



Dear friends:

As the school year winds down, I wanted to take a moment to send you an e-newsletter to update you on several issues that have arisen.

(A regular newsletter was in production for mass mailout, but we decided to delay that until fall because of the Canada Post strike situation.)

I wanted to make you aware that HRM Council approved the community centre, the field and \$300,000 in funding for enhancements to the Cafetorium at the new Bedford high school.

Our next issue involves gyms at the new Bedford high school. A recent newsletter from School Board representative David Finlayson indicates "[T]here has been a change on the enhancement to the gym and it has moved to the HRM part of the school. Generally this will not affect access during the school day, but there will be some inconveniences with this change and HRSB will work with HRM to minimize disruption. This was a decision taken by HRM."

The community gym at 10,500 square feet is bigger than the standard 8,400 square foot gym provided by Department of Education Standards. HRSB superintendent Carole Olsen has written to HRM, making it clear that the standard gym size is adequate to meet program outcomes. (However, this standard was fixed before new physical fitness guidelines - with increased participation for students - were brought in. And I have spoken to physical fitness experts who make it clear the standard DoE gym is too small for the school population.)

At a meeting last week attended by HRM officials, the two area councillors, the two catchment area MLAs (including me), an HRSB official, and two members of the School Steering Team, it was made very clear this decision *could well* affect school access to the bigger gym during the day. How much time the school is allowed to use the larger community gym will be completely dependent on decisions by the volunteer board (as yet set up) that will run the community centre.

This decision was taken in part because HRSB and HRM have long-standing problems with community access at other school site shared facilities. As well, the new HRM Auditor General has made it clear it is not appropriate for HRM to fund projects over which it has no control. I understand this concern.

I suggested that careful placement and design of the change rooms and security features for the two gyms should make both gyms accessible to the school and the community. That way, if the smaller gym is all a community group needs, they can access that gym while students can use the larger gym. This suggestion was well-received by HRM officials.

I remain of the opinion that students are members of the community too, and their needs should be considered when scheduling the use of the larger gym. And the DoE, HRSB and the School Design team need to consult with gym experts and the parent representatives on the School Steering Team to make certain this facility is adaptable for all needs. Some of these parents have been through school construction before and may well have innovative solutions to our concerns. Still with school issues: a recent facilities report from the School Board (<http://www.hrsb.ns.ca/files/Downloads/pdf/reports/2010-2011/March/11-03-1292.pdf>) also indicates a plan to build a new junior high school that would serve the Bedford South/Ravines area. School Board rep David Finlayson indicated in his most recent newsletter that: "Since May of last year there has been a letter for emergency funding for a new junior high in the Ravines- Bedford South area. As yet, there has still been no response from government as we attempt to deal with rapid growth and overcrowding in the area. We have had staff contact DoE and still no confirmation on when and if this much needed project will go ahead."

When I questioned the Minister on new school builds in the House, she responded "Mr. Speaker, there has been no request for any other school."

Clearly, there is a disconnect somewhere and I have written to the Minister to clarify what is happening. My understanding is the province has not issued a call for new school construction.

This report from HRSB also indicates a new high school will be built in the Ravines area of our riding. It will be English-only and be attended by students from the Larry Uteck, Cresthaven, Birch Cove, and Kingswood areas. French Immersion students from the Larry Uteck/Cresthaven/Birch Cove areas would attend Halifax West High school and French Immersion students from the Kingswood area of Hammonds Plains would attend the replacement Charles P. Allen High School. (See <http://www.hrsb.ns.ca/files/Downloads/pdf/reports/2010-2011/March/11-03-1292.pdf>.) Please let me know what you think.

Lyme disease remains an issue in the area. HRM has indicated two new areas appear to have significant populations of blacklegged ticks - Hammonds Plains and Fall River. However, the province has not acted to include these communities on their list of endemic areas. This concerns me because - while Lyme disease bearing ticks can be anywhere in the province - it's more likely that a black-legged tick will latch on to a person or a pet in an area where a lot of them exist. For more information on ticks and Lyme disease, check out <http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/cdpc/lyme.asp>.

Some of you may have attended the event at DeWolf Park to save our coastal reef. The area in question is slated for development at a future time - although our Councillor, Tim Outhit, has indicated more infrastructure (including public transit) needs to be in place before any more major development takes place. The reef in question is held privately - the Waterfront Development Corporation does not own it. I wrote to the WDC in February to have some questions about its mandate clarified but have not yet received an answer (despite several inquiries about its progress).

In terms of the House session, this sitting saw the government bring in a budget that has cut funding to our schools - and there are ramifications for our students. While pre-student funding remains essentially the same - putting us near the bottom of funding across Canada - funding for programs like Reading Recovery have been gutted. Teachers will now be expected to deliver a reading program (which has no scientific evidence backing it to prove it works) while they teach in the classroom. Educational Program Assistants are being laid off in various parts of the province. Here in HRM, the Pathways and Transitions Program has been changed and will now be offered on site in schools - when part of the reason the program worked was because it removed students who were having difficulties in regular classrooms and gave them a fresh start in a different environment. I've heard from many students who felt their success was directly owed to the specialized education they received from this program, and I believe this new version of the program is a recipe for disruption in classrooms.

The government has also reduced funding for universities by 4 percent. This has resulted in tuition increases across the province - most pegged at 3 percent, but some programs are facing increases of 6 percent (Law), 10 percent (Medicine and International Students) and 14 percent (Dentistry). NSCC did not receive an increase in its funding (although the government had negotiated salary increases on its behalf) and has raised tuitions by three percent as well.

The government also used its majority to enact a new Elections Act. The changes direct Elections Nova Scotia to provide political parties with your voting history (whether you voted or not, beginning with the last election) and your birth year. The Liberal Party has concerns about whether this will compromise personal identification security. We also feel political parties should rely on their volunteers to collect voting information at the time of elections; Elections Nova Scotia should not be doing our work. Both the NS Privacy Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer have indicated they have concerns with this bill.

On a positive note, I'd like to alert you to a new government program that I think will be really useful. HealthLink 811 connects Nova Scotians with health information and services - simply by dialling 8-1-1, you can have access to non-emergency health advice from a registered nurse. The HealthLink nurses can also provide information by fax, mail or email. They can refer callers to community-based or provincial health services and link you to 911 if that's appropriate. If you're hearing impaired, you can call 711 (TTY) to access the service.

Finally, I'd like to wish you and your family a safe and happy summer. My office will remain open during this time; please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



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