

# THE MAYOR'S STATE OF THE CITY

**Saint John Mayor Don Darling will be giving his first State of the City address on Thursday morning. From the chamber of commerce to a literacy organization, here's what some Saint Johners want to hear in the speech**



Saint John Mayor Don Darling will give his first state of the city address on Thursday morning, hosted by the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce.

PHOTO: SARAH PETZ/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



### **David Duplisea CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce**

How will Mayor Darling exactly move forward with his growth agenda? That's the big question David Duplisea, CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, hopes to hear

an answer to Thursday. "How are we going to keep Saint John competitive particularly with the tax rate?" he said. "How are we going to attract people and retain here? And how are we going to bring all our economic development agencies [together] so we're all rowing in the same direction towards a common goal?" Over the last year, Duplisea says there's been a variety of city plans rolled out – including for transportation and recreation – but he's interested in finding out how all these plans will fit together to create an overall growth strategy for the city. At the same time, Duplisea says the chamber remains concerned about the financial picture for both the city and the province. "We can't run deficits and we need to find new revenue streams," he said.

### **Erin Schryer Executive director of Elementary Literacy Inc.**

For Erin Schryer, who heads up the non-profit Elementary Literacy Inc., she'd like to see the city recognize its volunteers more often. Her reading program runs on volunteers that devote their time and talent to helping students in Anglophone schools across New Brunswick. "Saint John has a tremendous amount of volunteers who doing a lot of work and if they had to be compensated, it'd be very expensive," said Schryer, who serves as the organization's executive director. "The value that [volunteers] bring – recognizing that where they can – the city could support it financially." She says the city recently supported a recognition event for Elementary Literacy volunteers – an event that her non-profit didn't have the budget for. "We look for municipal leaders to help us with that and the city stepped up no questions asked, really, so that was a great foray into that and I'm sure there are other examples where the city could organizations like mine and others recognize the value of volunteers."

### **Sheila Henry President of the Saint John Real Estate Board**

Henry indicated that she hopes mayor Darling will help spread the message that Saint John is a great place to come and live during a time when home prices within the city are inexpensive in comparison to other cities of similar size across the country. On where she would like to see improvement, Henry mentioned former Enterprise Saint John CEO Steve Carson, who is leaving ESJ to take over the real estate file for the city this fall, as someone she hopes to help better integrate the real estate sector and the city of Saint John in the future to help develop the city, fill some of the vacant properties and expand the tax base the way Grow Saint John has lauded in the past. "We'd love to see us being more involved with co-operation with the city for things like planning, development, zoning, just a sharing of ideas between us, because obviously we

sell houses but we have a great background on all sorts of areas of the city where improvements could come and zoning that could be more popular than others," she said.

### **Donna Gates Executive director of Living SJ**

Gates said she's been inspired by the mayor during some of his past speaking engagements, listening to his plans to make "big bold" moves in the Port City with respect to improving the poverty issue, which she calls, "an incredibly important issue." Similar to Henry, she said she hopes further integration will become possible in the future and that working through the Central Peninsula Community Action Plan, more emphasis will be put on mixed-income opportunities in neighbourhoods to help bolster the city in the future. "What we need to see as a community are the conditions that allow for that to happen, whether that's through zoning or development guidelines, we need to see as a community in order for us to achieve growth and vibrancy, mixed income neighbourhoods need to happen," she said. "That's what I want to see language around is the idea that growth and prosperity have to be linked to the idea of creating spaces for everyone."