

Children's centre must leave school site ^[1]

City tells group to vacate St. Pat's-Alexandra by month's end when developer takes over

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Source: Halifax Chronicle Herald

Publication Date: 10 Jan 2012

EXCERPTS

The child-care centre that has operated at the former St. Patrick's-Alexandra School site in central Halifax has been given 22 days to leave the premises.

Belinda Bignell-Leck, longtime executive director of the St. Joseph's Children's Centre, said someone from Halifax Regional Municipality dropped the bombshell by phone at about midday Monday.

She later confirmed the news with Jono Developments, the company that plans to turn the former north-end school into a mix of condominiums, rental housing units and commercial and community space.

"It's very emotional," Bignell-Leck said, eyes tearing up, when she talked Monday night about the news at a meeting of Peninsula community council. "I feel that someone's pulled the rug out from beneath me."

She said the children's centre has to be out by the end of January, the closing date for the sale of the Maitland Street property Halifax regional council has controversially approved the sale.

About 20 families send children to the centre, which has five staff members.

Bignell-Leck said along with losing the child-care centre and administrative offices, staff will have to quickly relocate an industrial kitchen that prepares meals for satellite child-care centres on Monastery Lane, at Scotia Square, in Clayton Park and at the Bedford Commons.

The centre also runs many programs in schools throughout Halifax.

"That kitchen opens up at 5:30 in the morning," Bignell-Leck said. "To relocate that is a daunting task."

The director said she will spend today talking to parents and staff about what the future may hold.

She said there had always been a chance they'd have to leave the property for good, although she said they had been led to believe they would be able to stay for at least two years and perhaps become part of the overall plans for the development.

Several people went to the community council meeting to speak about the sale of the school property. Many in the area are pressuring regional council to reverse its decision on the grounds that proper procedure wasn't followed in the sale.

The children's centre, located on the Brunswick Street side of the former school property, opened in 1968 to meet the needs of low-income and single-parent families in the neighbourhood.

In the short term, spaces for children will be found in other centres, "but that's an inconvenience," Bignell-Leck said. "These children will have different teachers, they'll have different schedules, they'll have a different environment. That will have an impact."

The development issue is expected to come up again tonight at regional council's first meeting of the new year.

-- reprinted from the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*

Region: Nova Scotia ^[2]

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