

Presentation to the Feb. 9, 2015 LKDSB Trustee Meeting

Presenter: Keith Wyville, Sarnia, ON

Good evening Chair Bryce, Vice Chair McKinlay, Trustees, Director Costello, Superintendents, Staff

My name is Keith Wyville.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening about the proposed closing of Sarnia Collegiate Institute & Technical School, locally know as SCITS. I do want to acknowledge the patience of staff and Trustees who have thoughtfully responded to my questions and comments regarding the South Sarnia Secondary School consolidation issue.

I am here tonight, as a homeowner and 35 year resident of one of the older parts of Sarnia - the 'south-end.' This is the historic part of the city in which Sarnia Collegiate Institute & Technical School (SCITS) is located. This part of Sarnia has been experiencing creeping urban blight over the past few years. A hospital in the area has closed and sits boarded up. A public elementary school sits closed on three acres of land and was sold for \$50,000. A once vibrant business community (Mitton St.) now shows evidence of decay with several boarded up buildings. On the plus side, this part of the city offers affordable housing. Older residents are leaving, moving to apartments while younger couples with young families are beginning to move back into the neighbourhood again.

The 'south-end' neighbourhood in which SCITS is located, is also the closest neighbourhood to 'downtown', an area that has also faced

challenges but has most recently been in the process of rejuvenation due to a major influx of projects aimed at revitalizing the downtown. SCITS has been an anchor to the 'south-end' - I might suggest, even to the city over the years. I have often described the proposed closing of SCITS as 'the final gutting' of our south-end neighbourhood.

Let me remind you of a few things about SCITS. SCITS has the largest auditorium in the city. It is the only auditorium in any Lambton County school. (seating approx. 850-860) This auditorium is regularly used by SCITS drama classes, music classes, and Phys. Ed. dance classes. It is also rented by community groups, making the auditorium a source of revenue. Yet, it was conspicuously missing from the list of quote, 'spaces' in the original SCITS School Information Profile, page 1. Incidentally, the library, cafeteria, and even the track shed were among the 'spaces' that did make that list. *(In a recent development, the auditorium was added to the list due to work at the ARC, according to the LKDSB, ARC, FAQ site.)* As well, SCITS has the only swimming pool in any city school. Its architecture is massive, solid, and stately. No other school in Sarnia can make these claims, as most are products of the 1960's 'box-school' building spree to accommodate baby boomers.

All schools have the same maintenance and repair issues. The LKDSB has done a commendable job of maintaining these buildings. Is SCITS more expensive to operate? Of course, but it has more amenities (auditorium, pool, etc.), and it is a larger building than most.

Most recently administration has proposed closing SCITS, and within a couple years, moving the SCITS students to St. Clair High School, promising greater opportunities for students. The fate of the SCITS building will be determined 'later.'

I have a bias. I want to see SCITS remain open; however, I am also a realist. Sometimes it is inevitable that schools close, amalgamate, or new schools are built. I can accept this reality. But, like everyone in

this room, we want to make sure the decision is the right one, at the right time, and the right procedure is followed.

1. As we are all aware, an Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) has been established to review Administration's proposal: Close SCITS and combine the students with those at St. Clair High School. It is my understanding that the Ministry of Education Guidelines outline the establishment of ARCs including who should be on them. Included on the ARC should be representatives of the affected student bodies, representatives of the community, parent representatives and others. Now, the following question is not intended in any way to cast negative thoughts against current ARC members. In fact, I commend them for their volunteer service and hard work. The following question is strictly about 'process.' I am curious as to what the involvement of the community was in selecting the community reps. I also wonder what process was involved in selecting student reps.
2. It is my understanding that the decision to close SCITS was based in part on the age and condition of the school. These factors, among others, were used to 'quantify' the condition of the school. The result was, SCITS lost out to St. Clair. In my opinion, after looking at both schools (albeit from the street), I would be very concerned that something in the data was not correct. The SCITS structure appears much more solid, with little evidence of deterioration, whereas the St. Clair structure being a typical 1960s era structure, appears to be a building 'with an expiry date.' Are there issues involved with the maintenance and operation of the SCITS facility? Yes. Are there issues involved with the

maintenance and operation of the St. Clair facility? Yes. Are these problems the same problems common to any large building? I would suggest that answer is also 'yes'.

3. The Administration is presenting the Trustees with one proposal via the ARC process: Close SCITS and combine the student populations at St. Clair High School. I would suggest that more than one proposal could be developed for the ARC and Trustees to consider. For example, some interesting suggestions I have heard proposed by members of the public include, but are not limited to:
  - Close St. Clair and move all students to SCITS
  - Keep both schools open and incorporate grade 7s & 8s into each
  - Convert St. Clair into an elementary school and send all secondary school students to SCITS, thus saving the cost of a newly proposed elementary school in Sherwood Village, the same neighbourhood St. Clair High School currently serves.
  
4. Finally, would it not be prudent to request that Administration include with any proposal which may result in a school closure, a projection of either the costs, or revenues, expected when disposing of the closed properties?

In summary, in respect to the current proposal, I would ask the Trustees to consider:

- Are you satisfied that the impact on the 'south end' community has been given sufficient consideration?
- Are you satisfied that the members of the ARC have been selected objectively?

- Are you satisfied that the data used is objective and accurate?
- Are you satisfied that one proposal is sufficient?
- Are you satisfied that there is no need to extend the scope of any proposal to include costs or revenues expected in disposing of closed school properties?
- Are you satisfied that closing SCITS is the only option?

Thank You,  
Keith Wyville