

PRESS RELEASE: Community Will, Partnerships Help Launch Skate Park in Antigonish

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It may be a long time coming, but the construction of a world class skate park is finally within view for the community of Antigonish. Reaching this point has taken persistent drive from the community, and a partnership that included the Town and County of Antigonish, St. Francis Xavier University, and – of course – the Antigonish Skatepark Collective (formerly the Antigonish Highland Skateboarding Association) have brought it one step closer to reality.

“A skate park adds to an already impressive recreation package that our community offers and includes multiple fields, gyms and multiple ice surfaces, beaches, trails, Keppoch, rowing at Lochaber and much more.” Warden Owen McCarron stated, “This is another example of what is possible when we all – County, Town, St.FX and community – work together.”

“In my experience, this is among one of the finest examples of all sides coming together to deliver an important asset to our community – especially to the youth of the community,” said Mayor Laurie Boucher.

In the past, the quest for a skate park was lead by the Antigonish Highland Skateboarding Association – then a small group of extreme sport athletes and enthusiasts with the mission of not only developing the skate park but of fostering friendships and promoting active lifestyles for youth. And while some opportunities pursued by the group never quite panned out, the dream among some of its members (now the Antigonish Skatepark Collective) to ultimately construct a skate park in the community never diminished.

“We feel it is important for this community to provide modern recreational opportunities that will be utilized by today's families,” stated the Collective. This sentiment was echoed by Mayor Boucher. “We heard through our Engage Antigonish session that we conducted with youth that our young people are searching for spaces to hang out that are fun, free and easily accessible,” she said. According to the summary report of the Engage Antigonish consultations, “Youth Friendly Spaces” was the highest rated priority for Town Council among the youth consulted, with a skatepark near the top of the list. “I think this project shows we are listening and taking the opinions of our youth seriously when they were asked: “How can we make Antigonish a place that you are proud to call home?”

Constructing a skatepark can shape a community and sends an important signal to youth about their value to the community. “A skatepark is a feature of a progressive community,” the Skatepark Collective said. “It lets the youth of Antigonish know they matter and their sport matters.” Perhaps most importantly, adds the Collective, “It is important to let the youth of Antigonish Town and County know they are valued and celebrate their talents so they will want to stay and grow this community.”

The Importance of Partnerships

As of late, building partnership arrangements has come quite naturally to the Town and County Councils, but this project has proven to be somewhat unique.

The partnership grew around the community’s collective will to build the skate park, notes the Collective, with the partners quietly rallying behind that goal for the past year. “It has brought together the Town, County, the University, and a community group (the Collective) to achieve a common goal,” noted Warden McCarron. “When you step back and look at it, it’s a special thing when you can accomplish that level of commitment and cooperation from three important sectors of our community.”

“At St. FX, we have been very deliberate to support efforts that will help improve the mental and physical health of our community,” said Dr. Kent MacDonald, President of St. Francis Xavier University. “For example, investments in facilities like the Saputo Centre for Healthy Living provide us with the health benefits that come with a state-of-the-art recreation complex. These investments also support our efforts to bring national-scale events like the Special Olympics to our region. A world-class skate park is another example of St. FX University’s belief that supporting healthy living brings a range of positive benefits to our community.”

When asked about what made the partnership successful, it boiled down to mutual respect, open communication and accountability.

“There’s been a mutual respect between all stakeholders working towards a common goal of improving and growing this community,” said the Collective. “It came down to meeting, coordinating, strategizing, and holding each other accountable.”

Building trust is also a big part of the equation for successful partnerships. “Partnerships are successful when everyone is pulling in the same direction, and that sense of common purpose is accomplished when we truly achieve trust among those involved,” said Mayor Boucher. “We all worked hard over the past year to listen to each other, we kept the lines of communication open, and we delivered on our promises.”

Location

An agreement was recently reached, in principle, with St. Francis Xavier University, who generously agreed to lease land along West Street to construct the proposed skatepark. The location was selected due to its visibility, ease of access, and its proximity to the RCMP station, which ensures the venue will be a safe space for users.



“Many sample designs were reviewed over the course of the past year simply for context,” noted Mayor Laurie Boucher, “and I bet that many residents will be surprised at how seamlessly these facilities can be integrated into the community landscape as a complement to the beautiful Town we have here in Antigonish.”

The land is approximately 11,000 square feet, and all involved believe that it provides suitable space to construct a world class facility.

What comes next?

If all goes as planned, the community could see a skate park by next summer. The Town will be leading the procurement process and anticipates issuing a Request for Proposals for a Design/Build within the next month.

Then comes the matter of financing.

There is a commitment to have funding shared among the partners. At this stage, the project has already received an anonymous donation of \$200,000, leaving an estimated \$500,000 more to go to achieve the initial vision for the park.

“We still have a few more steps ahead of us,” said Mayor Boucher, “but knowing what this group has already achieved and the community will behind it, I am confident that we will see a skate park very soon.”

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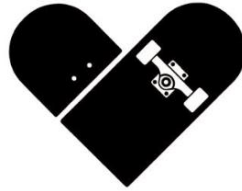
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Fund Raising Information:



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The Antigonish Skatepark Collective will begin a fund-raising campaign to help reach the funding amount required to achieve this vision. To find out how you can get involved, please email **Matt Schumacher** (mschumac@stfx.ca) with “Skatepark Fund Raising” in the subject line.