reeve Hall asked when the Board was holding their Public meeting on consolidation in the Renfrew area? Mrs Doering said she believes the date is February 10, 2005 at Renfrew Collegiate Institute, for Calabogie and Horton. If there are specific questions that are to be asked they can be sent ahead to the board, so they can be researched.

Sandra Beimers asked if Mrs Doering knows how long each presentation can be, as they need to know to prepare their presentation. Mrs Doering said that she did not know the time but if they call the Board Office they could get this information. A copy of the information Sandra Beimers was given by the Board, some time ago, was given to the CAO/Clerk to be copied for the group.

Deputy Reeve Hall thanked the group for coming and Mrs Doering for attending and answering our questions.

Mrs. Beimers declared the meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Chair, Sandra Beimers

CAO/Clerk