

Pelican Mountain School Community Meeting Minutes

March 20, 2019

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Sandy Lake Community Hall, Sandy Lake, Alberta

In Attendance: 50 community members, 8 staff members, 2 Board Trustees.

Welcome Address and Land Acknowledgment: Robin Guild, Trustee Ward 7, gave the welcoming address and land acknowledgment. He also acknowledged Ward 5 Trustee, Louis Cardinal.

Opening Prayer, Cultural Reflection or Reflection: Elder Johnnie Auger gave the opening prayer.

Dinner at Sandy Lake Community Hall.

Superintendent Gord Atkinson reviewed the Pelican Mountain School Viability study:

- Background information
- Staffing statistics
- Number of students
 - Currently 18 students with the potential of more students joining.
- Community Population
 - Correction - the community population of Sandy Lake is actually 156.
 - By community member count, there are 36 students are in the area that could be attending Pelican Mountain School.
- NSD Policy 15 was reviewed.
 - The cost and the program are the key pieces of school closure.
- Attendance area and impact on schools
 - Number of students that would have to change schools would be 18.
 - St. Theresa would be able to absorb Pelican Mountain students.
- Transportation
 - 4.6 The need for, and extent of, busing correction:
 - Students would be bused to Wabasca; the ride time is actually over an hour, depending on where kids need to be picked up. It is a minimum of 65 minutes, up to 75 minutes for ride times one way.
 - For a child in elementary, those ride times are too long.
- Program Implications
 - The educational program is good at Pelican Mountain School.
 - The academic results are suppressed because it is a small school.
- Financial analysis
 - \$275,000 a year deficit to operate the school.
- Viability analysis
 - The funding level that NSD receives does not cover the costs of the current student population - we are required to have 40 students to break even.
- Capital needs
 - A facilities review was completed on Pelican Mountain School in the fall of 2018; it will cost 1.2 million dollars to bring it up to the standard of other schools.
 - The Board is submitting it's capital plan on April 1st

- Possible uses for the school
 - We would look for community input into the possible uses for the school.
- School closure schedule.
 - The minutes will be posted on March 27, 2019 and will be at the school or on the NSD website.
 - The community has until April 23rd to provide a written submission to Gord Atkinson, Superintendent of Schools.
 - May 24th Corporate Board meeting is when the final decision will be made.

Community Questions/Comments

- Question about school of choice busing that the Board currently offers for students to go from Sandy Lake to Wabasca:
 - Prior to this administration, there was a decision for students to ride a NSD bus to Wabasca.
 - This has an impact on the enrolment at Pelican Mountain School.
 - The Board will have to decide if the school of choice busing will continue.
 - NSD provides transportation for 21 students; the decision was made in 2006.
 - Alberta Education did an audit on the transportation runs, and they will not provide funding for the transportation of Sandy Lake students to Wabasca anymore.
- How many students are school aged that are in the attendance area in the reserve outside of Sandy Lake?
 - NSD is sending 21 students and one goes on their own to St. Theresa.
- What NSD is missing is the parents that are driving their kids on their own, there is more than one.
 - We need the numbers up one way or the other, need the community to send their kids to Sandy Lake.
- We have a fantastic little school here, and encourage people to think of the 35-40 kids that can go to the school and see what the school offers.
- There might have been issues in the past - there was a community survey that NSD completed 4 years ago - and all of those issues were resolved.
- Closing a school is a decline of community; you would shut down the community. If NSD did that, there would be a lot of work to do if the community wanted to get it back.
- We can utilize the school more than what we have been doing.
- The bus ride is too long. I used to ride that bus into Wabasca. You're tired because it is such an early morning, you're tired at school, and tired after school. As an adult, if you have to work longer than 8 hours, you are paid overtime and we're sending our kids for 10 hours of overtime a week due to the transportation. We're doing a disservice to our kids by busing them.
- How big are the classes at St. Theresa? 28-30 students per class is too much on the teacher.
 - At St. Theresa, we have three classes of each grade.
- I have a question about the \$275,000 a year deficit – it's going to cost \$200,000 a year to maintain it, so you're only losing \$75,000 a year right now. Sandy Lake has the possibility of tripling its population; we have 80 empty housing lots that could be filled. Once we get water and sewer and keep the school open, it will open up the population.

- Clarification: we would not have the utilities on all the time so it would be a shell. The costs would be significantly lower than \$200,000.
- Question of the MD - do they tax the school if it is no longer a school?
 - It would be taxed under regular tax rate.
- At St. Theresa School, we lost 25 students last year but they all came back, and people are happy with the school.
- There was a request of the school division to add more grades to Pelican Mountain School.
 - This is something NSD has to consider in the next steps, only the Board can make that decision.
- The community wants the teachers to work and live in the community, that is in itself is a big big thing. We had teachers in the past that did a great job and led a great example of what we are supposed to do.
- Our students that are bused to Wabasca miss a lot of school due to the weather and the road - their attendance is low due to that.
- As a parent and community member, NSD has to say no to bus kids from Sandy Lake to Wabasca. You have a school in Sandy Lake, so take your kids there.
 - As a board, we may very well have to make that recommendation.
- What has NSD has done themselves to cut costs. For example, you have many pens here; you obviously have money, maybe allocate some of that money to the school?
 - The overall budget is 70 million, and there are pockets inside of that – the school is authorized to buy supplies to bring to the kids and parents.
 - This meeting is the Board looking to cut costs.
- Why don't you move the headquarters for Central Office to Wabasca to cut costs?
 - The reason why it was in Peace River is the airport, there were a lot of fly in communities to get to.
- Is it getting top heavy at NSD?
 - When the Superintendent joined NSD, he went to the Education Minister and wanted to see change in NSD, but stated we cannot take funding from the classroom. We need other money, and the Minister agreed, and Alberta Education gave a 5-year investment to support students and schools.
 - Family Wellness Workers, Pedagogical Supervisors, Associate Superintendents are all supported separately from the province so that NSD did not need to take funding from the classroom.
 - The only thing that affects school budgets is enrolment.
- What are the values of a business? It might make sense to close a school from a business perspective, but what are the values of providing a good accessible education to our children - if you look at it through those values you would want to keep the school open?
 - NSD is not a business, it is an education system. Through that lens you would keep that school open
- A community member stated that there is a plan he developed to present to the MD to help the school. Once presented, he will give a copy to the Trustees for something to consider keeping the school open.
- What is the financial status of NSD? Is it in the hole?
 - NSD is not in the hole. The audited financial statement comes out at the end of November and deliberations are occurring for the end of June.
 - There is a spring budget, then a fall update when students are enrolled.

- We have many students from NSD that go to OPK, so we pay the Band for them – we have an agreement but we are working on a new one.
- The money you get from the band isn't it allocated to all the schools?
 - We charge the actual cost per student, so no. Could have been that way in the past, not sure.
- Federal revenue is about 35% of the total budget, we ensure those dollars go to that particular community.

Alternative Programming

- At the school council meeting on February 5, the school council shared information that there was an application to the MD for before and after school care. The MD council has offered a draft letter to support before and after school care.
- If the parents had before and after school care in the community, they would be willing to send their children to Pelican Mountain School.

Closing Remarks

- Trustee Guild gave the closing remarks. Mistakes were made in the past; we have a brand new elected Board as a year and a half ago, new Superintendent, new administration at the school that are doing a fantastic job. We need to convince the rest of the community to see how great the school is doing, and encourage the kids to come back.
- The bottom of line is, the Trustees do not want to shut down the school. We came to the community to get your ideas to make the school more viable, please send in your ideas by April 23 so the Trustees can look at in May to do everything we can to keep the school open but we really need the community to keep the school open.

Closing Prayer, Cultural Reflection or Reflection: Elder Johnnie Auger gave the closing prayer.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:35 PM