



The Village of  
**PORT CLEMENTS**  
“Gateway to the Wilderness”

36 Cedar Avenue West  
PO Box 198  
Port Clements, BC  
V0T1R0  
OFFICE: 250-557-4295  
Public Works: 250-557-4295  
FAX: 250-557-4568  
Email: [office@portclements.ca](mailto:office@portclements.ca)  
Web: [www.portclements.ca](http://www.portclements.ca)

6:00 PM, Monday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Committee of the Whole

**PRESENT:**

Mayor Scott Cabianca  
Councillor Brigid Cumming  
Councillor Kazamir Falconbridge (by conference)  
Councillor Dennis Reindl

**Not Present:**

Councillor Wayne Nicol

CAO Marjorie Dobson  
Deputy CAO Elizabeth Cumming

Members of the Public: Stacey Brzostowski (Haida Gwaii News), Marilyn Bliss, Maureen Bailey, Linda Berston, Alan Lore, Emma Lore.

**Committee of the Whole Meeting Called to Order at 6:04 PM**

Councillor Dennis Reindl: I call to order the committee of the whole meeting of the Village of Port Clements being held on the traditional territory of the Haida People.

**1. ADOPT AGENDA**

2025-02-038—Moved by Councillor Cumming

THAT the Committee adopts the February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Committee of the Whole Agenda as presented.

**CARRIED**

**2. REPORTS & DISCUSSIONS**

D-1-School District #50's Reconfiguration Review of Port Clements Elementary School

*Key discussion points:*

- The discussion started with the identification that the purpose of this Committee of the Whole is to have a more detailed discussion that could provide recommendations to Council. The School District#50 Board of Trustees are being presented with 3 different options from the Superintendent (on Tuesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>) – one to maintain the status quo at Port Clements Elementary School providing K-7, another option giving the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) a year to decide on a new learning plan for the school, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> option to reconfigure the school to only providing K-3 or 4. The Village is looking at potentially trying to put pressure on them to choose option #1 or #2, which has to be arranged fairly quickly to get to the Board before their meeting.
- Discussion first focused on the topic of the Tlell-Port bus route, and the community's desire for that to be reinstated citing the need to bring in the Tlell children to the school for numbers. One person's research into the costs of buses found that the cost of purchasing a bus is covered by the Province, not coming out of the School District's budget which just handles operating costs. The fuel cost of a diesel bus is approximately \$23,000/year while an electric bus is \$6,000/year – the total cost of running a Port-Tlell bus is \$40,000-50,000/year. Another point brought up in the discussion was that currently the School District buses 2 children from Port Clements to Tahayghen Elementary in Masset, so why can't they have a bus from Tlell for the estimated 6+ Tlell kids that could go to Port Clements (which is far less kilometers than the distance to Masset)? They hit more kids as they get into Masset, but they could also look at less costly options such as a passenger van for a Tlell-Port route.

- The discussion then shifted to examples of successful alternative school models that could be considered. One focused on was Sun Peaks School, which is located on, and bases its programming around, a ski hill (K-4 on a bunny hill, 5-7 further up the hill, and opened up an 8-10 down the hill – all on municipality-donated buildings). Their local school was threatened with closure by their original school district as they only had 19 kids, so the parents pulled the kids out of the School District, enrolled them in distance education before joining School District #73 (Kamloops-Thompson; runs several distributed learning programs). They are still a conventional school model, but also separately run Sun Peaks Secondary Academy (private school). Within 15 years they went from 19 kids to now 125 kids enrolled, and with waitlists – the kids are on the move and kids are interested in going to learn in an outdoor ski hill classroom. Another example is the Living and Learning School in Daajing Giids that has been in operation for 30+ years, has 21 FTE, provides grades 1-7. It is a parent-run school but is properly accredited independent school. Their 2013 budget was \$100,000/year while for 2023 it was \$316,000/year. Unclear on funding sources, but they get ½ the per-student allocation that the School District gets from the Province. Parents are heavily involved in the operations – donating about 10 hours per week, or pay \$500/kid/month. Some people in the discussion expressed a preference for pursuing Port Clement pursuing establishing an independent school rather than dealing with School District #50.
- Another point expressed in the discussion was that the School District should be exploring remote learning options if small classroom sizes/socialization is a concern. They could have devices in the classroom twinned with another classroom in another school to increase interactions, as well as other technological solutions that would allow for more distributed/distance education. A related point brought up was that the School District moved the adult student learning program to Daajing Giids, and it was questioned on why they could not offer that program in Port Clements since it is all remote. It was identified in discussion that for remote/distance education the School District attributes them distance education to the school in Sandspit to boost its numbers.
- Discussion featured the opinion that expenses in SD50's budget are far higher than provincial averages – for administration costs the provincial average is 4% while SD50's costs are slightly over 7%, while for operations provincially it is 11% while it is 23% in our district. There should be more cost savings opportunities than have been presented. Discussion identified that such discrepancies between provincial and local figures may be from having the equivalent of 2 non-enrolling principals in the district out of 8 principals (meaning that the principals are attributed to the school district and not to students in schools – there is one principal that is in principle principal of all the primary grades [1-4]), in addition to 4.2 non-enrolling teachers. When reviewing Statement of Financial Information (SOFI) Reports, there is a substantial different between 2014/2015 and 2023 budgets, even considering inflation. There are also additional positions they have filled that are not required – like having both a superintendent and an assistant superintended. Their operating budget is \$12-14 million. Additionally, SD#50 in their public meeting identified that the \$600,000 deficit they are trying to cut costs for by reconfiguring Port Clements Elementary School is only a projected budget deficit – not an actual – in 3 years it is projected that it will be a deficit of \$1.8 million and use up their current surpluses, but it is uncertain how they are projecting a \$600,000 deficit. Some people identified that the projected deficit was from raises teachers got as result from labour negotiations as well as hiring additional staff before they had received budget approvals. It was identified that in the last 3 years wages have gone from salaries of \$115,000/year to \$150,000/year in costs – which is a range of 35-40% increase, which is not necessarily due to union negotiations (as the union rates have not gone up by more than 20% for the period). In general, frustration was expressed over how SD#50 is perceived as not applying any austerity or other controls to reduce the deficit in year 2 or 3, and seems to be targeting Port Clements Elementary Reconfiguration as a red herring of a solution to their budget issues. Cutting the grades 4-7 only reduce potentially one teaching position, one classroom, which would not cover the whole deficit (potentially only +/- \$100,000). Sending the children to Skidegate/Masset would have their costs for those schools stay the same to a certain amount, but they're still only making the same amount of money. It was identified that they should be reviewing their top-staff heavy administration, with the general sentiment that they are overstaffed, as well as the subsidized housing being provided (below market rental rates), being more of a cause for the financial issues at hand. It was also identified that closing Tahaygen, when combining the two schools, resulted in a loss of \$250,000/year for the school district, though it is offset by no longer having the operational costs for one school. The discussion debated whether it was

possible for the school district to be audited (which they currently are) or have their audit/financials reviewed for cost savings with a business analysis.

- Discussion shifted around what the contents should be for a letter written by the Village to go to the School District (Trustees, Superintendent, MLA, MP, Minister of Education, Protocol Table, etc). At the last Council meeting, Council decided to send a letter asking for the Board to delay their decision to give more time for the Village to look into its options, get legal opinions and consult with the public; this letter has not gone out yet, and legal opinion received identified that the Village did not have a position where it could force a decision over the school's operations or budget, but the Village could advocate for a party or the community generally. While there was some talk about whether to send one or two letters, it was decided that just sending one more detailed letter would be better. It was also expressed that anything going in the letter should be limited to what is verifiable or accurate and not just assertions.
- In some parts of the discussion, it was identified that it was thought that the Village's position should not just be asking for a delay to revisit the options in a year's time or at a later date to get better prepared, or requesting them to pursue option #1 and maintain the status quo and keep the school k-7, as well as looking at other cost-saving opportunities. Some attendees expressed disappointment with the Village just taking a position of status quo, as they would like to have something better than what the community currently has with the School; and it was generally agreed that the sentiment was that the community of Port Clements has been trod on for decades when it comes to its School and its declining services, and it needs to come out with a strong position and request to put pressure on the Board. That this is something the Village really needs to fight them on as without children, there is not much of a community. The discussion generally pivoted to the idea that the Village should be advocating on behalf of the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and their preference for having 2 years to develop an alternative program/magnate school proposal as it was debated on whether a request to just delay the decision would amount to change (and the School District's option #2 is limiting with only having 12 months to develop a plan), or what would the Village do with that time if it was delayed. PAC's preference represents 10 families with children in the school. Though it was also questioned whether there was really an opportunity with developing an alternative program/magnate school as it does not necessarily address the underlying economic issue identified by the Board, which is the issue at the end of the day. It was also debated on whether a public petition being prepared by one of the residents (concerned parent) should be included with the letter or not, with the agreement that the petition should likely be in line with the letter being sent to seek community support for option #2 and be concise. It was also identified that it does not hurt for the community to continue to explore other alternative options such as pulling out our enrollment from the School District.

*Councillor Cumming left the meeting at 7:33 PM*

- Discussion turned to identifying that the Village likely needs to provide a letter in advance of the next School Board Meeting being held on March 4th, so a meeting on March 3rd, 2025, may be too late. Discussion turned into having a Special Meeting at some point this week, Wednesday (26th) or Thursday (27th) to have the letter sent to the School District (and others) by Friday (28th), which should give some time for support.
- Discussion concluded that the PAC representative in attendance would send letter to the Village requesting the Village's support/advocacy.

2025-02-039-Moved by Mayor Cabianca,

THAT the Committee recommends to Council that it advocates on behalf of the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), and their request, to SD#50

**CARRIED**

Meeting end at 7:45 PM

  
Councillor Dennis Reindl



CAO Marjorie Dobson

