



**Town, Country and Coast
Community Development
in New Brunswick**

presented by



Next NB/Avenir N-B

It is time for New Brunswickers to talk to each other. Our province and our region face some challenges, which means both must confront some difficult questions. Just as our nation seeks to redefine its role in the world economically, militarily and diplomatically, so too must New Brunswick's citizens decide for themselves their place in Canada.

Next NB/Avenir N-B will do that through a series of discussion papers it will release between February 2004 and June 2005. These papers will be supported by public forums held throughout New Brunswick and will culminate with a conference in Saint John.

Next NB/Avenir N-B will be a bilingual project to reflect New Brunswick's nature and its distinction as the only officially bilingual province in Canada.

Next NB/Avenir N-B is a unique opportunity to explore what New Brunswickers think about themselves, their province and its place in Canada and the world.

Please join us in the conversation.

To obtain additional copies of this discussion paper or to offer your comments, please visit our website at www.nextnb.ca or write to us at:

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He is obviously a professor, the man who comes through the door of the aptly named Bridge Street Cafe, with a newspaper tucked under his arm. There's a wave hello to an acquaintance as he settles in at one of the small tables near the window and awaits a cup of coffee. The laughter from a nearby table warbles over the music on the stereo, some non-descript rock that adds to the aura of well-worn grooviness that marks this favourite Sackville hangout.

Across the street is the old Vogue Theatre, now resurrected as a community-run film society, where residents gather to see foreign flicks and art house movies. Around the corner is Mount Allison University, which each autumn welcomes a community of artists, academics and students into its midst. Down from there is the Tantramar Regional Civic Centre where you will find that oh-so-familiar Canadian tableau; parents huddled over paper cups of coffee, watching as their kids chase down the puck and their own sports fantasies on a fresh sheet of ice.

This is the community of Sackville, population 5,361. About 10 years ago residents weren't sure what was to become of their town. There was a common New Brunswick dilemma. Three major employers moved out, leaving Sackville with empty buildings and unemployed workers. The community's response was to create Renaissance Sackville in 1994, a community development agency. It produced a strategic plan with three tenets: the town should focus on economic development that enhanced Sackville's quality of life and protected its natural and cultural heritage. It was a uniquely flavoured homebrew that proved to be the recipe for renewal in Sackville, just as it has been in other New Brunswick communities that have confronted the loss of major employers, the exodus of citizens or the general malaise that settles around communities that have forgotten their *raison d'être*.

Those that have succeeded in revitalizing communities did so because they turned inward, considered the unique rhythms and attitudes that had shaped their communities and used that as the base upon which to design their own renaissance. The original use of the word *renaissance* denotes the historical period following the Middle Ages in Europe that was marked by a

period of discovery set against a backdrop of intense interest in the ideas of ancient Greece and Rome. Out of this time came a set of genuinely new values.

New ideas and innovations borne from a reexamination of a society's roots and history: this is the essence of any renaissance. It must be the basis upon which we conceive a new story for New Brunswick. It must be our guide as we explore the communities we call home.

Who are we?

On the surface New Brunswick's people are a scattered lot. Our population is spread across 103 municipalities and 270 unincorporated areas, known as local service districts or LSDs. By definition there are eight cities – Saint John, Moncton, Fredericton, Dieppe, Miramichi, Bathurst, Edmundston and Campbellton – none of which claim to be the dominant urban centre. That makes New Brunswick unique in Canada, where other provinces have one large city, which drives the economy and attracts new people.

In addition, New Brunswickers have divided themselves almost equally along urban/rural lines. According to the 2001 Canadian census, 50.4 per cent live in town and 49.5 per cent reside in the country. New Brunswickers have grown accustomed to describing their home as a rural province, but what does that mean?

There was a time when living a rural lifestyle meant earning a living from the land or the sea largely through farming, logging or fishing. In 1891 New Brunswick had 38,577 farms. By 2001 the number of farms had plummeted to 3,034. These farms are home to 8,145 people - 2 per cent of the province's rural population. Like farming, the life of the logger is also slipping away. In 1963, 4,378 people earned a living in the woods of New Brunswick. By 2000 it was down to 3,200 people, less than 1 per cent of New Brunswick's rural dwellers. Similarly low numbers describe the province's traditional fisheries. New Brunswick had 6,083 fishermen in 1961. By 2002 it has increased slightly to 6,959 people – 2 per cent of the rural population.

If rural New Brunswickers aren't farming, logging or fishing, what are they doing? Increasingly, they're driving into a city to work. In 1993, the provincial Commission on Land Use and the

Rural Environment pointed out that between 1971 and 1991 New Brunswick had recorded the fastest growing rural, non-farm population in Canada. That trend continues today. According to the 2001 census, 27 per cent of rural residents live close enough to a municipality to be counted as part of the greater urban area. For example the 122,678 people included in a count of Greater Saint John includes the decidedly rural area of Musquash (population 1,280). An additional 50,301 people live in unincorporated areas where over 30 per cent of residents work in a nearby municipality.

While it may be true that close to 50 per cent of New Brunswick's citizens choose to live on the land, fewer of them are living off it. This is an important distinction as New Brunswickers consider their place within a country that is increasingly urban-focussed. Perhaps New Brunswick is more urban-focussed too.

- How do you define your home – urban, suburban or rural?
- Do you live in the same community where you work?
- What should be the relationship between New Brunswick's bedroom communities and the adjacent city?
- What is the role of New Brunswick's cities?

Where does it start?

By building strong communities. Ask a New Brunswicker where the heart of their community is and they're not likely to point to city hall or their local chamber of commerce office. Our communities are moulded by far more personal experiences such as the ones found in our churches and other areas of worship, in our parks, in our arenas and recreation centres, in our schools, in our service clubs, in our volunteer organizations and in our social scene – the bars, restaurants, theatres and artistic venues we frequent. These are the pillars that build and support a community.

In the 1960s some New Brunswick communities weren't functioning well. At that time, schools and hospitals were funded through taxes collected by county governments, which placed smaller communities at a disadvantage. Premier Louis J. Robichaud recognized that problem and in 1963 he created the Royal Commission on Finance and Municipal Taxation. Chaired by Edward Byrne, the commission recommended the provincial

government take over the administration of health, welfare and justice. It also recommended the provincial government assume financial responsibility for education, property assessment and tax collection. In exchange, the county governments were abolished, 90 new villages created and the non-incorporated areas were renamed local service districts (LSDs).

Premier Robichaud accepted these recommendations and in 1966 introduced the Program of Equal Opportunity. It ensured that all New Brunswickers would have access to a basic standard of public services. Although no other program has had as profound an effect on New Brunswick's development, Equal Opportunity failed to address one key area. The program centralized power at the provincial level and in doing so wiped out all vestiges of local governance in the unincorporated areas.

This wasn't the original plan. In fact the 1963 Byrne Report states quite clearly that the elimination of county governments was not an invitation to unfettered rural development.

"In our society, the individual is, and should remain, free to live where he chooses," states the report.

" But this does not mean that he should be privileged to impose upon others the extra costs incurred in providing him with the publicly-provided amenities of urban living. If a person chooses to live at some distance from any organized municipality he should not expect to have roads, water and similar services provided at the cost of provincial taxpayers."

But that's not what happened. By the 1960s it was evident that development in the unincorporated areas was proceeding largely unimpeded by provincial regulations. For example, this uncontrolled development led to the creation of New Maryland outside Fredericton. In 1991 the unincorporated area became a village and today it has a population of 4,284, making it the second largest village in the province, with a population greater than the towns of Sussex, Hampton, Dalhousie and Shippagan.

Major growth has brought one major problem: New Maryland's water and sewage wasn't designed to support this many homes

and the village is struggling to find the money necessary to upgrade its overloaded water distribution system. Last year it received \$8.8 million from the federal and provincial governments to build a new sewage treatment system to replace aging sewage lagoons. New Maryland is not alone, evidence that the choices made in the past have created challenges for us today.

- What local institutions are important to the well-being of your community?
- Do you belong to an organized group or participate in organized activities?
- Do you feel a part of your community? Why?
- New Brunswick's infrastructure (it's roads, water, sewage and transportation systems) is getting old. How should communities pay for the upgrade and maintenance of infrastructure systems?
- Should the provincial government play a greater role in controlling development in the unincorporated areas?

How do we get there?

By learning to balance the twin principles of liberty and equity as we transform our province. Each of us has the right to live where we want. What we should not be able to do is build homes and develop the land in a way that has a negative impact on our neighbours or the surrounding environment. Of New Brunswick's top 20 most populated communities, seven are unincorporated areas. They are the rural community of Beaubassin East and the parishes of Moncton, Saumarez, Kingsclear, Beresford, Alnwick and Dundas. Because there have been few restrictions placed on development many unincorporated areas have evolved into quasi-suburban communities. This pattern of development has had an impact on New Brunswick in three significant ways: it has slowed the rate of growth in our cities, it has shrunk the amount of land available for traditional rural use such as farming and forestry, and, it has placed a burden on cities that must maintain roads that now carry far more car traffic than the roads had originally been designed to do.

Outside our cities it has meant the loss of agricultural and forestry land to residential development, a trend that has changed the look and use of rural New Brunswick. Drive along Route 8 through central New Brunswick or around the Acadian

Peninsula on Route 11 and you will see homes spaced far enough apart to allow privacy between neighbours. Land use planners call this ribbon development and it has robbed rural towns and villages of land taxes and a sense of community.

Consider also the fate of New Brunswick's coastal zones and river systems. Not so long ago the rivers and ocean coastline of New Brunswick were home to communities that used the water for their livelihood. Today those economic requirements have given way to recreation and aesthetics; where once we worked on the water, now we play. But there are still people and industries that use the water: commercial fishermen, river guides, farmers, pulp and paper mills and aquaculture farms. This inevitably leads to conflicts between those who play and those who work on the water.

- How do we create strong cities?
- How do we balance development with environmental stewardship?
- What will be the new economic drivers for rural towns and villages as the primary industries – farms, forests and fish – continue to decline?

What do we want?

Communities that reflect the realities of modern New Brunswick. Increasingly, young people are opting for life in the city. In 2001, 16 communities had a median age younger than the provincial number of 38.6 years. That meant people living in these communities were younger on the whole than the rest of the province. All but three of these communities are located within 30 minutes of one of New Brunswick's three southern cities.

There is one other group that boasts a younger population. New Brunswick's 16 Aboriginal communities - 10 Mi'kmaq and six Wolastoqewiyik - continue to have a younger citizenry than the provincial average. This presents its own set of challenges for Aboriginal communities. For Aboriginal youth, leaving home is more than just a rite of passage; it means leaving a familiar culture for the larger non-Aboriginal world where it is sometimes difficult to retain and practice a distinct Aboriginal identity. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities are experiencing an exodus of their younger citizens, particularly those with post-secondary education.

A generation of New Brunswickers, roughly those between the ages of 19 and 35, are on the move. They represent 22 per cent of the population and they are a mobile and worldly group. Television and the Internet has allowed them to explore a variety of ideas, which means they are a well-informed group and because of that they are not easily defined by traditional structures or groups. More than anything else, members of this generation seek to celebrate their individuality. Which means if New Brunswick is to attract and retain members of this generation we must do more than just encourage companies to move here and create jobs. We must welcome diversity in our citizens and encourage the development of activities for a variety of lifestyle choices.

But not every New Brunswick community will experience a youthful renaissance. As the overall population continues to age courtesy of baby boomers passing through middle age and into retirement, a number of our municipalities will be forced to redefine the nature of community. For example, the provincial department of education predicts the number of children enrolled in the public school system will drop by 18 per cent between 2004 and 2014.

Our health care services will also feel the effects of these changes. The specific needs of senior citizens, particularly geriatric and palliative care, will have to be considered as the delivery of health care services continues to evolve. Changes to the school system and to health care services will inevitably change the tempo and rhythm of our communities.

If highways and roads connected communities to each other in the 20th century, broadband cable and wireless networks are the tools to bring us together now. Projects such as the *Collectivité ingénieuse de la Péninsule acadienne*, which connects the rural communities of the Acadian Peninsula to each other and to government services and the Grand Manan Community School's technology program, which has equipped classrooms with computers and offers some classes via uplink with the mainland, are using technology to conceive a new community model.

Service New Brunswick (SNB) could be key to this transformation. Created in 1990, this provincial Crown corporation offers 176 services for government departments, utilities and some municipalities. SNB provides services either online, over the telephone or in person at one of its 36 service centres. An independent study of SNB conducted by IDC

Canada Consulting concluded that, along with some tangible economic benefits, SNB had quietly witnessed – and abetted – the transformation of New Brunswick into a technologically savvy jurisdiction.

Since 1990, the province had become the call centre capital of Eastern Canada, a development centre for multimedia software and the new home for the National Research Council's Institute for Information Technology. All of these groups have one thing in common: rather than invent something new, each has used technology to figure out how to deliver traditional services in a new way. So it must be with our communities. While technology can help bridge the distance, its arrival and development in New Brunswick can also be a model for change. Transformative change does not always arrive with a seismic boom. Often it settles in so quietly we don't notice its presence until it's too familiar to miss.

- What are the values young New Brunswickers look for in their communities?
- Are our cities prepared to welcome new ideas and points of view?
- What is the relationship between Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqewiyik communities with nearby cities?
- What effect will the drop in public school enrollment have on our communities, where schools and the activities that surround them are often a centerpiece of community life?
- How are communities adapting to the changing demographics?
- What role can public institutions, such as Service New Brunswick and the National Research Council, play in developing new ways to deliver services and information to New Brunswickers?

Why?

Because we deserve a special place to come home to, a vibrant place to call home. Others have shared this dream. The generation that weathered the Second World War reshaped New Brunswick with an aggressive post-war reconstruction plan that saw the province make some very strategic investments in infrastructure. They were the ones who set down the roots of our modern highway system that helped make New Brunswick the most export-focussed province in Canada. They built the

province-wide electricity and telecommunications grid that now powers the Information Age. And they invested in education – both at the public school level and in universities – because they knew a strong society was best supported by an educated citizenry.

A generation later, it was our social structures that needed to change. Equal Opportunity led the transformation. It did more than just change the health, education, welfare and justice systems; it dared us to accept the language and cultural differences that have given New Brunswick its unique character. Now it is time for the next generation to leave their mark on this place.

If we are to transform our province, it will start in our communities, in those places closest to our hearts. Our communities and neighbourhoods are what root us to New Brunswick. If tended properly, they will nurture new growth, foster new ideas and welcome our rebirth.