

Students shouldn't feel targetted – F'ton Mayor

K Brookland

The Brunswickan

Fredericton Mayor A.M. (Sandy) DiGiacinto denies the Southeast Hill Secondary Plan Memorandum (SHSPM) targets students, saying "That is not correct."

DiGiacinto said one of the problems is "the university does not have enough accommodations for students. There is a crunch in Fredericton's housing. We want more housing - more units."

The Mayor continued, saying there is a new apartment building going up by Bishop's Drive and "there is a rezoning planned for Church Street, which is close to the university."

He pointed out that "the university has not built student accommodations for a long time."

DiGiacinto said he is concerned about student housing, so much so that, despite a resolution being passed last week, the process has been postponed to give the city an opportunity to talk to the University/City Subcommittee on Housing this week. "There might not be any changes but there must be consultation," said DiGiacinto.

When asked why basement apartments are the focus of the SHSPM, DiGiacinto responded, "Basement apartments are not the focus. The focus is on too many unrelated tenants occupying apartments...there is an overflow problem. This is not only a student problem."

Another factor which concerns the Mayor: "We do not want all the apartments near the university to be owned by absentee landlords. It just downgrades the whole area."

The SHSPM reads "The issue in the Southeast Hill is that economic realities have made the properties desirable to purchase and utilize as income properties through renting out the units, which has resulted in a change in the nature of their neighbourhood." When asked if this statement didn't appear classist, DiGiacinto said, "It's not classist. It's a fact of life. The nature of the neighbourhoods has changed."

Asked if it appears the property owners are being dictated to as well, DiGiacinto said the City is

going to "wait to see what kind of reaction we're going to get. The public will be given an opportunity to speak. When there is a first and second reading, we will hear objections. Then, by the third reading, objections may be made before it is passed."

Another recommendation made by the SHSPM is there not be multiple people housed in the same bedroom. As many students do share bedrooms to cut down on their cost of living, this could be problematic.

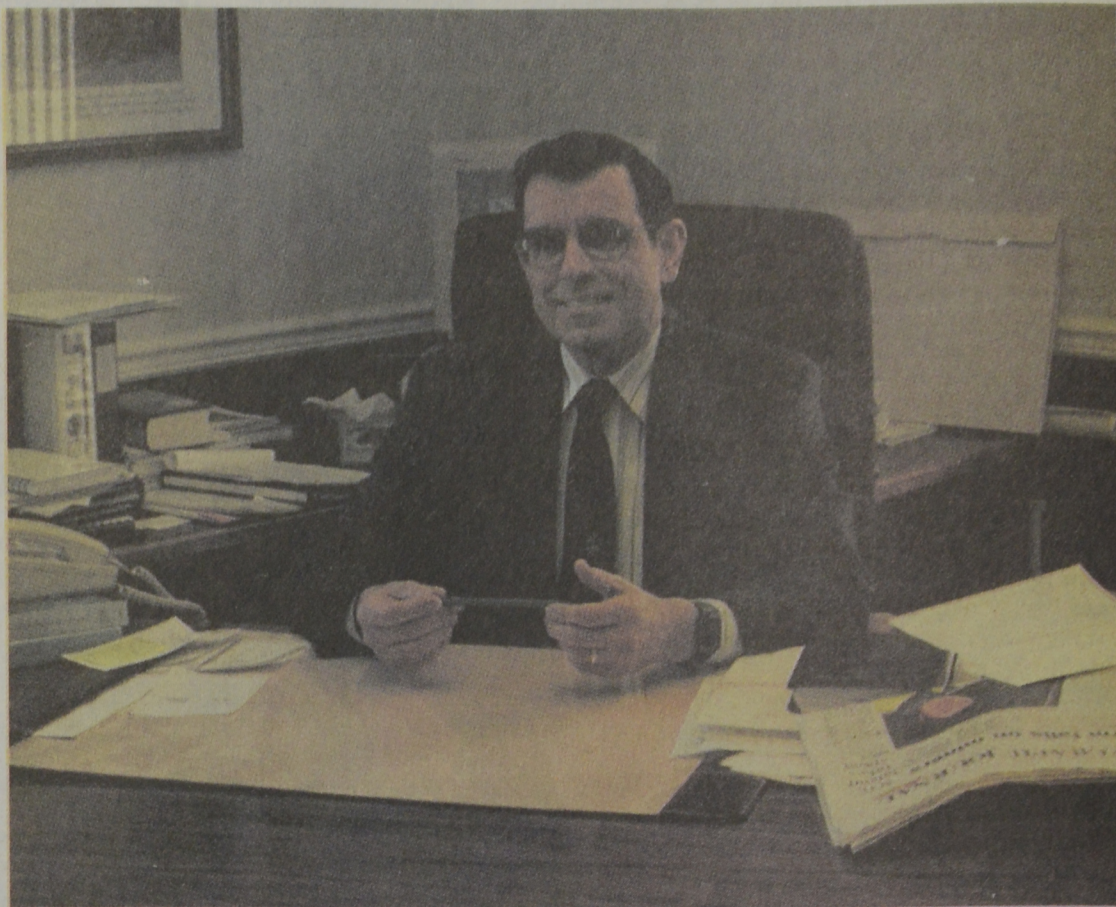
DiGiacinto says there are already restrictions on the numbers in place. Most zones permit 75 square metres or 75 percent of the upstairs unit for basement apartments, whichever is less. Another restriction is that only three unrelated people may live in a basement unit and four unrelated people can live in the upstairs unit.

The mayor added, however, that "two new regulations are proposed. One is that there be a maximum of two bedrooms in a basement unit and that each bedroom not exceed 15 square metres." He also said the basement unit must be secondary to the key unit.

When asked if it did not occur to City Council that the reason students and other low income people have to double up in bedrooms is because the rents in Fredericton are exceptionally high, DiGiacinto responded, "Money is always a problem - not with just students but with everyone."

"Council and staff have been meeting with developers and encouraging them to build. We do not want to get into the situation where rents go totally out of sight. We're second highest after Halifax [in rental rates] in the Atlantic area."

The SHSPM also discussed the plans which are being recommended to study "shortcutting," particularly in the Lisgar Street and Pederson Crescent area. Apparently people are using this area as a shortcut, causing traffic problems. DiGiacinto said "This is not a student issue; it's a traffic issue. If people in a residential area complain about shortcutting, we look at putting 'calming' in place." (An example of 'calming' is around St. John and Charlotte Streets, where a traffic circle



Kevin Forneris / The Brunswickan

Fredericton's Mayor Sandy DiGiacinto explained proposed changes to occupancy rules for apartments are not designed to single out students looking for housing.

was put in place.)

DiGiacinto was asked why there was no mention of the SHSPM and its recommendations in his press release announcing his intention to run for Mayor again. The Mayor said "The press release was a generalized statement and this is a particular issue. Quite frankly I thought the City has been working very well, in that all the interest groups have been pulling together."

He went on to say "We are working closer with the university than we ever have. There have been no great achievements yet but we are trying to make things better. Students are welcome here. The university is an integral part of Fredericton."

Councillor David Kelly is on the SHSPM Steering Committee. When asked if Kelly would abstain from voting on the committee's recommendations, to avoid

a perception of conflict, DiGiacinto responded, "Why? A Councillor is there as a Councillor. There are Councillors on the Planning and Advisory Committee (PAC). On a number of occasions when I was on the PAC, I'd vote one way, but on Council, I voted another. The perception [of conflict] may be there, but it is unfounded."

DiGiacinto concluded, "There is more to the students in Fredericton than this [issue]. We want to keep as many of our graduates here as we can. We want to provide jobs for our young people. It can only be done with the cooperation of the university - it's an extremely important part of the city. I'm on the Board of Governors of UNB because I feel it's an obligation to bring the city's perspective to the table - and to show that the city's senior officer is interested."

Somerville House – continued from page 1

Row from the province.

In return, the provincial government acquired Somerville House from UNB.

O'Brien also noted that UNB had an opportunity to participate in the recent call for expressions of interest in the provincially-owned property. "I don't even know whether they [UNB] tabled an expression of interest or not," he said.

"I can only assume that they didn't, or if they did, the review committee recommended our proposal to government as the preferred proposal," O'Brien emphasized.

Meanwhile, UNB's Associate Vice-President Campus Services and Planning, Michael Ryan, told *The Brunswickan* earlier this week that UNB has sent a letter to the province indicating interest in Somerville House. "We were a little late in getting our response in to the call for expressions of interest," Ryan said.

"Whether that has affected our standing I don't know."

"We did write the province and say if they are looking at options with respect to this house we'd like to record the fact that we'd like to be among those that the province would speak to," Ryan emphasized.

Ryan said UNB's curiosity about Somerville House was piqued several years ago when it became known that the province's Lieutenant-Governor would be moving to new quarters at Old Government House on the Woodstock Road in Fredericton.

"At that time we made informal inquiries to the province, but they were not really clear about it," Ryan maintained.

"In that sense, UNB was in the door well before the April 2000 call for expressions of interest."

If UNB were ever to acquire the property, Ryan said the university always has difficulty responding to new

university-related initiatives that require additional space. "Right now if space were available we might be able to temporarily accommodate the new National Research Council staff when they first come to town and before their proposed new building on campus is ready," he said.

Ryan remained unsure what UNB's reaction would be if STU acquired or leased Somerville House and property, especially given its historic ties to the university.

Ryan said he has not discussed the issue with UNB's Properties Committee.



Mike Cormier / The Brunswickan

How much wood could a woodpecker peck if a woodpecker could peck...wait a minute - he is pecking wood.

Tibbits collecting for local Shelter and Community Kitchen

Gordon Loane

The Brunswickan

For the fifth straight year, student residents of Tibbits Hall on the UNB Fredericton campus, are collecting items for the Fredericton Community Kitchen and the Fredericton Emergency Shelter.

The student residents have asked members of the community to donate non-perishable food items, health care products, household cleaners, and sports equipment (especially indoor soccer balls) for the Shelter and Kitchen.

Donations can be dropped off until tomorrow, February 3rd, in the lobby of the SUB on Pacey Drive or at the entrance of Tibbits Hall (located behind Joy Kidd

House on the uphill parking lot off MacKay Drive on campus.)

Tomorrow, between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. students will be conducting their door-to-door campaign at homes in the areas bounded by Priestman, Smythe, King's College and Regent Streets.

The Tibbits residents noted that the Community Kitchen feeds over 100 people daily, the Emergency Shelter houses an average of 28 people nightly, and the demand for both services is even greater during the winter months.

For further information, please contact Shannon Brander at 450-6775 or Brooke Morgan at 450-6776.

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