

An aerial photograph showing a large-scale highway interchange and bridge expansion project. The bridge spans a wide river, with multiple lanes of traffic. The interchange features several overpasses and ramps, with construction activity visible in some areas. The surrounding landscape includes green fields, trees, and some residential or commercial buildings. A water tower is visible on the right side of the image.

FORT ERIE
Gazette

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM CORPORATION

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***Peace Bridge
Expansion
Moves Ahead***

Border mayors urge action on common issues

Mayors of the six Niagara border communities in Canada and the United States have banded together to urge action by state, provincial and federal governments on long-simmering issues.

Representing Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Ont., Niagara-on-the-Lake, Buffalo, Niagara Falls, N.Y., and Lewiston they formed the Niagara River Bi-National Border Mayors' Coalition.



Fort Erie mayor Wayne Redekop

"The coalition is committed to impressing upon the senior governments that the border and bridge crossings are meant as infrastructure to move goods and people, not to create traffic congestion," explained Fort Erie mayor Wayne Redekop.

"They are important economic drivers for both Canada and the United States," he said. "Somehow the critical message that an unimplemented solution is no solution at all is getting lost in the political noise of competing priorities at all government levels."

"This is an important first step," said Buffalo mayor Anthony Masiello. "The residents of all of our communities want a border that is safe and ensures the efficient flow of people and goods."

A long-history of cooperation between Western New York and Niagara underscores the logic of collaboration, he said. "A significant percentage of our industries are either bi-national, export-dependent or both."

Coalition members have stressed their commitment to work together, especially in light of factors over the past few years have affected the border.

"Increased population growth, economic conditions, shifts in transportation modality and the resulting increase in security-induced congestion as a result of the 9/11 aftermath are frustrating the free flow of trade and economic growth," said Niagara Falls, N.Y., mayor Vincent Anello.

The Niagara River constitutes the most significant transportation crossing into Eastern North America.

The four border crossings in the region carries approximately 19 per cent of all Canada-U.S. trade, said Niagara-on-the-Lake mayor Gary Burroughs. "The four highway bridges and two railway bridges make it the second busiest commercial border crossing along the Canada-U.S. border."

The Coalition will be addressing both capital and operational concerns.

"The timely development and effective management of safe, efficient border crossings and transportation approaches are essential for our future and continuing prosperity," said Niagara Falls, Ont., mayor Ted Salci.



The beautiful white sands of Crystal Beach are just one component of Fort Erie's waterfront which is one of the major lifestyle attractions that encourage new residents to choose to live here, fueling growth in home building.

Residential growth attracts home builders to Fort Erie

Residential builders are busy meeting the demand for homes in Fort Erie, one of the Niagara Region's fastest growing communities.

Builders are targeting both family and adult lifestyle markets given the growth in both these demographics.

"We're starting to see more and more interest in medium density housing, townhouses and condos," said Rino Mostacci, the Town's director of community planning and development services.

"Specifically these target seniors which is good because it supports the 'age-in-place' concept that we're promoting. That is, as you get older and no longer find your single dwelling suitable, you can move within the existing community to something that meets your changing needs."

Additionally, Mr. Mostacci notes, the Town is getting increasingly more interest from large-scale developers who are from outside the town.

Robert Mills of the Blythwood Group is one such developer who has made the decision to invest \$35 million in Fort Erie. His development, Ridgeway Shores, is designed as an adult lifestyle community appealing to empty nesters and retirees. The community will feature bungalow homes and town homes centered around a 6,000 square foot club house and park.

With significant development experience in communities like Niagara-on-the-Lake, Mr. Mills is convinced of the benefits of developing in Fort Erie.

"It's a great location, close to the larger populations of Toronto and Buffalo. At the same time, Ridgeway in particular, is nicely treed and has that small community feeling to it. It still retains the charm of living in a small centre which appeals to empty-nesters which are our market. Every minute, one person in Ontario turns 50."

Another developer new to Fort Erie is Mountainview Homes, a successful residential builder since 1979 and well known in other area municipalities.

Currently approved for 90 sites, Mountainview will be building in both the Crescent Park and Ridgeway areas of Fort Erie. Ranging in size from 1,100 to 2,900 square feet, the homes will appeal to young families as well as baby boomers making retirement plans and who hail from the greater Toronto area.

"Right now the Fort Erie market is pretty good, and unlike before, we can actually gauge it," said Mark Basciano, Mountainview president.

"With the freezing of lands as a result of the province's greenbelt legislation, development is being directed to Fort Erie and other parts of the Region's southern tier. Fort Erie is definitely a

future growth area."

Ed Lenchyshyn of Park Lane Home Builders, a builder for almost 15 years, described the Town's appeal.

"I feel comfortable working in the Town and there's lots to do here. I have a huge supply of residential building lots for new homes that are affordable. Taxes also are lower than in most communities in Niagara. We find that we're increasingly selling to people who are coming from outside Niagara."

Mr. Lenchyshyn said there is also great support from the Town staff and the Economic Development and Tourism Corporation.

"The networking and development services they provide really help us to know our market, source supplies and services and get things done faster. I will definitely build in Fort Erie until I'm retired," he said.

Increased development in the Town is in keeping with recent findings of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Milan Gnjec, a CMHC market analyst for Niagara, at a recent Housing Outlook Conference, noted that housing sales have gone up in Niagara-Fort Erie.

He explained that this "is due in no small part to migrants moving into the Niagara area from other parts of the province, especially from the Toronto area. Roughly 1,800 people from outside Niagara are now purchasing homes here each year."

As this trend accelerates, as is predicted, it's certain that residential developers will have to match the pace of development to meet the Town's housing demands over the next decade.

In addition to its base population of 30,000, Fort Erie is home to 10,000 American seasonal residents and has an influx of 7,000 visitors per day and 8,000 immigrants a year.

Fort Erie is very interested in "controlled growth", said Jim Thibert, general manager of the EDTC.

"We understand the pressures in Fort Erie and will respond effectively in ways that maintain our values and quality of life," he said.

The Town has a new corporate strategic plan and an economic development strategy to outline its goals for development and ensure continuity and best practices.

Welcome to the first edition of the Fort Erie Gazette, produced by the Fort Erie Economic Development Corporation.

At this time of the year, we start to reminisce about what took place throughout the past twelve months. We thought we would like to encapsulate some of the very positive things that are developing Fort Erie.

Some of these stories have appeared in various newspapers and bear repeating. Others we have reported on for information purposes.

It is the sincere hope of the Board and staff of the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation that you enjoy the news and that you and your family have a positive, prosperous Holiday Season and New Year.

\$42 million to improve Peace Bridge traffic flow

Fort Erie has long understood the importance of being Canada's second busiest border crossing and what that means to all Canadians.

To reflect this significance, the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority has embarked on a \$42-million project to reconstruct the Canadian Plaza at the Peace Bridge. It will be an impressive, and truly Canadian, gateway.

Ron Rienas, general manager of the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, explained the timeframe for the project.

"The relocated toll plaza will be operational in February 2005 and immediately thereafter construction will begin on the new administration building, customs building and refugee processing centre. When construction is completed in 2006, the result will be a much more efficient crossing with significantly less backups and congestion which bodes well for Fort Erie business, particularly those reliant on U.S. customers."

Improvements to the Canadian Plaza include road reconstruction, moving toll booths, new inspection booths, landscaping, and a two-storey customs and immigration building.

NORR Architects of Toronto designed the complex which will feature limestone, wood, glass and a unique vaulted roof. In addition to the customs and immigration building, there will be an administration building and two-storey refugee processing centre. Fort Erie is Canada's busiest entry point for refugees.

"The Peace Bridge authority was very clear: it was looking for a centrepiece, a building that talks about Canadian values and Canadian ideals", says NORR's principle-in-charge, Silvio Baldaserra.

In a letter to Mayor Redekop, from the chair of bridge authority, Paul J. Koessler, the Town's assistance with the project was acknowledged.

"I would like to thank you and the council for your support in moving this project forward," Mr. Koessler wrote. "It is critically important that we continue to work together to ensure that traffic continues to flow as efficiently as possible for the economic and environmental well being of the entire bi-national region."

The Canadian plaza project is funded jointly by the federal government's Border Infrastructure Program and Peace Bridge authority.

Pre-clearance centre cuts truck queues

A pre-processing centre for commercial vehicles recently opened at the Fort Erie Truck and Travel Plaza located on the QEW just minutes before the Peace Bridge.

The move is a collaborative effort between the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority and the Plaza.

Supported by both Transport Canada and the Ministry of Transportation Ontario, the centre grew in response to recent changes in the U.S. Trade Act.

As of Nov. 15, commercial carriers are required to file documents with U.S. Customs at least one hour prior to arriving at the border. Vehicles may be forced to wait up to two hours before proceeding to the border if they are unprepared.

The plaza has the parking capacity to handle these trucks and also provides drivers with various amenities, including showers, laundry, television and restaurant while they are being processed.

The PBA provides the service free of charge to drivers with only marginal transitional costs while the plaza gains the benefit of visitors to the site.

Jennifer Patrick, economic development officer for the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation explained the positive impact.

"Traffic flows are improved and it shows how everyone is prepared to make this busy international trade corridor work efficiently."



The 107-year-old Fort Erie Racetrack is the cornerstone of gaming and the largest employer in town. Fort Erie's three large bingo halls provide funding for many charitable and non-profit organizations and are key to supporting the efforts of thousands of volunteers who make Fort Erie the great place it is to live. The 1,200-machine slots casino which opened at the racetrack in 1999 enhances the century-long tradition of gaming, helps support the horse racing industry and municipal works projects as well as providing income for provincial government coffers.

Marketing efforts promote 'safe, fun' gaming facilities

In a partnership that has seen four advertising campaigns in three years, the Economic Development and Tourism Corporation plans to continue its promotion of Fort Erie's gaming product in 2005.

"We have it all - horseracing, the slots and three bingo halls," explains Jim Thibert, EDTC general manager.

"Seventy-five per cent of our gaming patrons are from the U.S., especially Western New York, so we plan to continue our efforts to attract them to Fort Erie. Our collaboration these past few years with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership has been crucial to us getting the word out".

Previous campaigns co-sponsored with OTMP in 2002, 2003 and 2004 included print, radio and television media, some offering special packages and incentives.

"In three years, we've leveraged \$125,000 of our dollars toward more than \$600,000 in advertising," Mr. Thibert said. "Our gaming partners

have been pleased, but with the competition being so intense in the gaming marketplace, it's important that we continue to make our presence known."

The campaigns focused on promoting Fort Erie as a complete, safe and fun gaming experience, Mr. Thibert said. "Our partners included the Holiday Inn and Peace Bridge Duty Free. U.S. residents just need to be aware of what we have to offer."

Herb McGirr, operations manager and director of marketing for the Fort Erie Racetrack said, "We're in a very competitive gaming offering marketplace and in order for us to maintain our stature in that market, we have to continually reinforce what we're offering our customers. Collectively, we have a much stronger offering under the EDTC gaming campaign."

In addition to the 107-year-old Fort Erie Racetrack, Fort Erie offers a slots casino with 1,200 machines and Uncle Sam's, Delta and Golden Nugget bingo halls.

Fort Erie tops in bloom competition

Fort Erie captured first place in its category for the provincial 2004 Communities in Bloom competition.

With a score of five blooms out of five, the Town captured the number one spot in the category of communities with populations between 20,001 and 50,000.

Entrants were evaluated according to eight criteria: floral, turf and groundcover, landscape, heritage, tidiness, environmental awareness, urban forestry and community involvement.

The Fort Erie Communities in Bloom Committee was struck in 2002 and has been hard at work mobilizing volunteers and encouraging support and participation.

Members of the business, residential, industrial, institutional and service communities were encouraged by the local committee to participate in improving the tidiness, appearance and visual appeal of Fort Erie's neighbourhoods, parks, open spaces and streets.

Communities in Bloom is a Canadian non-profit organization committed to fostering civic pride, environmental responsibility and beautification through community participation and national competitions. (www.communitiesinbloom.ca)

Recent large investments in Fort Erie

- Fort Erie Racetrack—\$2.5 million track reconstruction plus upgrades of barns and other facilities for world-class thoroughbred racing.
- Ontario Welcome Centre—\$9 million state-of-the-art business and travel centre built by Nordic Gaming Corp. with direct access off the QEW.
- Peace Bridge—\$42 million for plaza reconstruction to facilitate improved traffic flows.
- Riverwalk—\$1.2 million project of the Town of Fort Erie, Regional Niagara and the Niagara Parks Commission.
- Veterans Way—\$1 million project by Town, Parks Commission and Peace Bridge at Mather Park.

Efforts made to re-invent Fleet

When Magellan Aerospace announced it would be closing Fleet Industries, there was concern for those who would be losing their jobs and the economic impact on Fort Erie.

In response, the Economic Development and Tourism Corporation commissioned a \$10,000 feasibility study to determine what opportunities and market forces exist for a re-invention of the company.

The Niagara Enterprise Agency completed the study and concluded there is sufficient business for the operation and that employee-ownership of a new company, Newco, would be a 'go-forward' strategy.

"We feel very strongly about how things are moving forward," said Glenn Stansfield, Newco chief executive officer.

"There are great prospects for Newco in Fort Erie and we see this succeeding. Without the EDTC in the early stages



and the tremendous support we've got from them throughout the process, this wouldn't have been possible," he said.

"This is a cutting-edge economic development initiative" said EDTC general manager

Jim Thibert.

"The prospect of closing just didn't make sense given the talent and experience of the workforce, the specialized facilities and the reputation for quality production with the cus-

tomers around the world. Those are the tools of the trade in economic development and we believe we can make the new company work and prosper with lots of effort on our part and a little help from everyone else."

Golf course to set new standard in Niagara

With spectacular views of the Niagara River, Fort Erie is the proposed site for the Niagara River Golf Course, an 18-hole championship public golf course that is anticipated to set a new standard for upscale, world-class golf in Niagara.

Canada's leading golf course construction firm, Persimmons Golf, is the project manager for the development.

"An outstanding best-in-class project team has been assembled to carry out the vision for this exciting world-class initiative," said Bruno Dammizio, the impetus and investor for the golf course.

After tremendous success in the information technology sector, Mr. Dammizio returned to his Niagara roots wanting to create a gem that the public could enjoy. The golf course is the result of his vision and community-mindedness.

The course is being designed by world-renowned U.S. golf architect Arthur Hills and is the firm's first master course in Canada.

In addition to a stunning English manor-style clubhouse, facilities will include a comprehensive, state-of-the-art golf academy. The course will have no other commercial or industrial development. The property will be a beautiful park-like setting and dedicated to providing the finest golf experience one can enjoy.

"The project raises the tourism product in Fort Erie to a whole new level of investment, demographic appeal and market reach," said Jim Thibert, general manager of the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation.

"It will be the largest new tourism infrastructure in Fort Erie and will have significant economic impact on area businesses and labour," he said. "This is not to mention the on-going spin-off benefits that result from a world-class venue and an investor that encourages community support and collaboration."

The course is scheduled for the first tee-off in spring 2007.

International trucking firm invests in Stevensville

Zavcor, an international trucking company, is in the process of construction of its new truck servicing terminal in the Stevensville area industrial park in Fort Erie.

Co-owners Kirk Zavitz and Rick Bacon explain that the company will provide fueling and service to 100 transport trailers and 45 power units.

"We have room to expand to 175 trailers and 75 power units so the site is terrific for our present as well as future needs," Mr. Zavitz said.

The trucking terminal will be an important stop for professional transports and their drivers.

"The location appealed to us because of its close proximity to the

QEW and the U.S.," he said. Also, located close to the terminal is the Truck and Travel Plaza, a \$6 million centre off the Gilmore Road exit and less than one mile from the Buffalo-Fort Erie Peace Bridge.

"Zavcor is an excellent example of what companies are seeking when they come to Fort Erie," says Jim Thibert, general manager of the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation.

"We have the closeness to vital transportation corridors, the pre-processing facilities for trucks and greenfield and brownfield lands for development. Zavcor is one example of a solid greenfield development that we're proud to have helped."

Zavcor's Stevensville terminal is slated to open in spring 2005.

Volunteers work to build health clinic

Plans are in the works for a Community Health Centre to be located in the Ridgeway-Crystal Beach area of Fort Erie.

Modelled on clinics in 40 other communities in Ontario, the centre will provide turn-key facilities for physicians, nurse-practitioners, counsellors and other salaried health care professionals.

"There is real community support behind this initiative", said Jennifer Patrick, economic development officer of the Economic Development and Tourism Corporation.

"To cite just one example of local generosity is that of Bruno Dammizio, owner-developer of the proposed Niagara River Golf Course. He donated \$100,000 to the Town specifically to assist with the centre's start-up," she said.

The Greater Fort Erie Health Services Board is developing the proposal and will seek funds from the Ontario Ministry of Health for the project.

A privately-owned physician's clinic opened late this summer to provide non-emergency urgent care - a service which accounts for 90 per cent of visits to hospital emergency rooms.

The EDTC was instrumental in attracting Dr. Artaj Singh to open his Fort Erie Urgent Care Clinic at 660 Garrison Road. The clinic offers medical services seven days a week.

Aggressive marketing focused at Toronto area

The EDTC plans to launch an aggressive \$185,000 marketing campaign targeting the Toronto area to reach developers and investors for manufacturing, gaming and tourism.

"The greater Toronto area market is one that we've not penetrated with any kind of strength," explained Herb McGirr, chair of the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation.

"The EDTC has to take the lead role in that. There's every indication that other small businesses in the greater Fort Erie area who have moved in that direction have met with success. We need to start to be aggres-

sive," Mr. McGirr said.

"The campaign will reach developers and increase exposure for our tourism market also as a result", said Jennifer Patrick, EDTC economic development officer.

"There are significant impacts from this type of marketing because Fort Erie's profile in the Niagara Region will be raised."

EDTC general manager Jim Thibert said Fort Erie needs to be on the "radar scope of businesses looking to expand to increase our job potential."

The focus has traditionally been on the U.S. for business development and market potential, he said.

"Competition for new business is tough and it's time we started to take advantage of the tourism and GTA markets."

Broadening advertising and branding will also make people more familiar with Fort Erie and more aware of the Town's gaming and tourism assets.

"Having Fort Erie promote more in the GTA would be a benefit to many companies," Mr. Thibert said.

"They are recruiting employees with specialized skills and experience, and they would be more apt to relocate here if they're familiar with the great quality of life advantages we have to offer," he said.