

HUGA: Realizing a Dream

By Leonard Preyra

More than a decade ago, a group of community-minded residents, the Halifax Urban Greenway Association (HUGA), envisioned a network of trails that would be used by hikers, cyclists, roller-bladers, skateboarders and wheelchair users for recreational purposes, and as an active transit route to the universities, hospitals and other destinations on and off the Halifax peninsula. On May 26, I had the pleasure of participating in a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the completion of the first kilometre of the Halifax Urban Greenway, and the vision, spirit and commitment of the HUGA volunteers and community partners who made it happen. Many hands, including all three levels of government, worked together to make this dream a reality. (The provincial, federal, and municipal governments each contributed one third of the \$670,844 total project cost.)

The completed trail follows the aprons of the Canadian National Railway (CN) line along Beaufort Avenue. The next phase, starting at the south end of Beaufort Avenue, necessitates the use of vacant Saint Mary's University land adjacent to the rail cut and the construction of an active transit bridge across the rail cut to Pine Hill Drive. HUGA has had constructive meetings with Saint Mary's University's Property Committee and other university officials and will be meeting with the University's Board of Governors shortly to help secure a partnership for this phase. Both HRM and CN are awaiting the



Leonard was joined by Senator Stephen Greene and Sue Uteck, HRM Councillor, District 13, for the official opening of the Halifax Urban Greenway (Phase 1) on May 26.

outcome of a court decision (involving the maintenance of existing bridges across the CN rail line), however, in the interim, HUGA is attempting to organize an informal meeting with CN officials to explore ways and means, and issues to be addressed, in anticipation of the bridge-building phase. In the meantime, HUGA has also had positive meetings with Port of Halifax officials who have expressed support for continuing the Greenway from Point Pleasant Park through the Seaport and on to Lower Water Street, the Macdonald Bridge and the Trans Canada Trail.

A lot has been written about the need for safer active transit routes and recreational spaces on the peninsula, and

how this multi-use trail will contribute to promoting active and healthy living. Over the years, however, I have come to realize that this trail, as part of HRM's network of trails, and the collective process of building it, means much more. It helps build community, and, as a legacy project, is our gift to future generations.

Much has been accomplished and much remains to be done. The May 26 celebration was held in a beautiful park, which was developed by HUGA, on municipal property at the corner of South Street and Beaufort. To showcase the trail and the Northwest Arm, HUGA plans to develop similar spaces with benches and historic interpretive signs along the trail route. Spring and summer plantings are also planned. I know from the many HUGA-organized meetings I have attended that the Greenway project now has the strong backing of a supportive community. I am writing this column to encourage anyone who shares this vision and would like to help make it a reality to contact HUGA (<http://www.halifaxurbangreenway.org>) and volunteer. I'll be right there beside you.

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From Citadel Hill to Sable Island...

I'm here to help.



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