

PWSD receiving funds for new Five Mile school

By Brad Quarin
Town & Country News

The dream of establishing a new school in the Five Mile Hall area is moving forward after Alberta Infrastructure announced last week funding will be provided for the project.

The dollars will go to design, with the proposed school intended to replace Harry Balfour School in the city.

“It’s an excellent first step to getting our new school,” said Bob Stewart, Peace Wapiti School Division (PWSD) superintendent.

Harry Balfour School has 410 students in kindergarten to Grade 8 classes.

Stewart said PWSD won’t know how much funding will be provided until the division receives its official letter from Alberta Infrastructure.



Harry Balfour School is located in Grande Prairie and has 410 students in kindergarten to Grade 8 classes. Alberta Infrastructure will supply funding to Peace Wapiti School Division, which will go toward replacing the building with a school in the Five Mile Hall area. (Photo supplied)

ABOUT THE FIVE MILE HALL SCHOOL

- The proposed school is intended to replace Harry Balfour School
- Whispering Ridge Community School (WRCS) was founded north of Grande Prairie to help replace Harry Balfour School
- WRCS opened in 2018 with 460 students (kindergarten to Grade 8)
- Harry Balfour School has 410 students

It’s uncertain if the announced funding will cover geotechnical studies or 100-year floodplain studies, he said. It may only cover architectural design.

(Floodplain studies are required to determine whether the land is susceptible to flooding, though Stewart said this isn’t much of a concern in this area of Alberta.)

He said the goal of establishing a school east of the city was set out in the Clancy Report, which recommended PWSD move its schools outside the city to reduce bus times.

“By eliminating the additional time required to transport rural students through the busy central core of the city, we will simultaneously reduce early morning pick-ups and late drop-

off times,” said Kari Scheers, PWSD board chairperson.

Stewart said that when Harry Balfour School was initially built, it was in the county, but city boundaries were later expanded to include it.

Implementing the initial phase of the Clancy Report - a school north of the city - was achieved with the opening of Whispering Ridge Community School (WRCS) last year, he said.

Alberta Infrastructure will decide who manages the Five Mile project, he said.

(In the past, PWSD has managed some and Alberta Infrastructure has managed others.)

However, Stewart said the “footprint” of the new school would be similar to that of WRCS.

This includes the size of the school grounds and the location of the bus loop, staff parking and fields within the property, he said.

Stewart said interior features of the new school may differ, and will be determined by the school board and a committee after considering what’s best for the students.

County council approved a Borrowing Bylaw Feb. 25 authorizing the county to borrow \$1.25 million for land near Five Mile Hall.

The county previously acquired the 137 acres in December.

A portion of the 137 acres of land will be transferred to PWSD while the remainder will remain with the county, according to county communications.

Stewart told the *News* earlier this year that after a Five Mile school is built, Alberta Education will decide what to do with Harry Balfour School.

An option would be to transfer it to another school division, he said.

Suicide Prevention Resource Centre holding event for community support

(Submitted)

Because of the complicated grief of suicide loss and challenges around that, healing can be very difficult.

Those bereaved by suicide are aptly referred to as “survivors” of suicide loss.

The Suicide Prevention Resource Centre (SPRC) aims to support survivors of suicide loss and organizes many opportunities for survivors to connect.

For many, attending a survivor day event is the first step in gaining comfort and understanding in their loss, and realizing they are not alone.

Seeing the value in the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention initiative, SPRC in Grande Prairie was one of the first communities outside the United States to host one of these events.

SPRC personnel are inviting the community as they gather on Nov. 23.

This year’s documentary, *Pathways to Healing: Hope after Suicide Loss*, follows the family and friends of Chris Taddeo, a young adult who died by suicide.

Together, they show the individual experiences a community of people can have after a shared loss: from confusion and denial,



to isolation and finding support.

Through their various approaches to grief and healing, each journey shares a message of hope, connection and resilience.

SPRC will be joining others from around the world to take part in this event, starting at 10 a.m. in the training room on the second floor of Nordic Court in Grande Prairie.

Part of the challenge is reaching the people that an event such as this would benefit and to reassure them that this is a safe place to share, or not, support others, or not, but for sure, to find support and understanding.

Survivors, and those who support them, friends, family, co-workers, and agency workers, are all welcome.

Alberta declares war on mountain pine beetles

The provincial government is increasing mountain pine beetle funding to \$30 million annually for the next four years, the government announced recently.

The extra funding will increase the mountain pine beetle management program’s annual budget from \$25 million to \$30 million through 2022-2023.

“The cost of doing nothing is not acceptable,” said Devin Dreesen, agriculture and forestry minister.

“Alberta and Saskatchewan are both funding mountain pine beetle programming and we will continue to press Ottawa to take this seriously.”

This is a proven program that reduces the spread of the mountain pine beetle and mitigates damage to Alberta forests, according to the government.

The money will go toward additional ground survey and control work on more than 83,000 hectares.

This year, the County of Grande Prairie had contractors work on land in the area south of Grande Prairie, between Peace Area Riding for the Disabled and Pine Valley South rural subdivision, removing dead pine beetle-infested trees.

“We welcome this responsible and timely investment by the government of Alberta,” said Paul Whittaker, Alberta Forest Products Association president.

“We only need to look west to British Columbia to see the widespread environmental degradation and lost jobs that occur when too little action is taken to fight the scourge of the mountain pine beetle.”

“Here in Alberta, timely investments and co-operation between government and industry has not only prevented destruction of our forests, it has also slowed the eastward spread of the beetle.”

The value of pine susceptible to mountain pine beetle is currently valued at more than \$11 billion.

Since 2006, Alberta has spent more than \$500 million controlling mountain pine beetles.

Since 2011, the government of Saskatchewan has provided \$6.15 million for mountain pine beetle management.

Alberta received \$1 million from Saskatchewan last year, and Saskatchewan has committed the same for this fiscal year.