

Halifax North West Trails Association

Chair's Report to the Annual General Meeting – 12 April 2012

Good evening everyone and thanks for coming. 2011 was a very eventful year for HNWTA. Perhaps our most noteworthy accomplishment was the design, construction and installation of our Trails Kiosk at the Canada Games Centre. We were fortunate to receive the services of HRM landscape architect Nicole May who designed the structure incorporating some features from the CGC building itself. The map graphics were prepared by Will Flanagan of the Geography Department at St Mary's University, with some assistance of board member Bruce Smith. The text was prepared by Trails Group members and new Century did the fabrication and installation, albeit with a few bumps and hurdles along the way. We thank HRM through Halifax Regional Trails and Councillor Debbie Hum for financial assistance.

The Kiosk Grand Opening is scheduled to take place on International Trails Day, Saturday, June 2 at the Canada Games Centre and a committee is hard at work organizing the event. Hope that you can all come!

The Trails Group was awarded Capital Funding of \$50,000 to extend the Mainland Linear Parkway (the Linear Trail to most of us) from Main Av to Washmill Lake Dr. This is just the first phase of a much larger project which envisions extending the trail through to the Chain of Lakes Trail. We have also obtained some supplementary funding for 2012 through Halifax Regional Trails so that we should be able to complete this first 400 m of trail during the upcoming construction season.

Related to the Linear Trail Extension, HNWTA hosted an Open House to gather public input on the project. Our consultant, Journey Consulting, did an excellent job of organizing the event and ensuring that the day ran smoothly. We were delighted with the response. Not only did we have close to 70 attendees and an additional 30-35 who provided input online, but the support for the project was overwhelmingly positive. This encouraged us to move ahead by issuing a tender for construction and we had over a dozen companies submit bids to do the work. We expect a contract to be signed off very soon.

For the first time, HNWTA applied for and received Maintenance Funding from HRM through HRTA. In addition, we received a small grant from the Province. This funding not only covers trail remediation work but also various other expenses such as insurance, memberships and office expenses. Extensive remediation work on the Mainland Common Loop Trail has completely exhausted these funds and in fact we made a special request for supplementary funding should any other groups not be able to use all their funds. Just a few days ago we learned that our request was successful so we should be receiving some additional funding any day now! I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the very considerable sweat equity expended by many Trails Group members on wood chip distribution and tree planting in the Mainland Common after we were informed at the last minute that our corporate partner group cancelled their participation in the event in early June.

In 2010 we received a Positive Aging Grant from the NS Department of Seniors which we were able to carry forward to 2011. Using these funds, three benches were built and installed – on the Linear Trail at Parkland Dr, overlooking Belchers Marsh, and overlooking Belchers Pond, both near Parkland Dr. We were also able to achieve our long-sought-after goal of producing a brochure describing both the Trails Group and the trails in our area. Also produced was a separate membership card and we have several new members already!

Growing out of our concern that HRM seems to have forgotten its promise to move ahead with the creation of Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park (made in the 2006 Regional Plan), and in light of the on-going negotiation for the sale and development of the HRM-owned land adjacent to the Bayers Lake Business Park,

HNWTA hosted a public meeting and held two smaller private meetings (with HRM Open Space staff and NS Environment) to voice our concerns and gain support for the regional Park with other stakeholder groups. We are of the opinion that the HRM land within the Birch Cove Lakes watershed, north of the ridgeline, should not be sold but rather saved for incorporation into the Park. In addition, many of our members have expressed concern regarding the possible relocation of the Lacewood Transit terminal to the Willet Passive Recreation Area, a parkland considered part of the Mainland Common.

A signage committee has been established and has come forward with a proposal for the creation of over 30 trailhead signs to encourage more people to explore the trails in our area. In addition, two larger interpretive/informational panels are to be produced for the Cabin Lake lookoff and the Westridge entrance to the Mainland Common. We do have funds dedicated to signage from Keen Canada, via the NS Trails Federation, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation and an HRM Community Grant.

Our application for official name recognition for Cabin Lake at the northern end of Hemlock ravine Park has been accepted by HRM but has been delayed by the Province. We are members of OurHRM Alliance, a consortium of over 35 community groups, focused on sustainable development and the preservation of Open Space. One of the items placed in the kiosk is a newly-prepared map of the Mainland Common, showing existing trails, roadways and other infrastructure. We hope that it will be used by CGC users for walking and running activities.

Annual funding applications for Capital and Maintenance projects for the 2012-2013 fiscal year have been submitted to HRTA/HRM. We will hear if we have been successful once the HRM budget deliberations have concluded.

Future plans include constructing the Linear Trails extension, completing the first phase of our signage project, updating our web site and possibly revisiting and updating our Mainland Halifax Trails Master Plan. In addition, we will be carrying through with our annual series of walks and hikes on our trails; please join us on hikes around Belchers Marsh, to Susie's and Charlie's Lakes in the BMBCL Wilderness Area or perhaps to some new destinations. Further information will be posted on our web site, Facebook wall, and sent directly to members and contacts.

Finally, of course, few of these accomplishments would have been possible without the dedication of the members of the Board. Scot Jennings, our Vice-Chair, is clearly a man of many talents, from preparing a Capital Proposal, to a maintenance request, to spreading wood chips and planting trees! Scot and Nancy have served as our representatives on the Board of HRTA and Nancy is also a most capable hike leader. Bruce Smith led us on a series of hikes through the Whopper Drop trails down to the shore of Susie's Lake and as well designed the layout and did the graphics for our brochure, membership card and, in part, the kiosk map. Davena Davis is our dedicated Secretary, not a trivial task at our monthly meetings! Pat Leader is our able researcher, willing to spend many hours in the NS Archives Bldg, looking for information on the cultural history of one or another of our trails. Lea Anne has spearheaded our signage committee and she and Bruce have come up with a proposal which has the full support of the Board. And, of course, Wendy continues to be my right and more recently, also my left hand, attending meetings, writing letters of concern and in general keeping me on track. My sincere thanks to you all!!

I hope that you all will become a member or renew your membership in the Trails Group to support our efforts and will join us on one or more hikes this summer.

Bob McDonald, Chair