

Lampson faces closure as enrolment rises

Esquimalt school meets board's eight criteria for remaining open

BY WENDY SWAN

We must not forget the important vote happening at the Greater Victoria School Board offices on April 10 and we must not forget to question the motive behind closing Lampson Street School.

It's not due to declining enrolment. Lampson's numbers increased this year and are up for next year. Lampson is at 74 per cent capacity; other schools are at 51 per cent. It's not due to lack of funds; the board has a \$5.2-million surplus.

Lampson meets all eight criteria in the board's policy that specifies which schools should not be closed.

The board has denied every application made by Lampson in the past four years to generate revenue. Applications for expanded out-of-school care, full-day kindergarten, an early learning centre, and partnerships with Esquimalt Parks and Rec have all been denied.

Many of the trustees are unaware of these applications; they are received and denied by staff. Trustees are being asked to make decisions based on incomplete and biased information.

In January, the board received a rec-

ommendation from its declining enrolment committee to close a school in the Reynolds family and one in the Esquimalt family.

The list of items to consider when choosing Cloverdale included six comprehensive factors. If the same system had been used with Lampson, it would have come out in favour of not being closed.

- Lampson has the highest safety rating in the district as it has already been seismically upgraded; all other schools in our family are rated high-risk. Macaulay, our "receiving" school, has large signs posted warning of asbestos contamination.

- Closing Lampson will impact existing French immersion by creating a two-tiered education system — French classes will not be disrupted, will not be over capacity, and will not have to be relocated to portables — but English classes will.

- Closing Lampson will leave only one elementary school in all of Esquimalt.

- Closing Lampson will affect access and equity within the district as there will be no other option for families to choose.

- Closing Lampson will put both

Macaulay and Vic West schools at about 95 per cent capacity, leaving no room for growth. Five new housing developments are underway, and cyclical influx from DND and Vic Shipyards will feed directly into these schools. Where will those children go for schooling?

Demographic studies and real estate agents say that Rockheights is changing from an elderly base to a young family base.

Esquimalt is the last affordable area for family homes in all of Victoria — and now we will have only one elementary school.

But these criteria were not evenly dealt across the playing field. They were not even considered. Instead, the board had only two criteria to consider for Esquimalt: Aboriginal education, and where children live.

In the past few years the board has championed aboriginal education and commended schools (such as Esquimalt High) for innovative and continued work in this area.

Lampson has more aboriginal students than Macaulay and Vic West combined, and has an established curriculum. Marginalized students are the ones most likely to fall through the



Lampson school has been seismically upgraded. If it closes, there will be just one elementary school in Esquimalt. *Times Colonist*

cracks if their school routines are disrupted.

If this is one of only two guidelines the trustees are using, then they are blatantly violating their committee's recommendations.

Another issue is out-of-school care. Out-of-school care at Lampson, Vic West, Macaulay, the Y, the Boys and Girls club, and the Esquimalt Rec Centre all have waitlists. Closing Lampson will result in the closure of Macaulay's out-of-school care as the facilities will be needed for the resulting over-capacity enrolment.

The same week the trustees announced probable closure of Lampson, Esquimalt council unveiled plans for the revitalization of the municipality in an aggressive time frame. With promising reports from the Parks and Rec Department, Statistics B.C., Victo-

ria real estate companies and CMHC, Esquimalt is poised for a complete turnaround in the immediate future.

How can the board ignore these facts?

Esquimalt council, the Chamber of Commerce, and local business owners unanimously support Lampson in its bid to remain a vibrant and vital part of Esquimalt.

The trustees should not even be considering closing Lampson; they are violating their own policies and obstructing the needs of our community.

What is the hidden agenda? Why are we letting our students and our community suffer for it?

Wendy Swan, a parent of three children at Lampson Street School, has been a resident of Esquimalt since 1974.