

An Open Letter To:

**Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, Zach Churchill**

We are writing to you on behalf of the residents of the Spryfield Community to express our dissatisfaction with the new JL Isley High School Site Selection process. Although we are very excited with the prospect of a new high school in our community, we have serious concerns about the process to determine the location of the new school and we request a new public engagement session to take place as soon as possible and prior to the final site selection for the new school.

Here's what happened related to the new JLI High School from our perspective:

- A new JLI High School was announced on January 25 2017.
- The government directed HRSB on March 6 2017 to recommend three proposed sites for the construction of a school.
- A Site Selection Committee was formed and it had little, if any, local representation.
- A list of 8 sites was developed through a series of meetings which took place from May 2 to June 6th.
- The Site Selection Committee meetings were closed to members of the public; minutes were posted some time after the meeting took place.
- A single public meeting was held through this process. It took place on June 6, at which 8 sites were identified by the public for consideration, however very little information on the potential sites was provided for discussion.
- Subsequently, on July 12, the site selection committee recommended 3 of the sites considered to the Minister of Education.

On October 12, and October 17, members of the Spryfield Community Association wrote to various leaders within this process to request additional public consultation and more transparency about site selection criteria. We heard back from Linda MacKay (school board member), on October 18th and Joe MacEchern (Executive Director Finance & Facilities Management, Education and Early Childhood Development) on November 15th, who advised that the matter is no longer with the school board and also that only one public consultation is required. We also heard back from Ron Heiman (HRSB Director Operations Services) on January 8th, 2018 to advise that once the site is finalized any future members of the School Steering Team would be made up of School Advisory Council (SAC) members and HRM staff. None of these responses addressed the community's request for further public consultation.

We understand (through municipal and provincial contacts) that since this time, one of the sites has since been removed from the consideration as it was HRM land that was not supported by HRM for this purpose. We have also been made aware that in recent months, a developer has since proposed another site, not previously reviewed by the school board, for consideration and this site may be under consideration by the province. **Neither of these possible changes have been discussed publicly or have had any opportunity for input from the community.** The removal of the 3<sup>rd</sup> site from consideration, may also mean that the required process of recommending 3 viable sites has not been followed.

The last and only public consultation on the JLI site selection, took place more than 8 months ago. The single consultation was inadequate. **The public has currently no insight into the status of this project<sup>1</sup> and we request that a public session take place as soon as possible.** This session should bring the community up to speed on the status of the initiative, review remaining sites that are under consideration, share with greater transparency the site selection criteria and weightings and advise the process ahead given the status of school board reform.

We are also concerned about the school sizing in the context of Spryfield given its regional planning designation by HRM as an “Urban District Growth Centre” (and furthermore, with Herring cove designated as an “Urban Local Growth Centre”); we wish to ensure that this school will be adequately planned to meet the community’s growth and future needs and would like to understand the approach. Furthermore, we recognize the potential for new school infrastructure to multi-function as a valuable community resource into the future (e.g. Citadel High School) and request the opportunity for engagement in the planning of this infrastructure.

Minister, we consider this process inadequate to date and ask that you consider new guidelines to reform this process for future projects to ensure greater local engagement, including the existing school administration/staff/student council, municipality and local elected representatives.

In addition, we would like to hear from the Minister with respect to our request for community engagement as soon as possible, which our association would be happy to support as needed.

We are hoping to publish an article to the Spryfield Community in the Chebucto Connections to solicit the community’s feedback on this matter.

Submitted by,

The Infrastructure and Planning Committee  
Spryfield Community Association

Cc:

Brendan Maguire, MLA Halifax-Atlantic  
Councillor Stephen Adams, HRM  
The Premier, the Honourable Stephen MacNeill  
Lloyd Hines, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal

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<sup>1</sup> Brendan Maguire recently commented on the status of the new high school in the Chebucto News