



## **To answer those who do not understand why the board chose to rebuild Davisville/Spectrum**

### **'Only reasonable option'**

Globe and Mail (December 1, 2018) Letter to the Editor

*Summary: The Toronto District School Board looked at maintaining the original 1960s building that housed the Davisville Public School, but it just was not possible. As it was originally designed as a school for the deaf with smaller classrooms and less than half the required pupil places needed now, we would have had to tear down most of the interior walls. Throw in the required upgrades to heating, electrical, data, fire alarm, accessibility and safety systems, and the entire interior design of the school would have been destroyed. Architectural features such as the main staircase don't comply with building requirements and were a safety risk to students. The roof would have had to be completely removed and replaced at significant cost. In addition, a new city-owned aquatic centre is being built on the site with underground parking which is required due to space constraints. When all of these factors were considered (not to mention that we don't receive any money from the province for heritage projects) the only reasonable option was to build a new school.*

*Robin Pilkey, Chair, Toronto District School Board*

### **Background -**

Heritage aspects of our facilities are always considered when we look at a capital project. Where possible, we look to maintain what we can of a facility of heritage significance. We have a list of all of our facilities that are 'listed' which may become 'designated' by the City (Heritage Preservation Services) at any time during a capital project. In some cases, when a facility becomes designated, we are in support (such as Central Technical School), as the facility continues to serve the needs of the TDSB. This is ultimately what matters most for us – can a facility be designated of heritage significance and still serve the needs of our students and staff. Davisville was "listed" but was never "designated" by the City.

Specifically for Davisville, the decision for the replacement of the school goes beyond the cost of retrofit and repair. Since 1998, we are funded for capital and renewal by the Province of Ontario. The purpose of funded improvements to, or the replacement of, existing schools is to create the optimal, practical learning environment for children and youth; building to the best

standards. It is simply not possible, given the extent of our backlog and our capital needs, that the province would provide millions of dollars above what is necessary to rebuild a new school and that is why they would never consider a deep retrofit of the existing building.

The 60% of the school that was designed to accommodate the Metro Toronto School for the Deaf are undersized classrooms that would be extremely costly to renovate to accommodate regular sized classrooms. Load-bearing walls would be required to be removed with new transfer structure added. In addition to the deterioration of major building components, reflected by the Facility Condition Index, would mean a deep retrofit of a school would be required to upgrade the facility to meet current building code requirements including accessibility, life safety, structural systems (to meet current seismic standards among others) and other building systems. Hazardous material remediation would be necessary and these are just the knowns.

There are also undoubtedly unknowns which we would need to undertake extensive destructive testing to determine, which, in an occupied building would be problematic. The Board recently underwent a deep-retrofit with Nelson Mandela Park PS which escalated in costs from \$18M to \$29M. The Board cannot expose itself to risk of this potential and frankly, the Ministry would never allow it. Simply put, from the province's perspective (which is our funder), there are too many unknowns to retrofit and enlarge and thus too much risk in bringing an old facility up to meet current codes and standards – with the majority of classrooms no longer appropriate for programming needs, accessibility issues throughout the school and with the need to build a much larger school to try and keep up with development, the province has provided capital funding for rebuilding as they clearly understand it cannot be fixed to meet student needs.

The very features that some argue are of cultural heritage are the very features that don't work - the small, "playful" windows do not let in enough natural light; the open stairs are not compliant to code and would need to be replaced; the roof design is the Achilles heel of the building (more on that in detail later); the small undersized gym on the second floor is not accessible... it was purpose built with 16 under-sized classrooms and for a population less than half of what it currently is now.

In 2014 alone, the TDSB spent more than \$500,000 repairing damage from water that flooded in from the roof during a routine rainstorm. This same roof is one of the preservationists' most-loved architectural features but there are two aspects of the roof that need to be discussed and staff directly involved have provided this input. The first is the overall geometry of the roof panels and the building form. The roof of the existing school is made up of a series of parabolic concrete shells that are arranged in a modular array. The resulting building form

leaves recesses and depressions that were inadequately drained and – in the Canadian climate – fill with drifting snow due to prevailing winds. This has led to unmanaged water accumulation, leaks and continuing issues with water damage in the spaces below. Most significantly, water penetration to the generator & main electrical room which put the entire school at risk & lead to a shutdown of the facility.

The second aspect is the nature of the concrete structure itself, which was not properly insulated or waterproofed – a general issue associated with buildings of this generation. In the case of Davisville, this has led to deterioration of the concrete itself, falling fragments and the need for on-going repair.

Our facilities team has spent time dealing with both these aspects of the roof design. Resolving both in any meaningful fashion would require full reconstruction of the roof, along with improved drainage. This would completely contradict the notion of restoration & preservation.

And then there are the program aspects, for example, the location of the current undersized Gymnasium on the second floor is very problematic. While access to this space can be addressed with the installation of an elevator, its location does not serve well the needs of the community to have easily accessible community space. In addition to the sub-standard size of a number of the classrooms and gym location, reconfiguration of the bearing walls would be only one aspect of the programmatic expectations of a JK-8 school for the 21st Century which will be difficult and costly to achieve in a 55 year old building, including specialized rooms for intermediate instruction (science & art). I believe the Board is looking for a school that will better serve the students in its community (with increased capacity) and as a result be a more valued part of the City's culture than the existing facility.

- To accommodate all of the grade-related programs in the school for 728 students (i.e. Gymnasiums, Main Office, six Kindergarten Rooms, Stairs and Circulation), and to accommodate the Ministry-funded Child Care Centre, and to accommodate the additional program areas funded by the City such as an additional Gymnasium and a small community room, we need a building footprint of 40,900 sq. ft. or .94 acre.
- To accommodate all traffic-related uses, such as a ramp down to the underground parking (we are saving land use by having below-grade parking), the access easement for the neighbour (to the east), drop-off for parents, and areas for garbage storage and pick-up we need an area equal to 16,200 sq. ft. or .37 acre
- To accommodate the building footprint of the future City of Toronto Aquatic Centre (designed to City standards and needs) we need an area of 19,200 sq. ft. or .44 acre.

- To accommodate various Public Realm initiatives, such as a set-back along Davisville and a walkway along the west side of the property, we need an area of 7,300 sq. ft. or .17 acre.

If you add these above areas together you get a total of 1.92 acres of land required. The Davisville Jr PS/Spectrum Alternative School sits on a 3.9 acre site. So the amount of land remaining for outdoor play is roughly 2 acres. For 728 students, the TDSB's outdoor space guideline of 150 sq. ft. per student (includes both hard and soft play space) translates into 2.5 acres. For the TDSB to accommodate the City of Toronto programs, and the future Aquatic Centre, we have been willing fall slightly short of this outdoor guideline as we recognize our students will have access to these City of Toronto initiatives.

All this been said, it is clear from these numbers that there is just not enough room on this property to accommodate the TDSB and City needs as well as keeping the existing school for another use. The plans prepared by architects, and their advice, while provocative, are not representative of what is actually needed by the TDSB and its City partner on the Davisville/Spectrum property. This is understandable as they have not been involved in the design of the project nor have they had a conversation with the TDSB and City on the program needs of both parties.

### **City as a Partner – City Council Decision**

City Council on July 12, 13, 14 and 15, 2016, adopted the following:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to enter into an agreement, to the satisfaction of the City Solicitor, with the Toronto District School Board to invest in the new Davisville Junior Public School to construct a three-storey school to create a smaller footprint and therefore allowing for room on the site for the City to construct a City owned and operated aquatic and community recreation facility.
2. City Council direct that future non-program budgets include provisions for the disbursement of Sections 37 and 45 funds of \$1.000 million in 2017 and \$5.807 million in 2018 as grants to the Toronto District School Board to support the design and construction of an additional third floor and the underground garage as part of the Davisville Junior Public School project.
3. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to include in the 2017 Capital budget submission a project for the design and construction of the Davisville community and aquatic facility.

4. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to negotiate with the Toronto District School Board on a shared-use operating agreement that optimizes the City's capital investment in the new Davisville Junior Public School prior to the release of the funds for construction of phase one funding, noting that the aquatic facility will be owned and operated by Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

### **TDSB Decision**

The project cleared another hurdle at the TDSB Board Meeting of November 28, 2018 when the Board approved the following recommendations related to the rebuild of Davisville JPS/Spectrum Alternative Sr. School and the proposed City of Toronto Aquatic/Community Centre:

*That TLC finalize and execute all necessary agreements, in a form and content satisfactory to legal counsel, forming the foundation of a long term shared use relationship with the City of Toronto in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Davisville site.*

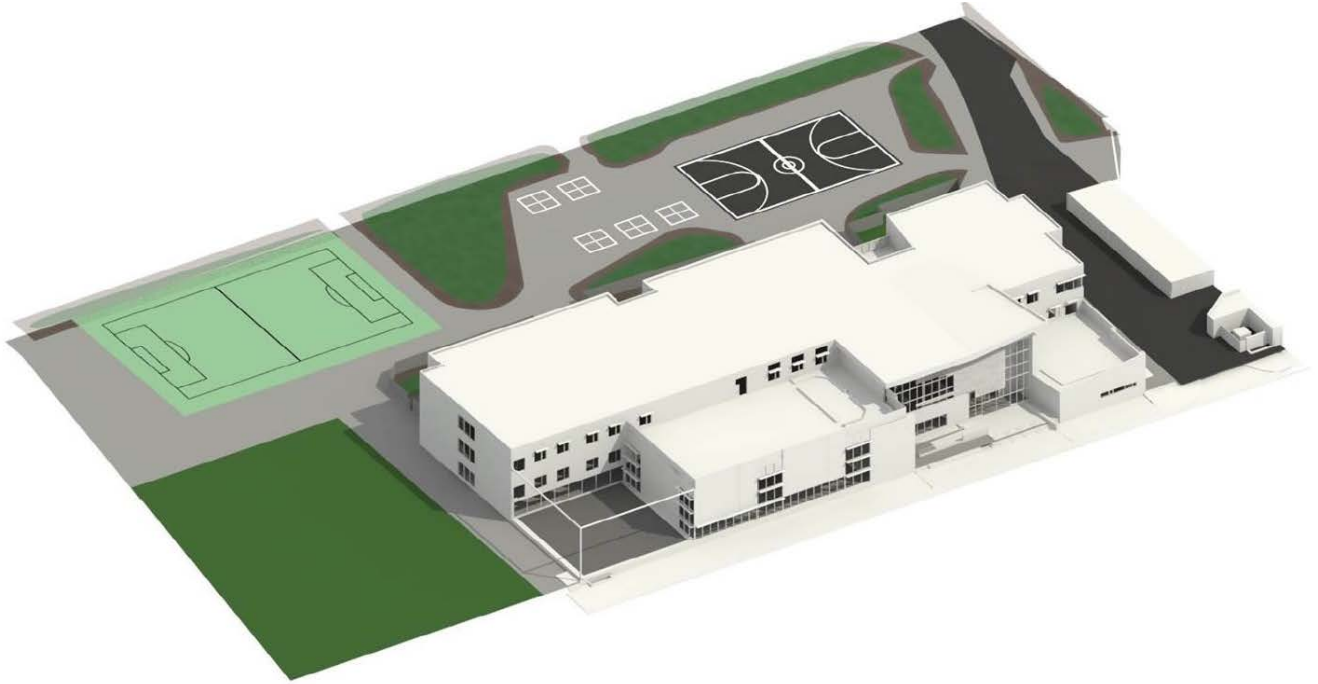
*That the associated ground lease be for a term of 49 years commencing of the first day of the new Davisville public school opening and must comply with Ontario Regulation 444/98 and satisfy Ministry of Education related approvals.*

The full report that clearly outlines the facts regarding the City-Board arrangement can be found here

<https://www.tdsb.on.ca//Leadership//Boardroom//AgendaMinutes.aspx?Type=A&Folder=Agenda%2f20181121&Filename=181121+Davisville+Spectrum+3532.pdf>

### Context from the TDSB Report

*The TDSB and the City have been working towards a vision of a community hub for the Davisville JPS/Spectrum Alternative School site. With a combined Provincial and City investment in the range of \$45M, supported by a long term TDSB/City agreement, this significant capital investment will enable the transformation of the Davisville JPS/Spectrum Alternative School site into a vibrant community destination. The site will feature a new three storey, 728 pupil capacity JK-8 dual track public school, with an expanded 6,000 ft2 gym including an official size basketball court and provide for the accommodation of a Mid-Town Community hub that will contain an aquatic pool and 5,000 ft2 of recreation space. The community will enjoy access to recreational programming at the gym, pool and recreation centre, which currently does not exist within the ward, while students will benefit from the daily use of the expanded gym, access to the pool with the school community being accommodated through the scheduling of special school evening events.*



And now I circle back to the funding issue and the fact that the current school does not meet the learning needs of the students – to put a new roof on a building that no longer works for students would never be supported. I am not arguing there is no value to the architecture of buildings – however, in this case, we are a school board and our first priority is the students and I do not apologize for that.