

ANDREW SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEETING: SEPT. 20, 2022

SUMMARY

Overview

Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) invited parents to take part in a school community conversation on Sept. 20, 2022, regarding facility condition issues in the building that currently houses Andrew School, the preschool, the library and the Village of Andrew offices.

Information was shared and conversations were held to ensure a clear understanding of the challenges the Division and the Village face in terms of repairs necessary to maintain occupancy within the building.

Session Overview

Superintendent Mark Liguori met with parents and other community members to discuss the situation. Superintendent Liguori spoke to the group, explaining the issues with both the fire suppression system and the roof—that emerged as the result of four phases of construction undertaken between 1957 and 1991.

The fire suppression system originally installed was a dry system; that is, it wasn't designed with pipes to hold water in reserve. Unfortunately, at some point the system was charged with water and as a result, pipes have corroded, leaked and it has led to incidents of flooding. The Division has replaced portions of the system over time, but an entire replacement is required. Should the system fail, the building could no longer be occupied.

Problems with the roof have also contributed to the deterioration of the fire suppression system, and the system cannot be replaced without also addressing the condition of the building envelope. The slope of the roof, as well as a lack of insulation between old and newer portions of the structure, means ice dams will continue to form in the winter as warm air rises, snow melts, and then refreezes.

Responsibility for repairs on the building are shared between EIPS and the Village of Andrew, and meetings have been ongoing with the Village council to discuss next steps. EIPS is drafting a Request for Proposals (RFP) that will be posted sometime in the next few months to the Alberta Purchasing Connection, asking contractors to bid on a comprehensive assessment of the facility condition that will include a complete scope of work that would need to be undertaken to remedy the situation. At this point, it's anticipated costs may be in the \$3 million range for all aspects of the work but until a complete assessment is done, that figure is just an estimate. Once the two parties have a clear understanding of the scope and cost of repairs, each would have to determine how to fund the project, if the repairs needed are financially feasible for both the Division and the Village, and what alternatives might be considered—for example, partial deconstruction or reconstruction. If repairs are undertaken, those would start no sooner than Spring 2023.

The priority for EIPS is ensuring a safe learning and working environment for students and staff.

Key Themes

COMMON QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Q: Why hasn't the problem been fixed before it got to this point?

A: Over the years, both EIPS and the Village of Andrew have invested significant dollars to keep the systems functional and the building safe. But there needs to be considerable work done on both the roof and the fire suppression system to maintain occupancy that general maintenance cannot address.

Q: If there was higher enrolment at Andrew School, would the discussion be the same? Is this just the next step in closing the school for good?

A: The conversation would be no different in junior and senior high students were still located in Andrew; this is a facility condition issue. There has been no discussion about closing the elementary school.

Q: How much does the Division get for projects like this each year? Is there a set amount per school? How does it decide to allocate its maintenance and capital funding?

A: EIPS' Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal funding (IMR) and Capital Maintenance and Renewal (CMR) funding totals \$3.8 million for 2022-23. Administration determines the areas of greatest need and puts forward recommendations to the Board of Trustees about where best to invest those dollars. There is no set amount per school.

Q: Is there a set amount or cap the Division has for a project of this kind? If it exceeds a certain total, would EIPS decide not to proceed?

A: EIPS cannot provide a number; there are several factors that would determine whether the Board of Trustees—informed by the superintendent's recommendation—would opt to fund a project. That may include scope of the work; whether the Village voted to invest dollars; what sources of funding may be available through reserves, budget allocations or emergency requests to Alberta Education and Alberta Infrastructure.

Q: Are there any other surprises maintenance people might find? Have they looked at other issues like the boiler or problems in the ceiling caused by condensation?

A: As part of ongoing preventative maintenance, Facility Services has a solid idea of where the problems are—that is, the fire suppression system and the slope of the roof. To the best of our knowledge, all other systems are in good shape considering the age of the building, and it remains a safe place for students and staff.

Q: Why aren't these issues covered under the Division's building insurance policies?

A: Insurance covers only catastrophic damage within or loss of a building.

Q: There were obviously many problems with construction over the years. How do we know we won't experience similar or different problems with the work that may be undertaken in the spring?

A: Documentation from those stages, between 1957 and 1991, reveals some concerns regarding the final phase of construction. EIPS was not involved in any of that work. What we can tell you, however, is that our Facility Services team has overseen not just a highly successful maintenance program in all our schools but has also coordinated the construction of several new schools—on time and under budget. A project manager from EIPS would oversee the work and conduct on-site visits during construction to ensure the work meets design specifications and the proper materials are being used. Additionally, there are performance bonds in all our contracts that require contractors address issues we identify before final payments are made.

Q: Does the mayor of Andrew have anything to add to what's been said by EIPS?

A: He stated he has the support from all councillors to work towards a solution. EIPS is doing the right thing, and conversations between the Village and the Division have been open and honest. The final decisions on both sides will rest on the results of the assessment undertaken. The Village is happy to be part of the solution but needs to know the costs. There has been a lot of negativity on social media but the mayor feels everyone need to remain positive. If the community works together, it will find a way forward.

BIGGEST ISSUES FOR THE ANDREW COMMUNITY

- Residents are worried about a full-school closure.
- There's concern more may be wrong with the building than is currently known.
- Uncertainty about the school makes it difficult to attract new residents to Andrew.
- The Village and EIPS may not proceed with repairs if the cost is determined to be too high.
- The closure of a school represents the end of the village.
- There needs to be a cohesive approach towards a solution. The Village council, EIPS and the community need to work together to find the best way to keep the school operational and the building viable going forward.

Next Steps

EIPS will post the RFP and hopefully have the assessment done before the Board of Trustees meeting in November. Once the results are received, EIPS has had an opportunity to discuss the situation with the Village of Andrew and has updated parents, the recommendation report will be written and shared with Village councillors and school families. Those who wish to may address the Board of Trustees directly through a delegation at the board meeting. The Board of Trustees will determine what, if any, portion of the project will move forward.