

History of the Argyle Community Action Group (ACAG)

Mission Statement:

The central purpose and role of ACAG is defined as:

- To develop and promote the community of Argyle to attract and maintain a sustainable population by advertising, marketing, training, developing community partnerships and lobbying for community development.*
- To assist in the development and promotion of Brant-Argyle School to best meet the needs of the students and community.*

Vision:

- An active, continuously revitalizing organization, responding to the community's needs to promote sustainable development.*
- A group of energetic community members working together to achieve a sustainable, vibrant, growing rural lifestyle, enhanced by the contributions of local community members.*
- A vibrant and healthy community that reflects traditional rural values.*
- An innovative, viable, dynamic, local community school on the cutting edge of the best practices in education.*

History: In response to the new Interlake School Division (ISD) Policy on school closures (School Facility Review Policy), a group of concerned citizens met In Oct. 2007, to discuss the future viability of the Brant Argyle School.

This is the first focus of the community group. A public meeting is held at the school in Nov. 20/07 with additional meetings with the RM Woodlands and RM Rockwood and the ISD. A five year enrolment projection survey is compiled along with a letter and email campaign to local MPs, and MLAs. James Bezan comment is to, “become active publicly & obtain community support for the school.”

The group formalizes in Dec. 2007 as the Argyle Community Action Group (ACAG) and continue to research and lobby for support for small schools with the municipalities, in the media and with the Manitoba Education and Training (MET) office through the spring of 2008.

Group mandate realized: After a strategic planning exercise, it is determined that the focus of the group should be to lobby for Argyle to maintain a long term solution to community sustainability by marketing and providing support to maintain school population and development interest in Argyle.

Goals: Marketing and Public Relations: develop website and calendar; **Community Partnerships:** research and apply for grants for facility development; brainstorm ideas for customized school programming; assist in promotion of community events and facilities to provide public exposure; **Community Development:** research development, sewer & water and zoning bylaws to provide additional housing options for young families. **Childcare:** research options to encourage young families.

Met with the ISD Board: In early March 2007, the ACAG meet as a delegation with the ISD Board to challenge the school closure policy and bus transportation ride times described in the School Facility Review policy.

Researched and prepared report to Manitoba Education and Training (MET) outlining concerns of school closure: To be proactive regarding subtle news that was circulating regarding small school closures within the Interlake School Division (ISD), The ACAG extensively researched the benefits of small rural schools, and prepared a report "Support for Bill 28, The Strengthening of Local Schools Act", which was presented to the Minister of Education, Peter Bjornson, and at the legislature to advocate for the proposed bill. One of several components, the Bill would place a temporary moratorium on school closure, which would give small rural schools and their communities an opportunity to develop plans to increase their viability and sustainability for the future.

The ACAG researched, prepared and delivered a report in June 2008 to The Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development; The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB. outlining our concerns.

Some excerpts from the report:

Introduction

Our committee, the Argyle Community Action Group (ACAG), is a group of parents and community members whose purpose is to promote our community and to ensure that our local school remains viable and continues to be the dynamic place for learning that it is today. Brant Argyle School occupies a heritage building that is vital to our neighborhood's character and rural community life. It provides a healthy rural, cultural environment for our children, and provides acceptable bus ride times.

Support for Bill 28

The Act is progressive, and is in the best interest of our children and their education. We believe in the intent of this Bill - to support and strengthen our local community schools, and to provide an opportunity to develop alternative ideas as cost saving measures. We strongly support Bill 28.

Why should school divisions be concerned with the value of schools to the community? Without the economy, there is no tax base. Without tax base, there are no schools. Without schools, people do not move into the rural community. Without people, there is no economy.

Bill 28 encourages a collaborative process..... Community members and parents will be a part of the decision making process regarding the future of their schools."

Bill 28 and school closure moratorium approved: On May 12/08, the ISD Board passes a School Facilities Review policy; however the MET department announces a Moratorium on School Closures and introduces the new Bill 28, The Strengthening Local Schools Act which receives Royal Assent on June 12/08. A thank you letter is sent from the ACAG to MET.

Organized two Open Houses at Brant Argyle School: To increase visibility and awareness, the ACAG organized two Open Houses at the School in Apr. /08 and Apr. /09 to showcase the many talents of our small school; including school historical tours, a book sale, community activity fair (4-H, Curling club, BAACSL) and interactive art (clay table) plus local musical entertainment.

Conducted a Childcare Needs survey: The ACAG continues community support by conducting a childcare needs survey and appearing as a delegation to the ISD re childcare.

New Website launched: The ACAG develop and maintain a community website to promote local activities www.argylecountrylife.ca (live Jan.18/09; and online community calendar added in Feb.).

Developed constitution/bylaws and became incorporated: The group developed a constitution and bylaws and received incorporation status in Feb. 2009.

Conducted three community strategic planning sessions: In the spring of 2009, the group invites a facilitator from Community Futures to conduct three community strategic planning sessions to determine the future community focus. The focus of the ACAG turns to community development as the group canvasses the municipalities on land development opportunities and possible sewer and water upgrades.

Met with Facility Consultant and General Contractor to determine hall structure needs: In early 2009, the ACAG lends support to the Hall Board by organizing a meeting with a facility consultant and general contractor to determine hall needs. The community comes together for a hall painting and renovation bee.

Researched and applied for grant opportunities for hall renovations: The ACAG researches grant opportunities for hall renovations and submit two grant applications to MB. Community Places and the East Interlake Community Support Initiative grants.

Received \$8,900.00 in grants for the hall renovations: Both grants; MB Community Places \$3,900.00 and the East Interlake Community Support Initiative Grant \$5,000.00 are successful for a total of \$8,900.00 which is presented to the Hall Board in the spring of 2010.

Advocate and offer support and marketing for community events: the community group offers support and marketing for the Argyle Coffee House, the Argyle Community Theatre, Pumpkinfest, and the Argyle Fall Supper.

Advocate for and market the Community Fundraiser: The group supported the Community Fundraiser in Oct/09 by developing a fundraiser letter, canvassing for donations, making up gift certificates, advertising on the webpage, development of posters as well as helping at the event.

Conducted survey for sewer and water service for Argyle: In the spring of 2010, a community survey is compiled, distributed and tabulated to determine if the community is in favour of the ACAG canvassing for sewer/water in our area. The survey was positive. Work continues on this project as well as town development in partnership with the RM of Rockwood, Woodlands the SIPD and the Manitoba Water Services Board.

Current event: to offer support and volunteer for an Argyle Museum project: Recent meetings have been held to show support/volunteer for an Argyle Museum project. This would demonstrate our local heritage, and create community interest for tourism and school groups.

Monitor current news affecting small school viability, to support our small school: With new information from our school trustee regarding the new Minister of Education, school closures are again on the horizon and due diligence is required in attending ISD meetings to hear the latest news in order to support our local school, and the effort continues. . .