

**Chignecto-Central Regional School Board
Education Services/Operational Services Joint Committee Meeting
February 24, 2015**

The Joint Committee Meeting of the Education Services and Operational Services Committees was held in the Board Room at Central Office on Tuesday, February 24, 2015 at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present

Education Services Committee

Vivian Farrell, Chair
Susan MacQuarrie
Wendy Matheson-Withrow, Vice-Chair

Operational Services Committee

Adam Davies, Chair
Keith MacKenzie
Marilyn Murray

Other Board Members in Attendance

Anne Beaver
Ron Marks
David Myles

Margie Nicholson
Mackie Ross
Trudy Thompson, Board Chair

Staff in Attendance

Lynn Blake, Recording Secretary
Debbie Buott-Matheson, Communications Manager
Valerie Gauthier, Director of Financial Services
Debbie MacDonald, Operational Services

Allison McGrath, Director of Human Resources
Scott Milner, Director of Education Services
Herb Steeves, Director of Operational Services

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Farrell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

ADOPTION / AMENDMENTS OF AGENDA

Moved by Trudy Thompson, seconded by Marilyn Murray
THAT THE AGENDA BE ADOPTED.

MOTION CARRIED

INTRODUCTION

Chair Farrell welcomed everyone, reviewing the meeting and presentation protocols.

PRESENTATIONS

Maitland District Elementary: Catherine Yuill, Denise Miller, Julie Thomas

Although the Maitland Community Hub Association did not have a presentation or materials to distribute, they were pleased to inform the Board that they are moving forward with the development of their submission and that they are on target for the May 31st deadline. At this point they indicated they did not see any value in making a detailed presentation to the Board and Administration citing that the format of the meeting does not present an environment for collaboration, brainstorming and work shopping innovative ideas. The Association members assured they are moving forward with the Hub model as heard in previous presentations. They are confident and excited about the potential they will demonstrate in their submission. They spoke briefly and directly to the elected Board Members to recap their serious concerns with the process:

- The entire first year of the two year allotment to demonstrate the viability of the community Hub was spent waiting on guidelines. Recognizing this, the Minister asked the School Board to give the schools an extra year. Responding to the Minister, the Board decided not to extend the timeline by two years. They asked each Board Member present to ask themselves if that is fair.
- The Board Administration, knowing that these schools had two years to explore community Hubs, should have undertaken the process to identify the space availability to communities two years ago. Instead, they were notified in mid-June the space that would be available to them. Three months before the viable business plan is due, they have been recently told the space available is significantly less than what they have been presenting in their plans all along. It's hard to believe the Board Administration did not review the schools and the education programming to determine that although they were only using 18% of the school according to the impact assessment, the program will require over 60% of the space to operate. This is not consistently applied to other schools the same size. They again asked each Board Member present to ask themselves if this is fair.
- Teachers, they heard recently in the news, have been allocated to different assignments before any final decision closure has been made. The media reports do state that this can be changed if schools are kept open but will current teachers be kept or will there be substitute teachers there? Another disruption to the school body.
- Responses to requests for information integral to the planning often take weeks. An example of this was a question posed to Administration following December's presentation at the Board. The question was sent on December 19, 2014, at 10:00 a.m. in the morning. The response was returned January 16, 2015, at 4:27 p.m. That was almost a month after the request was put in. A lot of the information pertained to the space allocation, some had to do with finances; all an integral part to the plan.

Because of the delays and hurdles the Association has been stalled on for certain portions of the plan, and the frustration of feeling that Administrative Members appear to not take the matter as seriously or see the urgency in the requests—even when it is stated clearly in the Association's communication—that being said, the Association knows they have a great model and have excitement building on what the plan can

be for the community, the Board and most importantly the children they are trying so hard to make it work for. This is the reason they are presenting and going down this path. They want to keep elementary education in Maitland and they know the Hub model is on the verge of creating something great. They need true collaboration and partnership to make this a reality.

Co-Chair Davies asked, indicating all committees would likely be asked, "When you say partnerships, who do you see partnerships with? Obviously it's the school/school board, but inside the community who are some of the partnerships that you see within the county?" referencing County Council. "What have you seen as the commitment coming from entities like County Council or Municipal units?"

Ms. Miller responded stating that there is support from Community Council however no monetary value has been asked of them at this point. The Association is presenting to Community Council on February 25 with an actual dollar figure to ask for.

Ms. Yuill added that certainly the Municipality is an important partner but there are also private businesses expressing an interest but cannot sign anything until the Association is further along in the process, as well as other not-for-profit social enterprises.

Co-Chair Davies followed up with the question, "Communication from the Municipal unit; that will be part of the presentation at the end?" The answer was, "Yes, once there is confirmation."

Chair Farrell asked about the information that was said to have taken weeks to get; that it was asked for on December 19 and it was actually received on January 16. Ms. Yuill stated that, "Yes. It was pretty consistent with how requests have been." Chair Farrell followed up with, "And once you received it, it was information you could use?" The response was that it was confirming something the Association was not sure about.

Member Murray asked, as the communities are concerned about the staffing in the schools, if Allison McGrath, Human Resources Director, could speak to how the staffing is being dealt with for clarification for everybody. Ms. McGrath commented each year a number of different factors are looked at in order to determine the staffing for NSTU. The collective agreement requires that a minimum of six separate rounds of teacher staffing. The first one starts with internal transfers and requires a number of days of being posted, a number of days for interviews, then goes to a second round of internal transfers and then there are placements of term teachers with a certain amount of service. Each of those takes almost a week to do. Because of that, they start as early as possible in order to get as much done before the summertime begins. The collective agreement requires all of those components to the NSTU staffing process. Because of that, they need the information before they start that first round because you can't go back and remove staff at a later date. You can always add staff later on, that's possible, but you can't subtract once you've started those rounds. With the NSTU, they've contacted the schools and started discussions with the Teachers' Union looking at the contractual requirements which talks about what happens if a school closes; where do the teachers go under those circumstances. It doesn't really talk about if at the end of the day a different decision is made. Let's say the school doesn't close or there is an extension or there is something different that happens after June 10. The Teachers' Union is very interested in coming up with a fair option for the teachers which would possibly include the teachers being able to go back to that school. Once those details that are still in negotiation right now are finalized, they will be providing those options and the information to each and every teacher and principal and Family of Schools Supervisor so that everybody knows in advance what's about to happen, the timing and what the

options are at the end. The CUPE and NSGEU are a little bit different. The collective agreements are all different and the way staffing is done are all different. They're anticipating with them, because they don't have the same type of round system and it doesn't take 6 or 8 weeks to do it, that they may be able to wait and not actually implement anything until after June 10, 2015, for those groups (administrative assistants, education assistants, custodial staff). It will probably apply a little bit differently, depending on which group.

Chair Farrell thanked the Association representatives and clarified that the deadline is March 31, 2015; not May 31, 2015, as Ms. Yuill mistakenly said in the presentation.

River John Consolidated School: Sheree Fitch, Valerie Suidgeest

Ms. Fitch began with an anecdote that when she was a little girl she would say to her dad, "Tell us a story with your mouth talking," and that meant talk to us without a book. What was great about that is that you never knew what was going to happen, but also that the story never ended because the next night he would pick up where he left off. Tonight we're picking up where we left off in December and we're hoping that the story is not going to end, but that it's a chapter in something that could be a really exciting story for all of the communities. Our mission and our vision is the same. We would like to draw your attention to the quote, 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has'. It should be familiar to everyone; it's on a plaque outside the Superintendent's office. We are those committed citizens. We're not trying to change the world. We are trying to save the small schools and therefore have a community that supports the students that live there. We also have a quote from Ray Ivany; and River John SOS is an excellent example of Ivany in Action. In fact our members are participating in, and if you don't know about it, it's a great initiative, Pictou County 2020 and Premier MacNeil just last week referenced that in an ATV interview as a really good example of what Ivany was talking in his report. So we did want to refresh why we're here...the HUB-bub. We were slated for closure; all of us were, unless we could come up with a Hub proposal. That's a big window of opportunity that we think many elected Board Members really, genuinely thought was worth pursuing. But in our meeting with Minister Karen Casey one-on-one, and I know the other committees would say, Minister Casey looked us right in the eye and said, "Look. Nobody really even knew what a Hub was." She was very honest about that and it's true. There were all kinds of ideas floating about at the time. The small schools' initiative had some ideas of what Hub would be but really nobody knew what it was. We're on new ground here, we really are. So, that was the first thing and we didn't wait. We didn't wait for the team of experts that didn't include any elected board members or any community members to decide what a Hub was. Instead we took ownership of that and we went to work and you know by now what our Hub represents to us. We had a community meeting and this was the kind of conversation that went like, "We will not be a strip mall for our children if that's what they mean by Hub." I remember that because that's the night I went "Whoa. This is the community I belong to. I am so in. They know what they want; they know what they don't want for their children." And that was enough for me. So what we ended up with in River John is people saying, "We're a great school, we're already a community Hub. Let's just prove it to the Board and be what we are, only better." So, 'H' for health and wellness; 'U' for unity of community and 'B' for building a brighter future. This of course led us to the idea of North Shore River John ScholarShip Discovery Center and MakerSpace Community. Seems really ambitious doesn't it but you know what? We are a big small school of 70 students and we have a lot of excess space. That was the problem, declining enrolment, excess square footage costs, so we had to come up with a pretty big idea. Little did we know that we would be expected to come up with capital costs, which you know we have the most of;

and also operating costs? That just never even crossed our minds that we would be asked to be revenue generators. If it was an honest invitation, "Let's create a Hub," then, yes. But, it's been obvious, "Show us the money first." That has been a financial ask that none of us think is reasonable or possible.

Quoting Nelson Mandela, "Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you." The reason we put that in is because our idea does seem ambitious. It's a "Who do they think they are?" kind-of-thing. The truth is the Discovery Centre in Halifax started with two men in the back of a van. Dream big, modify if and when you have to. I'm a Maritimer. I come from NB and NS and my whole life I heard, "Don't be getting too big for your boot straps." How do you haul yourself up by your boot straps if you play small? No one said it would be easy.

Nobody, I don't think in the last six months has said thank you to the Board Members who decided in their wisdom that maybe the process hadn't been fair in the review leading up to the decision to quit these three schools and maybe there was an opportunity. They were conflicted enough to give us a chance. We haven't said thank you. As we were doing this we haven't said thank you. Thank you to those Board Members. Now we need you to work with us.

I'm not going to go into the "But reallys?" You know what it is. We just can't believe what you asked. So we worked on and we think it's doable. I think at one point we thought, "What do they want us to do?" when we got those ridiculous numbers. "Did they think we would just quit in September when they said, "Show us almost a million dollars. Come up with a million dollars." Well, we won't quit and we didn't quit but with love we are creative; with it we march tirelessly. With it and with it alone we are able to sacrifice for others. We are all here because of the children and the students and I know that includes the Board too.

So as you know, on January 20, 2015, we met with Minister Casey and we have in here the January letter that we took into the meeting. I'm afraid sometimes electronically we don't all get things; we'd really like to make sure that the Board Members read it and take it back to the rest of the Board. There were four very pointed questions we asked the Minister. The next day we sent a letter back to her thanking her for meeting us one-on-one because she didn't have to do that. Unfortunately we also have her response to the four questions which is a non-answer. Basically, she has said very clearly she will not interfere in the process that is on-going. "You are firmly in the hands of the elected Board of the CCRSB." Good for the minister; great politician. Bad for us, the community. *[Duplicate letters were provided.]* We have also read her response to the Fowler Report and Valerie will speak to that.

Ms. Suidgeest began by stating that though the report doesn't directly mention Hub schools, they continue to move forward with what their vision of what a community Hub would look like in River John. We are a school first for our students. There is a lot of information in the handout previously circulated. We believe what we are envisioning is what is being envisioned in the report. We looked into social determinants of health, population of health, a lot of statistics and research but want to highlight 12 common determinants of health that are accepted by various disciplines and believe many of these could be supported through the vision and the school. They would include social support and environments, activities, educational opportunities and healthy living opportunities that all contribute to strength, a strong sense of belonging and that are importation for all ages but especially for our youth. Community schools also play an important in the health and well being of today's youth. Schools are a vital part of the community and even more important in rural communities which relates back to the Ivany Report on rural Nova Scotia.

Physical health is also very important. We believe that our school and our Hub vision would certainly offer a safe environment for indoor and outdoor education that our children can grow, play and learn in. There were a couple of changes from the December presentation but the website has been updated to show where the preschool has been relocated and bathrooms relocated. An architect's rendering of how the Hub entrance was circulated and will be posted to CCRSB's website as well.

Ms. Fitch stated that with regards to the exterior plans, the River John Fire Department and the people who own the easement in front of it very generously volunteered to make sure that the Hub had the right of way so that the children would be safe. There is a foyer with space available for an art gallery and café. The exciting thing is that Pictou County Creative, which is an arts council in Pictou County, is fully endorsing this and there is a list of artists and artisans who have already committed to displaying their art in this small gallery. There's no coffee shop in River John so there is no competition. The sale of art and coffee will all be worked out and there are lots of ideas, including the idea of a gift shop down the road. It doesn't interfere with anything in River John because River John is still a community on the rise.

Outside there will be a community garden. There is a horticulturist who graduated from NSAC who is volunteering to help, as are a lot of community members. The next thing is the outdoor recreation Hub. Movements like 'No Child Left Inside' in the United States or the book, 'No child in the Woods' which talks about today's children having a nature deficit disorder—we all know common sense, get outdoors, grow your healthy brains. Now the World Health Organization is actually thinking of making it a children's right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Again, the space that we have, five acres belongs to River John School, two belong to the county; the idea of a play forest, nature trails connecting trails... Pictou County Trails is very interested. We have cast our net very, very wide. This is the part that we really think that has been missing that some of you would really be interested in.

Ms. Suidgeest spoke of Minister Casey's response to the Freeman Report. Part of what she talked about was the readiness to learn of our early learning and our early childhood. The Province is committed to expanded services and programs. Minister Casey recently announced four early learning centres throughout. River John Consolidated has actually had a licensed preschool since 2002. It is staffed by a teacher with an early childhood diploma and it is inspected yearly. There is a liaison with the DEECD who comes in to see how the program is run. It has been very successful over the years and we certainly feel that it is a very valuable part of our school and with our Hub. We have plans for the future that we could expand it to five days a week; we could have a before and after school program which currently does not exist. There could also be an early intervention program and a parent support group for the area. Having the preschool has certainly given the students that have gone through it the confidence to enter Grade Primary. They are comfortable at the school because they are coming to the preschool during school hours, they are seeing the staff, they are going right by the primary classroom, they are seeing the teachers, they are seeing the layout of the school. Our teachers notice how much easier the transition is for our youth to come in for that and that they are performing better in school because of that.

Ms. Suidgeest also referenced the NSCC. It had been mentioned before. A survey was sent in December to the community to see what the interest was in courses that could be offered in the school. Results will be broken down in the March presentation. A final decision has not been made but there is an interest.

Ms. Fitch talked about the winter workshop series that everybody said, "Nobody will come to River John from 1-3 on Saturday afternoons in the winter!" The series has exceeded expectations. The first one was dance yoga and 28 people showed up and it goes on. They are really happy and are planning for spring

workshops, fall workshops and, maybe, even summer workshops are a doable thing. Twenty-eight people on a Saturday is a significant thing in a community the size of River John. It's not just our community, it is Pugwash, Tatamagouche, and Pictou; they're coming to River John. We're geographically located in a good place.

The next initiative really meets educational outcomes. All along we have been trying to match our MakerSpace Community and ScholarShip Centre with the Board's mandate and with the Department of Education and with the School Boards Educational outcomes. This is a really exciting one. Pioneer Community Newspaper, which we have given copies of in the last two progress reports, it's a new initiative in River John; it's in the black and it is actually going to go on for another year. This is great because it tells stories about our community, it celebrates our community, and seniors who are not online get to hear and read about themselves and reminisce. The same group of people is thinking about starting a small publishing company. You cannot see the difference between self-published books and Scholastic-published books. Self-published books are better produced and the quality is amazing. Imagine our students having an opportunity to know about publishing and having their stories shelved in the same library. Educationally compelling and thought to be covered quite well. It's also exciting for people who come in, they can tell their stories, and they can get a little chatter before they go. The possibilities there are endless and we have a lot of letters of support.

And of course there is the elephant in the room and I am sure that this is what you are really excited about: it's the money. So the biggest expense that you gave us was our roof. Really good news is that we have people at Airfield Engineering Flight in Pictou County and they are really, really interested in our roof. You know what that means? They will do it for free...for free! I am saying they will do it for free. We have the highest capital costs. We were handed that. It's an older school, it's a bigger school. So, if they do it for free, we just have to raise money for materials and you know we'd get busy doing as much of that as we could and if that happened? This is the exciting piece: Bullfrog Power from Toronto. We have been in touch with them on and off for about four months now. They have said that if we can get the roof done they will provide the resources for photovoltaic solar panels which means we would bring down our operating costs which means the David Suzuki Foundation is behind that which means you would make history as taking an old school and instead of shutting it down, you would be doing something environmentally green, clean, efficient and environmentally educating plus educating your students plus educational tourism. People get to come in to see how it all works. Everybody is happy. It's a really exciting idea. Of course, like Maitland and Wentworth, we are the chicken and the egg. Until we get the green light, how can people commit. The RCMP have committed to renting space, Read by the Sea has committed to renting space. But, they are not going to revenue generate for us. They are not going to pay our operating costs. We know that. We are still trying to get an audit by Efficiency Nova Scotia with a few emails back and forth but in the meantime, because we couldn't wait, we have Ecology Action Nova Scotia eager to help us assess the costs because they are excited about Bullfrog Power.

Ms. Suidgeest reviewed the five-year projected budget, what they have raised and spent and what they have made for revenue. The finance group has been busy sending out letters for donations and sponsors. Letters of intent have been received from the County and Read by the Sea and RCMP. They continue to be in contact with ACOA and Ms. Fitch has been in touch with the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. They have also launched the website and video on YouTube.

Ms. Fitch commented it is ambitious but they have done what they never thought they could do in less than eight months so they feel if they get the green light they will work their hardest to make it happen as

soon as they could. They wanted to say who they were. “Who are you? You’re not elected board. You’re not staff. What are you trying to do, taking your children’s/students’ education and trying to come up with plans and telling us what to do?” We’re not trying to do that. We’re trying to save our school and we want to work with you. It has never been done before and we’re inviting you to make it work.

Ms. Suidgeest answered, “We’re the parents of the students and we’re retired teachers, working accountants, nurses, publicists, women, fishermen, farmers, police, business people, stay at home parents, artists and more.”

Ms. Fitch said it takes a village to raise a child, we are that village. We also think it takes a child to raise a village and sometimes a little child shall lead you. We have a school that works and now we have an amazing vision but you, the Board Members, you really are the voice of the community who elected you. You are our voice, we have no power anymore. We don’t think; we know. We know we can create a new way forward that benefits all children of CCRSB. We have a lot of supporters and we don’t have to name drop but yes, everybody from Margaret Atwood to—and thank you to Karla [MacFarlane]—our MLA from Pictou County, who is here tonight and has been behind us every step of the way, and Active Pictou County and it goes on.

So what do we want? Ms. Suidgeest said they want to be invited back into the CCRSB family and we want to implement our Hub with CCRSB as partners as well as with other businesses and groups as partners.

Ms. Fitch continued. What we don’t want. We don’t want another year in limbo jumping through hoops. You’re going to vote in June to give us another year. Why would we go through what we have gone through? Nobody in our community can do it. It would be different if we were going through something, creating something hopeful but fighting like we’ve had to fight, like these communities have had to fight? No. And we are a team of 17 and we have young people on our committee and nobody wants to go through another year of jumping through hoops and we don’t want another review. We happen to think that if we were reviewed today since the Fowler Report, since that review, that we would pass with flying colours. We still continue to think that River John was thrown on that list at the last moment and we were never supposed to be on that list to begin with. We don’t want to go.

Ms. Suidgeest said in conclusion they are still hopeful that the Board, in its collective wisdom, will help them keep the school open. They are excited and working hard and know that there is a lot of work ahead for everyone.

Ms. Fitch said they want the Board to stand up for small schools. We want the Board to take a stand that sometimes not all small schools should close in this province or we will have ghost towns all over. I know many of you came from small communities. River John is geographically located in a village. You take away the life plug of that village if you take away the children and shut down the school. For them you take away their family because it is a big extended family in River John. What we would like you to do is to take all our progress reports back to the rest of your Board Members. We want you to get excited about our small scale discovery centre and makerspace community. You could be educational visionaries. You could be creators, not destroyers. I can go on, but you know, and I don’t think you need me to lecture you.

Ms. Suidgeest stated that in Minister Casey's response to the Freeman Report she states there's one guiding question, "Is this decision in the best interest of our students?" Certainly we don't feel that closing River John would be in the best interest of our children.

They closed with a quote from Margaret Atwood, "Money isn't the only thing that must flow and circulate in order to have good value: good turns and gifts must flow and circulate... for any social system to remain in balance." They also quoted Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. which they felt people should recognize as it too is in the hallway outside the Superintendent's office, "I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving: To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it -but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor." They thought this last one was really appropriate for the ScholarShip concept and they don't think that they have been at anchor or drifting in River John.

Chair Farrell thanked Ms. Fitch and Ms. Suidgeest for the presentation as well as for providing the presentation ahead of time as it gave Board Members an opportunity to look at it in advance.

Co-Chair Davies commented, "Ultimately when we are looking at a Hub, when it goes forward at some point, we're going to be tying together three strands: education, rural development and economic development. When you speak in the presentation about a letter of intent with the Municipality how supportive is the Municipality to the idea that when a Hub is actually in place, that becomes the new norm for a community and that becomes the way all business will be done in that community; that you would be the first point of contact to see if it actually works, potentially. Where is the Municipality on that specific issue?"

Ms. Fitch responded that the Municipality has been 100% supportive. For example, United Way is collecting the donations on the website page. That in itself, to have United Way behind them, is an incredible thing to make that link actually happen in the computer. Contact has been made with Mark Vandalo of ACOA, Donnie Cameron, Economic and Rural Development, Craig Beaton from Community Culture and Heritage and Mike MacKenzie of Tourism. Tourism couldn't provide any start up money but once the green light is given and the Hub is up and running Tourism can do all kinds of things from putting Discovery Centre on the website to actually providing expertise. The same goes for the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic and The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, "When the green light is given we are eager to help rural areas have some art and some culture and heritage." Again, it's very much like the chicken and the egg. The Municipality, like everybody, is on new ground. It won't be easy but it will be conversation, not confrontation. It will be a lot of people sitting down thinking, "How can we make this work? How do we keep something good and not break it?" The Municipality has been fantastic. The Municipality has committed \$25,000 per year but the discussions have been that it may not be just for River John but for other schools as well that may have that requirement in the future.

Co-Chair Davies clarified that the question wasn't specifically about money because it's in the plan; it's more the idea that ultimately a Hub is reconfiguring a lot of things and redesigning it and making sure that when these proposals come forward that Municipal units can understand that.

Ms. Fitch responded with Pictou County 2020 is an initiative which is all about if every community is healthy, as a region we're more healthy, as opposed to competing and elbowing. It's "What's good there? Let's make it work and make it better." It is a new way of seeing collaborative partnerships and a coalition

of people who have a vested interest in the health of small rural communities and the potential for some small schools to stay open.

Member MacQuarrie commented that when reading the Minister's Strategic Plan, the 3Rs, she found it interesting and immediately the three schools came to her mind. She stated she felt disappointed in the response to the meeting with the Minister and it's now up to the Board and its members to look at where the Minister wants us to go moving forward and to acknowledge that these schools are the ones that have it right.

Ms. Fitch said they were disappointed but not surprised. They expected that she doesn't want to interfere or give a directive. Everyone has read the Education Act. If the Minister of Education wants the Hub to work, it will happen but the Minister wants to give the Board their place. Ms. Fitch said she respects that and that she believes in school boards and the elected Board taking a big picture. Tough decisions, hard decisions aren't decisions without heart. It's just not the fiscal hard line decision. Ms. Fitch has faith that there are people that have given the three schools the opportunity and they all have in their own ways jumped through all the hoops that they possibly can because every community has a different vision for what their school can be in their community. They are three completely different areas and different schools and different solutions.

Member Nicholson commented on the amount of work that has been done so far. She asked if River John thought about a Welcome Centre or a Tourist Bureau. Ms. Fitch said that an old church houses the Welcome Centre in River John and that the Hub Committee won't replicate anything but what they are hoping is that the Welcome Centre will direct its visitors to the Discovery Centre.

Member Murray asked who the contact person for 2020 is. Ms. Fitch answered that Susan MacConnell is her contact person and that Ms. McConnell is willing to present to the Committee-of-the-Whole to let the Board know how supportive they are of the idea. Jamie Page is another contact person.

Chair Farrell indicated Pictou County 2020 has a website which Ms. Fitch confirmed, in addition to a Facebook page.

Chair Farrell thanked Ms. Fitch and Ms. Suidgeest for their presentation.

Wentworth Consolidated Elementary School: Andrea Rushton, Rick Parker

Mr. Parker spoke to the Members present:

This evening gives the chance to speak to the Board Members again and share where we're at in terms of the Hub model development. It gives the chance to challenge the Board again on their thinking. We have some of the same similarities that have already been heard in terms of some of the frustrations and challenges but some differences as well. Each of the communities is trying to respond to the closure decisions in ways that makes sense to us. I'll walk through this and I'm sure you'll see some differences as we go along.

I want to give a sense of some of the meetings and discussions that have happened. The meeting with Minister Casey has already been spoken about. I feel it's important for the Board to appreciate that there

was a meeting with the Minister and an opportunity for the three communities to bring our concerns to her. The concerns really centered around the unachievable revenue requirements, the unworkable time frames and some of the unrealized educational value; to summarize the three main themes of our concerns. The Minister has chosen not to intervene with those concerns and as has already been heard, we are somewhat disappointed with that. We had some expectations from that meeting that there may be some clarification provided by the Minister but as you've already heard it's interesting that we have come to the same sort of conclusion that in some ways her not intervening we think is a good thing maybe from a glass half full perspective or maybe it's even more than half full. It puts the responsibility back to you as Board Members and in some ways she is showing, I believe, some confidence in you as Board Members to make decisions; to deal with these concerns that she is not going to intervene with. We [the committees] didn't speak before tonight but we ended up in the same place in terms of the meeting with the Minister.

As you know, we made a presentation to the Committee-of-the-Whole on February 4, 2015 and we took a different approach in terms of our belief that Wentworth School should not be closed; that it deserves a chance to be reviewed under the new process, that we believe there was a significant amount incorrect and insufficient information to make an informed decision on. We presented that information and encourage everyone, because there were a couple of Board Members not present at that meeting, so we will be following up and hoping that you come to an understanding of that meeting and that presentation. I know you're going to have a chance to ask questions in camera later. That is basically our request of the Board, to make an informed decision. A lot of this is the theme around getting to effective decision making, getting to informed decisions.

At your board meeting, you postponed the motion to reconsider the closure decisions to a time on or before the end of June, 2015, and that was based on the Hub model timeframes overlapping with the March 31, 2015, date and you have heard already how that creates a lot of uncertainty. It creates uncertainty for the students, for the parents certainly for staff and for the community.

I wanted to advise you as well that we had a very positive meeting with County Council last week. They have been supportive throughout this process and they again confirmed their previous motion and their letters to the School Board. You will be receiving another letter from them requesting, from their perspective, that the closure decision be set aside and that Wentworth be allowed to be reviewed under the new process. They want to collaborate with the School Board and I think some of that is coming from the Ivany Report; some of it is coming from more community involvement within the County. They would like to take a different view of the relationship between the County and the School Board so there is something there for you to think further about.

So let's talk about the elephant in the room. It is very much the cloud over us in terms of what we are trying to work through and it has to do with revenue requirements. The closure decisions, I believe, were made based on financial pressures at that time. In fact, during our meeting with the Minister, Gary Clarke said that the finances at the time were very tight for the School Board and that really was a focus for the impact assessment reports. When we reviewed the FOIPOP information that became clear because a lot of it was based on the financial analysis, the money that could be saved and the cost of joining the schools. But, communities were given an opportunity to come up with ideas for other sources of revenue. Not just the Hub model, I don't think that was the only option, but to come up with ways of raising funds, with ways to offset some of these increased pressures on the bottom line on the finances of the School Board. No specific amounts were provided to us except for the Hub model requirements. We were advised along the way that cost savings would be considered similarly to other sources of revenue. We

think, that led us in part to take a broader view in the last couple of weeks around the revenue requirements and that's what we're going to be encouraging you to do as well. From discussions with one of the Board Members after our presentation on February 4, 2015, my eyes were opened a little bit in terms of some of the frustrations around funding and how the province changed the formula previously that will recognize some square footage funding to a per student funding. That got me to thinking about the pressures that puts on the school board in terms of declining enrolments which means declining revenues and so I understand that challenge that you have. There is a sense that smaller rural schools may be subsidized by larger consolidated schools. I think I can show you that that's not the case in Wentworth and may very well not be the case in River John and Maitland if you look at it slightly differently. Regardless, we know that Hub schools could utilize access space and could contribute some revenue as well and we talked a bit about that. So I had a look at the financial numbers. I am a bit of a numbers person but I don't want us to focus on that. I tried to come up with what is the funding that the School Board receives for Wentworth school. I looked at the 2014 audit statement and I took \$126.5 million in base funding that you get from the province and divided it by the 20,500 students and you get about \$6,182 from the province for each student as part of base funding. Special education funding is separate as well as some separate recognized funding for First Nations students and so on. And then the Municipal funding is also something that is sort of base funding. It's a more detailed calculation but I have pro-rated it on a per student basis based on the \$3.5 million that the Cumberland County provides their 2600 students in the County. It works out to about \$1300 per student. So there is almost \$7500 per student that the School Board gets. If you take that and look at the 35 students in Wentworth; currently there's 27 we showed you how there could be 45. Next year there is going to be 32. Without transfers there could be 36—35 is a pretty conservative number in the middle. That's \$262,000 just on the basic per student funding that the school board gets for the 35 students in Wentworth. I would encourage River John and Maitland to maybe do the similar math.

We also get money from the Hogg Formula which is for rural somewhat isolated schools. That \$108,000 is an old number and would actually be higher with 35 students but it works out to total revenue of \$370,000.

So we looked to the operating expenses. The biggest part of that is obviously administration, teachers and wages. Maintenance hasn't amounted to too much. These are from the operating statements of 2013. We didn't have the updated information for 2014 but they wouldn't be very different. The total expenses are about \$338,000 for our school. The net surplus is \$32,000. We think that shows us that the school is actually viable from a financial perspective. Someone is going to say, "What about bussing and the cost of head office?" The 'black hole' as we used to refer to it in my workplace previously, the place you allocate things to when you don't know where else to put it.

We know there are additional sources of revenue. We have identified about \$30,000 in our Hub model work which includes things like garbage collection by the Municipality, shared administration from the principal's perspective, we believe there's savings in bussing costs that can be done. We think that with the surplus and the additional revenue that will also cover off the bussing costs and the head office allocation which worked out to be about \$750 per student and \$1,000 per student.

Here's where we end up with some observations and conclusions:

- Wentworth School is financially viable on basis of per student funding;

- Base Provincial/Municipal funding plus the Hogg formula should be considered in the community revenue and the Hub model requirements; otherwise the community pays twice for the education and operation of the school.

Maybe this can be explained in a different way. If Wentworth was successful in its Hub model operation and actually came up with a plan that generated \$250,000 per year and covered all the maintenance and capital costs, the school would still get the revenue from the Province and the Municipality. So what happens to that money? Where does that money go? Does that go to some other school? Does that go somewhere else? It seems to me that money, that funding should be used in any calculation for the financial requirements of a Hub model. If there's a shortfall then fair enough, look for the Hub model to come up with that short fall. In Wentworth, there is not a shortfall. There is actually enough money coming from the Province, coming from the Municipality, coming from the revenue and cost savings that we know are there to pay for the operation of the school and at 35 students, two classrooms, it's a small school, but the average classroom size becomes acceptable. The school is already fully utilized, there's only one classroom available for Hub school model so we think that this is the kind of perspective that is needed.

Saying all of that, though, where are we at with our Hub model? We have identified the other sources of revenue and cost savings. The interpretation of the guidelines as they currently stand does not account for the ongoing Provincial and Municipal funding. We only have one classroom that could be available by rescheduling the use of it because the school is basically fully utilized for education and yet the present revenue requirements which are not reasonable or achievable as I've already said are \$250,000 per year plus all the capital and maintenance costs. So where we're at with this, unless something changes, unless the school board changes its interpretations of the guidelines so that the revenue requirements are based on a combination of things; maybe the percentage of space that the Hub model uses, if it's using 50% of the school, covering 50% of the operating costs and recognize the base funding per student because that money is still going to be paid by the Province and the Municipality for the students that are in that school. Unless that changes, it really makes no sense for our Association to continue with any further work on the Hub model. We have identified opportunities that we think can contribute revenue. They are small and not as big as River John's ideas or even Maitland's for that matter because we only have one classroom. We know there is opportunity for a Hub model and we can present that to you but we really don't see any sense of trying to go any further and present you with any further plans at this point unless this elephant in the room, unless this funding issue can be addressed.

So then we sat back and said, "Where does that leave us?" We think we still have a lot of mutual interests between our community, the school board, the county; we've come to recognize that. Sure, at times we're frustrated but we also believe in the local decision making of the School Board and we're a local community group trying to hold onto our school. We think there are some mutual interests. We need to consider the children first. We've already heard that, that every child counts, to create the best learning environment for them. We don't think that's by bussing kids out of our community over an hour to a school when we can keep them within our own community.

So consider the impact of the school closure on the community and the County. The County is going to be confirming their wishes to try and keep the school. There's no question that if that school closes that community is going to be done harm that cannot be changed. The social and economic impacts we've identified to you as the County. The Ivany Report, as was very well stated by Sheree Fitch, is looking for collaboration; that's what we're looking for.

You need to consider the information that has been presented. It's obviously due diligence on your part and good governance. We know you're capable of that and to make effective decisions. We also know that the Auditor General is going to be looking over your shoulder at some point soon and I think you will want to be able to hold up and feel good about the decisions that you are making.

Consider the uncertainty that we now are in because of deferring the decision until June with children, parents, teachers, support staff and the community.

We're not sure this is the right thing to do but this is where we're at. We believe that if you really give this the thought that it deserves, given the mutual interests and unless there are more realistic revenue requirements, we can't go much further on a Hub model proposal so why wait until June? Why would we wait until June for you to make a decision on Wentworth? We respectfully request the Board to make an informed decision and to reconsider the closure at your March meeting. Remove the uncertainty from all of this and make a decision that we believe we've shown to you. We're not asking for a lot here. We're asking that the School Board treat us fairly. Give us a fair chance at the new review process. We're not asking for the school to be open forever and a day. We're not asking that you simply just go away and leave us alone. That's not what we're asking for. We are prepared to do another review, believe it or not. Probably with some different people involved but we'll be there. That's what we're asking for. It's not a big request, it's not a big ask in our minds. Please give our children something to cheer about.

Member Murray stated that the other two communities have reached out to Municipalities and business and community colleges. She asked Wentworth how much reaching out Wentworth has been done to try and make it viable. Mr. Parker responded that the County has been very supportive through the whole review process and in the last two years as they have tried to come up with other sources of revenue. Small business and large business, such as Wilson's, has been very supportive. It's been difficult for Wentworth to say definitively how they can help other than contribute some money to help them through the planning stage. Again, they only have one classroom. For the first year they didn't know what the rules were going to be on a Hub model and then three months after that, it was confirmed how much space they had. In the sense of reaching out they have talked to public health people, talked to community YMCA organizations, small businesses in the area, and Provincial government. Wentworth is a central location so there are definitely opportunities to use that little bit of space for other purposes to generate revenue. It's not as big an opportunity as you hear in the other two communities. Ms. Rushton added that the \$250,000 is a deterrent.

Chair Farrell thanked Mr. Parker and Ms. Rushton for their presentation.

Chair Farrell concluded by thanking all of the Hub communities for their presentations; the fact that all attended to participate in the process is appreciated and all that was said is respected. At this time the meeting will be going in camera as Members of the Committee discuss the presentation that the Wentworth Sustainability Association made on February 4, 2014, the contents of which touch on legal and personnel issues and as per the by-laws such discussions must be held in camera. As to what happens after that, it will be decided and communicated in the near future including some indication of a timeline in which we can respond in a more definitive way.

Moved by Wendy Matheson-Withrow, seconded by Marilyn Murray

THAT THE MEETING MOVE INTO AN IN-CAMERA SESSION REGARDING THE WENTWORTH SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY ASSOCIATION'S "REQUEST TO RECONSIDER SCHOOL CLOSURE PRESENTATION TO CCRSB".

MOTION CARRIED

Note: Members of the public left the meeting.

Moved by Trudy Thompson, seconded by Wendy Matheson-Withrow

THAT THE MEETING RECONVENES IN PUBLIC SESSION.

MOTION CARRIED

Moved by Trudy Thompson, seconded by Marilyn Murray

THAT ALLISON MCGRATH, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES, REVIEW THE WENTWORTH SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY ASSOCIATION'S "REQUEST TO RECONSIDER SCHOOL CLOSURE PRESENTATION TO CCRSB" SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE-OF-THE WHOLE ON FEBRUARY 4, 2015, AND REPORT BACK TO THE BOARD AT A FUTURE MEETING IN-CAMERA.

MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was adjourned at 8:57 p.m.