

**Joint Town and County Advisory Council Meeting
Saint Andrew Jr. School
Antigonish County**

Present

Mayor L. Boucher
Councillor Mary Farrell
Councillor Jack MacPherson
Councillor Diane Roberts

Warden Russell Boucher
Deputy Warden Owen McCarron
Councillor Mary MacLellan
Councillor Hugh Stewart
Councillor Vaughn Chisholm
Councillor Gary Mattie
Councillor Bill MacFarlane

Regrets

Councillor John Dunbar
Councillor Remi Deveau
Councillor Donnie MacDonald
Glenn Horne, Municipal Clerk/Treasurer (County of Antigonish)

Deputy Mayor Willie Cormier
Councillor Andrew Murray
Councillor Donnie MacInnis

Also Present

CAO J. Lawrence (Town of Antigonish)
Beth Schumacher, Deputy Municipal Clerk (County of Antigonish)
D. Wilson, Deputy Clerk, (Town of Antigonish)

Strait Regional School Board (SRSB) Members
School Options Committee (SOC) Members
Members of the Public
Media

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 PM by Mayor L. Boucher. She noted the purpose of the meeting and stated that comments would be limited to and from School Board members and Town and County Councillors.

Round Table Introductions

At the request of Mayor L. Boucher round-table introductions of Town and County Councillors, School Board Members and the School Options Committee members were made.

Approval of Agenda

Moved by Councillor D. Roberts and seconded by Councillor M. MacLellan that the agenda be approved as presented.

Approval of Minutes

Mayor L. Chisholm called for the approval of the previous Joint Town and County Advisory Committee minutes.

It was Moved by Councillor J. MacPherson and Seconded by Councillor M. Farrell to approve the Joint Town and County Council Advisory Committee meeting minutes of February 15, 2017.

Mayor L. Boucher invited Mr. S. England to the floor to provide details on the process of the SOC.

Mr. S. England provided regrets on behalf of SRSB Superintendent Rice. He then provided background details on the school review process, which lead to the school review policy, P-3 schools in the area and their status. He noted all relevant documents related to the school review are available on the SRSB website.

Mr. S. England referred to the feeder system, the school review process, the timelines and processes of the SOC. He noted the SOC makes a recommendation to the Board, noting a decision is required by the end of April.

Council was advised that the Board is to receive final presentations tomorrow prior to making a final decision. Mr. S. England noted that three public meetings were held, reiterating that the information from the meetings are available for viewing on their website.

Mayor L. Boucher thanked Mr. England for his comments, noting she had attended some of the meetings, and provided comment on the public becoming more engaged through the process.

Councillor MacLellan advised that she represents District 1, which covers the area in which H.M. MacDonald School is located, noting she had attended all meetings. She provided comment on a February 22, 2017 meeting of the SOC which recommended the status quo. Councillor MacLellan noted she intended to make motion during this meeting that Town and County council support the status quo.

Councillor M. MacLellan provided comments on a March 6, 2017 meeting when a decision was reversed by the SOC, and another on April 19, 2017, when it was decided to close H.M. MacDonald School and advise that the Board requires Antigonish Education Centre after June 30, 2017, and that H.M. MacDonald permanently close, with Antigonish Education Centre designated as a receiving school for those who would have otherwise attended H.M. MacDonald School, and keeping St. Andrew Jr. School as a receiving school.

Councillor M. MacLellan noted she had read the reports and scenarios, and found no evidence where H.M. MacDonald was strongly recommended for closure. She then read through various School Board Scenarios. She noted the recommendation to close H.M. MacDonald School was an unexpected motion by the School Board.

Councillor M. MacLellan referred to a meeting held on April 19, 2017 and requested clarification on a motion to close H.M. MacDonald School permanently on June 30, 2017. Mr. S. England responded, noting that the meeting was held in camera. It was noted that H.M. MacDonald School was considered for closure, as part of an overall review.

Mr. S. England responded to a question from Councillor M. MacLellan on the calculation of savings on closing H.M. MacDonald School and how the savings are arrived at.

Mr. J. Blackwell, member of the SOC, noted that he was present at all public meetings and did not remember any public presenter suggesting H.M. MacDonald should close. It was noted the suggestion was included in presentation from Dr. Boyd.

Warden Boucher thanked everyone for attending. He then spoke to emotions related to schools, small schools as a resource and social hub for students. Warden Boucher noted his Council was not in favor of the school closures before the Board. He then spoke to the financial role of the municipal units that provide significant funding but have no say in how the money is spent.

Mayor Boucher thanked Warden Boucher for his comments.

Deputy Warden McCarron spoke to mental health issues, children moving to larger schools, and a possible air quality issue at Dr. J.H. Gillis High School. He commented on healthy small schools and having a high proportion of funding. He noted that population wise the County has bucked the trend other than Halifax Regional Municipality, and that small schools are the backbone of communities.

Councillor M. Farrell provided comments on the loss of jobs, less money in the community, the social aspect of younger and older children being schooled together, educational and spiritual well-being, and managing curriculum and goals. She noted she would like to see the status quo for the Antigonish Education Centre and H.M. MacDonald School.

Mr. S. England advised they have not looked at changes to curriculum and will look at class caps (provincial). He noted that in grades P-6 this year not one school broke the class cap and such initiatives will still be in place. Mr. S. England stated the Board would ensure students have supports in place, and that a gap analysis carried out this year by province, identified the SRSB as one of a few school boards that met the analysis, and that the resource ratio is at what the province recommends.

Councillor D. Roberts spoke briefly, noting that if a motion was presented to stay with the status quo, she would be supporting it.

Councillor H. Stewart spoke to the devastation his area experienced with a school closure, along with the loss of ball and soccer teams etc. He stated he was in favor of the status quo.

Councillor J. MacPherson provided brief comment noting he would support a motion in favor of the status quo.

Mr. S. England responded to a question from Councillor B. MacFarlane on the 2014 Options Report. Mr. S. England noted his Board has gone through a number of school closures, and thanked the SOC for their hard work.

Councillor B. MacFarlane noted his agreement with maintaining the status quo.

An Inverness County School Board member provided comment on school closures, funding based on the number of students, and that 80% of the budget goes toward teachers. He encouraged everyone to ask their MLAs to lobby as a group to say enough is enough with school closures. He further noted that the Ivany Report indicated a need schools in rural areas.

Mayor L. Boucher thanked him for his comments.

Mr. J. Reddick (Town of Mulgrave) noted she was involved with a school closure, that she had to make a decision in best interest of all students, and that that is what she will do in this process.

Mr. G. Kehoe spoke, noting he was a teacher for 31 years. He stated the new funding formula came into effect 12 or 13 years ago. He further noted the first year was devastating to the SRSB and the unreasonable amount of funding they had to make up in one year. He referred to a stop gap that was put in place with transitional funding for a few years. He further noted that the province now wants them to pay back the transitional funding.

Ms. R. MacLaughlin, thanked Councils for inviting them. She stated that the foundation for all of Nova Scotia is an opportunity to have conversations, and that she would like to see something positive come out of this. She agreed that the funding is not from a good formula. Ms. R. MacLaughlin requested all partners, in moving forward, continue to have these conversations and continue dialogue. She stated she had high hopes for the School Board, and that she was in support of keeping all schools open.

Mayor L. Boucher thanked Ms. MacLaughlin for her comments.

Mayor L. Boucher thanked the School Board and SOC representatives for attending. She stated her appreciation for the work of School Board members, and giving consideration to their constituents. Mayor L. Boucher noted that schools affect communities as a region, with community members coming to schools after class, and little chance of increasing numbers if schools close. She noted that property values are higher in areas with schools. Mayor L. Boucher further noted that she is well aware of the lack of recreation space in the town and county, and the need for schools for recreation and extra-curricular activities.

Mr. J. Blackwell, provided a text comment from Dr. Boyd, noting that Dr. Boyd stated that although what he said was not what he intended to say, he confirmed it was what he did say.

Councillor M. MacLellan noted the valid points made at an April 19th meeting and at a meeting held at H.M. MacDonald School on April 20, 2017.

It was Moved by Councillor M. MacLellan and Seconded by Councillor J. MacPherson to keep both schools open and to vote for the status quo. Motion carried.

Warden R. Boucher stated he feels all of the information might not be there to make a good valid decision. He emphasised that it is not a problem to go back and revisit a matter. He further stated that if it H.M. MacDonald School ever happened to close, that the money for demolition would come from mandated money. Warden R. Boucher requested the School Board reconsider it's decision, give it more time, get more information, and keep the status quo until they can make a full-fledged decision.

Councillor M. MacLellan noted she was teacher when smaller Pictou schools moved into large schools and the dramatic affect it had. She thanked the School Board and SOC members. Councillor M. MacLellan requested the School Board members to consider amending a decision

from the April 19, 2017 meeting to recommend to support status quo at their next Board meeting.

Mayor L. Boucher thanked everyone for attending and expressed her thanks to the School Board and staff.

Mr. S. England thanked everyone for inviting them. He thanked everyone on behalf of the Chair and members present.

Motion to Adjourn

At 7:42 PM it was Moved by Seconded that the Joint Council Advisory Committee meeting be adjourned. Motion carried.

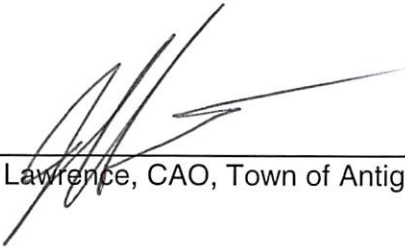


Mayor Laurie Boucher



Warden Russell Boucher

Owain Mc Carren



Jeff Lawrence, CAO, Town of Antigonish



Beth Schumacher, Deputy Clerk
County of Antigonish