



The City of Saint John

Mayor Donna Noade Reardon
Mayor's Office/Bureau de la mairesse

Open Letter to the Saint John Community
April 9, 2025

Dear Residents and Community Partners,

Recent comments by the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce (April 7 news release by CEO Shannon Merrifield) have raised concerns and misunderstanding about Common Council's decision on the rezoning of the Wolastoq Park property. We write to clarify the facts and assure our community that Saint John Common Council remains committed to economic growth, responsible planning, and transparent decision-making. We value and welcome investment in our city, and we are equally committed to ensuring that every decision reflects both the short- and long-term interests of the entire community.

It is important to clarify that Council did not vote on J.D. Irving, Limited's (JDI) \$1.1 billion NextGen Project pulp mill expansion itself, which is proceeding at the company's existing mill site. The vote in question was to consider a zoning by-law amendment for company-owned land at Wolastoq Park – specifically, whether a section of green space could be rezoned into a 506-stall parking lot to support construction. Council approved "[Option 3](#)," allowing this use for up to five years, after which the zoning would revert to parkland unless further action is taken by the applicant.

This decision was a compromise; it supports JDI's temporary parking needs while protecting long-term green space. Council did not vote "no" to the project but rather supported its implementation with conditions that reflect a balance between development and community priorities.

This decision followed more than 10.5 hours of public hearings and stakeholder engagement, including consultation with the Planning Advisory Committee. Council carefully considered input from residents, planning staff, the applicant and business leaders. Many residents shared their concerns about environmental impact, traffic flow along Route 100 (Simms Corner), public safety and the loss of green space. Others voiced support, citing the benefits of the NextGen project to the local economy.

JDI co-CEO James Irving addressed Council directly during the April 3 public hearing and acknowledged that future zoning would likely require reapplication, depending on business needs at that time. "It's unfortunate that we've come to an uncomfortable situation on this project," Mr. Irving stated, adding that the company remained open to working with the City.

City staff recommended rejection of the permanent rezoning request, as it is inconsistent with Saint John's Municipal Plan. Council's choice of a time-limited option provided a balanced outcome that addressed the logistical needs of the company over the next five years, while preserving the long-term intent of the Municipal Plan.

Contrary to the Chamber's release, Council did not reject a confirmed financial commitment. There was

no firm dollar investment from JDI or the Province tied to Route 100 (Simms Corner) upgrades. Route 100 is a provincially designated highway, and future decisions about infrastructure investment or stakeholder contributions will rest with the Province of New Brunswick. Saint John taxpayers, through the City's transportation plan, MoveSJ, are already contributing \$3 million – the estimated cost of a roundabout at the intersection.

JDI offered to advocate for provincial and federal funding, a welcomed gesture, but not a confirmed investment.

The Chamber's reference to "\$2 million in community-driven proposals" misrepresents the facts. That figure was not proposed by the applicant. It was part of a motion by Councillor Harris during the public hearing, which did not receive a seconder and therefore was not considered or adopted by Council.

Council appreciated JDI's amended community benefit proposal, which included \$250,000 for upgrades to Dominion Park, \$250,000 to extend Harbour Passage, and up to \$3.9 million in enhancements to Wolastoq Park. These enhancements included pedestrian access for their workers to get to the mill, trail upgrades, and improvements to landscaping and structures. Under the approved temporary rezoning, these investments could still have been made.

Council fully supports Project NextGen and the tremendous opportunities it brings. As a \$1.1 billion private-sector investment, it will boost the regional and provincial economy, create hundreds of jobs, and support local businesses through increased activity and spending. The City has worked collaboratively with JDI since the project was announced, including at public open houses and during the planning review process.

Saint John's future has never been brighter, and our city is open for business. We welcome game-changing investments like JDI's NextGen project with open arms because they mean quality jobs, innovation, and growth for our community.

Council's role is to represent all Saint John residents, taxpayers, and landowners. While the Chamber speaks for the business community, Council must weigh broader considerations, including community impacts, land use planning, safety, transportation infrastructure, and the preservation of public spaces.

We have to strike the right balance between supporting big business and protecting the interests of our residents and taxpayers. Saint John can do both. We can embrace major investments while also standing up for due process, good planning, and what is fair to our citizens.

Council's decision to allow temporary rezoning with a five-year limit provides the flexibility needed to meet immediate workforce parking demands, while ensuring that future use of the land will be reviewed with the benefit of new information. Should JDI require the land beyond that period, a new application process will allow Council and the community to evaluate future needs openly and responsibly.

During the public hearing, Mr. Irving also acknowledged that future needs of the company could differ significantly and that a future rezoning request may be submitted based on business realities at that time. This approach provides clarity for both the company and the community moving forward.

Common Council remains committed to transparency, collaboration, and professional urban planning. I

am confident that the Wolastoq Park rezoning process, while lengthy and at times complex, reflected these values. Over the past several months, we followed a rigorous process, including public notices, two rounds of public hearings, a Planning Advisory Committee review, and detailed deliberation.

Saint John remains open for business and committed to thoughtful growth that benefits the entire community. The NextGen Project will bring long-term value to our city, and Council has made a decision that is principled, balanced, and future ready.

We thank the Chamber of Commerce and all participants in this process for their passion and input. Healthy debate is a sign of a healthy community. Moving forward, let's continue working together as business leaders, residents, and city officials to ensure Saint John's growth benefits everyone. Our door is always open to dialogue, and our policies will continue to reflect a city that is open for business, and open for living.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Noade Reardon', with a stylized, flowing script.

Mayor Donna Noade Reardon
on behalf of the City of Saint John Common Council

To view the entire Council Agenda and report, visit [Common Council - April 03, 2025](#)
To watch the meeting of April 3, 2025 live, visit [City of Saint John - YouTube](#)