

First-ever council meeting held on campus



Published on February 17, 2011
Katie Tower

Topics : [Sackville](#)

It was an historic event, a coming together of “town and gown” that drew praise from everyone.

Believed to be the first town council meeting ever held on the Mount Allison campus, Monday’s night three-hour session attracted probably its largest crowd ever – from university students and staff to area residents who got to experience, many for the first time, the inner workings of municipal government.

“It was quite interesting,” said fourth-year student Sasha Vankatwyk following the meeting. “I got to see how municipal government works and how much actually goes into it.”

The idea to host the meeting on campus was the brainchild of Mount A professor Michael Fox, a staunch supporter of collaborative partnerships between the town and the university.

Fox teaches both a community planning class and a community classroom course in which the students are required to learn more about the municipal planning process. So he thought hosting a town council meeting on campus would provide an easier way for all 75 students to attend a session.

“So instead of just presenting the theory, they will actually have attended a council meeting and can use that to decide whether it’s a reasonable process,” he said.

When Sackville Mayor Pat Estabrooks was approached about the concept to hold a meeting on campus, she said she didn’t hesitate.

“I think it’s so important for young students to watch, and to participate, in municipal government,” she said during the meeting. “It’s the best form of government because it’s closest to the people.”

Vankatwyk agreed with the mayor, saying Monday night’s meeting provided him with a better grasp of the distinct roles that are taken on by the council and staff. He also noted it was a hands-on learning opportunity that will serve him and the other students well as they delve further into discussions about municipal planning.

Monday night’s meeting, held at Tweedie Hall inside the newly-renovated student centre building, featured an array of topics – from residents voicing concern over the destruction of the Memorial Library to a rezoning application for an apartment building to the launch of the town’s new website as well as discussions centering around the future of the downtown revitalization committee and the strain on this year’s snow-clearing budget.

Vankatwyk also said he was pleased to see Mount A students were praised during the meeting for their commitments and efforts in Sackville.

“As a Mount Allison student, I think it’s great to see the students recognized as part of the community.”

The mayor commended the university students for becoming such active volunteers within the town. From organizing meetings on the future of the farmers’ market to setting up green spaces in the downtown to introducing a green investment fund that is benefiting the area, Estabrooks said the involvement of the students in these programs is “helping to make Sackville a special place to live.”

Gabrielle Reid, a fourth-year Mount A student who serves as the town’s aquatics supervisor for the recreation department, said it was interesting to see council in action Monday night and was particularly pleased to see that local residents’ concerns are not taken lightly and that important issues are being addressed.

“It’s nice to know there are people concerned about what’s happening in the community, particularly within the recreation department because I am a part of that,” she said.