

Tax may be sticking point

Riverview businesses move toward establishing BIA

RIVERVIEW PUBLIC LIBRARY
34 Honour House Court
Riverview, N. B.
E1B 3T7

HF-Local Politics & Government

By Peter R. Boisseau
Staff Reporter

Riverview has the beginnings of a designated business area today.

A half-dozen business people who attended a meeting at town hall Wednesday reached a consensus to start working toward forming a Business Improvement Area.

The term describes a government-approved business area in a municipality, complete with legally defined boundaries.

But deciding a BIA would be good is the easy part, the business people were cautioned. The real task is in convincing the business community to accept a special levy that goes with it.

There are approximately 175 businesses in Riverview.

The levy can be as much as two per cent of the assessment base, explained Betty Rooney, manager of the Moncton Central Business Development Corporation.

It will be up to the businesses who are already on the bandwagon to sell it to their counterparts, said Riverview Mayor Dave Richardson.

"As soon as you start talking

about taxes and levies, people tend to go into a starry-eyed crouch.

"It appears to me you people have to soft sell this thing and convince the other businesses it's not such a bad thing."

BIAs are governed by a board of directors drawn from the business community. They create a basis to apply for government funds and consolidate development and commercial promotion, explained Rooney.

The levy is used to fund special projects for the BIA.

Moncton has had a successful levy program in place for the last five years, said Rooney.

For the average business, the fee can be nominal, she noted. For a mall owner, the outlay can be considerably more.

But there is no doubt about the benefits or the value for the return on their money, she said.

In addition, up to \$150,000 in provincial funds under the Mainstreet Improvement Program would be available to Riverview, she noted. But she cautioned the businesses to start with small projects, like landscaping.

In Riverview, the oft repeated goal is to get people to buy from local businesses instead of elsewhere.

"We have to start making people proud to spend their money in Riverview, and not in Moncton," said Metro gas bar owner, Mike Saucier.

To convince Moncton businesses of the need for the BIA and levy, the MCBDC used figures which showed that none of the \$50 million in business taxes previously collected over a 15 year period had been spent on improving the downtown core.

Rooney said Moncton took the initial \$300,000 collected that year and installed some brick sidewalks and crosswalks. The BIA became the catalyst of much larger projects that have revitalized the downtown core, she added.

And over the years, the levy has dropped from 15 cents per \$100 of assessment to nine cents, said Rooney.

"That's because we have so many more businesses involved in the BIA now. When we started, we had five empty blocks. Now they are full."

Moncton's BIA runs east to

Vaughn Harvey Boulevard and west to King Street. There was some discussion Wednesday that Riverview's could run along Coverdale Road from Trites to Pine Glen roads, or a portion of that.

Establishing a BIA was one of the recommendations contained in a controversial study last year on a downtown core for Riverview.

The study had originally designated an area where the core should be built up, but that recommendation was dropped in the face of stiff opposition from residents.

A BIA merely consolidates what is already in the town, it was noted.

It needs the consensus of two-thirds of all businesses in the designated BIA to come into affect, said Rooney.

Once the consensus is reached, all the businesses in the BIA automatically become part of it and are subject to the levy, Rooney said.

Don McWilliam, Century 21 Countryside Realty owner, was selected as interim chairman for the group seeking to establish the BIA.