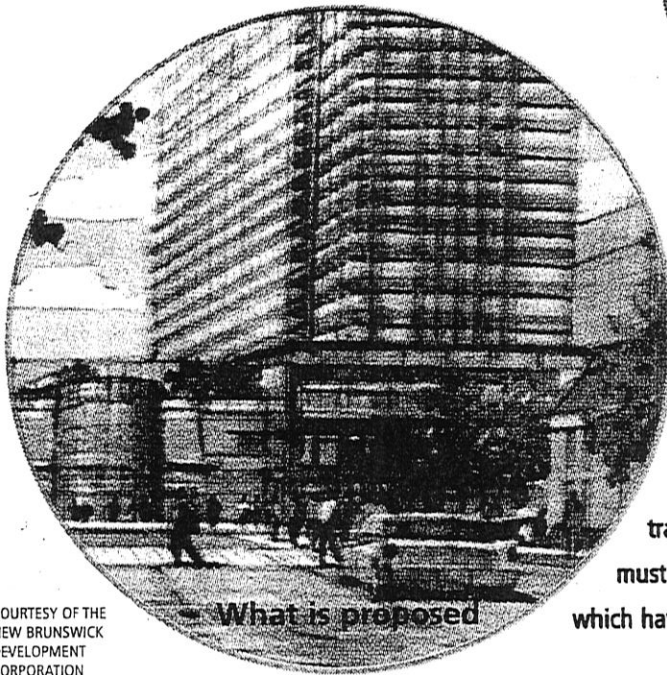


Gateway Center moves ahead

ILYA CHIGIREV/
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THE PLAN

Devco proposed the 330-foot Gateway Center in February 2005 as a downtown transit village. At 600,000-square feet, the building would contain 200 residential units, the University bookstore, and a bridge to the train platform. If Devco receives the contract, it must acquire the land from the current businesses, which have filed suit to stop the redevelopment.

By Rohan Mathew • CORRESPONDENT

Ed Mueller, owner of New Jersey Books, might be starting to sweat.

The New Brunswick City Council unanimously voted yesterday to amend the plan for the Easton-Somerset redevelopment area — better known as the proposed site of the Gateway transit center — in which Mueller's property lies.

In the heart of the state-designated transit village, the Easton-Somerset area — which was designated in need of redevelopment in 1991 and subsequently developed into the Easton Avenue Apartments — was expanded in 2005 to include an additional block on Somerset Street where several retail businesses currently lie.

"Any person that has reasonable common sense would see that the property is underutilized," said New Brunswick Mayor James A. Cahill.

The council approved the expansion later in 2005, affirming the site meets state requirements for condemnation.

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Gateway: Businesses fight redevelopment

continued from front

The requirements include buildings that are unsafe or dilapidated, land that is underutilized and areas where the designation is "consistent with smart growth planning principles."

The amendment introduced last night updates the original redevelopment plan from 1991 to reflect the expanded area.

The plan puts a 350-foot cap on the height of any construction. It also mandates building step-backs of 50 feet to provide for the "perception of a lower scale building from the streetscape."

The consideration is meant to prevent overwhelming nearby St. Peter's Church — which won't be affected by the redevelopment area.

The amendment also proposes traffic improvements in the area, including increasing the turn radius at the intersection of Easton Avenue and Somerset Street, enhancing pedestrian crosswalks, creating taxi stands and designating "kiss 'n ride" drop-off areas on each side of the area.

Now that the Council has approved the plan, the city Housing Authority will designate a developer for the site, which will presumably be the New Brunswick Development Corporation that introduced the Gateway proposal along with the city and the University.

Devco's proposal calls for a 600,000 square-foot building on the 1.12-acre plot. It would

include a 500-space parking lot, 200 residential units and the University bookstore in addition to a connection to the train station platform.

"Our vision is that you'd be able to get off the train, walk down to College Avenue and catch a bus to the Douglass campus, all very easily," Devco President Christopher Paladino said in January.

Fighting the designation of their property, two businesses in the redevelopment area — New Jersey Books and Victory Taxi — have filed suit to fight the relocation.

Thom Ammirato, a spokesman for Mueller, said their effort isn't thwarted by last night's development.

'We would not want
to see New Jersey
Books go anywhere
but New Brunswick.'

James A. Cahill
New Brunswick Mayor

"We're not surprised the town continues to move forward with their plans while ignoring the property rights of the individuals involved," Ammirato said. "We feel confident that when we get in front of a judge

we'll succeed."

He added that Mueller received a request for informal settlement discussions with Devco, but they haven't progressed.

Although a court date has not been set to hear the complaint, Ammirato said the companies were pushing for a March hearing.

Cahill said that he still values Mueller as a city businessman.

"We would not want to see New Jersey Books go anywhere but New Brunswick," he said. "They should look at this as an opportunity — we're asking them to help the city."

A public hearing and final vote on the redevelopment plan amendment will be held March 1st the next city council meeting.