

### **2016-2017 Progress Update: City-School Board Cooperation to Strengthen the Pupil Accommodation Review Process and Respond to Surplus Declarations of School Property**

**Date:** October 2, 2017

**To:** City-School Boards Advisory Committee

**From:** Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division

**Wards:** All

#### **SUMMARY**

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The City and the school boards are partnering on a number of city-building initiatives. Areas of ongoing engagement with the school boards include the development approvals process, the provision of spaces for licensed child care and permitting for recreation or other community use purposes. This report provides information to the City-School Boards Advisory Committee on how the City and school boards have improved communications through the Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) process and how these improvements have advanced the model of schools as community assets.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division recommends that:

1. The City-School Boards Advisory Committee receive this report for information.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of this report.

## DECISION HISTORY

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Over the past several years, City Council has regularly called attention to the community importance of school lands and buildings, outside of their role as a location for education. As the Province of Ontario encouraged school boards to rationalize their property portfolios, City Council urged the Province to preserve and protect from sale those public school properties that measurably contribute space for community use, or are considered to be important as an asset to preserve public land and facilities over the long-term.

In 2015 Council established the City-School Boards Advisory Committee to provide advice to Council on the best ways for the City and school boards to share information and plan collaboratively in relation to publicly funded schools and related infrastructure.

In 2016, Council directed City staff to develop and implement an evidence-based method for comparing and prioritizing municipal interest(s) in school properties that may be put up for sale by local school boards ("Community Asset Evaluation Framework") and to continue to work on a regular basis with the school boards to assess the City's interests in schools. Council encouraged the school boards to assess the impact of new and planned transit and future growth when considering the disposition of school properties and to consider retaining some school sites as "Core Holdings" (whereby the respective school board would retain the asset but use it or lease it for other purposes) to provide flexibility to address future growth.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.EX16.21>

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.EX13.20>

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX4.4>

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX2.1>

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.MM3.12>

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.MM3.14>

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilMinutesReport&meetingId=9690>

## COMMENTS

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### **Improved Communications during the Pupil Accommodation Review Process**

In January 2015, the Minister of Education directed the Toronto District School Board to prepare a three-year capital plan to reflect a comprehensive, system-wide assessment of the public accommodation needs of the Board. The TDSB was required to state how it would manage its capital assets within its current school operations and renewal funding envelopes. Among other issues, the Board was required to address how it would reduce underutilized spaces in its schools, including a schedule of pupil accommodation reviews, and a strong justification for under-utilized schools that would be retained as core holdings. In response to this directive, the Mayor provided a letter to the Chairs of the TDSB and TCDSB regarding the need for collaboration between the municipality and school boards around Toronto schools and public land use. The TDSB chair indicated that the board would welcome a plan for collaboration that would address the changing needs of the city.

## **Evaluation of Municipal Interests in Surplus School Properties**

In 2016 City Council adopted the Community Asset Evaluation Framework for reviewing and comparing municipal interests in school properties and prioritizing properties for potential acquisition. The City outlined its position that notwithstanding considerations of school boards' own real estate portfolios, school buildings and school fields represent important community assets for Torontonians. Loss of these properties could harm community well-being and negatively impact equitable access to local services. The potential disposition of school sites must also be carefully assessed against the future growth and natural life cycles of the various communities throughout the City. The opportunity to establish new schools is limited in terms of access to appropriate sites and the high cost of land. In light of these considerations, City Council has defined a fourfold interest in schools as "community assets". Schools may be important sites for:

- Child care and early learning;
- Green space and recreation;
- Community programming; and
- Responding to future growth.

The framework enables the City to provide consistent cross-divisional information to members of the public and to Council as to the City's level of interest in acquiring surplus schools that may be circulated for sale. The City's evaluation of school properties is intended to occur in the spring, after the completion of the Boards' annual PAR processes and after surplus declaration decisions have been made for the year. The City's review of 23 TDSB properties resulted in Council's decision to negotiate to acquire 925 Albion Road (Thistletown Multi-Service Centre) from the TDSB. In addition, the evaluation framework has enabled the City to respond to Surplus Declarations for Sale based on a measurable cross-divisional interest and has provided a useful reference when councillors and members of the public have inquired as to the City's position on surplus schools that are circulated for sale.

Staff met with the TDSB in July 2017 to review properties that are likely to be circulated under O.Reg 444/98 within a two-year period. The outcome of this meeting was to receive an update on the schools that were first evaluated in 2016 and to determine which of the schools that were included in the 2016-2017 PAR process should be evaluated by the City using the Community Asset Evaluation Framework. The TDSB indicated that some schools that were declared surplus prior to 2016 will now be retained as Core Holdings by the Board to provide flexibility to address future growth, particularly along the Yonge St. Corridor in North York, and near Danforth Avenue.

As the TCDSB has reported to City staff that no schools are planned for disposition at this time, a similar process was not conducted by the City and TCDSB.

## **Municipal Input into the Pupil Accommodation Review Process (PAR)**

The Ministry of Education's 2015 update to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline required that school boards seek feedback from the local municipalities related to pupil

accommodation reviews. The updated guideline also required that school boards provide any relevant information from municipalities to their Board of Directors at the start of the PAR process. Both the TCDSB and the TDSB requested the City provide comments on the schools included as part of their 2016-2017 PAR studies. The City provided comments on 25 schools in total (11 TCDSB, 14 TDSB). These submissions to the boards marked the first time, staff's ability to provide comments based on the Council approved Community Asset Framework. The City's comments were included in the TDSB's June 5 2017 report to its Planning and Priorities Committee. The TCDSB indicates that the City's comments were included in the TCDSB's request for expanded provincial funding for child care in the affected schools.

### **Ministry of Education Updates to the Pupil Accommodation Review Process and O.Reg 444/98**

In June 2017, the Ministry of Education released its Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education. A focus of the plan is to pursue shared use of space in schools and maintain public access to these buildings. This plan will have an impact on Toronto school boards, as the Province will be undertaking a full review of the current Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) process. Direction from the Province is that school boards will not begin new pupil accommodation reviews while the process is being revised. Following a release of new PAR guidelines, each school board will likely need to adopt a new policy before initiating new PARs. Based on communications with both the TDSB and TCDSB, this effectively means the school boards will not be recommending additional schools for surplus until at least 2019-2020.

The Ministry of Education has advanced recommendations of the Province's Community Hubs Secretariat to amend O.Reg 444/98 (which governs the disposition of school boards' surplus real property). The intent of these amendments is to make it easier for public or not-for-profit agencies to purchase or lease surplus schools for community hubs. Some of the amendments to the regulation include expanding the list of public entities to receive notification of surplus school property disposition and extending the circulation period from 90 to 180 days.

Taken together, an updated PAR process and the amendments to O.Reg 444/98 could improve the opportunities for surplus school properties to be repurposed for broader community use. When school boards resume the PAR process, City staff will re-engage with pupil accommodation reviews and complete Community Asset Assessments of schools that are declared surplus.

### **Conclusion: Schools as Community Assets**

Through Council direction and the 2015 Provincial updates to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines, city staff have worked in partnership with the school boards to assess the City's interests in school properties and their value as community assets. The Council-adopted Community Asset Evaluation Framework will continue to be used by city staff to assess cross-divisional interest in surplus schools. This is an adaptable measure which has been updated to incorporate new strategic plans, such as the Facilities Master Plan and Child Care Growth Strategy. Further, as the Province

advances Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan, public agencies and organizations other than the municipality may be positioned to acquire surplus schools for broader community use. Although the TDSB and TCDSB have indicated that no new schools will be declared surplus until the 2019-2020 year, pending the outcomes of the Provincial review, City staff are positioned to resume their assessment of surplus schools using the Community Asset Evaluation Framework when and if additional properties are circulated by the school boards.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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