

Blossom Park School Council
Meeting Minutes – February 23, 2022

In Attendance:

Susan Fattal: Chair

Ayan Haji Egeh: Secretary

Nabi Habibi: Treasurer

Caroline Theriault: Principal

Anita Sloan: Chief Custodian

Seynab Hersj, Zeina Hosny, Masa Alfarawati, and Sedra Alrajab: Student Representatives

Dharia Hederi: A Parent

1. Welcome and Approval of Agenda and Minutes:

- Susan welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- The agenda and minutes from the last meeting were approved.

2. Chair's Update

- Susan contacted the City of Ottawa and spoke to one of the landscape architects in charge of the tree planting grant. Susan received information about the number, species and sizes of trees that can be planted.
- Susan met with Nabi and Ayan, looked at the school map and the locations of where the trees might be planted, and brainstormed some questions for discussion.
- PRO Grant Update: The Ministry of Education provides the funding for the grant. The Board gets the money and manages it as needed. The Board have confirmed that they will go ahead with the Speakers Series.

Susan is still not sure if the Science Night is approved as part of the Speaker Series. The Board will provide a list of topics and speakers from which we can choose a speaker on a specific date. Susan wants to register the school as soon as possible once the registration opens.

- The School Board is asking for feedback and suggestions regarding the topics for the speakers. Susan asked for suggestions from the members to be sent to her by noon tomorrow. The suggested topics from last year included special education, technology, parenting and equity. The OCDSB board will send the specifications of everything to the School Council by March 25th.
- The Speaker Series sessions will run from late April into May. At this point, the council is not sure how to address the language barrier for the parents during these sessions.

- The \$500 grant from the Parent Involvement fund will reach the school soon. Once it gets transferred, the school will send the council a cheque.
- The Charitable Impact donation amount has already been deposited in the school account. The school will send a cheque to the school council for \$281.88 once the paper work is done. The Charitable Impact platform was our previous donation platform, and we have moved now to “Micharity”.
- As of January 25th, the Board of Trustees approved the OCDSB human rights policy for students, families, committee members and employees. The policy promotes and protects human rights within the OCDSB, creating accountability mechanisms for everyone. The information about the new policy is available on the OCDSB website.
- **Library:** Denise Natyshak, the school librarian, reached out to Susan regarding an Indigo application to receive a grant to purchase books for the school library and other educational materials for the classes. She prepared a video including some students. Susan sent her a one-minute video advocating for support to our library.

After the March Break, we will address ways to encourage the students and parents to return the borrowed books to school and to find a mechanism to accept the donation for gently used books.

3. Treasurer’ Update

- The current balance is \$4,048.56 as of January 17th.
- The \$281.88 from the Charitable Impact will be deposited once the School Council receives the cheque.

4. Principal’s Update

- The school hired two more teachers last few weeks. The ESL teaching allocation was increased by half of the full-time staff. A hiring process was posted and there is a staffing competition. Allison Downton, who is already a half-time support teacher, was able to increase her status to full-time support teacher, so she is now with the school as full-time staff.
- Stephen Ruth, who has been long-time occasional in the afternoon, is now a full-time teacher and will be with the students for the rest of the year.
- Ms. Natyshak, the school librarian, is working on submitting the “Love of Reading Literacy Fund” grant. Caroline worked with Denise in creating a short video for the grant. It is a three-year period funding to promote literacy in the school through the library.
- Caroline received an email from facilities last month about whether the school would be interested in being involved in a nature nook project. Caroline agreed with their initiative since it is aligned with the outdoor class project. The facility will provide the

school with a metal bench and some trees. More details to come. The project is funded through the central environmental aspect of the facilities department and the school was nominated.

- Report cards were sent home last week. Access to the report cards has been simplified this term electronically, but some families needed to know the OEN number of their children. The office will improve the digital approach for June report cards to reduce the number of hard copies sent home.
- COVID screening protocol is still in place. It is challenging to get the forms completed by the parents. About 20 to 30 families are still struggling to complete the screening form.
- COVID protocol – the school is more relaxed on the COVID protocol, and students can now do group work with close proximity. The school is releasing the requirements to wear masks outside. Students are not required to wear masks outside. There will be more updates soon.
- The school received another \$3,000 donation for the school library. The donor is a space scientist. Caroline and Denise are thinking of ways to honour the donor. One idea is to purchase science texts and classroom activities and use them to showcase students' work and share it with the donor.
- The school will continue to collect funds through Toonie Tuesday for the Education Foundation's annual fundraising drive.
- Today was pink shirt day at school, which is an antibullying initiative.
- Intramurals are beginning for grades seven and eight, so Mr. Allen will continue with the sports activity plan.
- Grad photos will be held on March 25th, so grade eight will get cap and gown photos for the first time since the pandemic has started.
- Ottawa public health vaccination for HPV for intermediate students will happen in April.
- The school is wrapping up Black History month, and there have been amazing projects happening in the school.
- EQAO is moving forward this year in May and June. It will be completely online. Students will practice how to use Google read for the EQAO for grade 3 and 6 students.
- There is no plan to allow large in-person events or School Council or end-of-year school celebrations.
- Caroline mentioned that the Board has asked to be the sole provider for the HEPA filters and the PPE to the students because not everyone can do that. The OCDSB school board doesn't want school councils to distribute masks to the students because it might become an equity issue since not all school councils would be able to provide the time and the money to buy masks to the students.
- The OCDSB set specific criteria determining where to place the HEPA filters in the school building. There are 9 HEPA filters in the following locations:

- any room in which you couldn't guarantee consistent masking protocols, for example; special education classes;
 - any place where the school building wasn't connected to the main filtration system, which includes four classes in the back of the school building (portable classrooms). Those classes have independent HEPA filters attached to them;
 - any room where cohort groups are meeting for special education and English language learners.
- Susan asked if the number of HEPA filters provided by the Board is enough and meets the school filtration guidelines. Caroline mentioned that they would advocate for more, but since the facilities have upgraded the filtration system in the school building, it's above the code. During lunchtime, they have increased the cycling through of the air. This has increased to six times in an hour that it's purified. The standard is above the minimum code and according to the facilities management team, they feel that's sufficient. Since installing the HEPA filters, there have been no confirmed COVID cases in the school.
 - Susan mentioned that she is aware that other school councils have helped provide masks to their schools. However, the situation has changed, and Public Health measures are moving towards removing the masks; therefore, providing extra masks is not relevant anymore.

5. Vice Principal's update

Carmelina, the school vice principal, couldn't join the meeting.

6. Teachers' Update

Tammy couldn't join the meeting.

7. Student representatives

- Sedra wanted to confirm if the mask could be removed outside. Caroline clarified that students are allowed to remove the masks only outside and not inside the school.
- Masa is working on the school yearbook. She is meeting with one of the teachers at the school for assistance.
- Masa asked whether intermediate grades are allowed to go out for lunch. Caroline mentioned that the school is not lifting cohorting yet, and students are not allowed to leave the school.
- Masa is interested in painting a flag on the ceiling tile. Anita mentioned that it's a fire regulation, and the school is not allowed to do that. Caroline has suggested to look into other options around the school building to paint the flag, and for Masa to write a proposal for the principal's approval.

- Sedra asked for clarification around group work in class. Caroline said that students could work in small groups, and it's more flexible compared to the last two years. Students are encouraged to work in groups.
- Sedra wanted to know if another sports event could be done besides basketball. Caroline mentioned that there is a calendar of sports throughout the year and it may be basketball for this season and can be switched into a different sport for the next season or so. Caroline encouraged Sedra to propose other sports to Mr. Allen.
- Susan asked about the graduation ceremony. Caroline mentioned that there are no updates about in-person events at the school.
- Anita wanted to know the limit on the number of people attending in-person events at the school. Caroline is not sure of an exact number, but a gathering of 100 people or more, such as school graduation, will not be allowed. However, things might change in the spring.
- Sedra wanted to know if they were allowed to take part as lunch monitors. Caroline indicated that there would be no students monitoring lunchtime at the time to prevent the mixing of the cohorts.

Important matters for discussion:

Health and nutrition presentation

- Ms. Fiona Storfer contacted Susan and has suggested bringing a nutritionist to deliver a presentation about healthy eating and healthy cultural cuisine with a new perspective different from the western cuisine. She has selected two classes, which are grades 4 and 5. The speaker speaks the Arabic language and can provide language support for some of the newer ESL students. The fee is \$600 for two presentations.
- Susan mentioned that to approve any teacher's request, the School Council usually considers the budget, priorities for the council, equity, how many students can benefit from the workshop in addition to the nature of the activity or request.
- Susan thinks that healthy eating is a global thing for everyone, and it shouldn't be based on religion or culture. Taking into consideration the fact that we have no fundraising income to support us right now, the fee seems to be very expensive for two presentations and for two grades only. She is not going to support the request.
- Caroline had thought initially that the presentation was for the parents and not students. Caroline mentioned that one of the challenges is encouraging the parents not to send junk food with their kids in the lunch bags; she suggested having a topic on how to eat healthy on a limited budget. Susan suggested adding this to the PRO Grant speakers' series topics in the form to be sent to the Board.
- Anita said that it is nice to encourage your kids to eat healthy, but some children are picky eaters, which can be a challenge for some families.

- Caroline has mentioned that some activities about nutrition were done in the school that were more economical and more appealing to students.
- Ayan said the cost is too expensive and we need activities that will cover more students.
- Nabi mentioned that healthy eating guidelines is a scientific thing and it is the same for every one.
- The School Council will not support Ms. Storfer's request.

Tree planting project

- The tree grant application will be submitted by June 1st, 2022.
We should consider the location of the trees, the number of trees (we can order from 8 to 12 trees), what species we are requesting (Susan provided a list of species) and the maintenance plan.
- Susan is in touch with Sawmill Creek School Council. They are having their trees planted this spring. Susan looked at their map for some ideas. They have specified how many trees and species are on their map.
- The maintenance plan includes watering. We can have water hoses and buckets to water the trees. Note that buckets could be hard to carry, requiring more volunteers. We might need to add mulch at the beginning of tree planting, put fencing to protect the trees (if needed), and maintain the trimming of the branches. The City of Ottawa will provide gator bags for the trees.
- The City of Ottawa is asking for three-year planning of tree maintenance to be mentioned in the application.
- Susan mentioned that students' and parents' engagement would contribute to the project's success.
- Susan shared the map of the school in the meeting and flagged that we must ensure there are no hydro lines, phone lines, or gas lines in the area of the tree planting.
- The City of Ottawa wants to ensure that they have access to the yard and no future portables to be placed in the schoolyard where the trees will be planted.
- Anita indicated that there is no maintenance happening to the existing trees in the yard. Anita cuts the branches down after they break. If there is an issue with a tree, a contractor is hired to fix it.
- Anita's main issue about the project is students' safety. There is a metal bar holding the trees, which could be a potential cause of injuries. Students' safety is at stake. In addition, we must consider how to keep students away from the trees as they grow. This is an additional cost.
- Susan mentioned the possibility of adding snow fencing and stakes around the trees for protection, but not sure yet how they function and how much they will cost. She checked on the Home Depot website; they seem to be affordable.

- Anita said that we need to protect the trees from rabbits and kids swinging on the trees.
- There is no irrigation system in the field, and the only hose available is near the ramp at the rear of the building. Water will be a big issue because the trees would need a lot of watering initially. Anita recommends asking the city to bring watering bags to water the trees. Susan confirmed that the city would be providing the gator bags; they need to be filled up once a week to twice a week in the summer. However, the city still recommends findings ways to water the trees after the initial phase.
- Anita mentioned that we don't have long hoses and equipment to bring the water to the trees. For the volume of water that trees will require, we would need to carry potentially hundreds of liters at a time and we don't have the equipment to carry that much volume of water around the field. Anita will get back to the school council with some answers, options and recommendations about tree watering for the next meeting.
- Susan asked if students could be involved in watering the trees. Caroline mentioned the Eco-School Club, the environmental green team at the school, where classes can take ownership of certain trees to water. Students can water the trees from September to June. No watering is required in winter. We would require more people to water the trees in the summertime. Anita indicated that the custodians would be busy cleaning the school and not be available to water the trees in the summer. It would require parent volunteers to water the trees during the summer. There is no issue accessing the school. Anita will ensure to have the gate open for the volunteers in the summer to water the trees. Volunteers would need to send an email to Anita to have the gate open.
- A new project is happening in the school this summer, which is the repair of the asphalt, but since we are planting the trees next year, this repair activity will not interfere with tree planting.
- Caroline suggested 2 to 4 parents volunteer to water the trees. And two buckets to switch between them to water the trees.
- Seynab suggested having the tree watering project as community volunteer hours credit towards grade 9. Anita or any parent volunteer can sign off on the community hours for grade 8 students.
- Anita mentioned that we might get a yellow garden cart from another school to carry several water buckets all at once. The garden cart is sturdy and can be of use.
- Anita indicated that it wouldn't be feasible to have hoses based on the distance between the water source and the trees, and hoses will not be long enough to reach the trees.
- Dharia Hederi is a parent and suggested having a small football field for younger children. Caroline mentioned that there would be enough size for the football field following the tree planting.
- Caroline mentioned that school staff recommended planting native species that are suitable for our area, such as the maple, and can provide shades around the portable workspace and the picnic table area.

- Susan mentioned that her biggest concern is watering the trees. We need to look into that when deciding the location.
- Anita asked about the age and the size of the trees that the City of Ottawa provides. Anita indicated that it might take up to 10 years until we see substantial growth of these trees, and they could give any shades. Anita is also concerned about the height of the trees causing issues around the portables. Caroline mentioned that the city provided pictures of the recommended trees, and some of them were wide, and others were tall.
- Dharia suggested putting a big umbrella in the backyard to protect from the rain and provide shade in the summer. Susan mentioned that the School Council would consider the idea for a future project and when funding is available. We have discussed the idea as part of the outdoor class project.
- Nabi suggested reflecting on the need for the trees and whether we can have other alternatives to provide shading for outdoor learning and activities. Nabi thinks that watering the trees might be challenging, and we are going to be accountable and must be committed to maintaining the trees.
- Susan requested that the School Council parent members visit the schoolyard in the next few weeks to examine the field and the potential trees and water source locations. Caroline mentioned that members could come to visit the school. Susan will send an email to Caroline with the time and date of the visit.
- Anita mentioned that the timing to visit the school is appropriate to locate the snow piles. She recommended another visit in the spring when the snow melted to see the field better.

8. Questions/Concerns/Suggestion

9. **Next meeting** is scheduled for Wednesday, March 23rd, 2022, at 5:00 pm. Date to be confirmed by email.
10. The meeting was adjourned at 6:16 pm.