

# MIRAMACHI LEADER – ONLINE EDITION

## Residents continue fight to remain in trailer park

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Residents of the soon-to-be closed Clark's and Riverbend trailer parks finally got their meeting **with the mayor Tuesday night, with the Oct. 31 deadline to move out fast approaching.**



Daniel Martins photo

Miramichi Bay Neguac MLA Carmel Robichaud addresses the assembled residents while Mayor Gerry Cormier listens.

Gerry Cormier, most of city council and several city employees, along with Miramichi Bay-Neguac MLA Carmel Robichaud, were lined up to face the group of trailer park residents who had come to air their grievances and ask the city for help.

"Contrary to people who have said we're not interested, we are here tonight," Cormier told the assembled residents. "We are interested in what happens in these parks, and we will do everything we can to help you."

Residents were given notice in June 2007 of the impending closure by a representative of the parks' owner, Charlie Clark, due to a communal sewer system that was no longer up to provincial standards and deemed too expensive to replace.

Cormier stressed that the meeting that night was not to provide a solution to the problem.

"Any acceptable solution to your situation can only be achieved by the joint effort of the province of New Brunswick, the city and, more importantly, you, the residents of the parks," he said.

Cormier said he wanted to know if the residents were ready to move from their trailer parks if necessary, and asked them to appoint representatives to speak directly to the city.

Colleen Schriver, a three-year resident of Riverbend trailer park who had moved out, said she would like to return if the parks were kept open.

She noted the lack of trailer park space in the city, and said many of the parks' trailers were too old to be moved.

"Many of us ... this was our retirement home, and we cannot afford to move our trailers out of the park. We live month-to-month now, and there's the problem," she said.

Other residents voiced similar concerns.

Dorothy Morgan, who said she had completely renovated her trailer over the 23 years she had lived in the parks, and had intended it to be her home for the rest of her life.

"I can't even go back to work, I'm disabled," she said. "What do I do? I have no money to go out and buy a trailer. There's nowhere to go and no money to go with. That's what we're up against."

Colleen LeBreton asked for an extension of the deadline or some form of aid to ease the financial burden of any future move. She said she had been told by a local contractor that he had the authority to demolish any trailers left in the park and salvage the remains after the Oct. 31 deadline passed.

"Let me tell you, Mr. Mayor, when I first bought my trailer, I worked very hard, and I sacrificed and sacrificed," she said. "They'd have to take my corpse out of that house. They're not wrecking my house. I got too much invested in that."

But Archie Gilliss, a friend of the parks' owner, Charlie Clark, who has held Clark's power of attorney since 2000 when he was taken ill, denied the allegation.

"I don't know where that story comes from. That is nothing but complete, 100 per cent garbage," he said. "That has never been discussed."

He confirmed that he had hired the contractor in the past, to demolish two vacant trailers that had become an eyesore and whose owners had entered into bankruptcy, but the contractor had not been given authority for any further demolition.

"So our house is not going to be demolished?" LeBreton asked.

"We would never do that," Gilliss replied.

Other tenants made reference to the letter they received informing them of the Oct. 31 deadline.

Resident Gordon Simpson noted that attendance at that night's meeting was less than at previous gatherings.

"People are being picked off one at a time," he said. "They're losing interest, they've had meetings and ... there's no outcome to any meeting that was passed. So people are getting discouraged..."

Simpson said he understood that the parks were on private property and that the owner wanted them closed, due to concerns over the sewage system, which he acknowledged would be expensive to replace.

City engineer Csaba Kazamer confirmed that to replace the water and sewage systems of the parks would cost in excess of \$5 million.

Simpson asked Robichaud if there would be any government aid for a sewage upgrade or relocation, to which she replied moving aid would have to be addressed in individual cases by the Social Development Department, while her own ministry, Local Government, did not have money for sewage upgrades of that size.

"We see golf courses getting \$17 million," Simpson replied. "When you see these people in dire straights as they are, and people just giving homeowners no help, what's government all about?"

He asked Gilliss about previous statements he had made indicating an extension was possible, Gilliss replied he would entertain any suggestions, provided they did not put Clark's estate in debt.

Simpson suggested an extension would allow a committee of residents more time to find a solution, and wondered if there would be some help for Clark's estate to allow for such an extension, although Gilliss noted there were few people left in the parks.

Cormier took note of the suggestions offered during the meeting, and stressed the need for a smaller representative committee to deal with the city.

"If you can get ... together and get a couple of people to represent you, so that we don't have to meet in big groups, we can move quickly on this," he said. "It's what we, the minister and council, would like, so we can move quickly on this."

He also indicated the city had its own ideas for how to deal with the situation that he would prefer not to discuss at that meeting.

An officer from the Social Development Department who attended the meeting said any assistance from the department typically would involve funds for trailer repair rather than relocation. He said cases would be assessed on an individual basis, but that income would be a criteria. If the applicant has already moved, they would not be eligible for such programs.

As the meeting drew to a close, Cormier took down the contact information for the small volunteer committee that was selected that evening, headed by Morgan.

Schrivver praised the mayor and MLA for meeting with the group that evening.

"This has been a long time overdue," she said.

When asked by Coun. Michael Malley if there was a chance for an extension, Gilliss repeated that it was possible, provided it did not leave Clark's estate in debt.

"But I'm sure with the city, and the open minds I see here tonight, there's pluses and minuses that can be ... played around with," he said.

At an earlier meeting on Aug. 8, the parks' residents had originally been told they would meet the mayor on Aug. 18, but Cormier said a pledge to arrange a meeting within 10 days had been misinterpreted.