

# Youth Integrated Planning Assessment Report

## TOWNSHIP OF SOUTH ALGONQUIN

ONTARIO, CANADA



## Background

In July 2007 the Township of South Algonquin formally commenced the process of creating its first-ever official plan. Once adopted, this plan will outline land use policies for all areas of South Algonquin over which the Township has planning authority. An official plan usually spans a time horizon of 20 years or more and deals mainly with issues such as where new housing, industry, and shops will go and what services like roads, parks and schools will be needed in the future.

At the invitation of the South Algonquin Township council, Professor Christopher Fullerton, who is employed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography at Brock University, has taken the lead role for this project. Since the project began, Professor Fullerton has been working with several Brock University Geography students to compile as much community input as possible in order to ensure that South Algonquin's official plan reflects to the greatest extent possible the values, goals and objectives of the Township's residents. Accordingly, several public meetings and workshops were held between January and October 2008. A survey questionnaire was also made available for completion by the Township's year-round and seasonal residents between February and September 2008.

The results of this extensive effort to collect public input and other forms of data regarding matters of relevance to the future planning and development of South Algonquin are documented in a series of reports, including:

- the *Township of South Algonquin Community Profile* (January 2008);
- a *Preliminary Issues Report* (January 2008);
- a *Community Meetings and Workshops Summary Report* (December 2008);
- a *Community Questionnaire Results and Analysis Report* (January 2009); and,
- a *Youth Integrated Planning Assessment Report* (January 2009).

These reports have been prepared as a collaborative effort by Christopher Fullerton and the following project team members:

- Tyler Collins (December 2007-March 2008)
- Amanda D'Agostino (October 2008-Present)
- Alicia Davidson (October 2007-August 2008)
- Dan Della Mora (October 2008-Present)
- Sara Epp (October 2007-April 2008)
- Hillary Even (October 2008-Present)
- Erin Heibein (October 2007-April 2008)
- Courtney Heron-Monk (October 2008-Present)
- Tiffany Onesi (October 2007-August 2008)
- Samantha Papadacos (October 2007-April 2008)

The official plan is slated for presentation to the Township of South Algonquin Council for approval by mid-2010. Questions, comments or any other input concerning the formulation of the official plan may be directed to: **Professor Christopher Fullerton, Department of Geography, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, L2S 3A1. (Email: [chris.fullerton@brocku.ca](mailto:chris.fullerton@brocku.ca); Telephone: (905) 688-5550, ext. 3487).**

## **Introduction**

Community involvement and input is of prime importance throughout the process of creating South Algonquin's official plan. Healthy community planning takes into account the perspectives of everyone in the community, not just those with the most influence or the most vocal. Accordingly, this report is dedicated to the input of children within the Township of South Algonquin. It provides an outline of their likes and dislikes, as well as their own views on how the Township should move forward in terms of future planning and development activities. It is important to include the views of younger residents because they, too, are active members in the community and therefore should not be overlooked. Moreover, the children are the future of the Township of South Algonquin and will one day be the community's driving force of growth and prosperity.

Throughout a series of planning workshops conducted on October 24, 2008, it became apparent that the children of South Algonquin had a great deal to say about their community. Some key topics of discussion included recreation, community services, and retail development.

## **Methodology**

One-hour workshops were conducted at all three elementary schools in South Algonquin, namely: Whitney Public School, Saint Martin of Tours Catholic School, and Madawaska Public School. All children in attendance at school while the workshops took place participated in the sessions and, at each school, the children were divided into two groups. The first group included students in Grades One to Four, while the second group included all children in Grades Five to Eight (with the exception of one Senior Kindergarten student in the younger Saint Martin of Tours group). Workshops were divided in this manner to maintain the environment students were most accustomed to. During each workshop teachers and teaching assistants were present to ensure the comfort of the students and to encourage and facilitate student participation. The main purpose of the workshops was to gain a better understanding of what the children of South Algonquin liked most about their community and what they liked least. This was an important component of the exercise as helps to highlight areas of importance when creating the official plan. To gather this information the students took part in a number of exercises, including a "mental map" activity, a compilation of students' likes and dislikes about life in South Algonquin, and a discussion of what changes they would make if they were placed in charge of running the Township.

## **Mental Map Exercise**

Students were asked to create a mental map of the Township of South Algonquin. Mental maps are drawings made from memory of a particular area that illustrate one's perception and point of view of that area. Through this exercise, we were able to gain a better understanding of how the children perceived their community. The children were then asked to highlight attributes and areas on their maps about which they felt positively and negatively. In most cases, through their maps, the children expressed an attachment to many of the local services and recreation facilities. For example, many children labeled the baseball diamond, the beach, and the ice rinks as positive focal points of the Township. Moreover, in many of the children's maps, highway 60

appeared as a major dividing feature within both Whitney and Madawaska. In most maps, the highway was located in the center of the image indicating that the children perceive the highway to be a major feature within the Township. Several children indicated the locations of close friends and family of their maps indicating access and proximity to friends and family is important.

**List of Likes and Dislikes**

The children were then asked to consider and record their likes and dislikes about living in South Algonquin, and then to present these to the class. Together, each group came up with an extensive list of both positive and negative attributes about the Township. Table One (below) shows a summarized list of likes and dislikes according to those children in Grades One to Four, while Table Two shows a summarized list of likes and dislikes of those children in Grades Five to Eight.

*Table One - Grades 1-4*

<b>Likes</b>	<b>Dislikes</b>
School(s)	Long distance to many services
Playground	Lack of street lighting
Local Pizza Place	General lack of development
Other Restaurants	
Local Grocery Store	
Ice Rink	
Sled Hill	
Beach	
Swimming Hole	
Algonquin Park	

Table Two - Grades 5-8

Likes	Dislikes
Library	Library (too small)
School(s)	General Lack of Development
Sherry's Pizza	Medical Centre
General Stores	Train Bridge
Playground	
Rink	
Sled Hill	
Baseball Diamond	
Swimming Hole	
Lakes	
Algonquin Park	
Trails	
Beach	

The tables reveal that there is a vested interest in both the natural and built environment. Both age groups expressed a genuine likeness towards recreation facilities and existing retail developments within the township.

**“If I were in Charge of the Town I Would...”**

The purpose of this particular exercise was to allow the children of South Algonquin to express the ways in which they would change the current status of their community, if given the opportunity to do so. Throughout the exercise, the children identified a need for economic, recreational, community, transportation development, as well as a concern for the sustainability of the Township's natural environment. Below is a breakdown of the children's ideas pertaining to the themes noted above.

*Economic Development:*

The exercise revealed that the children within the Township desired an increase in economic development, especially in the form of retail development. The children expressed an interest in the development of restaurants, clothing stores, grocery stores, recreation shops, and music and video rental stores. Also among their ideas was the addition of a bank, pharmacy and car dealership. Many of the students suggested the development of a Smart Center in which these businesses could locate. The children also expressed a concern for the lack of jobs within the area and felt that the development of retail stores would help generate new job opportunities.

### *Recreation and Leisure:*

Recreation and leisure are important parts of the lives of the children in South Algonquin. Some treasured sites of recreation and leisure within the township included the library, baseball diamond, sled hill and ice rink. The children expressed a desire to further develop these sites, and also proposed new ideas for recreation and leisure opportunities. Their ideas for improving the current status of recreation and leisure opportunities included the addition of new facilities, including a movie theatre, arcade, indoor arena, bigger playgrounds, a recreation center, and the extension of the trail networks to include walking, biking and cross country skiing opportunities. Another desire commonly expressed by the children was the development of organized sports programs, including soccer, hockey, baseball, and other sports. The children suggested summer camps as a method of providing some of these sports.

### *Community Development:*

When asked what they liked most about growing up in South Algonquin, many of the children alluded to the sense of community they felt existed within the Township. They also expressed an interest in enriching this sense of community through a number of possible initiatives. The most popular idea the children had was to see the implementation of more community events, such as an annual community fair. Other ideas included the erection of monuments and statues of local significance. The children also expressed an interest in improving current community facilities, such as the addition of more affordable homes, the expansion of the medical centre, as well as an expansion of the local libraries. The children felt that the community would benefit by adding more specialized doctors to the medical center and more books to the library.

### *Transportation:*

As non-drivers, the children of South Algonquin expressed an interest in the development of alternative modes of transportation which would increase their personal safety and provide them with greater degrees of autonomy. Firstly, many of the students felt that a solid line should appear on Highway 60 in order to deter drivers from passing within the community limits, as this made them apprehensive of their safety. Secondly, numerous students suggested the creation of sidewalks throughout the Township's villages, as they felt sidewalks would make walking safer and would increase their autonomy by reducing their reliance on their parents to drive them to friends' houses, to community facilities, and to other nearby destinations. Along with the children's desire to exercise pedestrianism was the desire for better cycling opportunities, such as bike lanes and trails. Students also suggested the development of taxi and bus services as alternative modes of transport. Increased street and trail lighting were also frequently mentioned as desires by the students.

### *Environment:*

As children residing within a rural setting, the natural environment proved to be of major interest of the children of South Algonquin. Influenced greatly by the Township's proximity to Algonquin Park, the children felt that the natural environment contributes to their sense of identity and that, as a result, its protection is of great importance. Students also expressed an

interest in the implementation of a recycling program, as well as the use of solar panels in schools and other buildings within the township.

## **Summary**

Throughout the series of workshops, it became evident that the youth of South Algonquin have a vested interest in their community and its future. The workshops revealed that, although there are attributes of the township that the children clearly appreciate, there are a number of attributes that the children do not like. Among those attributes the children liked the most were: the recreational facilities within the Township, such as the ice rink, sled hill and baseball diamonds; the library; the local schools; and several restaurants. Two common dislikes the children expressed were the general lack of development in South Algonquin and the lack of proximity to services for those living in the Township. The children of South Algonquin offered numerous suggestions as to what planners can do to create a better community, not just for themselves but for everyone throughout the Township. Included among these suggestions were a series of economic, recreational, community, transportation and environmental development schemes. Some key suggestions included the implementation of organized sports, community-based events, and the enhancement of safe transportation options for children, such as sidewalks and bike lanes.

The students provided sound, useful ideas and suggestions for the development of the Township of South Algonquin. To meet the needs and desires of the children, various planning interventions would have to take place. One would be the expansion of the library, adding more space for increased inventory of books and computers. Another possible intervention would be to add a roof and walls around the ice rink as the children expressed a strong desire for an indoor arena. The possibility of a recreation centre could also be considered in order to provide further sites for recreation and leisure activities, particularly as a site for organized sports to take place. According to the students, other possible additions to the Township's two villages could be sidewalks and bike lanes equipped with proper lighting.

As active members in the community, it is important to consider the children of South Algonquin's ideas and suggestions throughout the formulation of the Township's first official plan. Moreover, it is of prime importance to take the children's ideas *seriously*, as they represent South Algonquin's future.