



MEDIA RELEASE

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RE: Amherst Striders Running Club praises town's trail system

AMHERST, Nova Scotia – Hope has turned into reality for Amherst's Active Transportation plan.

When it was implemented four years ago, the goal of the five-year plan was to get more people cycling and walking by providing an efficient and effective network of interconnected and continuous cycling and pedestrian routes that linked neighbourhoods and major destinations within the town.

"Amherst has made great strides in meeting that goal," Ken MacKenzie, a representative of the Amherst Striders Running Club, said recently in a discussion with town staff.

"The members of the club all feel that way and we are so appreciative of the work being done to upgrade existing trails."

They are appreciative because 10 years ago, when the club started, there were trails within the community, but because they weren't connected, "so we didn't do much trail running," MacKenzie, one of the club's original members, said.



MEMBERS OF THE AMHERST STRIDERS RUNNING CLUB RUN OVER A NEW SECTION OF SIDEWALK INSTALLED THIS YEAR ON LAPLANCHE STREET. THE CLUB IS PRAISING THE TOWN'S EFFORT TO IMPROVE ITS TRAIL SYSTEM. (TOM McCOAG / TOWN OF AMHERST)





“The trails were so chopped up you couldn’t get your flow going because you barely got started running when the trail ended. So, we stuck to the roads.”

The trails were also overgrown because the town didn’t put as much effort into maintaining them then as they do today, he said.

“I can remember being on my hands and knees picking weeds out of the trail in order to get it ready for one of the runs we ran that attracted runners from all over. It was like running on grass,” MacKenzie recalled.

That all began to change in the past few years, he said.

“With the advent of the Active Transportation Plan approved by the Amherst town council, there was a move by the town to start joining the trails together,” MacKenzie said. “The town developed a philosophy of encouraging people to be more active, they established a trails committee and designated money to improve the trails and build new ones. Over the last four years, through the Active Transportation Plan, they’ve really been connecting them up.”

As an example, he pointed to work done this summer on a new sidewalk on the lower end Laplanche Street, near the Robb’s Centennial Complex, that allows them to run from the complex, along the marsh to Derby Street, then up to Strawberry Fields and then along Dickey Brook to the firehall.

“The vast majority of that is now trails,” MacKenzie said. “It makes it safer because we’re off the roads and away from cars. It’s also so very exciting to see the Amherst trail development moving forward and shows the town is continuing to make this a priority in their plans.”

While club members prefer running on crushed gravel trails, even the asphalt and/or concrete section of trails constructed by the town as part of the active transportation plan are proving beneficial, he said.

“Years ago, we never ran on Robert Angus Drive. It was just too dangerous. We were too close to the heavy traffic that is on that street. Now, with the new two-way, active-





transportation corridor that goes by Walmart and the car dealerships, we run there twice a week because the trail is away from the traffic making it much safer for all who use it.”

Prior to the town’s commitment to developing the trail system, club members would only see the occasional person using the trails, MacKenzie added.

“Back 10 years ago, I’m not sure people even knew the trails were there, but thanks to the town’s recent efforts at education, their installation of signage and even the distribution of pamphlets that let people know the system is there, I’d say there is way more than a 50 per cent increase in the use of the trails.

“You not only see more runners, but you see kids on scooters, bikers, parents with kids on bikes, parents pushing baby carriages, more people walking dogs, more people walking.”

While he couldn’t say definitively if the health of town’s population has improved, he said the fact more people are using the trails would seem to indicate a healthier, more active population.

The club also knows having the trails is helping to attract people to the community.

“We get enquiries all the time about our trail system and we’ve gotten six or seven new members from folks who just moved to town who have indicated they are pleasantly surprised by how good our trail system is,” MacKenzie said.

With only one year left to go in the current Active Transportation Plan, MacKenzie said the club hopes the town continues its commitment to active transportation by developing a second plan, one that continues to improve the existing trail system by connecting the few spots where breaks now occur and by expanding the trail system into the west end of town.

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