

Community fights for new high school

BY ERIN KELLY

erinkelly@ottnews.ca

Community members around Longfields-Davidson Heights are saying their battle for a new high school is still underway.

Despite the fact that the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board recently approved the \$45 million budget for the Grade 7-12 LDH school, Scott Towaij, chair of the Berrigan Elementary School council, said the fight will not be over until the first shovels are in the ground.

Mr. Towaij, who has been advocating to the OCDSB for a new high school in the area since 2004, said the LDH school proposal could fall through at any time because it has to be voted on at various stages throughout the process. The board will also soon have a new set of trustees, who could reject what the current board has been already approved, he said.

"No one is philosophically opposed (to the LDH school being built) there are some concerns about costs," explained Mr. Towaij, who along with the council members from Adrienne Clarkson Elementary and Farley Mowat P.S. have formed the "New Longfields-Davidson Heights Grade 7 to 12 Secondary School Action Committee."

"Until they actually put pen to paper, there is still a fight," Mr. Towaij stated.

With the help of Lisa MacLeod, MPP for Nepean-Carleton, Mr. Towaij and other school council members circulated a letter to all local candidates for trustee, councillor and mayor asking for them to give their stance on the proposed LDH school.

Mr. Towaij said the goal of the letter is to raise awareness about the issue.

"The more people who know what is going on, the more people will know this (LDH school) is not a done deal."

Ms. MacLeod said she hopes the "grassroots" campaign for the LDH facility will unite the community and allow others to see how desperately needed the school is in the area.

"We just want to know that we have people's support, this is not about political affiliation," said Ms. MacLeod. "The fact of the matter is that South Nepean needs this school."

"This is the fastest growing area in the city, and one of the fastest in the country. We want to get the political voice of Nepean-Carleton together and show to the rest of the city that we need this school," Ms. MacLeod went on to say. "We need to work together on this, because this school will be a part of our community."

As of the end of last week, Ms. MacLeod's constituency office had received responses from nearly all those who received the letter. The majority gave their support for the LDH school.

Mr. Towaij said the OCDSB needs to stick to the planned opening of the new 7 to 12 school, which is set for fall 2008, if they do not want to lose more students to the Catholic board. He said the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board is preparing to expand its current high schools in the South Nepean area while building a new school at the same time, a move that could be detrimental to the public board if the timeline for the LDH facility is not kept.

"After Grade 6, there is no where for the kids to go (in terms of public education) in the community, so a lot of them are moving to the private board because they have schools in the community that are literally five minutes away," explained Mr. Towaij, adding that students who want to continue with the public board after Grade 6, have to go all the way to Sir Winston Churchill for Grades 7 and 8 and then to Merivale High School.

"Parents are frustrated that we do not have this school," Mr. Towaij added.

Ms. MacLeod agreed with Mr. Towaij's sentiments, saying students should have the option to attend schools in either board.

"A lot of our kids are going over to the private system. I don't want to pit one board against another, but it is only fair that kids should have the option to attend a private or public school," explained Ms. MacLeod.

The next move for this local advocacy group will be an open house at Berrigan Elementary School, 199 Berrigan Dr., from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Nov. 23, where residents can sign a petition in support of the new Grade 7-12 facility. The petition will be addressed to the Ontario legislature and Ms. MacLeod hopes to meet with the Minister of Education and present her with the petition.

Lawn signs supporting the LDH school will also soon be made available to residents.

The next decision on the Grade 7-12 Longfields-Davidson Heights facility will come in January or February when the OCDSB will determine whether the final design should proceed to tender.

For information more information on the LDH secondary school, please visit www.ourschoolourcommunity.com