

Riverview optimistic for 2005

■ Citizens involved in long-range plan that will set stage for future development

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The Town of Riverview has lots of reason to be hopeful in looking ahead to the new year, says Mayor Clarence Sweetland.

He said there are many key projects which should set the pace for the town's growth and development for many years to come, that will be launched or completed next year.

"I am very optimistic about the future of our community."

The process for putting together a five-year Municipal Development Plan is under way and the long-term strategy should be in place by the spring, said Sweetland.

Town manager David Muir said they would like to have the five-year plan finished in time to take advantage of the majority part of next year's building season. The town is working in conjunction with the Greater Moncton Planning District Commission.

"We are involving the citizens in the planning right from the beginning and already had a visioning session to get their views and opinions on how they would like to see their community grow," he said. "They are the ones who will be living here for years to come."

However, some residents, who attended the visioning session, complained later about the concept of reviving the downtown by developing a "niche" retail zone, which would run between Blythwood Avenue and Pine Glen Road from Coverdale Road back to Phillips Road.

Brenda Orchard, Riverview's economic development director, said that instead of trying to compete with the big box stores in Moncton and Dieppe, the town wants to attract smaller, unique specialty outlets and boutiques.

However, several residents in the area of Riverview suggested for the retail zone, claimed the move would destroy one of the community's oldest residential neighbourhoods. They suggested it

would destroy their property values and turn their quiet section of town into a "copy of Mountain Road in Moncton."

"We understand that people want to keep the residential nature of their neighbourhood," said Muir. "It (niche retail proposal) is not a done deal. We want to work with the people to see if we can come up with something that is satisfactory to them while helping the town to grow."

"We plan to work with the people, not impose something on them," he said.

The town manager said the completion of the replacement for the Gunningsville Bridge in the fall, to be preceded in the spring by the long-awaited East-West Corridor road, are two major projects for the town which will have long-reaching effects.

Muir said some commercial zoning around the corridor could really open up development and lead to the establishment of more commercial and retail facilities at Findlay Park. He said they are also working at getting some facilities, possibly including a farmer's market, erected in the property where the old Gunningsville Bridge is being removed.

Sweetland said the east-west connector and new bridge will join Findlay Boulevard to the downtown business centre in Moncton. "They (bridge and connector road) are going to give us a surge in development, especially in East Riverview, for which we have been looking for a long while."

He looks forward to the big celebration that will occur next fall when the bridge is opened, said the mayor. When the finishing touches are put on it, he said many people are going to be surprised and impressed by the quality of the new structure.

It will have wide walkways, lookout areas along it and be well landscaped on both sides, said Sweetland. He said it will be a foot bridge as much as a vehicle bridge.

The mayor said Riverview enjoyed another banner year for home building and every indication is that this construction boom will continue through 2005, said the mayor. He said Harmony Estates continues to blossom, the major housing development around the Moncton Golf Club will be in full swing next year and the Cross-Creek Mini-home Park continues to grow.

From condominiums to high-end houses, from young families to senior citizens, Sweetland said the demand for housing in Riverview covers the whole spectrum of accommodation types and age demographics.

He said one of the biggest selling points for the town has been its parks and recreation facilities. "Recently, I met a couple from Nova Scotia and they were very profuse in their praise for Riverfront Park. They said they enjoyed driving by it because it was so beautiful."

Sweetland said some upgrading work is scheduled next year for Riverfront Park, which also boasts a myriad of walkways and trails, that will involve repairs to its gazebo and the small bridge.

He said the Dobson Arena will receive a major overhaul in 2005 and 2006, while at the same time accommodating the many residents who regularly use it for ringette, hockey, figure skating, speed skating and other activities.

The Riverview Aquatic Centre, located in Riverview High School, will be modernized, said the mayor, including the addition of a new entrance for the public, separate from the one used by the students and staff, and improved changing and dressing room facilities.

However, one facility the town will not have next year will be the Chocolate River Music Conservatory, which was scheduled to be built, there, on property owned by Juergen Weiland, its managing director, and his wife Melody Dobson, its artistic director. Complaining they had too many restrictions put on the project by area residents, they eventually opted to locate the facility in Dieppe.

Sweetland said Dieppe made an offer that Dieppe was not in a position to match, which was to build the facility in the middle of a cultural complex they were constructing in their downtown. But Dobson is still providing music lessons in Riverview under the Chocolate River designation, which is "good to see," he said.

"We are not going to let one little setback cripple us. If you don't achieve one thing, you go on to the next thing and work even harder the next time around."

He cannot help but be encouraged about the positive things that are happening in Riverview right now and the tremendous promise 2005 holds for the community, said Sweetland. "We are definitely headed in the right direction."