

FEDERAL GAS TAX FUND PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF EAST HANTS

Municipality of East Hants

Incorporated: April 17, 1879

Population: 22,111 (2011 Census)

Project: Three outdoor recreation facilities

National objective: Building strong communities

Project outcomes: The outdoor recreation facilities provide important spaces for people of all ages to stay active and be involved in their communities. Overall, they contribute to the vibrancy, liveability and sustainability of the Municipality of East Hants.

Federal Gas Tax Fund contribution to project: \$738,407 (\$68,500 in 2015/16, \$662,741 in 2016/17 and \$7,166 committed in 2017/18)

Total project cost: \$791,407

Other Gas Tax Fund projects completed or underway in East Hants:

- Mount Uniacke Softball Field Upgrades - \$45,000 to improve drainage in and around the fields
- Hants North Walking Trail - \$10,000 towards construction costs for a walking trail

THE MUNICIPALITY OF EAST HANTS

The Municipality of East Hants seems to have the best of many worlds: a mix of small-town urban centres, diverse rural communities, long expanses of coastline, fertile agricultural land and unspoiled wilderness areas. These various features provide numerous economic development, cultural, leisure and recreational opportunities for residents.

The Municipality has several core villages, including Elmsdale, Enfield, Kennetcook, Lantz, Maitland, Milford, Mount Uniacke and Shubenacadie, which offer a diverse range of amenities. In addition to providing essential services to its residents, the Municipality supports the local agricultural, forestry,

tourism, energy, transportation and manufacturing sectors, all of which contribute to the economic vibrancy of the area. With its central location and proximity to the provincial capital, East Hants is poised to be a regional gateway for economic development and growth.

Predominately rural in nature, East Hants has made active living a priority by investing in well-planned recreation infrastructure for its communities. Through the many services and facilities it provides, people of all ages can easily enjoy the Municipality's diverse and beautiful landscapes, while maintaining healthy, active lifestyles year-round.

THREE OUTDOOR RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The Municipality of East Hants demonstrated its commitment to creating communities that support active, healthy living when it chose to invest in not one, not two, but three outdoor recreation facilities with support from the federal Gas Tax Fund. It had discussions over the years with residents about developing skateparks in the area, and in 2014, Council directed staff to explore the viability of this type of recreation facility for its communities. After scoping available land, identifying project costs and site requirements, and consulting with its local communities, the Municipality decided to develop three youth-focused outdoor recreation facilities.

Before the 2014-24 Gas Tax Fund came into effect, the Municipality of East Hants planned to provide \$50,000 in funding for each project, which would require the communities to fund-raise for the balance of the costs. However, under the renewed Municipal Funding Agreements, project investment categories were expanded to include recreation infrastructure. So with this federal funding now an option for financing the projects, the Municipality decided to expand its financial allocation to \$250,000 for each, making the development of these facilities much more feasible.

After considerable community consultation on location and important design elements for the parks, the Municipality of East Hants decided to move forward with projects in Mount Uniacke, Lantz and Noel. At this time, it recognized that the facilities should be designed to meet the unique circumstances of each community, while demonstrating the diverse way municipalities can provide recreation facilities for their residents.

Research shows that public skateparks provide a safe place for people to recreate and have become vital facilities to countless communities around the world. As an action and multi-generational sport, skateboarding is a great option for keeping people of all ages physically healthy and active. In terms of mental health, the combination of physical exertion, precise muscle coordination and balance required to perform skateboard tricks improves brain function. As well, skateparks provide valuable outdoor gathering places that allow young people to interact with their peers to build social skills and self-confidence.

From a fiscal perspective, skateparks can serve as drivers for economic development and have become valuable community assets, breathing new life into municipalities. Well-designed skateparks attract tourists, and can accommodate local events and school programs – all of which provide economic growth for their communities.

SKATEPARKS FOR MOUNT UNIACKE & LANTZ

In the spring of 2016, the Municipality of East Hants entered into a contract with *New Line Skateparks* to design and construct two of their new facilities. Recognizing the importance of engaging the communities in meaningful ways, the Municipality continued to manage the projects to ensure both received support from residents and potential users. *New Line Skateparks* collaborated with community members to identify designs that were well-suited to each site and appropriate for people of all ages and abilities.

Although they share similar elements, the skateparks in Mount Uniacke and Lantz have unique designs, thus providing different experiences for their users. The Mount Uniacke skatepark is a 5,600 square foot site, built on land donated to the Municipality by a local landowner. Very visible from the street, the skatepark is located in the heart of the community. The site’s underlying geology is an impermeable substrate of granite, so to avoid blasting into the bedrock, it was developed as



The Mount Uniacke Skatepark

a street plaza park. This design emulates the street skating experience with features such as stairs, railings and benches.



The skatepark in Lantz is built on a 4,500 square foot site and, since it required a substantial amount of fill, was constructed as bowl. Its curved walls allow users to skate around and across the bowl without ever taking their feet off their boards to gain momentum. It is well integrated into the community and situated adjacent to the East Hants Sportsplex. Sidewalks line the busy road leading to the skatepark so users can make their way safely on

foot or wheels. As well, the Sportsplex has parking, a café and washrooms, all of which are made available to skatepark users.

Once the communities' visions for the parks were turned into concrete design plans, construction began in tandem on each project early in the summer of 2016. Construction went very well, and the Municipality and its residents celebrated the parks' openings before the summer's end.

To date, both skateparks have been well received and are enjoyed by a variety of users. In addition to skateboarders, the parks can accommodate scooters and trick bikes, thus increasing their recreational value. As well, both are built of concrete and thus will require less maintenance and fewer repairs over their lifespan.

A MULTI-PURPOSE RECREATION PAD IN NOEL WITH A THIRD-PARTY ENTITY

The third recreation infrastructure project involved a partnership with a local community group - the Hants North Recreation and Development Association (HNRDA). The Municipality worked with the HNRDA and other community stakeholders to develop a suitable design for the chosen site, but original construction cost estimates came in over budget. Recognizing the HNRDA would have greater flexibility with

procurement and would most likely be able to make the project budget go further, Council decided to take advantage of the option to transfer gas tax funds to the group, as a third-party entity.



Under the Gas Tax Fund's Municipal Funding Agreement, a municipality can transfer funds to an organization (including a not-for-profit, for profit or non-governmental group) to undertake an eligible project that is deemed for "public use or benefit" in Nova Scotia communities. East Hants decided to take advantage of the opportunity this provision provided and entered into a third-party agreement with the HNRDA in the winter of 2016. The unique arrangement allowed this active group of community volunteers to become instrumental in addressing the recreational needs of their community by leading the design and construction of the new facility.

The HNRDA has future plans for the pad and surrounding area to increase its offerings. It intends to develop an adjacent dog park, and soccer and football fields. In addition to recreation events, it will use the site for outdoor events, such as concerts and community fund-raisers. Currently, it is exploring options with the Municipality to develop a network of adjacent trails that would make multi-purpose recreation pad accessible by bike, skateboard, and other modes of active transportation.

IN CONCLUSION . . .

The Municipality of East Hants' commitment to providing quality recreational opportunities that support healthy, active living is evident in its recent infrastructure investments. These facilities not only support physical activity but are situated in designated, safe environments, contributing to their success and high-volume use. They allow people to more easily adopt healthy lifestyles and connect with others in their community who share common interests.

“As a municipality, it is our responsibility to provide infrastructure that increases recreational opportunities in our communities. These kinds of investments pay dividends many times over through the benefits they provide by supporting healthy, active living. ” says Warden Jim Smith.

By developing a long-term plan to connect its communities in safe and enjoyable ways, and providing quality recreation facilities, the Municipality has made a significant contribution to the sustainability and vibrancy of the region. The availability of the federal Gas Tax Fund and the ability to partner with a local organization have been key ingredients to council and staff’s success in delivering on these important recreation amenities, all of which will serve East Hants’ residents for many years to come!