

Welcome to the 'gaybourhood'; Movement to designate six-block stretch of Bank Street as **gay village** gathering steam

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A purple sticker popping up in store windows along Bank Street indicates growing support for a grassroots effort to designate the area as a **gay village**.

The six-block stretch is between Nepean and James Streets, where a number of gay- and lesbian-oriented businesses and organizations have set up shop. The area is already considered a de facto village by some, but others want that status to be more evident, with markers such as street signs and banners on light standards.

"I think it comes down to visibility," said Glenn Crawford, the man spearheading the campaign. "An official designation will help create credibility for the area, so people who aren't in the downtown core will know where to go."

Mr. Crawford said the city appeared open to the idea of designating a **gay village** and even invited a member of the gay community to participate on the public advisory committee struck to consider the redevelopment plans for the street.

But when the proposal for the street was unveiled in March, activists from the gay community were surprised to see no mention of a village at all.

Soon after, the Bank Street Promenade Business Improvement Area (BIA) polled its members, but hasn't released the results of the two surveys. Executive director Gerry LePage did not respond to the Citizen's requests for comment.

Somerset Councillor Diane Holmes sits on the BIA board and said the results were split.

According to her, the majority of respondents to the first survey did not support a physical designation for the village, but in the second survey, she said a majority of respondents did support a physical designation.

The councillor, who says she is personally in favour of the initiative, could not provide any specifics about the survey or why the BIA might not be inclined to release the results.

Ms. Holmes did, however, suggest the designation might come in time.

"Let people get used to the idea of what this would look like and what the advantages are of moving to a GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered) community designation," she said.

Mr. Crawford and volunteers have been visiting businesses for the past four weeks to hand out the stickers and an information brochure Mr. Crawford created called, Why the Village is Good Business."

The brochure claims national, provincial and local tourism organizations already recognize the Bank Street area as a "gaybourhood."

Businesses offering a wide range of products and services -- everything from baguettes and bike repairs to manicures and adult magazines -- have stuck the bilingual "Proud to support the Village" sticker in their windows.

Mr. Crawford said the group has visited more than 100 businesses and at least 25 have posted the sticker.

Still, not everyone is enthusiastic.

"I have nothing against the people, but the idea itself I am not very supportive of," said Albert Bourjaily, owner of Hairmosa Salon and Hair Products. "There are much better ideas than just being a **gay village**."

A few doors down at Darrell Thomas Textiles, owner Darrell Graham said he isn't opposed to the idea, but questioned whether there are enough gay businesses in the neighbourhood to warrant such a designation.

"If you asked the average person on the street where the gay stores are, they don't know," he said, adding many would not identify the area as a gay neighbourhood.

But Rami Aroosi, who said his store, Foster's Sports Centre, gets a lot of business from the gay community, shrugged and asked, "Why not?"

"They have it in many places in the world," he said. "I don't think it's too ridiculous what they're asking."