

## New high school location on the menu for downtown eateries Downtown restaurants say student business important to them; await announcement of new school location



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THE VANGUARD

NovaNewsNow.com

As the Department of Education continues to chew on where a new Yarmouth high school will be constructed, downtown eateries wonder what impact the ultimate location might have on their business.

The department is still evaluating three sites submitted by the school board. The board has chosen the upper part of Forest Street as its top choice. That site is an amalgamation of two tracts of land: one owned by the town, which it has offered to donate, and adjacent privately-owned land. On its own, the town's land is not large enough to accommodate a new high school.

Of the sites the province has, Forest Street is the closest to the downtown.

Hungry students translates into business for restaurants. While students with vehicles may branch out to restaurants in other parts of the town, including Starrs Road, students on foot in search of food typically head downtown.

"It was crazy," says Zarotti's owner Joe Barry recalling business on the first day of school. "There were kids lined up out the door for half an hour. Compared to the week before where, at the same time, one person could handle everything, now you need three."

Barry says the business he hauls in from the high school and junior high is important enough that without it he'd have some serious decisions to make. He says it's crucial that students be within walking distance.



**Grade 9 and 10 students Lindsay Cain, Craig Sullivan, Chantell Cleversey and Ashley Williams venture downtown over their lunch hour. The students said they weren't sure if they'd make the same walk if their school were located further away. Tina Comeau photo**

“If it wasn’t for the school year and where we’re located, there is no way I would do this...Without the kids it’s not even worth it.”

If the new high school is located on Forest Street, and students walk along Forest Street to get to and from central downtown (compared to the walking along Parade Street from where the school is now) the distance is about one kilometre longer. But it’s anyone’s guess what route students would take.

Still, many businesses, and even students, question if the walk would be doable in the time allotted for lunch hour. Grade 12 students Jordan Smith and James Hennigar said it would be something they might have to reconsider because of the walking time. Other students said they might be more tempted to eat lunch at school.

That’s a concern for the folks at Zarotti’s. “I can’t see them coming this far,” Barry says. “I wouldn’t have when I was in high school.”

Jeremy Amon, manager of Subway on Main Street, also believes a new location could impact business, especially with students who don’t have access to mom or dad’s car.

“It’ll hurt, for sure. The longer a kid has to walk, the more they’ll think twice of maybe bagging their lunch or eating at the school.”

But, Amon says, it’s not just the high school students who bring business. The junior high kids make the trek too. “Usually we see the younger grades down here because the kids in the older grades have access to a vehicle.”

Either way business is brisk.

One could say that brisk business comes with a downfall if adults and people working in the downtown are deterred from entering a restaurant hour because of the long lineups. But most restaurants have lunch specials geared towards students, which means their orders get through pretty quickly.

Interestingly enough, Jake’s owner Joe Habib says the bulk of his business occurs in the summer months. But that doesn’t diminish the importance of student business.

“The students play a big role in business downtown, definitely, people need it,” he says. “It’s a good part of the revenue that comes in.”

Which is why he shares concerns of where the new school will be.

“If you’re used to getting 50 kids at lunch time, you’ve got to know that if it is far enough away there is no way they’re going to be able to walk downtown so sure, it’s going to affect your business,” he says.

Yarmouth MLA Richard Hurlburt understands these concerns.

“I have concerns as well. Having the school business is good for the downtown merchants...I want to make sure that we secure it as close to the downtown as we can.”

But in saying that, Hurlburt says neither he, nor the department, will allow any landowner to gouge the taxpayers when it comes to purchasing land for a new school.

#### QUICK GLANCE

In a very unscientific poll, the Yarmouth Vanguard surveyed about 30 students walking downtown about their lunch habits. The majority said they plan on eating lunch downtown most school days and most said they walk. Asked if they eat on Starrs Road, most said it depends on if they have a vehicle. Asked if they would walk downtown from a high school on Forest Street, the yes, no and I'm not sure responses were evenly split.

Asked if they eat in the school cafeteria now, the majority said no.