Strawberry fields forever as Fredericton sees future for urban agriculture

By MATTHEW HAYES

Fredericton - Fredericton City Council voted 8-4 to approve a rezoning request on September 24th that will protect the Sunset Strawberry U-pick and the adjacent pine and oak forest in the city's Northwest.

The approval was a hard fought victory for residents across the city, who mobilized to defend the property, located at 49 Ferris St. The city asked for expressions of interest in the property last fall, with a view to selling it for residential development.

Residents in Ward 5, however, quickly organized a petition, which collected over 2,000 signatures across the city in the days of January. Volunteers went door to door, including Betty Hugthon and Bob Morton, a couple in their 80s who single-handedly collected more than 800 signatures.

The future of the U-pick briefly became an election issue in April when the citizens initiated rezoning request came before Council for referral. Several councillors and Mayor Brad Woodside voted to defend the U-pick, but after the election, it appeared for a time that some preferred to divide the land and sell the forested section for suburban development.

Back in June, the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) rejected a staff report from the City, which recommended the rezoning to Agriculture and Open Space. The close 5-4 vote at the PAC meeting was carried when Dan Konz, the committee chair, and owner of Dynex Manufacturing, a buildings trade company, voted against the proposal.

The negative vote meant that a seven-vote majority was needed at Council to carry the proposed amendment at third reading. Despite the uphill battle, residents across the city banded together and lobbied councillors hard, collecting several thousand more signatures on the petition, and with a flurry of letters to local media.

In the end, eight councillors came on-side, including Marilyn Kerton (Ward 6), who had voted against it at PAC in June.

In its comments, Ward 1 Councilor Dan Kranan pointed out that the economic cost of not developing the property was minimal. “The houses will be built elsewhere,” he said, noting that there were several other areas in the city where residential R2 developments were taking place or could take place in the future. The rezoning, he said, will “enhance the area, and will have a positive impact on attractiveness toward the south and east.”

In one of the more spirited interventions, Councilor Eric Megarry (Ward 4) noted that “if the last hundred years in Fredericton was about development, the next hundred will be about the spaces we put in between those developments.”

Not all Councillors agreed. Steve Chase (Ward 9) and Mike O'Brien (Ward 3) cited the economic costs to the city. Councilor Chase noted that the property, if fully developed, would add up to $900,000 in tax base to the city.

His decision to vote against the proposal was based on fiscal prudence, he said, though he was not able to convincingly demonstrate that the revenue would be permanently lost to the city.

Scott McConaghy (Ward 7) and Stephen Hicks (Ward 6) also voted against the proposal. One of the main issues in the debate was how much such residential developments would generate in tax revenue for the city. Developers pay up the front costs of new infrastructure (roads, water and sewage), the city ultimately must pay to service and replace them. Some studies suggest that taxes will have to be prohibitively high in order to cover infrastructure renewal in the future.

One of the main variables, energy costs, is difficult to estimate 50 years into the future. Yet it seems certain that the spinning.

Lambourgeau’s three major cities - amongst the most sprawled in Canada - are particularly vulnerable as old infrastructure, spread out over larger built surfaces, costs more to replace than in average urban centres elsewhere in Canada.

Leading up to first and second reading on September 10th, many councillors were hoping to broker a compromise proposal which might have saved the strawberry U-pick, but sold the adjacent forest for development. Councilor O’Brien voted against the proposal in the hopes that such a compromise would come forward.

Neighbours, however, had already pointed out that the average forest would be fully mature in another 30 years, was home to wood turtles, a protected species, and successfully managed to tie the forest to the U-pick in the public’s mind.

“I just can’t believe it,” said a visibly emotional Greta Wells, a retired civil servant, who spearheaded the movement of city residents to rezone the property. “This was a gift in so many ways,” she said about the experience of working with people across the city to lobby for the rezoning. “It was a team effort in every way, and getting to know some of our city councillors and how the City Hall process works was a learning experience as well.”

La Biky wants to build a bicycle movement in Moncton

By AMANDA HACHAY

Organizers of La Biky, a community bicycle co-op, were overwhelmed by the level of support and interest during the opening on September 13th in Moncton.

Cooperative La Biky Co-operative is a community bicycle centre starting up in Moncton, with a vision to foster a sustainable, bicycle-positive environment. The co-op was set up with the intention of empowering people to bring cycling into their daily lives.

“We see a need to make bike culture in Moncton more visible,” says Marc Xavier LeBlanc (a.k.a Bones), one of the founders of the co-op. “We hope to encourage people to use their bicycles as a cost-effective, sustainable and active mode of transportation.”

In collaboration with Chrispy Lorette, who studied in Montreal and Ottawa and frequently used community bicycle centres in order to learn how to maintain and repair her bicycle. When she moved back to Moncton, she continued to commute by bicycle but missed the availability of those resources.

When I moved back to Moncton, I wanted to continue to use the bike as my main mode of transportation, but I really missed having a resource centre like a bike co-op that could help me maintain and repair my bike,” she said.

One summer day in 2011, Lorette mentioned this to Guy Gauthreau and Joanna Brown, two community leaders who were also passionate about sustainable transportation, cycling and community building. Their response: let’s build one!

Over many dinners, the small group of avid cyclists discussed the need for a community bicycle centre in Greater Moncton and spoke enthusiastically about the cooperative model. They approached the City of Moncton, which gave enormous support by donating space for the project and the Quality of Life Grant would be $15,000.

The group met Corey Herb, yet another cyclist who had also recently moved back to Moncton and was a proficient bicycle mechanic with dreams of creating a similar space in Moncton. “It was a perfect fit,” said Herb, who became a founding member and operations chair.

During the winter, the group came up with a name, developed a vision and mission, incorporated as a non-profit co-operative, and began to flesh out the project. The founding members organized a community meeting to present the project, gather ideas, and generate support.

The meeting confirmed the demand for a community bicycle centre.

A community survey and... (continued on page 2)

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