

# Windsor School Revival

John Campbell Public School in Windsor, Ontario recently underwent a massive \$10-million renovation. It could just as easily have been an expensive demolition instead.

Called “the finest public school building in Ontario” when it opened in 1927, by 2003 the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) had plans in place to demolish it—and two others that were also identified as “prohibitive to repair.”

Fortunately for John Campbell School, it remained almost unaltered from its original design, and the structure was still sound. There was also huge public support to preserve it. Various parent councils, The Walkerville Times, the Windsor Heritage Committee, former Heritage Planner Nancy Morand and various groups sought to save this community landmark. Rather than opting to build a new school, the GECDSB chose the costlier yet more historically focused route to modernize the existing school.

The complete brick and stone exterior is being preserved, counterbalancing the extensive alterations to the interior.

Designed by J.P. Thomson Associates, the new interior features a classroom that has been returned to its 1926 appearance, complete with hardwood floors, cabinets and original chalkboards. There is also a lobby with original doors, refinished woodwork and marble, and display cases documenting Windsor’s heritage; a second-floor music room whose long-forgotten skylight has been reopened; and a gymnasium where a beamed ceiling and stone features around the stage have been restored.

Provincial government consultant Rod Peterson, who formerly worked for the GECDSB, said at a Windsor Heritage Committee meeting that “the goal of the building is not only to preserve a part of Windsor’s heritage, but to provide a pretty cool school for kids to attend, and a facility which can be used by the community outside of school hours, in the summer and on weekends.”

Mr. Peterson added that the Ministry of Education funds the construction of new schools, but does not have a budget for the preservation of older or heritage school buildings.



Photo: David Staunton

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