

EDMONTON WELFARE COUNCIL

and the

YOUTH SERVICES DIVISION

BRIEF

to

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

on

COMMUNITY USE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES

Preamble ----- Page 1

Background ----- Page 1

A Point of View ----- Page 1

The Problems ----- Page 3

    (a) Financial questions ----- Page 3

    (b) Legal questions ----- Page 3

    (c) Administrative questions ----- Page 4

    (d) School design ----- Page 5

    (e) General problems ----- Page 5

    (f) Relationship between education and recreation ----- Page 5

Concluding Comments ----- Page 6

Appendix "A" ----- Page 7

Edmonton Welfare Council  
#301, 10182 - 103 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta

November 13, 1964

PREAMBLE:

The Edmonton Welfare Council, as a citizens' planning organization is vitally concerned that our city has a well developed and a well patterned system of social services. The Youth Services Division is a division of the Edmonton Welfare Council, operative in the youth field as a citizens' planning body. We are equally concerned with services under public and private auspices. By involving citizens in the planning of services we feel that the patterning will be more effective and the utilization will tend to be optimum. In the spectrum of social services such as education, health, welfare, recreation and corrections, many programs cannot function without the use of physical facilities.

BACKGROUND:

At the outset we would like to state that the concern of this brief is with the utilization of school facilities by voluntary community organizations. The use of school facilities by commercial enterprises is outside the scope of this report.

We are aware that the Edmonton Public School Board presently makes some school facilities available for utilization by local groups and organizations. We are also aware that certain cost sharing agreements on the use of school facilities exist between the School Board and the City Parks and Recreation Department. Also in some cases the Department will guarantee rentals for organizations and share the rental cost of the facility. For this forward looking approach we feel the Edmonton Public School Board and the City Parks and Recreation Department should be highly commended.

However, it is our feeling that these developments have taken place on a "piece-meal" basis rather than on the basis of a well developed approach or policy as was the case in Jasper Place prior to amalgamation. Apparently one of the stumbling blocks to such a policy is the statement which appears in the Edmonton Public School Board's rental regulations which reads as follows:

"School Buildings and grounds are constructed and maintained primarily for the education of the school children of the Edmonton school district, and therefore no use shall be made of the buildings and grounds which will interfere with their most effective and beneficial use for school children."

This represents a statement of policy that limits the Edmonton Public School Board in developing school facilities as a total community resource.

A POINT OF VIEW:

We contend that the above statement does not reflect the current desires of the citizens of Edmonton. It is our feeling that a new approach, a new policy,

should be developed in this city wherein the school facility is viewed as a total community resource. As such school buildings would be utilized not only for formal educational purposes but as centres of community activity embracing the community league movement, adult education, youth programs, cultural activities, active and passive recreation and various group activities. It is our feeling that such an approach would more accurately reflect current public opinion on the community use of schools.

This approach is being successfully practised in other communities. Perhaps it is best illustrated by quoting the following statement of California's Superintendent of Public Instruction. It is excerpted from a document entitled "The Roles of Public Education and Recreation." This was a joint project of the California Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation and the California State Department of Education.

"The primary objective of the public school system is to help to develop to the fullest the ability of each person to think and act effectively and creatively. This objective is to be reached through the teaching of the knowledge and skills evolved by centuries of civilization, including the human and physical sciences, mathematics, the arts, languages --- Recreation, therefore, is an essential part of the educational program and as such has as its purpose the development and expansion of attitudes, skills, insight and resources which will benefit the individual both in his leisure and at work. For the young people, it can provide new insights and greater skills in the use of the products of education. In later life, it continues the learning process while providing beneficial use of leisure time. Because of its constant and direct relationship to more formal education, recreation is indeed a part of the educative process, and as such a matter of great importance to the schools."

While the above quotation relates rather specifically to recreation and education, and in effect joins the two, we feel this approach also applies to such areas as group activities, adult education, etc. which may or may not be classed in the strict sense as recreational activities. As such this approach is fundamentally different from our present approach in Edmonton. The Edmonton Welfare Council favours an approach that views the school facility as a total community resource.

Further enunciation of the philosophy is put forward in Appendix "A" of this brief. Appendix "A" is a copy of a brief the Edmonton Welfare Council submitted to the Mayor's Special Committee on Recreation (March 1964). The concept of community use of schools as a well developed philosophy is the corner stone of this report.

The subsequent report by the Mayor's Committee had the following to say about the community use of schools and we quote:

"Consideration should be given immediately to a closer liaison with the School Boards in the City of Edmonton. Many potential useful facilities owned by the School Boards are lying idle for much of the time. These facilities could be put to good use by Community Leagues and the (City) Parks and Recreation Department. This may require some legal work and some diplomacy but the matter should be pursued, otherwise there may well be more unnecessary and expensive duplication of facilities."<sup>1</sup>.

While this may be a useful approach we are fully aware of some problems and administrative difficulties. However, in an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation we feel these difficulties are by no means insurmountable.

#### THE PROBLEMS:

##### (a) Financial:

At the outset we would like to state that community use of schools by no means implies "free" use of schools as someone must ultimately absorb the cost of heating, lighting, cleaning, and supervision. In effect there would be a subsidized use of school facilities and any subsidy involved should be the responsibility of the citizens of Edmonton. In fact the City is presently accepting limited responsibility in this area. The City Parks and Recreation Department provide rental subsidies to a number of city groups and organizations.

A nominal charge for use of the facility is reasonable providing the charge does not put undue burden on the organization. Too often we find the organizations so overly concerned with finances that useful programs become perverted into "money-making" activities. It may be desirable to have organizations utilizing school facilities to develop a caution fund.

It is not our purpose to work out detailed financial arrangements but rather to put forward a point of view. Policy making and administrative machinery could be set up to work out these details.

##### (b) Legal Questions:

One area that would require examination is that of public liability. We would suggest that it would not be unduly costly for the Edmonton Public School Board to increase their public liability insurance to cover any difficulties that may arise while organizations are using school facilities.

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1. "Report of the (Mayor's) Special Investigating Committee on How to Improve the Relationships between the City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation Department, the Federation of Community Leagues and the Community Leagues." - City of Edmonton, April 27, 1964.

(c) Administrative Problems:

In the main we feel there are no major administrative barriers to the community use of schools. A precedent for solving administrative difficulties has been established in the preamble of the Cooperative Agreement between the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Public School Board dated March 1962 which states:

"Whereas it is the opinion of both the Board and the City that:

- (1) Wherever possible, Junior High and Elementary school grounds and park land should be acquired and located immediately adjoining one another; and
- (2) Such sites should be developed for both school and general public recreational use; and
- (3) The cost of development and maintenance should be shared by the Board and the City, and;

Whereas it is the policy of the Board that the City by means of its Parks and Recreation Department (hereinafter called the Department) should carry out:-

- (1) Planning, development, construction and landscaping of school sites; and
- (2) The maintenance of grounds and horticultural maintenance on all public school sites, and;

Whereas it is deemed that such co-operative development and maintenance would encourage:

- (1) Better provision of school recreational and public recreational facilities; and
- (2) The adequate use of school grounds by the general public; and
- (3) More effective use of land, planning of sites, and the maintenance thereof."

Aside from the major question, which we feel is covered in the aforementioned preamble, there are a number of policy rules which have a bearing. The "no smoking" restriction has recently been relaxed to allow smoking in non-program (i.e. corridor) areas.

We have always been impressed with the manner in which the custodians keep our schools clean and orderly. However it is often difficult to utilize school facilities because the custodian is not present. We feel it would be possible to conclude a satisfactory arrangement with the Union in order that the custodian's time could be staggered to better accommodate after hour's use of schools. It is our feeling that the basic administrative arrangements for community use of schools are in existence but that trivial situations arise which hinder community activity in school facilities.

(d) School Design:

In relation to school design we would refer again to the Cooperative Agreement between the City and the Edmonton Public School Board which on page 4, paragraph 8 states:

## "Design of School Buildings

- (1) All future school buildings should be designed to meet the needs of:
  - Community Recreation Centres
  - Neighborhood leagues
  - Community and City-Wide Recreation programs
 and to provide for more extensive and economical use of schools by the general public.
- (2) The additional cost involved will be shared by the Board, the City and any neighborhood league on a basis to be agreed between the City Commissioners and the Board.
- (3) Existing school buildings should be considered for modification, wherever feasible, on an individual basis."

We would also like to refer again to Appendix "A" and the point of view contained therein. If we are to have a well developed, area based, public and private, recreation facility then the design of future schools to accommodate community use is essential.

(e) General Problems:

There are a number of problem areas upon which we would like to make some comment.

Some organizations find it difficult to utilize school facilities due to lack of storage space for program materials. It is our feeling that if an organization wished to use a school facility on an extended basis it would not be unduly costly for the organization to supply their own storage facility providing a storage area could be made available.

Another area centres around the use of school equipment. Organizations using school facilities must be expected to be responsible citizens and capable of utilizing equipment in a proper manner.

The use of sports equipment such as basketballs, volleyballs, etc. seems to also be an area of concern. Prior to amalgamation with Jasper Place the School Boards and the Town Council entered an arrangement whereby the cost of such equipment was shared 50% - 50%. This enabled the citizens to utilize the equipment already in the building without having to supply and arrange storage of their own equipment.

(f) Relationship Between Education and Recreation:

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wherein we contend that while the formal education of our children is the primary use of school facilities it is not their sole use. Education and recreation are inter-related and have as their common aim the development of attitudes, skills, insights and resources which will benefit the individual in both work and leisure.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS:

This brief envisions a broad policy regarding the community use of schools. Necessary to this development is a well formulated plan for making all Edmonton school facilities available to all voluntary organizations.

In order to achieve this aim we feel the following steps should be taken:

1. A SPECIAL COMMITTEE BE ESTABLISHED CONSISTING OF THE FOLLOWING:
  - (a) One elected official and one administrative official of the Edmonton Public School Board
  - (b) One elected official and one administrative official of the Edmonton Separate School Board
  - (c) One elected official of the Edmonton City Council
  - (d) One administrative official of the City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation Department
  - (e) One member of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
  - (f) One representative from each of two different citizens' organizations.
  
2. THIS COMMITTEE BE CHARGED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DEVELOPING A BROAD POLICY ON THE COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY FOR CARRYING OUT SUCH A POLICY. THE POLICY TO BE REFERRED TO THE RESPECTIVE BOARDS AND COUNCILS FOR FINAL APPROVAL.

The need for the school facility by the community is great. It is our feeling that the principle of community use of school facilities is more important than the problems involved and that in a spirit of cooperativeness these problems can be solved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The Edmonton Welfare Council and the Youth Services Division would be pleased to provide assistance in making this idea a reality.

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President,  
Edmonton Welfare Council.

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George Levine,  
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