

La Croisée Community Association

**BRIEF: IN RESPONSE TO THE WQSB ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL BOUNDARY STUDY (DECEMBER 2012)**

January 23th 2013





INTRODUCTION

The La Croisée Community Association is a non-profit enterprise registered within the Province of Quebec and located 1km from South Hull Elementary School in Aylmer Quebec. Among our Association's mandate is the following:

- support recreation/social events and the shared sense of belonging in our community
- community website management (www.croisee.org)
- representative in support of a co-operative, informative relationship between residents, public administrations and our developer, Richcraft Homes (Ottawa)

PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEF

On the evening of January 16th, following the public consultation meeting, the Board received a legitimate summary of the La Croisée parents' concerns regarding the WQSB Boundary Study¹ along with a signed petition from our community's residents. As a Community Association representing the residents of La Croisée, we believe the Board's objective to develop a long-term elementary school boundary solution based on the concept of 'community schools', particularly in regards to the urban sector, is a correct one.

However, the current retained boundary option held by the Board, which removes the families in the La Croisée Community from their community school, South Hull Elementary, contradicts the Board's objectives to the detriment of the schools.² This option also marginalizes the La Croisée Community³ within its urban village. The long term success of the Board's objective, in facing enrolment and capacity issues in the urban sectors, must first comprehend how 'community' is created. The Board must also acknowledge and accommodate where a sense of belonging to a school community currently exists. Specific to the WQSB Boundary proposal, the intrinsic value of an existing school community at South Hull that includes the community of La Croisée should strongly be considered against the relatively small 0.5% difference in the percentage of students affected between Option One and Two. The La Croisée Community Association would like the Western Québec School Board's Planning and Review Committee to consider the concerns contained in this document and adopt Option 1, or a revision there of, as the recommendation to the Board on February 26, 2013.

BACKGROUND

The Boundary Study has four objectives that align with the reasons for the Study.

1. Develop a solution that is long-term by addressing future development plans and demographic shifts
2. Balance enrolment in line with the school capacity
3. Create a boundary for Eardley school to provide families with a community school (create community schools).
4. Increase the number of walkers within a 'safe' walking distance to schools

¹ Boundary Study, Planning & Review Committee, November 27, 2012, presented by Manon DuSablon.

² Options 2 and 3 would have residents of the La Croisée community removed from South Hull and sent to Eardley.

³ Our community lies from Upper Aylmer Rd. to Vanier Rd (east), Eddie (west) and north to McConnell Rd.



CURRENT STATUS AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Objective 1 – Develop a solution that is long-term by addressing future development plans and demographic shifts

Our brief, or any brief for that matter, cannot be expected to propose the perfect long term boundary solution without the data and tools available only to the Board or from an evening of consultation regarding constraints. In addition, we saw in the 3rd quarter of 2012, that Aylmer witnessed a 15% drop in residential home sales.⁴ This may be a result of new mortgage insurance regulations, Ontario residents being even more reluctant to move to Quebec or signs that the past levels of residential development may, in fact, not be sustainable.⁵

It is improbable that the current transportation data and software, combined with the MELS enrolment projections, used to allocate new boundaries in the study is able to accurately predict what percentage of growth and accurate time frame can be applied in estimating the future, long term number of English students. Under these circumstances, removing an existing community and its children who have a historical, existing, and strong sense of belonging to the South Hull community is illogical.

As discovered, basing projections for South Hull, simply on promises from a developer’s relatively empty high density community in barter for sole access to South Hull exposes a plan to greater risk through a narrower interest in the free market. Capacity balance may be overcompensated and the non-existing “future” children in that development, in this case, may never have the infrastructure for walkers to access South Hull Elementary. (see Exhibit 3)

We believe it is more prudent and sustainable to reduce the unknown risk in growth projections in the long run by assigning growth up to Antoine-Boucher to Eardley Elementary in line with their Urban village ‘Les Explorateurs’ thus creating a community school and maintain La Crois e children with the South Hull Elementary community as shown in WQSB Option 1. (see Exhibit 4)

Objective 2 – Balance enrolment in line with the school capacity

Similar to Objective 1, it is difficult to present a perfectly balanced school capacity plan to the Board without the appropriate tools and data. However, the community school concept must remain the guiding approach. We hope the Board allows our community further extensive study on how to reduce or remove the 0.5% discrepancy in affected students between Option 1 and Option 2.

In light of that, we have been made aware that some commissioners believe that due to their perception of our community as “a group” having a “homogeneous, higher social/economic status”, the board is being persuaded to believe our community will be better able to adjust to any impacts on our children from boundary changes because of that perceived status. Just as we are not, in fact, homogeneous in “status”, a size of home does not reflect a families net worth or what goes on inside a home. We believe this approach is misguided and discriminatory. It also irrationally suggests to the board there is a requirement to discover the wealth or net worth of each family before moving children to other schools. Parents do not agree and it is not a valid reason to target our community.

Likewise the interpretation by commissioners that moving La Crois e students as a group would positively influence an eventual higher ranking for Eardley Elementary⁶ is unsubstantiated and may, as some parents believe, have the opposite effect on the 24+ existing and upcoming affected children in La Crois e.

⁴ Real Estate Trends – November 23, 2012 Outaouais Living.

⁵ On a collision course with the Debt Supercycle”, Globe and Mail, Economy and Markets, B15, December 29, 2012.

⁶ Indices de defavorisation par ecole – 2010-2011.



Objective 3 – Create a boundary for Eardley school to provide families with a community school (Reason #3 – Create community Schools)

The school boundaries proposed in Options 2 and 3 remove the families of La Crois e that are less than 1km from their nearby community school, South Hull Elementary. The WQSB’s Option 2 places them in a school that is separated from them by a large area of mixed commercial and residential property that is approximately 4 km away.

As mentioned in our Purpose for our Brief, the Boards objective to develop community schools is a correct one. However, community schools are only created by parents, or citizens, living in close proximity, who come together, offer their time and abilities, then choose to move possibilities into an actual shared benefit for the public good of the school. As a result, through time and to the benefit of the Board, a sense of belonging to the school in the surrounding community is born. This is not an empirical exercise. Where it exists, it cannot be cut and pasted on a map and then be expected to thrive elsewhere. As you are aware, the School Board can only nourish a community school by keeping those families living in close proximity with their nearest school, together. South Hull is a community school of La Crois e.

For many years, South Hull has drawn residents to La Crois e and is a key part of our community, as reflected in our residents petition presented to you. Other South Hull parents and children are our close neighbours that we see at the local d epanneur, on the local rinks and baseball fields, walking and at the bus stop in our shared Urban Village. Our parents play an important role on South Hull’s Home and School Committee and Governing Board and Facebook page. However, aligning La Crois e with Eardley, outside our urban village, will weaken and marginalize La Crois e in its urban village and negatively affect the South Hull community. La Crois e parents will not share the same sense of community with Eardley. Our concern as a Community, and to the detriment of the Board, is that many good residents will simply move away.

Objective 4 – Increase the number of walkers within a ‘safe’ walking distance to schools

We note within the boundary options proposed by the Board, out of 1698 students there is only a potential increase of approximately 20 walkers. In particular, there is no mention of increasing the number of walkers within a safe walking distance to South Hull.

However, with Option 1, the families within the La Crois e community that currently walk their children to South Hull would keep the benefit of being able to walk their children to/from school and daycare within their urban village. Transferring these families to Eardley would eliminate these and future families from ever being walkers again. We believe that working in co-operation with the City and others we may easily improve the zoning of Upper Aylmer Rd and infrastructure at South Hull to allow for even more walkers at South Hull from our community.



SUMMARY OF CONCERNS & QUESTIONS FOR THE BOARD

La Croisée Concerns	Questions for WQSB
The only boundary option that WQSB parents and residents in the La Croisée community support is Option 1. As a Community, South Hull is very important to La Croisée.	Is it possible to work with the data and tools available to the Board, as well as consider the existing sense of belonging to the South Hull community to reduce the perceived 0.5% difference in affected students?
Parents believe commissioners are targeting our community for illogical reasons.	What opportunity do parents have to approach the Board with these concerns?
Due to the close proximity of other parents and the school, the sense of belonging to the South Hull community school currently exists within our community of La Croisée. It cannot be recreated by the Board with Eardley.	If the objective of the board is supporting community schools and it is the correct one, why does the board want to remove that benefit, permanently, from the families and students in La Croisée.

NEXT STEPS

We hope we can work together to develop possible solutions that meet your objectives and allow the adoption of Option 1 so that the La Croisée residents remain in support of the South Hull community as they always have.

EXHIBITS:

Exhibit 1:

Map; Urban Village and Rural Living Environments, City of Gatineau

Exhibit 2:

Indices de defavorisation par Ecole – 2010-2011

Exhibit 3:

South Hull Walker Zone – Current Development North

Exhibit 4:

South Hull Boundary Recommendation – La Croisée Community Association

Exhibit 5:

South Hull – Option 1 (WQSB Boundary Study – November 27, 2012)

Exhibit 6:

South Hull – Option 2 (WQSB Boundary Study – November 27, 2012)