

# Riverview should seek 'niche' retailers: study

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## ■ Grants would provide incentive for unique businesses to come to town

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TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

A retail marketing strategy for Riverview advises town council to attract "niche" retail outlets rather than the "big box stores" and providing incentive grants to entice new businesses.

Niche operations, explained Brenda Orchard, the town's director of corporate services and economic development, would be retail outlets that you would not find in Moncton or Dieppe.

Orchard said there are already some of them in place in Riverview, including Covered Bridge Quiltery, Homestead Restaurant, Kay's Framing and Marwin Interiors.

"They are unique and have a clientele that will travel great distances to get their product or service," she said, noting that people come all the way from the Miramichi or Halifax to get a cross-stitch frame at Kay's.

She said the operators of the big box stores, which are located on Trinity Drive in Moncton and Champlain Place in Dieppe, say they have pretty much saturated the market in Metro Moncton. A further expansion into Riverview would be a "cannibalization" of their existing stores, they suggest.

They feel that "niche retail," which involves locally-owned companies that are unique in themselves, is the best way for the town to go, at least for the near future, said Orchard.

The retail marketing strategy, presented by Orchard, comprised the findings of CB Richard Ellis Ltd. of Halifax, a private company, and the response to those findings by a special committee of about a dozen local business operators. The committee also sought and received material from the City of North Bay, Ont., which won a national award for its program for attracting new businesses.

The strategy included programs for incentive grants, which the economic development officer would like to see incorporated into Riverview's 2005 operating budget and included in the town's promotion packages.



RON WARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Coverdale Road, as it passes through the Riverview business district, has limited space available for new businesses to move in. A retail marketing strategy for the town, which was presented to town council this week, underlined the need to open up other areas of Riverview, such as Findlay Park, for commercial development.

One program calls for all commercial development or re-development to be exempt from development charges, including building, permit and rezoning application fees.

A second incentive would see a grant up to 50 per cent of the costs up to a maximum of \$5,000 to property owners who rehabilitate and improve the facades (including signs) of commercial buildings. She said the town would commit a maximum of \$20,000 a year to the initiative, which would be a three-year program.

The strategy also calls for a grant of up to \$5,000 to be provided by the town for feasibility studies and building renovation design. She said the committee feels the town should commit a maximum of \$20,000 a year to this program.

The biggest challenges to commercial growth in Riverview, identified in the Ellis report, were access, the land being equal or greater in cost than in Moncton or Dieppe, lower traffic counts than the other two communities and the need for more land to be available for development.

Orchard said completion of the new bridge over the Petitcodiac River and the start of construction of the East-West Corridor, which would run behind Coverdale Road, would help eliminate the problems of access and lack of land for com-

mercial development. Currently, she said Coverdale Road is absorbing an exorbitantly high percentage of the town's retail facilities, with very little space for new businesses.

She said the East-West Corridor Road, with the commercially zoned Findlay Park in the middle of it, would free up additional space for commercial and retail businesses and take some of the pressure and traffic congestion off Coverdale.

It is therefore important, said Orchard, that commercial zoning for the East-West Corridor route be in place in Riverview's new long-term municipal plan, which will be coming on stream next year.

"We have to have the access issue, land price and zoning, incentive grant program, bridge and corridor all coming together. Just one or two of those components cannot do the trick by themselves."

But she cannot help but be optimistic, she said, noting Riverview has a lot of good things going for it to attract development in the next few years. "According to one document, our disposable income is 27 per cent higher than that of Moncton and construction activity is moving toward a second consecutive record year in the town," said Orchard.