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April 27, 2009

Imagine the Possibilities

--Community Initiative Plans Long-Term Vision for Saint John Region--

Saint John, NB—“**Imagine the Possibilities**”, an event held on Friday, April 24 and Saturday, April 25, brought together over 100 community stakeholders from Grand Bay-Westfield, Quispamsis, Rothesay, St. Martins, Saint John, Hampton and the area Local Service Districts to discuss a long-term vision for the future of the community.

The event was hosted by the Mayors of the Saint John region and organized by Enterprise Saint John with a goal of imagining what the Saint John region of tomorrow could become through a collaborative approach to priority-setting and planning. The discussion included comments and ideas from a wide range of community stakeholders in the business, labour, social, cultural and environmental sectors as well as youth leaders.

The event featured remarks from Dave Hardy, Principal Consultant with Hardy Stevenson and Associates, who became familiar with the community and its opportunities for progress through his involvement with the Benefits Blueprint initiative. Mr. Hardy spoke to the potential of significant changes in the community, including moving rail lines to create a trail system, reclaiming Marsh Creek for the development of green space and an urban village, connecting Saint John to the Fundy Trail, growing the ICT, tourism, and knowledge sectors, and increased activity at the Port, and addressing the needs of priority communities to end the cycle of poverty.

“Other places in North America are struggling in the face of a global recession yet here in our region we are still planning for a period of extended, transformative growth,” said Mayor Grace Losier of Grand Bay-Westfield, who chaired the event. “We have a unique opportunity. We can shape that growth to directly influence the evolution of a truly sustainable community. We heard a lot of interesting and even provocative ideas about how we can do just that.”

A few clear themes emerged during the course of the discussion according to Mayor Losier.

Regional cooperation – the need for cooperation going beyond government that allows individuals and communities to work together with a shared vision and common purpose.

Regional planning (particularly transportation) – the need to examine our region’s overall planning approach, with a particular emphasis on the importance of transportation and related infrastructure.

Fostering knowledge and innovation – the recognition that we must focus our efforts on building an economy and society grounded in knowledge and innovation. That means both attracting and creating the human capital needed to spark growth, establishing advanced clusters in areas like health sciences, ICT and energy.

Supporting catalyst projects – underlying all of this is a recognition that, with a sense of urgency, the community must come together to demonstrate its support for the major investments that will serve as catalysts for additional growth. In a tough global economy, the community must

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do its part to support projects by companies that share local values and reflect local priorities. Similarly, there are a number of major community infrastructure projects that are proposed or underway today that are of considerable importance to the long-term vitality and quality of life of the region.

“Creating and executing a long-term vision for the Saint John region requires the efforts of many people,” noted Mayor Losier. “It’s much bigger than what local government can do alone. We may not all agree on the details just yet, but we should all agree on the need to work together to enhance the Community we share.”

Participants in the event and other members of the Community will be asked to sign a Declaration of Support to work together in the months and years to come.

Notes from the event and other information can now be found at www.saintjohnlifeonyourterms.ca. Members of the public can also get engaged in the process through the web site.

A real-time micro-blogging account of the event can be found on Twitter. Search #ImagineSJ.

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