

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (Public)
Report No. 23-007

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Purchase of New Portable Classrooms

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PURPOSE:

1. To obtain approval to purchase 10 new modular portable classrooms in order to provide the District with sufficient flexibility to accommodate student enrolment.

CONTEXT:

2. Report No.19-036, Purchase of New Portable Classrooms, was presented to the Committee of the Whole on 16 April 2019, requesting the approval of 20 new portable classrooms. Board approval was received. These portables were required in order to ensure that the District would have a sufficient number of surplus units available to meet anticipated needs for the 2019-2020 school year. Acquisition of the newly constructed portables was subsequently approved by the Ministry. The portables have now been acquired and placed at school sites within the District.

Staff at the time indicated they would monitor the portable inventory and would report back to the Board in the future.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

Enrolment

3. Enrolment at both the elementary and secondary panels, although not fully reconciled, has increased significantly for the 2022-2023 school year (a total of over 1,000 students). Official figures will be known later this spring. For the 2023-2024 school year, overall enrolment is also projected to increase.

Current Portable Use

There are currently 425 portables within the District. For the start of the 2022-2023 school year, 382 portables are in service as homeroom instructional spaces. An additional 11 portables are leased, and 32 portables are currently declared surplus. Moreover, a number of these surplus portables are not relocatable as they are part of a port-a-pak or placed at school sites where their future use is expected.

While the District is moving beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, there remain areas within the District that are experiencing accommodation pressures, where portables are required. In addition, there are portable requirements to accommodate students in schools that are experiencing facility issues, renovations or delays in new construction projects.

The annual portable allocation process for the current school year will commence in April 2023, with principals submitting their requests. Staff estimates that the District will likely require the use of all available surplus portables in order to meet needs.

The increases in enrolment, which the District has been experiencing in recent years, are forecasted to continue beyond the upcoming school year and into the foreseeable future. This trend will generate a continuing need for additional temporary classroom accommodation.

Over 70% of the District's portable classrooms are in excess of 25 years old. Although annual maintenance and renewal assists in the continued use of these portables, a number may have to be replaced in the coming years with newly constructed units.

Recent updates to the energy efficiency requirements in the Ontario building code have enhanced the overall performance of newly constructed portable structures by upgrading the building envelope through increased insulation volume and continuity. In addition to the building envelope performance upgrades, mechanical systems for portables are now required to incorporate energy recovery. Portables are run entirely off electricity, which reduces their carbon footprint by not consuming any natural gas.

Inquiries to the three coterminous school boards have confirmed that none have surplus portables available for purchase at this time. All of the boards responded that they are in a similar position to the OCDSB, either requiring all available portables or seeking the acquisition of additional new units.

Given the information above, it is prudent for the District to begin moving forward with the acquisition of additional portables for the 2023-2024 school year and beyond.

It has been staff's experience recently that it has taken longer than expected to receive Ministerial approval for capital expenditures. In order to ensure that accommodation needs are met in a timely fashion, staff is recommending the purchase of an additional 10 new portable classroom units at this time.

It should be noted that separate funding for temporary accommodation is provided by the Ministry, based on average costs incurred over the three preceding years. Under the funding model, staff is projecting that the OCDSB will receive approximately \$900,000 for 2022-2023, all of which would be used for portable moves.

Staff has had discussions with the Ministry regarding the need for the purchase of new portables and the funding mechanism. The recommendation is to fund their acquisition from reserves, subject to Ministry approval.

The pandemic and industry challenges have increased the construction costs dramatically over the last year and therefore the recommended budget has increased.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

4. New modular portable classrooms include air conditioning and are estimated to cost \$200,000.00 per unit. This estimate excludes HST and any costs to prepare the site, provide service connections, and receive the portables. Additional administrative and permit fee costs, estimated at a total of \$40,000, can also be expected. The purchase of 10 new portable units is estimated at a total cost of \$2,020,000.00 (plus HST) to be funded from reserves.

The updated figures reflect the most recent actual cost experience under the administered standing agreement.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

5. There are no communication or consultation issues associated with the recommendations contained in this report.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

6. The purchase of new portable classrooms will ensure that students are provided with learning opportunities and resources to support well-being. This is consistent with the culture of caring objectives in the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the purchase of ten new modular portable classrooms, at a budgeted total cost of \$2,020,000.00 (excluding HST), be approved and funded from reserves, subject to Ministry approval.

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