



The Brief

Vol. 4 No. 2

A project of the NB Media Co-op

October 2012

nbmediacoop.org

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 1, however, quickly organized a petition, which collected over 2,000 signatures across the city in the dead of January. Volunteers went door to door, including Betty Hughson 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 citizen initiated rezoning request came before Council for referral. Several councilors and Mayor Brad Woodside vowed 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 Koncz, 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 bore down and lobbied councilors hard, collecting several thousand more signatures on the petition, and writing numerous letters to local media.

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

In his comments, Ward 1 Councilor Dan Kennan 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 future. The rezoning, he said, "will enhance the area, and will have a positive impact on assessments," around the U-pick and forest.

In one of the more spirited interventions, Councilor Eric Megarity (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 Councilors agreed. Stephen 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 revenues would be permanently lost to the city.

Scott McConaghy (Ward 7) and Stephen Hicks (Ward 5) 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. While developers pay the up-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 sprawling neighbourhoods built after WWII during a period of low energy costs and low commodity prices is unlikely to continue in the 21st century, causing cities new fiscal difficulties.

New Brunswick'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 councilors were hoping to broker a compromise proposal which would 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



Gretta Wells is elated that Fredericton City Council approved a rezoning request on Sept. 24th that will protect the Sunset berry fields, forest and wetland in Fredericton. Photo by Nadine Ives.

current 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 Gretta 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 councilors and how the City Hall process works was a learning experience as well."

La Bikery wants to build a bicycle movement in Moncton



Amanda Hachey, a founding member of La Bikery, repairing a bike at the co-op's centre in Moncton. Photo by Marc Xavier LeBlanc.

By AMANDA HACHEY

Organizers of La Bikery, a community bicycle co-op, were overwhelmed by the level of support and interest during the opening on September 19th in Moncton.

Coopérative La Bikery 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 saw 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."

It all started with Chrissy 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 Gautreau 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 co-operative model. They approached the City of Moncton, which gave enormous support by donating space for the project and the Quality of Life grant.

The group met Cory Herc, 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 Herc, 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)*



NB MEDIA CO-OP
independent media by and for New Brunswickers

The NB Media Co-op relies on financial support from its members to fund high-quality, independent journalism by and for New Brunswickers.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____