

New Brunswick revitalization plan unveiled

By CHARLES OLIVER
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NEW BRUNSWICK — A proposed \$150 million revitalization plan for the city's business district — a model project because it is a joint effort of both the private and public sector here — was introduced yesterday.

The ultimate plan, which is years away from the necessary financing and city approvals, could create through proposed additional office and retail space as many as 5,000 new jobs and as much as \$25 million annually in additional retail sales in the city, its backers said.

International architect and urban planner I.M. Pei of New York presented his outline for the revitalization as the first step in an overall community renewal here at a press conference at the Holiday Inn, Route 1, North Brunswick.

Pei was commissioned to make the study by New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT), a non-profit private organization made up of a board of directors of 24 men and women who represent a spectrum of life in the city that includes city and county government representatives and ethnic and minority groups. Also included in NBT is the New Brunswick Development Corp., the private agency's own implementation arm for financing, constructing and managing the plan if NBT approves it.

The plan as outlined yesterday describes the scope of land-use in redevelopment for the downtown area, calling for commercial office building construction, revitalized retail activity, a new in-town residential community, better traffic circulation and more parking.

It is projected that the proposal, at completion, would generate additional tax dollars and by doing so lessen the property tax burdens on home owners here.

But John F. Heldrick, chairman of New Brunswick Tomorrow and vice president

of corporate administration for Johnson and Johnson, one of the initial business backers of revitalization plans for the city, warned yesterday that further delays in extension plans for Route 18 and the proposed Raritan River Bridge crossing could jeopardize the existence of both organizations and the revitalization plans.

Heldrick said that if permission is not granted for the spur, "it's going to cause a serious in-depth appraisal of our plans and our dreams as we have them today."

Last month the Department of Transportation in Washington called for further study on the 15-year-old plans, further delaying the proposal.

Pei described Route 18 as "vital" to the future of the city and a key factor in creating rational traffic patterns for the central business district. The plan proposed a southbound exit ramp to the central business district and minor ramp changes at Albany Street to provide continuity to one of the downtown traffic loops proposed in the Pei blueprint.

In addition to two traffic loops to redistribute vehicles by intercepting the radial streets leading to downtown and a 200-room hotel for South Albany Street, the Pei plan called for:

— The construction of four new office buildings in the Commercial Plaza section, a two block, 8.5 acre development area in the southeast corner of the downtown core that was cleared in the 1960's under urban renewal.

Of the estimated total of 525,000 square feet of space that will be available, it is anticipated that construction on the first building, a five-story structure on George Street with 125,000 square feet of office space, will begin this summer.

— The revitalization of George Street and the Railroad Plaza, by de-emphasizing vehicular traffic, enhancing bus transit, and allowing more space for the pedestrian.

By narrowing George Street, the additional footage on each side could be used for planting trees, adding benches and fountains, Pei said.

— Transforming Albany Street into any "intimate pedestrian environment" by maintaining the existence of low scale buildings rather than a large office complexes and transforming it into a tree-lined boulevard.

— Constructing new housing in the 10 acre Hiram Market area of the downtown business district bounded by Neilson, Church and Richmond Streets, by either adding 375 units in clusters of townhouses or row houses of five stories, or if required by economic factors, adding a maximum of 650 units by combining townhouses with "other unique concepts." Two parking levels would exist below.

Pei told reporters yesterday that he was confident the plan would be implemented and could be implemented immediately if funding were available.

David Nesbitt, president of the New Brunswick Development Corp., said the key to the concept was "simultaneous development (of all city needs) at a scale that makes sense for New Brunswick."

Although it could take longer, Nesbitt said he was optimistic that the improvements could begin in five years.

He said a significant feature of the concept was that it is "beginning to create a process that can be duplicated elsewhere in the country."

Abraham Wallach, the full-time president of New Brunswick Tomorrow, reported that the strategy will be to draw upon all community resources in financing the program, including innovative financing techniques, the private sector, public bond issues, attracting developers and efforts to obtain state and federal funding in neighborhood preservation.

The organization, in addition to economic development in the city, has been working with other agencies to develop action

plans for neighborhoods.

A series of public meetings in the six wards of the city will be scheduled to allow merchants, businessmen and residents to voice their opinions on the plan before NBT votes on it.

In addition, separate meetings have been set up with city and county officials and merchants.

Plans are also being formulated to assist the relocation of any business or resi-

dents displaced by development activities downtown.

The full effort for revitalization of the city began only a year and a half ago when the American City Corporation outlined a comprehensive planning and action process for renewal of the city at the request of a sponsor study group in the city.

A fundamental concept of the study that began NBT on its present course was that

"neither the private sector nor government alone can provide all the resources needed for a comprehensive revitalization program . . . the community development process works best when it is a joint venture of willing partners committed to comprehensive set of goals, supported both public and private investments."

Funding for NBT has come from over million in pledges from organizations and businesses.



NEW BRUNSWICK PLAN — Artist's model depicts future appearance of downtown New Brunswick business district under revitalization plan proposed by I.M. Pei & Partners, internationally known architects and urban planners. Memorial Parkway (Route 18) and Raritan River are depicted at bottom; New Street is at left; and Albany Street is at right.

Parkway defends insurance