

POLICY RECOMMENDATION – February 13, 2008

TITLE/SUBJECT: Hamilton Wentworth District Board of Education Centre Relocation Options

COMMITTEE: Business Development Committee

ACTION REQUIRED: Letter to be sent to the Board of Education through Chris Spence, Director of Education for the Board

BACKGROUND OF ISSUE:

The Hamilton Wentworth District Board of Education are considering a move to relocate their main Education Centre (currently at the corner of Main St. W and Bay St. S.) due to the current building's need for repairs estimated to cost millions and is deemed by the board too small to fit all of the board's non-teaching staff. It has been reported that of the seven proposals being considered the cheapest was to see the Board leave Downtown Hamilton for a new \$33 million building on the mountain.

The Board offered the public an opportunity to voice its opinions on their proposed options on January 10th, at a public meeting. Many spoke about the benefits of retaining the existing building built in 1967 by Mr. Joe Singer, a Hamilton architect. The Downtown Hamilton BIA presented an economic impact statement of the Board with its current 250 employees contributing to the downtown economy approximately \$1.65 million a year which would be lost if the Board decided to move up the mountain. The new proposal called for a consolidation of staff to total 600 employees which would have even more of an economic impact on downtown if they were to stay.

The City offered its own proposal to create a new Education Centre which would house a new Board of Education Building at the corner of King and Bay, a public health building to the south of it and a new McMaster University family medicine clinic with part of the monies needed for this centre coming from businessman David Braley at the corner of Main and Bay with two hotel properties completing the rest of the current Board site. The city says the Board could get access to city downtown incentives totaling approximately \$4 million and sell the excess land for \$8 million.

A staff union representative also pointed out to the board members that the favoured proposal on the mountain was on only one bus route whereas the downtown location was close to all bus routes in the city which eased traffic conditions and pollution from excessive use of cars.

There is approximately 26% vacancy rate in commercial office space in the Downtown core which the Board could certainly utilize and still have a large presence in the downtown.

The Board headquarters needs to be in the centre of Hamilton's civic government district and close to its inner city schools such as Sir John A. Macdonald and Hess Street

Elementary schools to monitor conditions of students and education in these inner city schools.

RECOMMENDATION:

Therefore for all the above reasons, while the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce will support whatever business decision makes most sense to the Board, the Chamber generally supports the concept that the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board Education Centre stay in Downtown Hamilton.