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ERIN MCCRACKEN/METROLAND

François Bouchard, president of the Country Grocer at the Riverside Mall, says Scotiabank's plans to close its branch at that location is devastating for many elderly clients living in the area and is shortsighted ahead of future growth in the community.

## Sole bank branch in Riverside Park closing its doors August

### Alta Vista branch to provide expanded hours

Erin McCracken  
erin.mccracken@metroland.com

Riverside Park residents are being stripped of their only bank branch in the community, a decision that has prompted River Ward's councillor to file a complaint with a federal banking regulatory body in hopes the decision will be reversed.

In a letter to Frank Bilodeau, vice-president of Scotiabank's Ottawa and west Quebec district, Coun. Riley Brockington said federal rules requiring banks to provide adequate notice and hold a consultation meeting with residents about plans to close the Riverside Mall branch, near Mooney's Bay, have not been followed.

“Really, it's not, at this point in the game, to spank them for not having a public meeting,” the councillor said. “Rather, there's still a desire to see if banking services can continue to be offered in this mall, and

that's what's important.”

A meeting between Riverside Park clients and bank officials would have allowed locals to better understand why the branch is being closed after about 40 years.

“Maybe there could have been a mutually agreeable solution where you have reduced hours or reduced service, but still a presence in the mall, which is what people need,” Brockington said.

**“It takes me longer to put my coat on than to walk across.”**

KEN ROBINSON

Local customers were left reeling in recent weeks over plans to close the Scotiabank branch at 751 Ridgewood Ave. on Aug. 12 at 11 a.m.

The decision was made to move customer banking accounts to an existing branch at 2714 Alta Vista Dr., at Bank Street, as more and more people turn to online banking. All seven Riverside Mall branch employees will be relocated to

Alta Vista.

### HIGH-TECH REALITY

The reality is that 80 per cent of banking transactions are now done online, said Heather Armstrong, director of Canadian banking communications for Scotiabank.

“It's no secret that changing customer needs and preferences are driving profound changes for banks around the world,” she said. “We know that customers have a greater demand for convenience, and many of them are choosing to do their banking online and in a mobile environment.”

But Scotiabank client Ken Robinson said the branch's location, just steps from the Denbury condo tower where he and his wife have lived for nine years, offers unparalleled convenience.

“It's only 50 yards maybe,” he said of the distance to the branch from his home. “It takes me longer to put my coat on than to walk across.”

The impact on elderly residents worries François Bouchard, president of the Country Grocer, located in the same mall.

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ERIN MCCRACKEN/METROLAND

A sign at the Scotiabank branch at the Riverside Mall near Mooney's Bay announces the branch is closing this August. Many residents are upset that the only bank branch in the Riverside Park community will be shutting its doors for good after about 40 years.

# 'It's a bit of a David and Goliath situation': mall co-owner

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"I feel absolutely devastated for the seniors in our neighbourhood that have counted on this branch for years and have trusted the branch and this bank with their assets and their life savings," said Bouchard, a branch customer and co-owner of the Riverside Mall. "It's a bit of a David and Goliath situation."

When people first found out about the closure plans, reaction was swift.

"I had customers in the store crying the weekend that it was announced, saying 'I don't know what to do, I don't know how this works, I've always banked there,'" Bouchard said.

The decision to close the branch does not reflect the needs of older clients and signals the bank is only thinking of the bottom line, said Pauline Kirkwood, president of the Denbury's board of directors.

"I can't believe there's a need to move it other than the practice of big business not thinking about their community," she said.

Forcing the seniors to make the trek to Alta Vista poses serious safety concerns, since many have mobility challenges and no longer have cars, she said, adding that having a branch next door allowed many to be independent longer.

"We've got 97 year olds that are living in this building," Kirkwood said. "If they weren't living close to some of these facilities, they wouldn't be able to manage."

To accommodate the needs of Riverside Park customers, Armstrong said banking hours at the Alta Vista branch will be expanded by an hour on week days, and it will also be open on Saturdays as of August 8.

However, for those who prefer going into a branch, the Alta Vista location provides little convenience given the busy intersection at Alta Vista and Bank, said Brockington, adding the 3.1-kilometre route from the Denbury is also a one-hour way one way.

"I can't believe there's a need to move it other than the practice of big business not thinking about their community."

PAULINE KIRKWOOD

It's the same distance to the Scotiabank at the McCarthy Plaza in Hunt Club.

And getting to Alta Vista by bus will also be a chore.

"It is two bus rides. There is no magic way," said Bouchard.

The Riverside Mall location is also near several apartment buildings largely inhabited by university students and new Canadians, many of whom don't have access to vehicles, he said.

Both Bouchard and Brockington said the closure is shortsighted because Riverside Park is primed for an influx of new residents, with the future development of the former Bayview school property to the south and a potential new development at a vacant parcel on Brookfield Road to the north, that is currently for sale.

"This community is going to grow with hundreds and hundreds of people," Brockington said.

## OTHER OPTIONS

Armstrong said even with the closure, customers still have options, such as telephone banking and arranging for automatic monthly withdrawals to pay bills.

"I recognize that not everybody is interested in learning how to do banking differently," she said, but noted that branch staff have been providing mobile banking tutorials to customers.

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