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Regional District Explores Options for Rural Schools

The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George Board is exploring options to determine if there is a role it can play in keeping rural schools open within the region. The move comes in the wake of School District 57's announcement regarding school closures in the district.

Earlier this year, the Regional District convened its Select Committee on Rural Schools to provide advice to the Regional District Board about the impact of the closures and to explore what options could be considered to keep the schools open.

At a meeting of the Regional District Board on Wednesday, directors voted in favour of pursuing a service establishment bylaw for community facilities in a number of areas including:

- Electoral Area F – Willow River and Upper Fraser
- Electoral Area A – Salmon Valley and Lakes Area
- Electoral Area E (Hixon Woodpecker)
- Area H – Dunster area

“What we voted on Wednesday basically starts the process of exploring if and how the Regional District could look at partnering with the School District in maintaining schools in the rural areas,” says Kevin Dunphy, Chair of Select Committee on Rural Schools. “There are a number of forms a partnership agreement could take, but we think this is a great opportunity to explore what a neighbourhood centre of learning could look like, while preserving the critical role schools play in rural communities,” says Dunphy.

When a new service is established within the Regional District, it must go through a process of demonstrating support of the residents who live in the area where the service will be provided. If there is sufficient support, the bylaw is brought back to the Board where it would be formally adopted.

“We know there is a lot of work to do, and a lot of questions to answer before we can decide if it makes sense for the Regional District to get involved with school operations in our rural communities, but we’re taking the first few steps in the process to help us determine the answer,” says Dunphy.

Draft bylaws would be prepared and presented at the May meeting of the Regional District Board. If approved, the board would then move into a stage of determining the level of support for establishing the service in each of the affected communities.

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