

# Bass River Community Voices Concerns About School Closure

By Linda Harrington

The Central Colchester Regional School Board (CCRSB) have heard loud and clear the unanimous message from the community of Bass River, "Do not close our elementary school".

A community meeting held on January 26th, gave people in the area an opportunity to voice their concerns. Approximately 200 people were in attendance and twenty people stood before the microphone to state their reasons for keeping Bass River Elementary a part of their community. All comments were being recorded and forwarded to a meeting of the CCRSB, which will be held the first week of March.

Bass River Elementary (BRE) was one of the schools considered for review by a joint committee of Educational and Operational Services in March, 2009. An Impact Assessment Report was developed for BRE and presented to the School Board in May, 2009.

The two options being considered where to leave the school as it is presently operating or to close the school and move the students to West Colchester Consolidated in Bass River.

Concerned citizens formed a Bass River Elementary Closure Committee, chaired by Martha Brown. They met regularly for the past few months and put many hours of work into a publishing a Response to the Impact Assessment Report. The committee reviewed each notation in the CCRSB report and found numerous mistakes, including items such as the wrong civic

address for the school, to more detailed errors in community use at the Elementary School.

Martha Brown's comments at the meeting on January 26th reflected what was written in the Committee's publication. She said the committee unanimously recommend that BRE stays open and "it is not in the student's educational best interest to cram them into WCCS."

Martha spoke about some of the changes that would be necessary at WCCS, including the addition of two classrooms, a learning centre, a library, and playground. Changes would have to be made to the existing washrooms in order to accommodate the younger children. Referring to the reported savings of \$7200 by the CCRSB if the elementary school was closed, Martha stated, "The monetary savings do not justify the education compromise to the students."

Sybil Flemming, who has been a teacher at both Bass River schools for 21 years, gave a detailed account of the educational environment presently at both BRE and WCCS and the effects of moving the elementary students to the Junior High School. "The social environment is not environmentally friendly appropriate here," said Sybil referring to the vast differences in ages of the two student populations. "The older students need to be big kids and the little kids need to play and do little kid things. They have diverse needs and the school needs to meet their needs on an age by age basis."

Two students from WCCS presented their views at the

meeting. Mary Knight made note of the fact that her school already has minimal resources. She felt combining two schools may reduce what they have now and harm the education of the students. Bradley Taggart presented a petition, on behalf of the WCCS Leadership Group, asking the school board to keep the Elementary School open. He was worried about losing resources like the computer lab, library and CAP site and said, "the money the Board might save would not make up for what we are giving up."

Speakers such as life long resident Darlene Smith, continued to express their concerns about what would be lost if the school closed. She reflected on the history of the Elementary School, built in 1912, which was actually once the area High School. She noted the fact that WCCS was designed for senior and junior high students not elementary students and mentioned some of the air and water problems that have plagued WCCS over the last while. Darlene said there are no problems like this at BRE. "The students at Bass River Elementary now have a positive learning environment in an un-crowded building. What more could we ask for?" she said.

Several speakers mentioned they were upset with the overall process to date, including the many errors in the Impact Assessment Report. Closure Committee member Karen MacFarlane said she felt they had not been given respect and consideration, and she challenged the School Board to "please value the students more than the money and keep our

school open."

Many prominent members of the community supported the Committee in their efforts to keep Bass River Elementary from closing and thanked them for all their hard work. Speakers included local Fire Chief Garnet McLaughlin, physician Dr. Karen Ewing, Anita McLellan- Director of the West Colchester Community Development Association, Colchester County Major Bob Taylor and Colchester County Councilor Tom Taggart.

David Fulton, chair of the meeting, thanked everyone for their attendance and he gave a special note of thanks to students Mary Knight and

Bradly Taggart for their presentations.

The CCRSB will hold an in camera meeting the first week of March, with a second

public meeting held the following week. The Board will then make their final decision on whether to close Bass River Elementary School.

## UPDATE

There was a joint meeting of Education and Operations held at the CCRSB office on Feb. 16th. The closure Bass River Elementary was discussed and upon voting the result was in favor of keeping Bass River Elementary School open. Many concerned people from Bass River attended this meeting.

There are two more meetings scheduled before

the final decision will be made. These will be held on March 3rd and March 10th, at the CCRSB offices on Lorne St., Truro.

Martha Brown says she hopes many people will turn out at these meetings and show their support. "We might not be able to speak at the meeting but I plan to be there and look them right in the eye," she says.

# Nature Notes

By Fran Spalding • 647-2837

January scarcely seemed like winter, but February started with bitterly cold and windy weather, enough to prompt a few birds to travel about. Aside from goldfinches and a few chickadees we'd had no flocks at our feeders, so it was a treat to have a couple of pine siskins, tree sparrows and purple finches stop by. They disappeared, though, when temperatures eased a bit.

We have our feeders close to the house and even on it (one with suction cups is attached to a window) and have tied branchlets to the railing of the porch where birds can land and look things over. This arrangement discourages starlings, pigeons

and, unfortunately, doves, but allows wonderfully close views of the braver species.

Many of you will have noticed how a chickadee seizes a sunflower seed, goes to a nearby perch and, holding it with his feet, bangs away at it until he's split the shell. He's lucky to go through two a minute while a goldfinch, on the other hand, will sit on or in a feeder full of seeds and, using only his bill, shell half a dozen in that time. I did once see a goldfinch try unsuccessfully to operate on one by holding it (with one foot).

Too, a blue jay will sometimes stop stuffing itself with seeds to store elsewhere long enough operate on one in the manner of a chickadee. It



reminded me that the bird books say chickadees are more closely related to blue jays than to finches and that the habits of our feeder birds evolved a very long time ago.

Janet Quinn in Lower Economy still has her female cardinal, and two males are coming to feeders in the Masstown-Glenholme area. Janet's daughter Heather took the attached photo at Mary Barley's house in Masstown. Perhaps this is the year that someone will find a pair - if so, please be sure to report it.

Away from feeders, the Meredith's have been keeping track of a bufflehead on the Kiwanis Pond in Truro, an odd place for a diving duck commonly seen at river mouths (e.g. at Five Islands and Parrsboro).

On Economy Point Joelle McLaughlin, out for a walk, with her binoculars, came upon a snowy owl perched in a small fir near her house. A bird that rarely visits our area it often sits on or near the ground and is easy to miss; it was a first for her.

At the deadline for this article I'm getting word of more birds appearing; next month's should seem positively spring-like.



Janet Quinn's daughter Heather took the attached photo at Mary Barley's house in Masstown.



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