

Bridgwater building cap lifted

Published: January 17 , 2018 by Joyanne Pursaga Winnipeg Sun

A building cap Winnipeg City Council once hoped would help trigger new school construction has now been lifted.

Council's Riel Community Committee twice postponed its decision on removing the cap before voting to do so on Monday.

Coun. Janice Lukes (South Winnipeg-St. Norbert), the area's councillor, initially called on the province to commit to school construction before the ban was lifted but now says she's putting faith in the province to pursue that goal.

"We completely believe that the province understands the problems and we're very optimistic that we will see them do the right thing," said Lukes.

The building permit cap itself, approved by city council in 2012, allowed only 750 single-family and 300 multi-family building permits to be issued for the Bridgwater Trails and Bridgwater Centre area until certain conditions were met. Those conditions included that an area elementary school be built.

But Lukes said she's been assured the province will soon complete its study to determine if there's a business case for using public-private partnerships to build Manitoba schools. That study is exploring a potential English high school in the Pembina Trails School Division.

The province hasn't given a firm commitment, though, said Lukes. And the councillor said she'll push council to reinstate the building cap if the province fails to act on the file within the next three months.

"If we don't see any positive action, we're putting the cap back on," she said.

While some city officials have argued the cap would help ensure school development for the community, the province blamed it for preventing school planning.

Education Minister Ian Wishart once stated it would “restrict development in the area and prevent the neighbourhood from reaching the necessary size for the consideration of an additional K-8 school.”

On Wednesday, his colleague said the city committee’s latest decision will remove that concern.

“Now that this barrier has been removed, the area will be in much more favourable position for the consideration of additional schools,” wrote Municipal Relations Minister Jeff Wharton, in an email to the Winnipeg Sun.

Pembina Trails School Division says there’s a need for four new elementary schools and one new high school in Waverley West. Its superintendent is hopeful lifting the cap will trigger action.

“It’s conceivable that new houses will be built ... (which) would put pressure on our existing schools serving this community and it would bring the province closer to announcing a school,” said Ted Fransen.

A homebuilders group says lifting the cap will also prevent stalling development of new single-family homes in the community, which had nearly reached the council-imposed limit.

“The number of permits was getting very close to cap level, so lifting that cap will allow development to continue,” said Lanny McInnes, president of the Manitoba Homebuilders’ Association. “We are very appreciative of the work that Coun. Lukes did in terms of coming to a solution.”

jpursaga@postmedia.com