

### **Development plan loaded with benefits**

New Brunswick officials have unveiled an ambitious proposal for redevelopment of the blighted George Street corridor between George and New Streets. If realized, the plan would ensure a raft of economic and quality-of-life advantages to the city and its residents. It also offers solutions to the most contentious public issue facing planners: condemnation of the successful Green Grotto restaurant. Officials have put forth several reasonable proposals for entrepreneur Newell White either to move or keep his business where it is, and as talks between the two sides continue there is reason to believe a settlement will be reached soon.

Plans for the redevelopment zone certainly will evolve, but as laid out now they include a nine-story building with 96 market-rate apartments above street-level retail; proposed Rutgers University bookstore combined with housing for 800 students; development of the long-anticipated Heldrich plaza hotel and conference center; relocation and modernization of the Chandler Center health clinic to another site within the zone, and an 800-car parking garage to serve the new development.

The proposal is a winner on a number of levels.

For one, it sweeps clean three decrepit blocks and replaces them with modern housing and revenue-producing commercial enterprise. Officials estimate that upon anticipated completion of the project in 2005 the city will realize an additional \$1.5 million in tax revenues, or a net savings of \$100 per average homeowner. Also projected are 500 to 1,000 permanent jobs.

In addition, a new and up-to-date medical building for the Chandler Center promises improved health-care services for low- and moderate-income residents, its typical patrons. And Heldrich Plaza would draw visitors and convention money to downtown businesses, infusing the citywide economy.

A final ancillary benefit, but not the least in importance, goes to Rutgers. The university would receive student housing it desperately needs. In turn, those students would no longer be in direct competition with New Brunswick families for the slim pickings among private apartments or homes, relieving pressure on rental stock.

It is always difficult to assess broad-brush designs because those plans inevitably change. But as a work in concept architects of the city's future are thinking straight.