

Presentation by Keith Wyville to March 8, 2016 ARC Meeting

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Accommodation Review Committee.

I have been following this process since November of 2015. My original motivation for becoming involved was to speak out against further urban decay happening in the south-end neighbourhood which I share with SCITS. But, over the ensuing weeks I have:

- Participated in tours of both schools;
- Spoken with, and listened to, several Lambton Kent District School Board Administrators and Trustees;
- Spoken with, and listened to, several ARC members;
- Spoken with, and listened to, several citizens actively involved in trying to 'save' SCITS.

I have met remarkable, dedicated, focused, and caring people on all sides of this issue. We are all truly part of an amazing community! I have learned that this issue is so much more than a debate about creeping urban blight!

Three events were watershed moments for me during this process:

1. First, was Paul Wiersma's (Principal, St. Clair) description of the difficulties involved in scheduling classes with current low student enrollment. This frustration was echoed by Rhonda Leystra (VP, SCITS), when she was asked about it during the SCITS tour. **Yes, amalgamation of both student bodies is necessary to improve course offerings to our students.**

2. Next, while observing the 'working ARC meeting' on February 16, 2016, at the LKDSB Sarnia office, St. Clair student and ARC committee member, Liberty Clements, made a comment that struck home to me. Allow me to paraphrase what she said:

"I hear a lot of talk about the community, and the buildings, but shouldn't the most important consideration be the students?"

Liberty's comment, which resonated with me, was a well timed reminder to us all, to not lose sight of **the big picture – the students.**

3. Finally, the school tours: I tried to keep an open mind while participating in the school tours. I wanted to see why St. Clair was recommended as the school to remain open to accommodate an amalgamated student body. After touring both schools, I thought about what I had seen for about a week. Without going into a long list of items, in my opinion, my inescapable conclusion is that SCITS is by far the better building, and will continue to be, easily, for the next fifteen to twenty years. In fact, I believe it would be a huge mistake to close SCITS at this time. Where St. Clair appears to be worn out, SCITS appears to have been extremely well maintained and is nowhere near its 'end of days.' (To be fair, however, St. Clair appears to have had some needed work put on hold, which is understandable, while we wait for a decision on whether the entire school will be upgraded or not, pending the Trustees' vote on the ARC outcome.) SCITS, the larger school, is more expensive to operate (i.e., air conditioning alone would drive up

electrical bills; similar thing will happen once AC is installed at St. Clair). SCITS is more expensive to maintain, which makes sense considering how much larger SCITS is than St. Clair. But, after touring both schools and spending a week considering what I had seen, I had to conclude that **SCITS offers so much more to the students** (i.e. larger music rooms, more shops, auditorium, pool, more gyms, wrestling room, etc.). And, as a bonus, **SCITS offers more to the community** than does St. Clair. Then, there are the 'intangibles,' such as the **thread of history** running through SCITS, linking generations together, and providing a convenient 'way-point' from which to view our community's, our nation's, and our world's history since 1922.

Will the time come when SCITS is no longer viable? Yes, it will. Is it now? I don't believe so. I believe SCITS still has much to offer. In fact, I believe SCITS has the most to offer of either school currently being considered; **the most to offer students and the community**. I believe SCITS is the school that can take us to the next big change in the education of our community's students. Perhaps, in the not too distant future, that will be 'super schools,' large schools serving all the secondary students in a community, while individual neighbourhood schools, like SCITS, St. Clair, and Northern, fade into the mists of time, as did the one-room schools of a couple of generations ago. But, until 'then', I would suggest that **SCITS 'is our ride to the future'** as well as our connection to the past.

Thank you,
Keith Wyville