

G.W. Williams move receives mixed reaction

By Brock Weir

The York Region District School Board and the Ministry of Education's decision to move Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School to Aurora's east side was made after residents of the Town's developing communities urged the Board to take action on a school site closer to home.

As The Auroran reported last week, the Board (YRDSB) and the Ministry have ratified a deal to move the long-established high school community from its site on Dunning Avenue, just east of Yonge Street, to a plot of land on the northeast corner of Bayview Avenue and Borealis, purchased years ago by the YRDSB for just such a purpose.

But, the decision has received mixed reaction from the Aurora community depending on which side of the train tracks you happen to live

In an online poll which is ongoing at www.theauroran.com, support for the move is decidedly mixed, a fact that was reflected at the Council table last week by Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

‘There is going to be a new high school in the Bayview area, and there are a lot of residents who are happy about that, and I am very happy for them, but we also have a lot of residents who are in the Williams area and are very unhappy about it,’ said Councillor Gaertner. ‘I would like to make it clear that it is a Board of Education decision and fortunately, or unfortunately, Council has nothing to do with it. But, I am very sorry for the people who are close to Williams and happy for other residents.’

In his interview with The Auroran last week ahead of the speech he was preparing to deliver to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce on February 21, Mayor Geoff Dawe said that he remembers people asking about a new high school on Aurora's east side as far back as the 2010 Municipal Election campaign.

‘It physically makes sense because that is where the people are going,’ said Mayor Dawe. ‘Plans are still unfolding as we speak, but Williams was doing the International Baccalaureate program and you might see that staying. The Board has indicated they are going to keep Williams for administration. They might keep some schooling there and it might work to an advantage, and I would expect they are looking at whatever option makes sense.’

All options for the new school, however, are still on the table ahead of its design process. Dawn Adams, a planner with the YRDSB, said that ahead of the anticipated opening date in time for the 2023-2024 school year, the Board will be looking at all opportunities to partner with the municipality on facilities.

This was a sentiment shared with Mayor Dawe as the Town continues to look at the future recreational needs of the Town.

‘One of the things that drives me crazy is walking through our recreational complexes in the middle of the day during the week and seeing them underutilized,’ said Mayor Dawe. ‘I think we need to be more aggressive from a sales perspective of dealing with the Board to say, ‘How do we get your students over to one of our facilities to take swimming lessons or to use the gym to get to the weight class or spin class?’ We're trying to get more kids active and rather than us building a new gym or a new facility somewhere, why aren't we using the schools? We have a great example with the joint use facility [of the field] at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School [and] we should be doing more of that.’

‘Let's have some of those ongoing discussions with the Board with what are you looking at with the new school, how we can participate, and what are you going to do with the old one, because there is a lot of property there.’