

Public gets first opportunity to review trails strategy survey results

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Ashley Kulp, Kemptville EMC

Local residents speak with a representative from MMM Group, the company responsible for development of North Grenville's integrated community trails strategy, during the May 28 Dandelion Festival. A booth was set up during the festival to give members of the public an opportunity to view results from the recent online survey and make further comments or recommendations for the trails strategy, the draft of which will be discussed at the June 20 Committee of the Whole meeting and is expected to be finalized at the June 27 council meeting.

EMC News - The results are in and one thing is clear: North Grenville residents certainly use their trails system.

Members of the public had the first opportunity to review results from the recent online survey conducted by the Municipality of North Grenville and MMM Group (the company creating the strategy) during the May 28 Dandelion Festival in Old Town Kemptville.

North Grenville's director of planning and development, Forbes Symon, along with representatives from MMM Group, were in attendance to answer the public's questions and gather further input.

The project is currently in its second phase and deals with developing a community trails strategy to address a long-range plan for trail infrastructure, including incorporating existing trails with future ones, as well as examining the trail infrastructure system and identify areas for expansion.

"Trails that are safe, attractive and accessible for users of all ages will enhance the quality of life unique to North Grenville by encouraging physical activity and connecting residents and visitors alike to our communities and its places," stated Symon in the survey results presentation. "The strategy will include a plan to guide future development and construction of trails, study how to build and maintain high-quality trails and establish trail usage and design guidelines."

One of the first tasks of the project was to conduct an online survey (available from January to April) to find out what the public wants to see contained in the strategy. It garnered more than 480 responses and showed that 60 per cent of those who answered the survey use the North Grenville trails. Of that 60 per cent, 97 per cent use them for cycling, 89 per cent use them for the enjoyment of natural environment, 86 per cent use them for walking and jogging, while 82 per cent use them for fitness and exercise. However 93 per cent indicated they would use the trails more if they were "available, connected and enjoyable to use."

The survey also highlighted the top ten uses of the trails. Walking and jogging hit the top of the list as 85 per

cent noted they use the trails primarily for this, followed by hiking (68 per cent), cycling (63 per cent), cross-country skiing (49 per cent), snowshoeing (42 per cent), dirt biking (26 per cent), in-line skating/rollerblading (19 per cent), ATVing/snowmobiling (16 per cent), dog sledding/skijoring (13 per cent), and seven per cent enjoy the trails in other ways such as horseback riding, tobogganing, geocaching and seasonal uses.

Many also enjoy the quality of life and access to natural areas North Grenville's trails provide, as well as the way they "connect the villages and new developments in North Grenville to one another" and how they "provide access to historic/cultural destinations and support tourism and economic development."

Challenges identified in the survey regarding the trails are the cost to construct them and maintenance to keep them up to standards, the physical and geographic constraints, community acceptance, land ownership, development and land permissions, conflicting trail uses, safety, site improvements and obtaining funding to do this, as well as the infrastructure priority to cars and where they fit in.

Overall, Symon noted the results were very positive and that residents had identified they enjoyed the informal public consultation process the municipality had adopted with the trails strategy project. Prior to the Dandelion Festival, the project had a booth at the North Grenville Community Sweetheart Brunch in February and also at the April 17 Sustainability Fair.

Some of the draft recommendations which came out of the survey process encouraged the municipality to show a larger focus on pedestrians, as well as make all the trails "universally accessible."

"The municipality should ensure the safe movement of pedestrians throughout the municipality and local communities by providing safe pedestrian facilities such as: Safety enhancements to pedestrian crossings on County Road 43, sidewalks with sufficient width and protective barriers and buffers between streets and sidewalks," the survey results noted.

Other recommendations asked the municipality to consider their trail system in parks be designed with a three-metre trail width, or no less than 2.4 metres in order to promote multi-use. As well, it was pointed out that additional pedestrian crossing over the Kemptville Creek near Pine Hill Road and Riverside Park is needed and the acquisition of abandoned rail corridors should be explored further for "future use as critical multi-use recreation facilities throughout North Grenville and linking to adjacent municipalities."

A steering committee was created to provide input on the creation of the strategy and residents feel that following the strategy's completion, a community-based trails advisory committee should be established in order to develop it.

The survey results also indicated that for the promotion of trails, the municipality should build upon its existing walking tours and trails, incorporate local youth and schools, use them for tourism purposes and promote North Grenville as a bicycle-friendly community by considering bike rental programs so people can cycle the trails.

During the festival, a large map of the area with the existing trail routes was set up and residents were invited to mark their preferences and comments on it which will be considered in the final strategy.

NEXT STEPS

The finalized draft proposed route network, implementation strategy and promotion/marketing program was expected to be completed June 3. A full report on this will take place June 20 during the Committee of the Whole council meeting before the strategy is finalized June 27 during a presentation at the regular council meeting.

To stay up-to-date on the integrated community trails strategy, visit www.ngtrails.ca.