

# Halifax North West Trails Association

## Chair's Report to the Annual General Meeting – 13 June 2017

Here we are having completed yet another successful year in the life of HNWTA. Our Capital Project came out of a joint undertaking with HRM staff and WSP consultants which examined potential future extensions and neighbourhood connections for the Mainland Linear Trail. The focus for this Functional Plan was on the community connections and these formed the basis of our capital proposal in September 2016. In May 2017 we were awarded funding for 4 connections, valued at \$230,000, at the top of Westridge Dr, Mary Clayton Park, Canada Games Centre and Turnmill Dr play-ground. We will be partnering with HRM staff in the delivery of these connections and we anticipate the work will be completed during 2017.

Problems with scheduling hampered our planned 2016 maintenance work on the Old Coach Road Trail. We did however carry out some maintenance work on the Mainland Common Loop Trail, taking advantage of the efforts of some 20 eager volunteers. Our maintenance proposal for 2017 was only partially funded so our planned bridge stabilization work on the Loop Trail is not going to happen and we are going to have to rely on more volunteer work as we did last year.

Our finances continue to be in good shape due in no small part to our current pro-active Treasurer, Frank Gibson, and his predecessor Maureen Manuge. Fortunately, Frank has agreed to re-offer his services for 2017-18. Susan Nasser has served as Secretary for 2 years now but will be stepping off the Board following the AGM. Many thanks for all your work, Susan – I hope that you know that we would welcome your participation at any of our future events!

We have a new Board subcommittee this past year and this is the Events Working Group. They have been planning events like the annual Belchers Marsh clean-up, the Loop Trail maintenance event and the regular guided walks and hikes which are in progress for the year. Our hike series for 2016 began with a Jane's walk in early May, followed by a walk around Belchers Marsh with Halifax Field Naturalists. We also led several interpreted hikes into the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area. Last year we co-led a series of walks of our nearby trails on Wed afternoon, starting at the Keshen Goodman Library. This year, activities began with a snowshoe event in the Mainland Common Loop in a partnership with HRM, a clean-up series of Nordic Pole walks has been taking place.

We continue to strengthen our connection with the Library through our donation of 16 sets of Nordic Poles to the Library. The poles can be borrowed like a book for a 3-week period. Two training workshops have already taken place and another is scheduled for July 20. Funding for the poles came from a grant from the local Community Health Board and the Provincial Health Authority.

We continue to be members of the Halifax Regional Trails Association, an umbrella group of some 20-plus Trails Groups, which provides access to Capital and Maintenance funds. We also

belong to NS Trails which provides access to the insurance we need, and Hike NS which connects us to a Province-wide network of hikers and walkers.

One Board undertaking this past year was the preparation of an inventory of existing trails and a wish-list of future trails which we hope to have built over the next 10 years. Since all of our future trails will be built in partnership with HRM, our wish-list was sent to a HRTA volunteer whose task is to create a database of all future desired trails. This will be quite a list!!

I am pleased to acknowledge financial support in 2 ways from our former councillor, Reg Rankin. Firstly, a grant made over a year ago allowed us to produce a replacement sign for the trails within the Mainland Common Park at the top of Westridge DR. In addition, two new signs, identical to this one, were produced and installed at 2 other locations in the Park. Speaking of signage, we were able to revise the text and replace the 2 damaged interpretive panels overlooking the duck pond at Belchers Marsh. Finally, again through support from Reg, we will be moving ahead with the installation of benches and a picnic table along the Linear Trail or other selected locations.

Although we are a fairly small group in terms of paid-up members, we have an extensive list of contacts who will come out for volunteer activities, including work parties! Wendy has been writing a regular 400-word column for the Parkview News and this after some revision appears as our monthly newsletter. The newsletter is also posted on our web site which has pictures, maps and some description for essentially all of the trails in our community. Our Facebook page maintained by Maureen has over 400 likes!!

One of the long-term interests for HNWTA has been BMBCL Regional Park. Over the past 13+ years of our existence, we have led numerous hikes and promoted the protection of as much of the land as possible. The Province has designated as a Protected Wilderness Area over 4000 acres of pristine natural area. And the Municipality has proposed to extend the boundary of the protected land by the acquisition of additional land which is going to have to be purchased from private landowners. Unfortunately, some of these landowners are developers who would rather see lakeshore building lots around Susies, Quarry and Fox Lakes. The Facilitator's Report released last summer caught many RP supporters off-guard. Her report definitely sided with the landowner/developers and the vision was to protect only a very small amount of the private land and allow development on the rest. This did not have the support of HRM staff, nor of the public! Within the 3-week period allocated for public input, over 1400 submissions were received, most of which insisted that no development be allowed within the concept Regional Park boundary. Regional Council has tasked staff to move ahead with negotiations with all the landowners to purchase land for the RP. This process continues but we must be vigilant and make sure that HRM Councillors and staff know we are watching. The sad fact is that during the 11 year period since HRM first proposed the Regional Park (2006), not one square metre of land has been acquired for the Park and further the HRM-owned land behind Bayers Lake Business Park was sold to a private developer for Business Park Expansion and of course that

land has now been clear-cut. Another complication of course is the fact that one of the major landowners has decided to sue the Municipality for \$119 million!!

Finally, we also belong to Our HRM Alliance, a consortium of nearly 60 community and business groups who are interested in development done right! One of their focus areas is the promotion of the idea of a Greenbelt for the Halifax Green Network Plan. Our interest in this is that BMBCL RP would be a very central and important component of this Greenbelt!

Please keep in touch through your membership and the newsletter. More interpreted hikes are planned during the summer and fall. When your voices are required to encourage action and cooperation with our partners, including the municipality, we will let you know!!

Bob McDonald, Chair

13 June 2017