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PRINCE GEORGE FREE PRESS

**Mayor pledges major changes coming**

By Arthur Williams - Prince George Free Press

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Mayor Dan Rogers has pledged to make noticeable improvements to the downtown core by the end of the current council's three-year mandate.

Rogers was speaking at a luncheon hosted by Downtown Prince George last month when he made the pledge to show year-over-year improvements to the area.

"Downtown and downtown revitalization is a priority for the new city council and myself," Rogers said. "We will look back a year from now and talk about the improvements made."

The poor condition of the downtown is limiting the city's economic potential, he said. The decrepit state of the downtown core deters potential investors.

"Everyone in Prince George has a stake in downtown," Roger said. "This is, in my mind, a crucial time in Prince George."

The current and previous city council's have created tax incentives for building owners, reduced development cost charges in the downtown area, and sought funding to make improvements to Fourth Avenue, Rogers said.

"We're also looking at a district energy system. I'm optimistic you'll be hearing more about that in the weeks to come," Rogers said. "We've made downtown a priority for snow clearing and street sweeping."

The mayor's downtown task force will likely present its report to city council this summer with a list of recommendations for further action, he said. In addition, the Smart Growth on the Ground planning charette is scheduled for next week.

"We're putting grease to the wheel, not reinventing the wheel. We're planning our recommendations to coordinate with Smart Growth on the Ground," he said. "We have an infrastructure working group looking at improvements to lighting and streetscapes."

A social working group is focusing on the social service providers in downtown and housing issue. A cultural working group is focusing on attracting cultural venues downtown.

The plan will set out timelines and identify who is responsible to meet them, Rogers added.

However, any improvements to downtown will require the partnership and buy in of downtown business owners and stakeholders.

"The knowledge and ability to go forward will depend on the people in this room," he said. "We want to hear from the community. Clearly we will not deal with any of our issues without partnership."

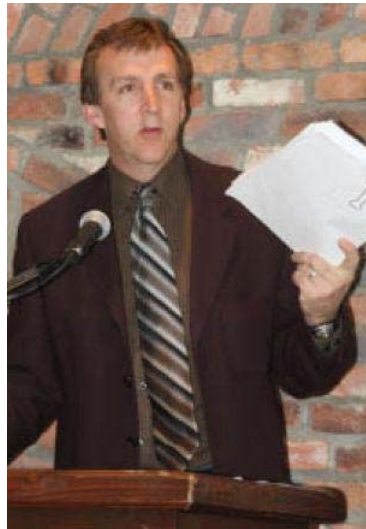
Prince George RCMP Supt. Brenda Butterworth-Carr said the RCMP have dedicated two officers per shift to patrol the downtown since late April. The officers patrol in teams on foot or bike, she said.

"This is based on a successful Vancouver City Police plan," Butterworth-Carr said.

The officers will meet with business owners and gather information about criminal activity in the downtown area, she said, as well as be a visible presence.

In addition, the detachment will look at developing a local Web site to provide information about police initiatives and receive information, she said.

"I've heard loud and clear the concerns of the business community. The biggest challenge now is to have



Arthur WILLIAMS/Free Press Mayor Dan Rogers holds a summary of previous, unsuccessful downtown initiatives. du

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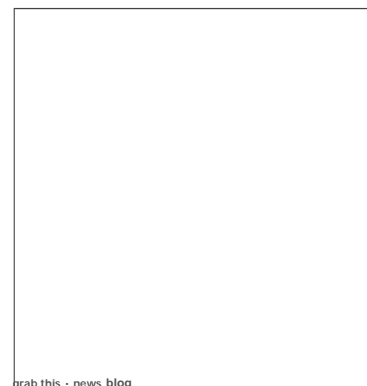
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