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Prepared by the Infrastructure Committee of the Musquodoboit Harbour and Area
Chamber of Commerce and Civic Affairs

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Abstract

In February 2025, the doors of ESDHS closed permanently as a public school building. Subsequently the Musquodoboit Harbour and Area Chamber of Commerce and Civic Affairs (MHACCCA), with its Mission “to promote and enhance the economic, social and civic well-being of the community,” created an Infrastructure Committee with a mandate to assist the MHACCCA in the investigation, planning, coordination, and implementation of applicable projects and activities described in the MHACCCA Community Development Plan and other identified projects that align with the MHACCCA Mission.

This document presents the benefits of repurposing the school building to preserve it as a community resource. The community has provided data on the needs of the region and how the building could house space for diverse activities and programs. The Infrastructure Committee has prepared this report, which includes information on ways in which the former Eastern Shore District High School building can be adapted and reused. The focus of this report is on sustainability, community needs, cost-effectiveness, community integration, access to resources, community programming, and economic development.

Background

A community meeting on the future of the ESDHS building was held at the Old School Community Gathering Place on January 18, 2023. Education, recreation, and well-being activities had the broadest support at this meeting.

MLA Kent Smith then approached Nova Scotia Community College to consider taking over the building, which they declined in early 2025. At that point, the MHACCCA tasked the Infrastructure Committee with exploring community interests and potential options for community input on the future of the building.

The students moved into the new Eastern Shore Consolidated as of February 2025. Oversight for the empty ESDHS building was moved from the provincial Department of Education to the Department of Public Works.

Members of the committee toured the empty building in July of 2025. In response to interest by HRM, The Department of Public Works, and MLA Kent Smith to hear community feedback on the potential future uses of the former Eastern Shore District High building and property, the committee then planned a series of community conversations for October. There was extensive outreach for the community conversations and the online survey.

The community conversations were announced in the September issue of the *Eastern Shore Cooperator*. There were posters, including a QR code, in 12 strategically located retail locations. Invitations were

sent via the MHACCCA to potential community influencers as well as MHACCCA members. The Community Conversation dates and locations were advertised in the *Eastern Shore Cooperator* as well as the MHACCCA Website. Links to both the registration for the Community Conversations (which were held in the month of October) and the online survey (which was open from November 1-24th) were provided to the community. Numbers: Community Conversations - 67 participants. Community Conversation Notes - 34. Surveys - 101 received. Other Submissions - 6. TOTAL Responses Received: 208.

What we learned

The interest from the community in the ESDHS building is real and passionate. There are palpable needs for which the building can provide solutions. The community overwhelmingly expressed that whatever happens to the building, the people want to be part of the decision-making process.

In December 2025, committee members gathered key words and phrases from the lists of ideas from the community conversations and the surveys. The survey results were overwhelmingly positive to use the building for the community, with only two comments that did not support community repurposing of the building.

We created several schemas to help us all understand these priorities and how they fit into various sectors. While we are fully aware that the governments cannot support everything, this report offers a range of what we think are compelling desires and innovative ideas.

Here is one way to look at the data: We used an AI tool to organize the vocabulary based on frequency of mention and the tool's interpretation of the importance to most people:

Top Priority Community Needs

1. Housing & Shelter (Most Frequent + Critical Need)

Includes: (NOTE: several mentions pointed out that housing could be built on the property, not necessarily in the building itself)

- Affordable housing
 - Seniors' housing & assisted living
 - Transitional, emergency, and supportive housing
 - Small rental units, co-op models, social enterprise housing
 - Shelter for unhoused people, domestic violence survivors, seniors
 - Apartments, low-income housing, motel/hostel concepts
- Why it's a priority:** High number of mentions + urgent need across age and income groups.

2. Health & Wellness Services

Includes:

- Medical clinic, nurse practitioners, mental health and addictions support
 - Physiotherapy, dialysis, orthotics
 - Twin Oaks expansion adjunctive services ideas
 - Health hub with wraparound services
 - Therapy rooms, seniors' healthcare
- Why priority:** Consistent community concern + major service gap on the Eastern Shore.
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3. Recreation, Fitness & Active Living

Includes:

- Gym/fitness centre, multipurpose gymnasium
 - Indoor walking track
 - Swimming pool / aquatic centre (very frequent)
 - New rink, sports fields (soccer/rugby)
 - Pickleball, floor hockey, basketball, volleyball
 - Youth recreation programs, outdoor skills, skate/pump tracks
- Why priority:** Frequent + supports health, youth engagement, and community cohesion.
-

4. Education, Skills Training & Lifelong Learning

Includes:

- Adult education, NSCC satellite campus or courses
 - Trades training (automotive, carpentry, ECE, culinary, welding, etc.)
 - Youth & adult learning programs
 - Tutoring, literacy, ESL
 - Skills training: tourism, arts, media, tech
 - Alternative high school
 - Child care/Daycare: a critical need
- Why priority:** Strong demand for local training + job creation + retention of youth.
-

5. Community Hub & Gathering Spaces

Includes:

- Community centre/multi-use hub
- Café/cafeteria as a social gathering space
- Meeting rooms, seniors' hub, youth centre
- Event and rental spaces (concerts, theatre, weddings, markets)

- Flex space, makerspace, co-working offices
Why priority: Almost universally requested; the community wants “one place” for services to live.
-

6. Food Security & Community Food Programs

Includes:

- Community kitchen, food bank, subsidized food market
 - Greenhouse, community garden expansion, permanent Farmers Market space
 - Food prep/preservation training
 - Kids’ cooking programs
Why priority: Frequently mentioned, aligns with Eastern Shore priorities for resilience.
-

7. Economic Development & Local Business Support

Includes:

- Incubator mall, small business spaces
 - Tech and green energy businesses
 - Tourism centre / visitor centre / eco-tourism development
 - Business development centre, co-working
 - Call centre possibilities, studio workspaces
 - Retail & essential services (NSLC, grocery, café, laundromat)
 - Makerspace/repair café
 - Storage facilities
Why priority: Strong desire for job creation + diversification.
-

8. Arts, Culture & Media

Includes:

- Theatre, performance centre, concert space
 - Music/dance classes, recording studio, film/media centre
 - Pottery, sewing, woodworking, makerspace
 - Art gallery, community arts programs
 - Heritage, museum, alumni archive
Why priority: Commonly repeated; enriches community life and supports local talent.
-

9. Emergency Preparedness & Response

Includes:

- 24/7 Emergency Resource Command Centre
 - Showers, industrial kitchen, freezers, emergency food/water
 - Shelter for extended outages
 - Search & Rescue, helicopter pad
- Why priority:** Rural coastal community with weather vulnerabilities; strongly repeated.

10. Transportation & Accessibility

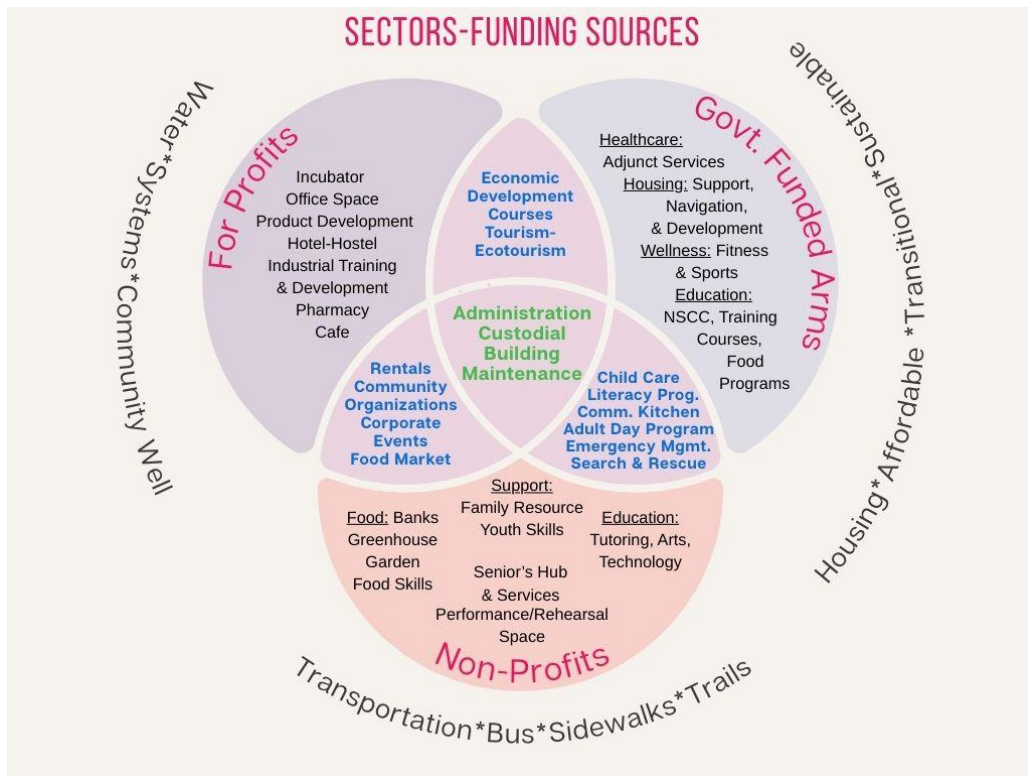
Includes:

- Transit hub, bus service (MetroX/MusGo Rider)
 - Active transportation: walking paths, sidewalks, bike rentals
 - Transportation for seniors/disabled
- Why priority:** Frequent concern tied to jobs, education, and healthcare access.



We note that not all of the ideas and desires fit onto the current building as it is designed, but we include them all to demonstrate the vision and passion for the community that the building represents.

Another way of thinking about the above list of priorities is to sort them by their sources of funding, in three categories: non-profit, for-profit, and government. The Venn diagram below shows this distribution-by-funding source.



The three sectors and the intersections contain the types of activities the community suggested would be desirable in the building. The sectors overlap as the sources (for-profit, non-profit, government offices) overlap on certain activities. The priorities listed are the ones most often mentioned in the conversations and surveys.

Specific immediate or near time needs include: the Family Resource Center (currently in Porter’s Lake and seeking larger spaces for increased need), Eastern Shore Ground Search and Rescue (deteriorating building and a need for training spaces, equipment storage), office spaces for local small business owners (currently renting in Dartmouth at high prices and no local access), expanded community garden and food access space, sports fields, a new and expanded fitness center with showers, and space for housing and mental health support services organizations.

A childcare center and adult day programming for seniors, with adjacency for shared activities, has been mentioned as not only desirable but as a gap in the community.

The externals – water, transportation, and housing—are critical supports for the village as a whole but also become viable investments as a result of placing some of the activities mentioned in the building.

The center of the diagram is essential. From everything that the community has endured, with underfunded nonprofits, infrastructure needs, and accessibility issues, we ask that the first consideration be given to building management, custodial needs on a full time basis with energy upgrades. The building is large and expensive to maintain as it is. If a federal/provincial/municipal partnership could be developed, many of the desired organizations, clinics, enterprises, etc. could coexist inside and adjacent to the building.

The potential cost savings to all levels of government and ultimately the taxpayer could be substantial when considering potential infrastructure.

Possible distribution of responsibilities:

- Engineering assessment and energy regeneration, including solar, heat pumps, water delivery system: Federal
- Social, educational, and health services: Province
- Recreation, sports, and fitness: Municipal
- Economic Development: Private investors

We have researched similar comprehensive community centers and recommend further explorations of two that model what could be a future for the building:

<https://newdawnproperties.ca/rentals/new-dawn-centre/>

<https://www.thenorthgrove.ca/>

We are also aware of a new youth center in Glace Bay:

<https://newdawnproperties.ca/developments/new-dawn-youth-centre/>

Youth are a concern for the community and having dedicated space for activities that help them expand and find support underpins many of the priorities community members expressed.

Musquodoboit Harbour and the areas nearby are growing, with young families and active seniors who want to age at home, with access to activities for all ages. With a growing number of small businesses (bookstore, crafts shops, bakeries, food shops, breweries) and museums, trails, the Neri Music Center, Farmers Market, bank, post office, library, and hospital, a village center is emerging as potentially walkable, and accessible, with centralized commerce and services. The loss of the high school building was a blow to the development of the village center, but the opportunity to repurpose the building to serve the community anew is at hand.

We look forward to further discussions with all stakeholders and prospective funders/investors to put the building back to work as the resource and hub it can be.

***Additional Considerations for the Case:
Why the School building should be repurposed***

Focus on Sustainability:

- Repurposing schools aligns with sustainability goals, promoting the use of existing infrastructure and reducing environmental impact. Converting existing school buildings into community centers is a sustainable approach, reducing the need for new construction and repurposing valuable assets.

Community Needs:

- Repurposing schools addresses the growing need for community spaces, particularly in rapidly developing areas. The decision to repurpose a school building fulfills the diverse requirements of a community through a range of uses, and creates needed space, offering venues for housing, community centers, health services, daycare, or agricultural hubs, addressing gaps in rural amenities.

Cost-Effectiveness:

- The adaptation of a school building to new uses not only saves it from demolition or loss, but renovating and repurposing an existing building can be more cost-effective than building new facilities, especially when combined with funding opportunities. The former Eastern Shore District High School was constructed in 1965 and encompasses an area of 68,697 sq ft. The 2025 Assessment value is \$4,083,000. The estimated Replacement Value is \$13,787,488 (as like kind replacement not including upgrades or change of use). The lot is owned by HRM and is 387,375 sq. ft. (8.9 acres).
- Should it be determined that demolition of the building is preferred to allow for a new build, the process of building on a brown field rather than a greenfield generates significant landfill waste at a substantial cost when other greenfield opportunities may exist to meet other community identified needs.
- Because rural communities tend to have limited cultural facilities, the local school's infrastructure (gymnasiums and computer rooms, etc.) often serves as essential resources for rural community life. If this building is demolished and not adapted for other suitable purposes, the community will ultimately be the losers, as it does not seem likely that the funding is unlikely to be available to build a new facility that will address the identified priorities and needs identified by community members

Community Integration:

- Prior to its closure, the school was an institution that offered events and activities that brought together the whole community. The school's closure brought about a decline in a sense of community. As a result, motivated residents have attempted to rebuild their sense of community despite concern and fear for the future of the community.
- Schools that are also community hubs can foster a stronger sense of community and belonging. Schools have long been identified as the central hub for rural communities and as places for socialization and the development and strengthening of community identity. Schools are the cultural, recreational, and social centres for rural communities, and are key components in rural communities' development and sustainability, as they foster social capital and social networks. Social capital builds a sense of trust among residents and increases the willingness to accomplish goals that benefit the community.
- The physical facilities, events, and programs that were previously schools offer can also contribute to developing and strengthening interpersonal relationships. A repurposed rural school can become a central place where friendships form, social networks are developed and community events are held.
- Currently the community offers few opportunities for youth, particularly after-school and weekend activities. Sports teams and leagues have little access to practice areas; arts programs and enterprises lack access to spaces for skill advancement and rehearsals.

Benefits of Repurposed Schools

Access to Resources:

- Community centers in repurposed schools can provide access to libraries, technology, recreational facilities, and other resources for the wider community.

Community Programming:

- Repurposed buildings can host a variety of community programs, from recreational activities to social services, benefiting residents of all ages.

Improved Communication and Collaboration:

- Community centers can facilitate better communication and collaboration between schools, community organizations, and all levels of government, can allow for leadership to emerge and knowledge to be exchanged, benefitting the community's future development.
- Repurposed schools can also foster partnerships within the community that benefit the school building and the community's future development.
- Boosts Community Spirit: Becomes a rallying point for volunteers, strengthens social connections, and provides spaces for events, fostering civic engagement.
- Economic Impact: Economic revitalization attracts new businesses (artisans, restaurants), creates jobs, generates local spending, and increases property values, often supported by grants and local investment. Repurposed schools can create new jobs and stimulate local economies. The employment and social opportunities provided by rural repurposed schools can retain young families, which contribute to further economic growth.
- The resources, programs, and skilled leadership within a repurposed school often exercise a large influence in the broader community and have an important impact on rural community development

Ongoing Trends to consider

Increased Demand

- The trend of repurposing schools into community centers is likely to continue as communities look for ways to provide more services and create stronger connections.
- Partnerships: Repurposing projects often involve collaborations between multi levels of government, and community organizations, fostering shared responsibility and resources.

Community Asset Transfer

- Adaptive reuse can preserve a community's architectural, social, and cultural historical values as well as maintaining the local identity of the area. Reuse also preserves the character of the neighbourhood, increases sustainability, and maintains the educational heritage of the site.
- Because of the role the school has played in serving residents for multiple generations, preserving their architectural qualities through adaptive reuse might also help to minimize psychological pain in the community brought on by the school's closure. In small towns and rural communities, school closures can threaten the economic viability of the community as a whole.

APPENDIX A

The committee researched stated government priorities to make the case for future uses of the ESDHS building

Rationales based on government identified priorities.

Healthcare

- **Improving access and infrastructure**

Economic growth and productivity

- **Developing a skilled workforce:** Efforts are being made to increase the number of highly qualified personnel employed in Nova Scotia.

Housing

- **Building more housing:** The province is investing in new public housing units and modernizing existing ones.
- **Increasing affordability:** Programs provide rent supplements to Nova Scotians and offer rebates on provincial HST for new purpose-built rental housing.
- **Addressing homelessness:** Increases in funding are supporting programs for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Education and skills

- **Investing in infrastructure:** The Capital Plan includes significant investments for building and renovating schools across the province.

Community and infrastructure

- **Strengthening municipal infrastructure:** The government is investing in programs to support municipal infrastructure projects like water, sewer, and stormwater services.
- **Supporting a clean energy future:** The province has legislated goals to reduce carbon emissions and is working on a collaboration framework with the federal government to achieve a low-carbon future.
- **Promoting culture:** Initiatives include supporting Mi'kmaq culture, creating a Culture Innovation Fund, and a marketing program to promote "Buy Nova Scotia Culture."

Key Determinants of Health shape the *conditions* where people live, work, and play, influencing overall well-being, illness risk, and life expectancy more than just healthcare, ultimately driving health equity, reducing disparities, and creating stronger, more productive communities with better economic and social outcomes.

The Determinants of Health are the broad range of interconnected factors shaping individual and population health, including social/economic conditions (income, education, jobs, housing), physical environment (clean air/water, safety), individual behaviors (diet, exercise, smoking), biology/genetics, and healthcare access/quality, all interacting to determine well-being beyond just lifestyle choices. These factors, especially the social ones, significantly impact health outcomes, often more than medical care itself.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html>

Why They Matter:

Key Determinants and Their Influence

- **Economic Stability:** This is a crucial determinant. Higher income levels are associated with better health outcomes and longer life expectancies. Economic stability allows residents to afford quality **housing**, nutritious **food**, reliable **transportation**, and access to **health care** and recreational activities, all of which contribute to a thriving, vibrant society. In contrast, communities facing high unemployment and poverty often experience poorer health outcomes and a diminished sense of future prospects, which erodes community morale and vibrancy.
- **Education Access and Quality:** Education is a cornerstone of a vibrant community. Higher educational attainment leads to better job opportunities, increased income, and enhanced health literacy, enabling individuals to make informed health decisions. An educated populace is more likely to engage in preventive health measures, contributing to a healthier community with fewer chronic diseases.
- **Neighborhood and Built Environment:** The physical surroundings directly impact community vitality.
- **Safety and housing quality:** Safe neighborhoods free of environmental hazards (like pollution or poor ventilation in homes) are essential for physical and mental well-being and contribute to a desirable place to live.
- **Infrastructure and amenities:** Access to quality housing, green spaces, parks, sidewalks, and accessible transportation systems encourages physical activity and social interaction, which are key components of a vibrant, connected community.
- **Social and Community Context:** Strong social support networks and community cohesion foster resilience, reduce stress, and provide a sense of belonging. A community with strong interpersonal relationships, active social engagement (volunteering, participating in groups), and a robust community sector (programs, support services) is better equipped to handle challenges and promote the well-being of its members. Discrimination and social exclusion, on the other hand, have negative health consequences and can isolate residents, detracting from vibrancy.
- **Access to Health Care:** While non-medical factors have a greater influence on health outcomes, equitable access to quality healthcare services and preventive health education is fundamental for maintaining overall health. A lack of access can reinforce health inequities and limit a community's potential to thrive.

In essence, positive determinants of health create an environment where individuals can reach their full potential, leading to a more engaged, healthy, and economically productive, or **vibrant**, community.

APPENDIX B: SLIDES FROM THE SURVEY



Survey for ESDHS Building

Musquodoboit Harbour and Area

The survey is organized and led by the Musquodoboit Harbour Chamber of Commerce and Civic Affairs

November 2025

Welcome

The Infrastructure Committee of the Chamber organized 9 community conversations throughout October

These conversations produced a tremendous number of ideas and possibilities

Now it is your turn to have your say!

Please watch the 5-6 minute presentation on the building and property before responding to the questions.

Repurposing....

The benefits of repurposing the school building preserve it as a community resource, and its continued usage as an active and interactive space for diverse activities and programs for the community.

The building could be adapted to reuse with a focus on

sustainability,

community needs,

cost-effectiveness,

access to community services

community programming

economic impact

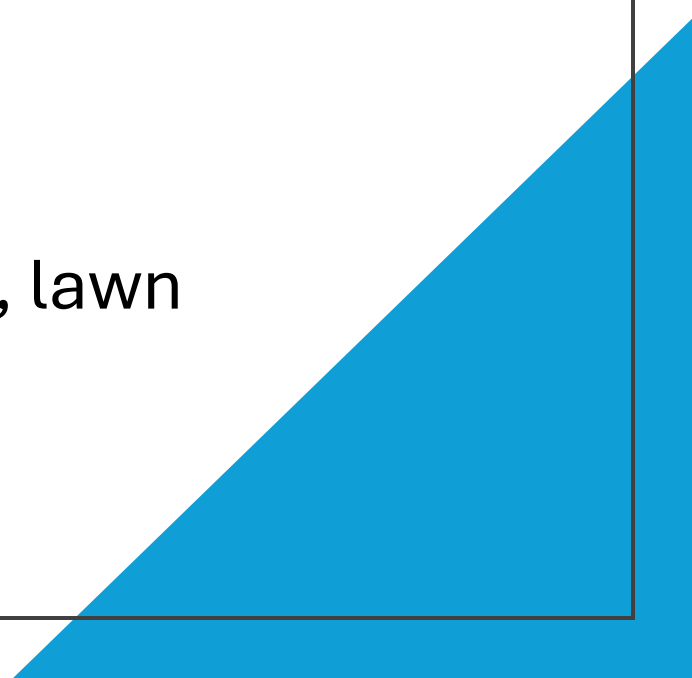


The Building

BUILDING/SITE INFO:

- Age: 60
- Construction Year: 1965
- Area: 68,697 sq ft.
- 2025 Assessment:
\$4,083,000 Taxes \$127,063
- Estimated Replacement Value
\$13,787,488
 - replacement not including
upgrades or change of use
- Lot site 387,375 sq. ft. (8.9 acres)

Current Status

- The building has been turned over to Department of Public Works with first right of refusal to HRM
 - Land is owned by HRM
 - Building has been empty since February 2025
 - The building is being maintained with insurance, lawn care, normal care.
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Outdoors

2 large playing fields: soccer, rugby, baseball

1 garden area

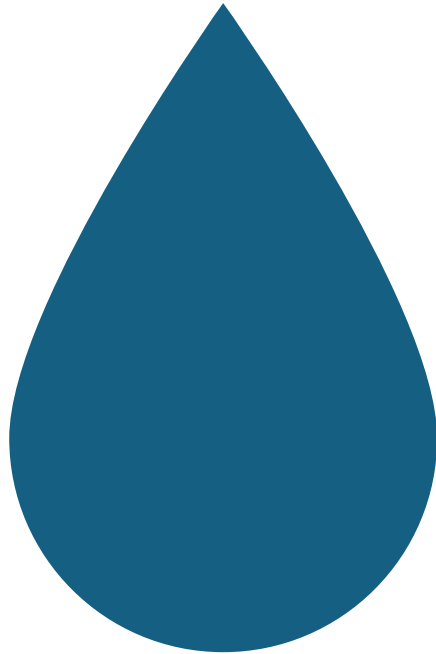


Building Assessment

- Building Condition Assessment and Capital Plan was done by Capital Management Engineering Ltd. (CMEL) In January 2018.
- The assessment of the site was based on a visual assessment of the visible and accessible components of the property, buildings and related structures.
- The review did not include an intrusive investigation of wall assemblies, ceiling cavities or any other enclosed spaces.
- No physical samples of building materials were collected to confirm or support the findings presented
- There is no new technical report for the building, and one is not forthcoming.
- We have not included any cost estimates as they can no longer be considered as they don't reflect current conditions/cost estimates.

BUILDING UPGRADES

- Parking lot redesigned and repaved
- Administration offices and lobby redesigned
- Gymnasium floor upgraded and new basketball hoops installed
- Reconfigured Roof Drains to Remove Water Entering Septic System
- Roof replaced with modified bitumen
- New Air Handling Units
- Elevator installed 2017, certified for current use



ABOUT the WATER

- 5000 Gal cistern installed 2019
- 3 new wells drilled/3 new water pumps installed (2017/18)
 - New wells had a flow rate of between 1-3 imperial gallons per minute
- Water from the wells would have been treated before it went into the cisterns. Confirmed by HRCE
- There are multiple water treatment systems - including filtration, water softener, chlorine treatment (not in use), UV treatment (sanitization).
- Arsenic removal treatment.
- Wells have not been used for at least two years.

Potential Concerns (as of May 2025)

- Potable water
- Washroom sizes
- Building exterior (brick) requires some repointing and in some areas brick replacement.
- Both boilers are potentially in need of retubing in the future.
- Sewage is pumped to the same treatment site as the hospital.
- Pipe goes from school across the road close to school entrance.

Key operational costs

Power Cost 2024 \$ 46,362

Oil Cost 2024 \$94,298.00

Taxes 2025 \$127,063

$\$267,723.00/12 = \$22,310.00$ per month minimum expenses

[opportunities may exist for energy conservation to reduce costs]

Building Components: 1st Floor



Lobby Community Office Gymnasium/Stage 3 Admin offices Meeting Room Lounge Computer Lab "A" 3 Classrooms	Girls/Boys Lockers Girls/Boys Showers Exercise Room 3 Guidance Offices 3 Classrooms	Dry Goods Kitchen Cafeteria Storage	2 Storage Music/Band Film/Video Lab	Carpentry Computer Lab "B" Automotive
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Layout

Eatarn Shore District High Room 1st Floor Square Footage March 2023



2nd Floor



Staff Kitchen
Lounge
5 Classrooms

Art Studio
Home
Economics
Resource
4 Classrooms
Office

Library
4 classrooms
Office

1 Classroom
Dance/Yoga Studio
Special Ed
Bio/Chem Lab

Eastern Shore District High 2nd Floor
Room Square Footage

Level 2



NOW IT'S YOUR TURN...