

Saint John, NB's Uptown Is Booming

People and investors are flocking to the port city

Things are happening in Saint John, New Brunswick.

The port city's Uptown – what other places tend to call downtown – is booming, with dozens of new developments, restaurants, stores, art galleries and more opening in recent years. The neighborhood's population surged 15 per cent from 2011 to 2016 as people moved to the city or left the quiet of the suburbs for the energy of the Uptown.

If you haven't visited the city in a while, you might think you've wandered into Boston's Back Bay neighborhood with Saint John's historic brick buildings and lively mix of restaurants, retail and residential spaces.

And where people want to be, investors are sure to follow.

Keith Brideau was a pioneer in the Uptown transformation. As the president and CEO of Saint John-based Historica Developments, Brideau redeveloped 17 buildings in the Uptown core, turning underused upper stories into trendy loft apartments and providing new spaces for upscale retail stores and restaurants.

His latest project will be his biggest yet. Brideau and a partner, Dr. David Elias, bought the building that houses Saint John City Hall and a number of other tenants. The 16-storey, 180,000-square-foot building will be transformed, offering more efficient and welcoming space for city offices and freeing up new space for commercial tenants and possible residential units. "There will be 80,000 square feet of space available in a prime location in what will be one of the best buildings in New Brunswick," says Brideau.

The city hall building may be an ambitious project for Brideau, but he's not slowing down. "Our mission is to help create the best, most-livable neighbourhood in Atlantic Canada. There are a lot of great opportunities here in Saint John. We've helped swing the pendulum toward living in the Uptown core, but there is still a lot of potential remaining."

Today, 99 per cent of residential space built or renovated in the last 15 years is occupied, so there is plenty of room for the city to grow.

"There are a lot of things driving investment in Saint John right now," says Develop Saint John CEO Steve Carson. "We have several of Atlantic Canada's largest international companies in growth mode headquartered in Saint John. We're home to three of the largest IT companies in Atlantic Canada. And we're witnessing a demographic shift toward moving out of the suburbs and into the uptown area."

Irving Oil's impressively designed new corporate headquarters is another major project nearing completion and will house 1,000 people in the Uptown. A former Salvation Army hostel in the south end is being redeveloped as upscale residences. Cooke Aquaculture is redeveloping a historic synagogue as part of its expanded corporate presence in Saint John, the home base for the rapidly growing international seafood company. A Toronto investment company just acquired two large buildings in the Uptown with plans for redevelopment.

"We're seeing some cool developments in parts of the city that haven't benefited from a lot of investment before," says Carson. "We have a really unique, authentic urban core and some of the finest heritage architecture in North America. There's been significant investment in the last five years to repurpose some of those buildings and it's having a real impact on the face the Saint John. The urban environment is where young people and new Canadians want to live, work and play, and they are having a huge impact on our city by choosing to live and invest here."



Keith Brideau
President & CEO
Historica Developments

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Thousands of people gathered in Uptown Saint John during Uptown Sparkles. Image: Uptown Saint John



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