



“Towards a Greater Geary”

**Community priorities for
Geary and surrounding areas, including
French Lake, Haneytown and Waterville, NB**

**Report of the first Greater Geary Association “Meet and Greet”
April 17, 2008**

Prepared by the Greater Geary Association, May 2008

“Towards a Greater Geary”
Produced by the Greater Geary Association
May 2008

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Photo credits:
Oromocto River Watershed Association (cover)
Geary Elementary School website (school and gym photos)

Executive Summary

On April 17th, the first ever Greater Geary Association “Meet and Greet” was held at the Geary Elementary School. The purpose of this event was to bring together community-minded individuals to discuss issues of mutual concern in the communities of Greater Geary: Geary, French Lake, Haneytown and Waterville – a population of approximately 3000 citizens. The event was a great success, with 40 people in attendance, many of whom are community leaders and volunteers.

The message was clear: there are many unmet needs in the communities of Greater Geary and these issues must be brought to the attention of the Government of New Brunswick. The majority of these issues fall under provincial jurisdiction, therefore they are provincial responsibility. However, these issues require local input, which has been lacking due to the absence of a local government. These issues, as detailed by the 40 attendees to the “Meet and Greet” are:

- **A new gymnasium for the Geary Elementary School**
- **More recreation opportunities for people in Greater Geary**
- **Improving community safety**
- **More family doctors**
- **An assisted living seniors complex**
- **A local "first responders" or volunteer firefighting group**
- **Access to transportation**
- **More post secondary education opportunities**

The Greater Geary Association will work with provincial officials to ensure these community issues are addressed in a timely manner.

“Together, we can make a Greater Geary”

Introduction

On April 17th, the first ever Greater Geary Association "Meet and Greet" was held at the Geary Elementary School. The purpose of this event was to bring together community-minded individuals to discuss issues of mutual concern in the communities of Greater Geary: Geary, French Lake, Haneytown and Waterville. The event was a great success, with 40 people in attendance, many of whom are community leaders and volunteers. This "Meet & Greet" represents the first major unifying community effort for many years, and is the first step towards addressing the major concerns of the area. This report outlines the major concerns and issues discussed by participants at the "Meet & Greet" and form the basis for the Greater Geary Association's agenda for 2008-2009.

Background

Many people in the Greater Geary area associate themselves with one of the four communities – Geary, French Lake, Haneytown and Waterville. Each community has a valuable history, and it is not the intent of the Greater Geary Association to diminish the association and pride people have with their community. The communities have a long history of working together – it is the intent to strengthen these ties under the united banner of the Greater Geary Association. The reality is that a united community of 3000 people carries weight – making Greater Geary bigger than organized communities such as Minto and Nackawic, bigger than Tracy and Fredericton Junction combined, and nearly half the size of the Town of Oromocto.

The concept for a "Greater Geary Association" took shape in mid-2007. Informal discussions with various community leaders and concerned citizens showed that there were many common issues in the community, but there lacked a common voice to identify priorities. In many communities, this common voice is in the form of a municipal government or advisory council, but neither exist in the Greater Geary area. These forms of local government have generally met opposition due to concern about higher property taxes. During these informal discussions, one common theme was evident: the major issues described were primarily the responsibility of the provincial government and there was no evidence that the Province was taking steps to address them. It was also evident that provincial rural property tax assessments were increasing significantly without any expansion in local service.

The most logical explanation for provincial inaction on major issues in the Greater Geary area is that many provincial officials simply do not know what the major issues are. A local organization is needed to seek accountability from provincial and elected officials on commitments to the citizens of Greater Geary. While many concerned citizens have made their opinions known over the years, the lack of a unified voice is clearly a major stumbling block. The Greater Geary Association aims to be that unifying voice. Through the "Meet & Greet", the Greater Geary Association took its first steps in becoming a formalized group to speak in support of the citizens of Greater Geary. A board of directors has since been organized, along with subcommittees to work on specific issues.

Statistics

Greater Geary is located south of Oromocto, bound by the Oromocto River to the West, and Base Gagetown to the East. It is located in Burton Parish (Figure 1), and even though there is no physical connection to the community of Burton, is considered part of the Burton Local Service District. The Parish of Burton has a population of just over 5000, of which 3000 is estimated to live in Greater Geary (Figure 2).

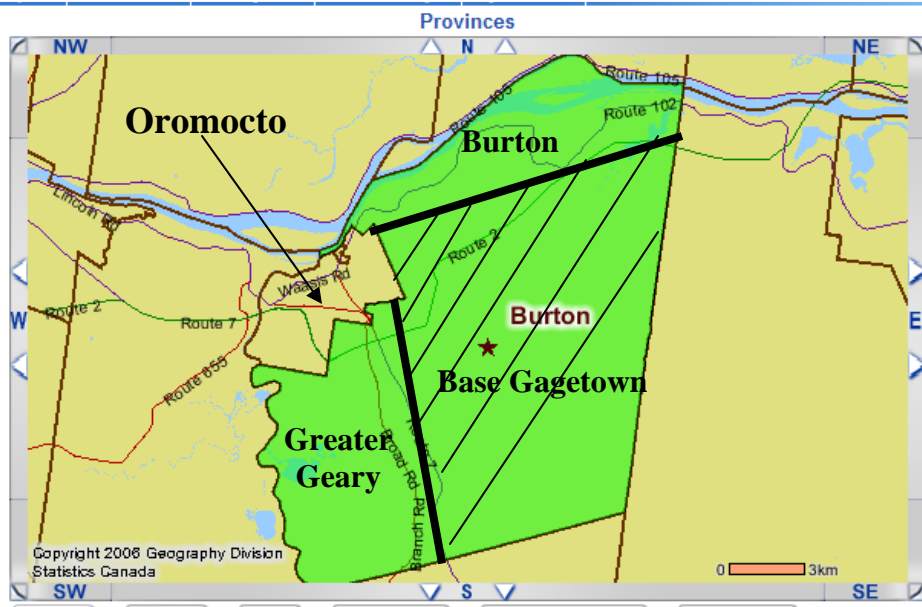


Figure 1: Map of Burton Parish LSD (in green) (Statistics Canada, 2008)



Figure 2: Satellite photograph of Greater Geary (Google Maps, 2008)

Population

Since Greater Geary has 60% of the population of Burton Parish, Statistics Canada census data for Burton Parish were extrapolated for Greater Geary:

- 555 people aged 15 or younger
- 411 people between 15 and 24
- 933 between 24 and 44
- 765 between 44 and 64
- 336 over the age of 65

In fact, Greater Geary has one of the youngest populations in New Brunswick.

Home construction in Greater Geary since 1986 has far outpaced housing construction province-wide. Statistics Canada figures for Burton Parish show nearly just as many homes were built between 1986 and 2006, than were built prior to 1986.

Economy

Even though Greater Geary has a population of 3000, there is only one store in the entire community – a convenience store/gas bar/pizza shop. This is likely a function of the proximity of the Town of Oromocto, which is a major employment and shopping centre for residents of Greater Geary. The City of Fredericton is 30 km away and has major shopping employment and shopping facilities as well. Only 5% of workers who live in Greater Geary work in the community, while 46% of New Brunswickers live in the same community they work in¹. While there are substantial commuters, the numerous trucking, contracting, and hauling businesses headquartered in Greater Geary, as well as local home-based businesses and a commercial fishery are important contributors to the local and provincial economies. One need for rural and home-based businesses is high-speed internet, which is not available in all areas of Greater Geary.

Greater Geary is a significant contributor to the provincial economy. Statistics Canada indicates it boasts a participation rate of 68.8% (the provincial rate is 63.7%) and an unemployment rate of only 5.7% (the provincial rate is 10%). Provincial figures for tax assessment show valuation of Burton Parish at approximately \$300 million in 2007, meaning a minimum of \$180 million in Greater Geary.

Yet, often overlooked in these figures is the poverty that exists in Greater Geary. The lack of affordable housing, in particular rental units, as well as the lack of provincial government services locally means the need for an automobile to access services, which can put a significant financial strain on those with low incomes. The lack of professional facilities, such as a commercial centre, limits the development of needed resources, including more family doctors, daycare spaces, government and financial services, and retail.

¹ Statistics Canada, 2006 Census

Major priorities arising from the "Meet & Greet"

Participants were asked to fill out a survey and identify the issues most important to them. These surveys were compiled into the following chart (Figure 3):

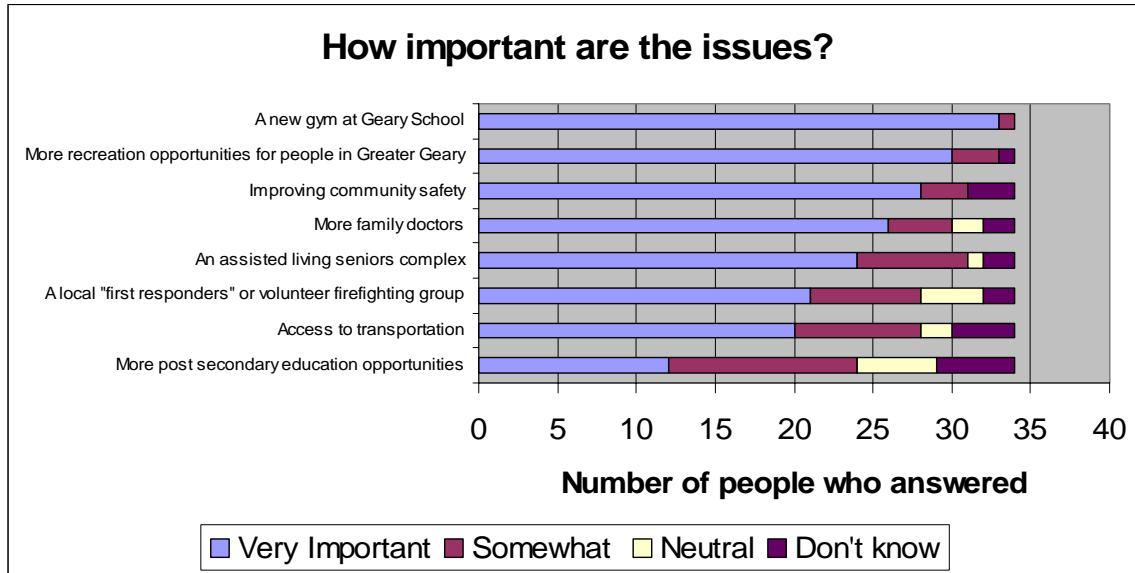


Figure 3: Survey summary

For "a new gym at the Geary School", 33 people indicated it was "Very Important" with one person saying it was "Somewhat Important". For "more recreation opportunities", 30 people said it was "Very Important", 3 said it was "Somewhat Important" and 1 did not answer. This was followed by "Improving Community Safety", "More Family Doctors", an "Assisted-living seniors' complex", a "local first responders group", "Access to Transportation", and "More post-secondary opportunities".

The following represents a summary of the discussion and comment on each of the top issues, ranked by those receiving the most number of "very important" ratings.

1. *The need for a gymnasium at the Geary Elementary School*

It was clear that the number one priority was getting a new gym for the Geary Elementary School. The Geary Elementary School has been at the heart of the community for over 50 years. Originally a grade 1-12 school, it was converted to its present state as an elementary school in the mid 1960's. It now has 160 students from K-5, a very active Home and School Association, and substantial community/school involvement. It is a major employer in the community.

The school's "Activity Room" has been functioning as gymnasium for over 50 years. Ceiling height is only 10 feet, and is not conducive for organized sports at any level. There has been significant community funding support for new playground equipment, however, the lack of a proper school gymnasium unfairly limits the physical education

opportunities for students. In addition, the school is not wheelchair accessible, meaning local children with disabilities cannot attend this school.

The gymnasium facilities at the Geary Elementary School pale in comparison to those schools such as Sunbury West School in Fredericton Junction, New Maryland Elementary, Coles Island School, and any elementary school in Oromocto. Currently, the District 17 Education Council has no additional funding to support the construction of this long awaited facility, therefore



Geary School's "Activity Room"

provincial government support is needed. In fact, both political parties committed to the construction of this facility during the last election.



Geary Elementary School

This new facility could be a showcase facility being available for both the school and surrounding community. The school is currently seeking designation as a "Community School", which would be a welcome opportunity by providing additional staff resources into developing community/school relations. The school upgrades could also

make it an excellent venue for extended or distance learning (hunters' safety courses, GED and community college courses, babysitting, etc).

2. More recreation opportunities for people in Greater Geary

Many in the meeting lamented the loss of recreation opportunities in the communities. At one time there was a very active recreation council that maintained multiple ballfields, which have since fallen in disrepair. Now, it is fairly common to see young people playing on the road, in ditches, or driving four wheelers on community roads. Recreation facilities and events are primarily in Oromocto, but it is not possible for all people to drive to these facilities. The main reason for the loss of these recreation opportunities is volunteer burnout. Volunteering had become for many a full-time job on top of their full-time job. There are now more provincial government programs that can assist community groups with funding, but have not been fully used by the Greater Geary area.

A new gym at the Geary School could be the anchor for a new community recreation council, as well as for various healthy living activities, such as fitness classes. A new gym could also be a cultural hub in the community, providing opportunities for the development of local talent (drama club, for example).

3. Improving community safety

The Greater Geary area is served by the RCMP out of Oromocto and the municipal fire services of Oromocto and Fredericton Junction. While there are Neighbourhood Watch programs in effect in the communities, it was not clear to participants whether these programs are currently active. There was consensus that there needs to be more enhanced patrolling by the RCMP, perhaps even inviting police officers to the community to make presentations on issues of public safety. There was considerable support for a local "first responders" group. This would include people trained in first aid/CPR, perhaps being local volunteer firefighters who could respond to an emergency in Greater Geary and be immediately on the scene until reinforcements arrive. It was also unclear whether the Greater Geary Area had an evacuation or emergency plan.

4. More family doctors

Many had concerns that more family doctors are needed, yet there are none set up in the Greater Geary area. A population of 3000 suggests that at least two doctors could set up practice in Greater Geary. The lack of a professional centre makes it difficult to attract these professionals. A local clinic could reduce the pressures on emergency facilities at the Oromocto Public Hospital, and the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital in Fredericton. A secondary benefit could be the establishment of a local pharmacy, making it easier for seniors and others to meet their medication needs.

Public health in the Greater Geary area is also a concern. Ensuring proper nutrition for young people, as well as for those who may be shut in (there was discussion about developing a "Meals on Wheels" program) is a priority. It is also not evident that there is any addictions counselling available locally, such as for alcohol, drugs or gambling addictions. In addition, a local social worker could help deal with various family and community issues. A community health centre or clinic could provide a focal point for these services, and is desperately needed in the community.

5. An assisted-living seniors complex

There are a growing number of seniors in rural areas. In a close-knit community like Greater Geary, maintaining close family connections is very important, yet seniors who may have mobility issues may have no choice but to move away from the community if wishing to downsize their home, or if assisted living is required. The development of an assisted-living seniors' complex in Greater Geary could allow seniors to remain close to family and friends, yet maintain aspects of independent living.

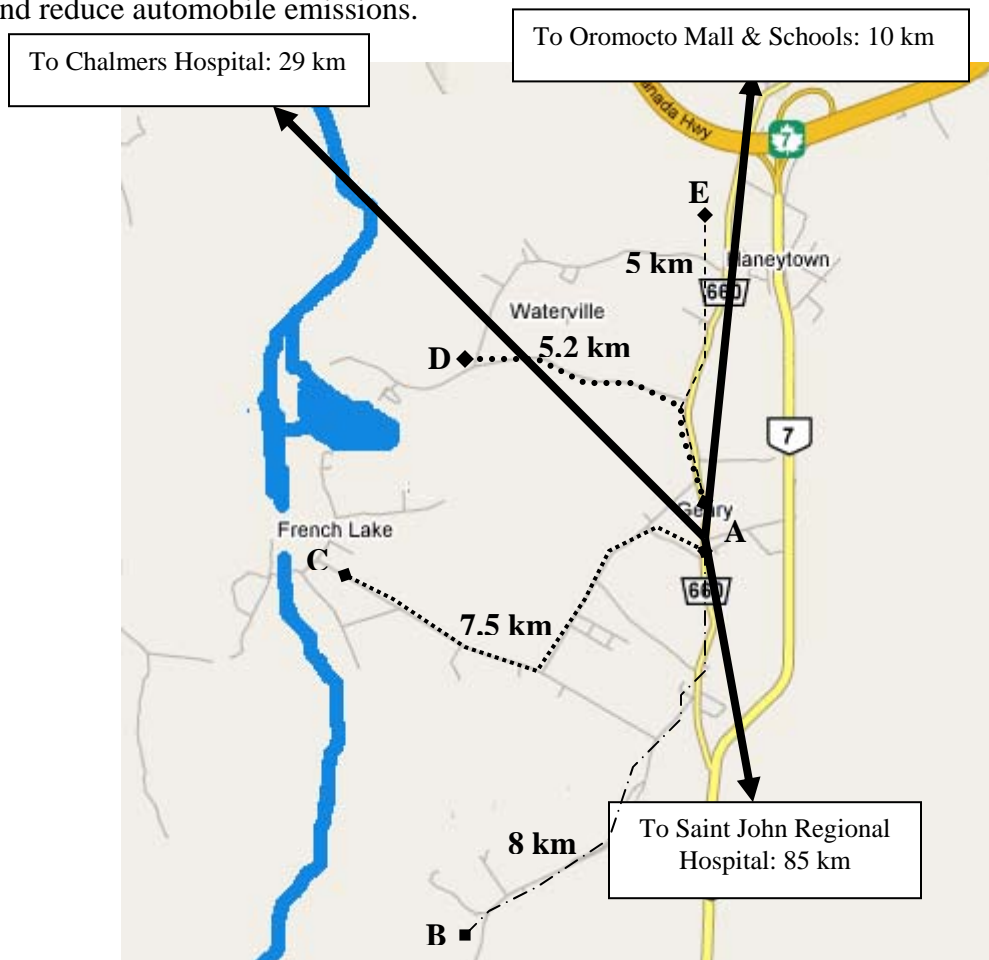
Throughout the discussion on the seniors' complex, there was recognition of the lack of adequate rental and low-income housing in the area in general. Given the desire for many to remain in the community, affordable housing alternatives need to be explored.

6. A local "first responders" or volunteer firefighting group
- Summarized in "Improving Community Safety"

7. Access to transportation

Many people in Greater Geary have unmet transportation needs. Unless one owns an automobile, or has friend or family they can count on for a drive, transportation is a huge burden. This typically impacts those with limited financial resources, those with disabilities, those who cannot drive legally (teenagers), and those who choose not to drive due to medical or safety reasons. Since there are no local professional, medical, recreational, or grocery facilities, Greater Geary residents must drive to Oromocto or Fredericton to access these facilities. Ironically, many others with significant medical issues must drive the furthest, approximately 1 hour, to Saint John (see figure below).

The Charlotte County Dial-a-ride concept was discussed and it was felt that a similar system would be worth investigating for the Greater Geary area. This Dial-a-ride is a non-profit, member-based organization providing rides to those who cannot afford to drive, or are unable to drive. In addition, given the high number of commuters, a park-n-ride system could reduce automobile usage, reduce parking demand in the urban centres, and reduce automobile emissions.



Note: Average distances taken from geometric centre of community at point 'A'— distances vary depending on actual location (For example: the over-the-road distance from A to C is 7.5 km)

By locating more services and facilities (educational, recreational, professional, governmental, and commercial) in Greater Geary, it reduces the transportation burden for residents and increases accessibility and safety.

8. More post secondary education opportunities

A recent study² of 2002 graduates from School District 17 (Oromocto and area) found that 49% of those who did not go onto post-secondary education (PSE) immediately following graduation (58 out of 205 students) were planning on going to college sometime in the future (compared to 17% for university). Of those who started PSE and left (26 students), 35% were planning on going to college (compared to 27% for university).

This study demonstrates there is a desire for technical trades training in the Greater Oromocto area, yet there is no community college trades training available to interested students. Students must travel to Saint John, Moncton, Miramichi or Woodstock for this training. In fact, when asked why they had not yet attended PSE, 44% of graduates said "Financial Issues" had a major impact on their decision, the highest percentage of all reasons. Clearly, the travelling distance to these centres of learning is a major barrier, especially for those looking to upgrade their education. While the availability of university training is excellent in the Greater Fredericton area, the lack of community college opportunities was recognized by many in attendance. It is not clear why someone can get a PhD in the Fredericton area, but cannot train to become a carpenter or plumber.

Other issues

There are other community issues as well that have been mentioned in the comment section of the survey. Certainly the lack of high-speed internet in areas of Greater Geary is an impediment to professionals who work from home, to those who have home-based businesses, and to those who need the convenience of the internet to conduct personal business, such as banking. Both major internet providers have not followed up on numerous calls from interested residents for service provision.

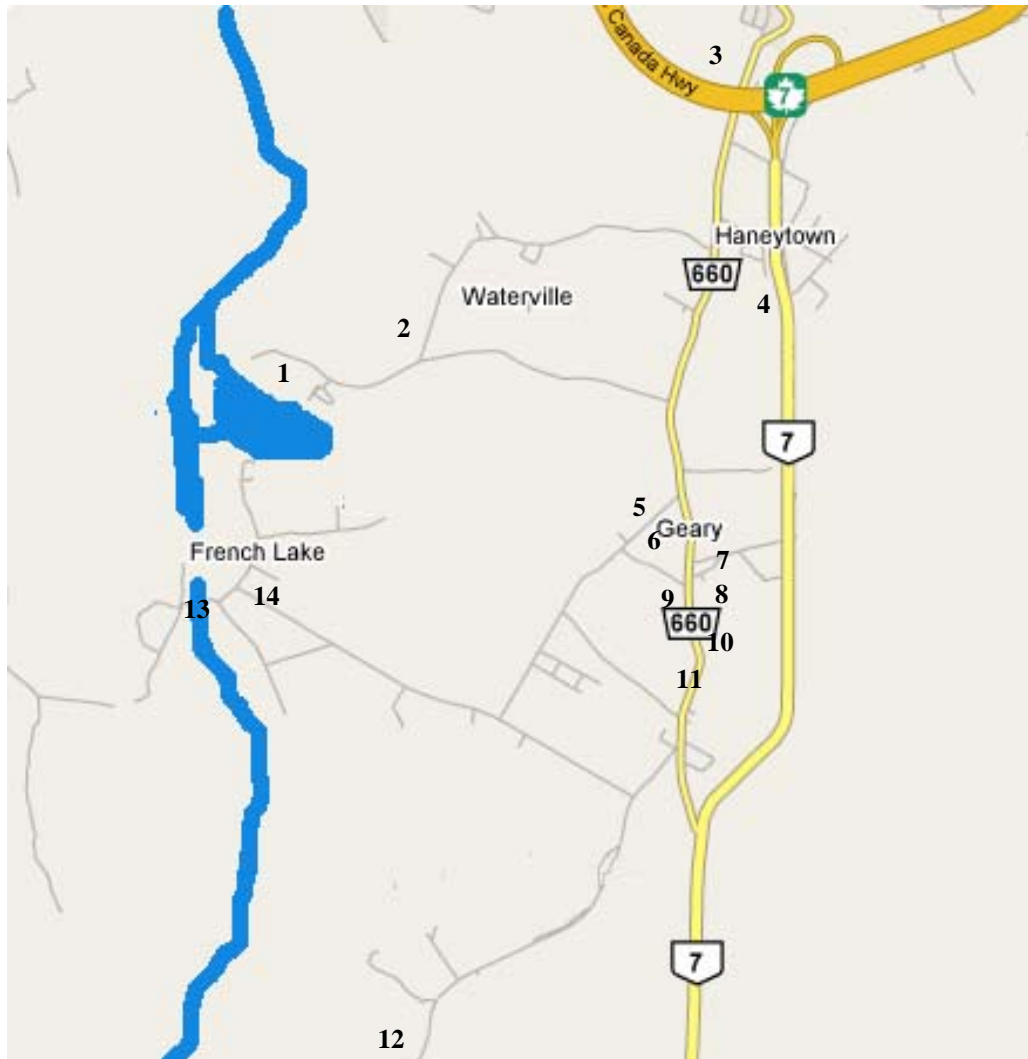
A community beautification and clean-up initiative also has merit, and was mentioned multiple times in the survey comments. This is worth investigating in more detail.

Conclusions

The message was clear: there are many unmet needs in the communities of Greater Geary and these issues must be brought to the attention of the Government of New Brunswick. The majority of these issues fall under provincial jurisdiction, therefore they are a provincial responsibility. However, these issues require local input, which has been lacking due to the absence of a local government. The Greater Geary Association will be working with provincial officials to ensure these issues are addressed in a timely manner. These issues must be addressed in a coordinated manner to ensure best opportunities for success.

² Survey of 2002 New Brunswick High School Graduates: School District 17. Prepared for the New Brunswick Department of Training and Employment Development and New Brunswick Department of Education by MarketQuest Research Group, April 2005.

Appendix A: Map of selected major facilities in Greater Geary (Educational, recreational, spiritual, commercial, government)



Legend

1. Sunbury-Oromocto Park & Campground (Ballfield nearby)
2. Waterville United Baptist Church
3. Sovereign Grace Baptist Church
4. Orchard's Geary Greenhouse
5. New Brunswick Department of Transportation Maintenance Facility
6. Geary Hill Riding Stables
7. United Pentecostal Church of Geary
8. Geary Elementary School (Ballfield nearby)
9. Geary Baptist Church
10. PetroCanada gas bar, convenience & Pizza Shack TM
11. Geary Lions Centre (Ballfield nearby)
12. Speedway 660 Raceway
13. Morrow Bridge (over the Oromocto River), boat launch, commercial fishery
14. French Lake Baptist Church

Appendix B: Summary of notes submitted by each discussion group

Group 1

Recreation and Education

Geary Gym was first discussed 52 years ago. There's a beautiful gym in Fredericton Junction, which has half the population of Greater Geary, plenty of after hours activity. Locals did not have a say in the original construction of the Geary School. Gym promised by both sides [political]. Could have sports for adults as well, and classroom opportunities after hours. What about a recreation director?

Health, safety and transportation

Need transportation for seniors. Need a study on community health centre. Courses could be offered by St. John Ambulance, perhaps water safety courses. The New Road needs to be fixed at junction of French Lake Road. What about a bus from community to community. Liked the concept of a dial-a-ride. Should have a local professional centre or mini-mall.

Group 2

Recreation – need a skating rink, baseball. Local sports to promote local pride. Utilizing local facilities, like the Oromocto River, boating, fishing, swimming. Gym – have a fundraiser within community? Create activities that bring and reflect community interest – be doers. Be proactive

Health – A senior citizen complex and clinic. In-thing, generally available.

Safety – Sidewalks on the Broad Road. Neighbourhood watch, coordinate with the RCMP.

Transport – coordinate a shuttle service to get seniors to services in town [Oromocto]

Group 3

Recreation – facility [needed]. Sports (get organized). Walking trail, ball fields

Challenges - need volunteers, funding – where to start?

Education – Upgrade the [Geary] school. Urgent: gym facility. Wheelchair accessibility to gym. Support community college in our area.

Health & safety. Occasional seminars on health issues that will encourage community wellness. Encourage more family doctors. Is there a need for meals on wheels? Relates to recreational facility. Local first responders [needed]. Transportation [needed] for seniors, single parents, low income. Dial a drive. Low income housing [needed]

Group 4

Recreation & Education

Our gym – something with a stage for more cultured activities eg. Drama, dance, sports. A place for our seniors to come and have exercise and games. It would be nice to have a place for our children to come and enjoy themselves with their peers. Teen Centre! Movie night, dances, organized sports, games night, Beavers, cubs, scouts, guides, brownies.

Health, Safety & Transport

[Need a place for] Hunters safety course, babysitting courses. Volunteer fire department first aiders. Bus service, Dial-a-ride for people who do not drive. All based on volunteers. Step-program. Children & safety in the home.

Commercial building central [to community] with day care facility, restaurant, barbershop, family councillor

Park & Ride

Issue: seniors that don't drive. Neighbourhood watch augmented. See signs, no news, notes or notices of meetings. Support groups meeting, local people talents and skills to share or offer. [Addressing issues with] gambling/alcohol. Parents.

Group 5

Greater Geary Association – should email Gary Wood Re: this association

New gym – community school designation. Facilitate and coordinate [activities]. Safety concerns –something for the youth to do. Could have access to [school] washrooms/phones. Library for all. Computer lab. Teach reading to seniors/all. Put a survey in every mailbox. Fitness classes. Baby sitting courses, hunter safety. A safe place where there is food on hand. Children that go hungry in our community go hungry. Apprenticeship programs. Is there a market for distance learning, community adult learning program – GED? Dial-a-ride. 3.5 years screening public health. If that were in place, no children would slip through the cracks. Bring public health to the school. Social workers at the school. These services should come to families. Partnerships – Oromocto Driving School, positive heart living, Additions learning, drugs. Increase awareness, ie. Kindergarten orientation. Peak time activities – 1. Movie Night , 2-swim night, 3-bowling night. Dial-a-ride [would help]. Neighbourhood watch. Seminars on health issues, community wellness, healthy foods, meals on Wheels, low income housing. Family doctors, senior citizen complex and clinic, sidewalks.

Group 6

Community school – use of school gym after hours. More active young people. A lot of use could be by seniors. [Avoid] having to travel to other communities. [Investigate] ITN (Independent transportation network). Park & go – park in Geary, get on bus, go to Oromocto and Fredericton. Bus also for seniors to get to and from Oromocto. Schedule their appointments around bus schedule. Meals on wheels/community kitchen/Lions Centre/school. [Need] seniors complex. First responders, first aid and fire. What about police service? Low income housing [needed]

Appendix C – Comments from individuals on returned surveys

- High speed internet [is needed]
- Community schools are important
- Perhaps an LSD may be an avenue to explore for the area
- Transportation for seniors
- Neighbourhood watch
- Community clean-up, beautification
- Geary is a great place to live!
- I love this community and the people who live here. We need more activities for our children to do and a place for them to go
- What a great idea. I am quite excited to be involved. Anything we can bring to our community is an advantage! Would love to see some addictions awareness
- Something needs to be done about the speed of 4-wheelers and snowmobiles speeding on the streets. Need street lights on corners, intersections
- Cut trees and clean grass in ditch. More sports for children
- A community gym would be wonderful for our children. Sidewalks, street lights, volunteer fire department. Rec council - would be nice to organize. Water supply, emergency evacuation - someone from each community
- A gym for the school, which the community would have access to use is top concern. Great community spirit and support!
- Road safety, sidewalks, street lighting. Clean up properties, plant trees, community day care, walking trails.

Appendix D: Attendee List* from Meet and Greet

Moderator: Trevor Hanson, Chair of Greater Geary Association

Provincial Government Representative: Jody Carr, MLA

Concerned citizens:

Wendy Barrieau

Theresa Bartlett-Chase

Jeannine Burchill

Edison Carr

Sharon A Carr

Weldon Carr

Polly Carr

Medley Carr

Wallace Carr

Rosalie Gass

Bertha Grasse

Wendy Greer

Darren Hanson

Robin Hanson

Joe Howe

Julia Howe

Lisa Howe

Leola Langille

Bonnie Lively

Shelby Mercer

Mark Noel

Elsie O'Neil

Tracy Roy

Mary Schriver

Mark Schriver

Vincent Smith

Judy Smith

David Smith

Beatrice Stevens

Marshalee Storey

Cecile Sundquist

Observers:

Jake Grandy

Crystal Hanson

Bonnie Worrall

*Official list - Some others attended and did not provide contact information