

“What We Heard”

Haines Junction Trail Planning Process



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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	0
Project Overview	3
Background	3
Government Priority	3
Engagement Objectives	3
Approach: What We Did	6
What We Asked	6
Who We Met With	6
Champagne and Aishihik First Nations	7
Overall Themes: What We Heard	7
The Big Picture	8
Accessibility and Inclusive	8
Bears	8
Commitment to Implementation	8
Community	8
Experience	9
Location	10
Management	10
Ownership	10



Sharing	11
Trail Planning Process	11
Visitors	11
Youth Empowerment	11
Where People Generally Agree	12
Improving Connections	12
Maps and Signage	12
Maintenance and Improvement of Existing Trails	13
Where Some Have Different Perspectives	13
Trail Designation	13
Prioritizing Trail Users	14
Opportunities	15
Participant Tone	16
Next Steps	16



Project Overview

Background

Haines Junction is home to a sizeable network of trails utilized by a broad range of organized and independent/informal recreationists. The Haines Junction Community Recreation Plan (CRP) adopted in 2014 established an intention to “create a multi-use, designated, interconnected and signed trail network” (Objective 3.3), in effect formalizing an unofficial (and unmaintained) recreation asset. It further set out to “create and promote active connections between recreation and community destinations” (Objective 3.4).

Government Priority

The Village of Haines Junction (VHJ) recognizes the significant value and importance of trails to Haines Junction residents and there have been a growing number of community conversations in recent months about the role trails could play in attracting more visitation, new residents, and broader economic development to the area. Accordingly, the VHJ Council and Community Development Committee (CDC) have begun implementing the key trail-related recommendations of the CPR, starting with the creation of a Trail Inventory in 2016/17.

CDC has initiated a comprehensive community engagement process in 2017 that will result in the development of a conceptual network and implementation plan for a community trail network within the municipal boundaries by Spring 2018.

VHJ strives to develop and maintain a mutually beneficial and collaborative relationship with Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (CAFN) through this and other initiatives.

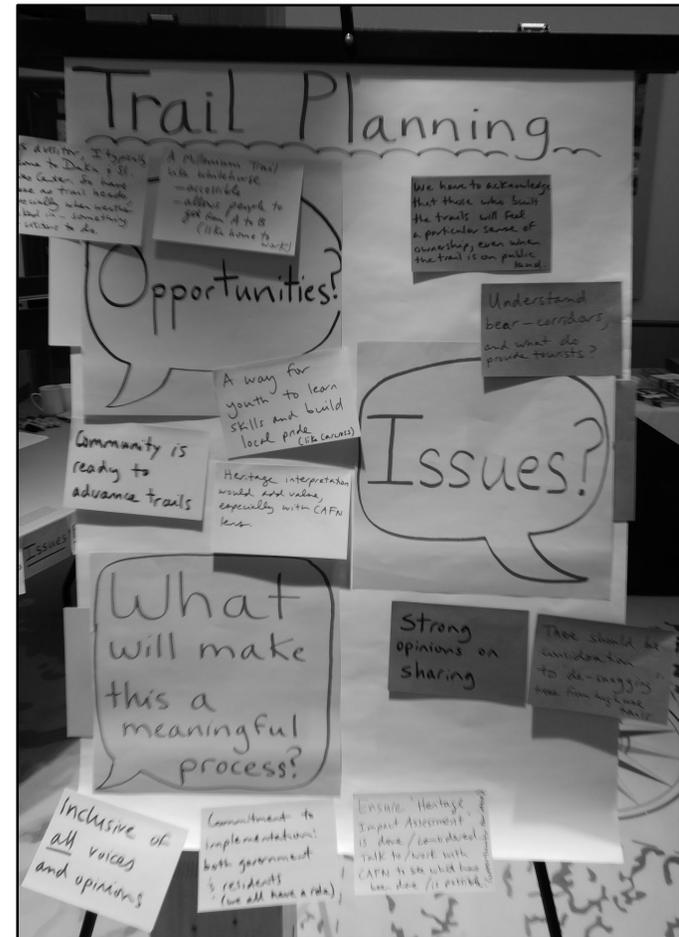
Engagement Objectives

Overall process goals:

- Deliver a process that embeds the core values of meaningful public engagement
- Reach out to and hear from a breadth of Haines Junction stakeholders and partners
- Build awareness and interest in developing a trails map and Trails Implementation Plan
- Continue to build trust and relationships between the Village and stakeholders
- Generate user-based information about the trail network to inform planning efforts
- Strengthen the government-to-government relationship between VHJ and CAFN through this planning process

Share information:

- Explain why the Village wants to identify existing trails and develop a Trails Implementation Plan
- Share what CDC views as issues and opportunities
- Confirm the value trails bring to the community
- Highlight successes and learnings from the past decade(s) of trail-development and use in Haines Junction
- Commit to the importance of collaborating and working with key stakeholders and residents to VHJ
- Invite stakeholders, government partners, and residents to participate and contribute to the engagement process



- Work with key stakeholders, government partners, and residents to pinpoint usage information, issues, and opportunities and trails

Engage stakeholders:

- Understand what key stakeholders, government partners, and residents view as:
 - Current issues and opportunities
 - Hopes and aspirations for the future
- Work with key stakeholders, government partners, and residents to:
 - Identify nature of use and levels of service provided by existing trails
 - Identify future trail priorities
 - Identify the levels of investment and management effort that residents support VHJ making
 - Identify potential contributions that VHJ partners could make, within and adjacent to municipal boundaries
- Develop an achievable implementation plan





Approach: What We Did

What We Asked

The planning team focused engagement activities around the following focus question: *How can the Village of Haines Junction best partner around, invest in, and manage a sustainable network of trails that meets the needs of the community?*

Conversations and interactions were deliberately 'loose' to allow flexibility and adaptability based on the needs and tone of participants, and generally followed the following topics:

- **Strengths:** What is working well, and what can we build on?
- **Weaknesses:** What is not working well, and what can we improve?
- **Opportunities / Threats:** What external opportunities / threats should we leverage / mitigate?
- **Values:** Why do trails matter in Haines Junction?
- **Vision:** What are your hopes and aspirations for the future of Haines Junction and our trails?
- **Process:** What is your best advice to support an inclusive, meaningful, and productive planning process?
- **Additional information:** Is there anything else you think we should know?

Who We Met With

Organization / event	Method	Date
Public	Web, online survey and social media launch - 82 Surveys completed	Nov 13
St. Elias Ski Club	Focus Group	Nov 13
Mountain Bike Club	Focus Group	Nov 21
Craft Fair	Interactive booth	Nov 23
St. Elias Seniors Society luncheon	Focus Group	Nov 29
School youth	Interactive workshop	Nov 29
Lions Club	Focus Group	Nov 29
Mountain Festival	Interactive Booth	Dec 9

Champagne and Aishihik First Nations

It is important to note the importance of the relationship between the Village and CAFN. The planning team and the Village are working with CAFN to explore areas of mutual interest. While certain CAFN citizens may have participated in the planning process as residents, this document does not reflect the needs, hopes and aspirations of CAFN.



Overall Themes: What We Heard

The Big Picture

Note: themes are ordered alphabetically, and are not intended to represent any order of magnitude.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

Accessibility and inclusivity was a common theme. Many people spoke to focusing on where people are located and where they move to, combining active transportation with recreational trail needs. High-use locations included: the senior's centre, DaKu and the daycare, CAFN's main administration building, the school, and St. Elias Convention Centre, as well as identified road-crossings. One person noted that trail planning should consider the '8-80' planning model, meaning that if the needs of 8 and 80 year olds are met, then the whole community's needs have been met which means the trail network is both accessible and inclusive.

Bears

Many participants noted the high volume of bears in the Kluane region and that key bear corridors needed to be identified. This is particularly important for tourists hoping to use the trails, and that bear education should be readily available (i.e. at the Parks Canada office in DaKu) and communicated throughout mapped community trails by signage.

Commitment to Implementation

Many people felt that successful trail planning and implementation would require a clear and consistent commitment from both the Village and CAFN (and Parks Canada, as appropriate). People also noted that all governments have limited resources and therefore residents (as individuals or organized groups) also needed to take ownership and commit to any future trail network. Several people noted that like any community, Haines Junction has limited volunteer capacity and that it seems to be the same people volunteering for everything, and could trails be an opportunity to build a broader volunteer base?



Community

A significant theme that emerged was the relationship between trails and community development. Many participants identified trail planning, development, and maintenance as a way to build skills and community pride. Some felt that Haines Junction was “not a community of pulling together (and that) trail development was an opportunity to build bridges”.

"I hope this conversation is an opportunity to bridge the various parts of our community"

"I think good trail development in the Village is important because it is symbolic. It showcases who we are as a community and what we believe in."

A few people noted the deep connection between their vision for trails and their vision for the community itself, in essence seeing the trails as an extension of their ideal community. Put differently, the extent to which they saw themselves as part of the trail network would be a reflection of how they saw themselves in their vision of an ideal Haines Junction. For example, many people talked about the Poker Run as highlighting a rift in the community. Some felt it was tradition, brought lots of visitors (and their dollars) to the community, was a significant fundraiser, and was fun. Others felt it destroyed community trails, that there has not been adequate remediation of said trails, that the overall benefit to the community was questionable, and that it impacted others enjoyment of the trails year-round.

Experience

Trail experience emerged as a significant theme:

- Many people it was important to offer a **range of experiences** to meet the needs of all users (this point is connected to the theme of accessibility and inclusiveness). Ideas ranged from loops, rugged trails, sidewalks, and identified routes using roads. One person asked if Haines Junction could one day have a Millennium Trail similar to Whitehorse?
- Several people shared their appreciation of great trail **access**: "Love that I can leave from my back-door and do not need to trailer"
- Several people shared different perspectives on **rules**. Some suggesting the development of shared trail etiquette and speed limits, with others suggesting Haines Junction does not want to 'become' Whitehorse.
- Many people brought up the idea having more trail-supporting **amenities** such as washrooms, benches, interpretive signage, wayfinding, and a map (both printed and digital).

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- The **safety** of trail-users was raised as a concern, though there was not a consistent idea of what was or was not ‘safe’
 - One mountain biker suggested Haines Junction could one day be “the 3rd jewel in the Yukon’s **mountain bike** crown’, alongside Whitehorse and Carcross

Location

Many residents spoke about the location of trails including prioritizing public land, possibly running adjacent to private land, and in some cases - with permission - crossing private land. Some felt the trail (and route) network needed to better identify safe and dedicated highway crossing(s). In the context of existing trails and desired trail development, many were unaware, and in some cases uninterested, in where the Village boundary was located. Several participants suggested the planning process should focus on ‘out-and-away’ trails to incentivize motorize users to leave the Village area, for safety and trail experience reasons. Some suggested the planning process should focus and clean up the existing trails, before adding new ones. There was an overall desire to better connect and coordinate all trails so that the network was more of a system.

Management

Several people shared thoughts about management, and how design considerations should consider long-term management needs. There was a general theme of ‘keep it simple’ to support minimal maintenance. A related aspect to management was accountability and liability. To what extent would / could the Village be supported by YG, CAFN, and possibly Parks Canada? To answer this question, one person suggested that the various governments commit to working together on trails and be clear on their respective needs, motivations, and available resources, and that this could include community groups.

Ownership

Ownership was a common and complex theme that emerged. Some felt that a person’s ‘right’ to dictate how a trail should or should not be used was based on how long they have lived in Haines Junction. This feeling was especially strong among those who have historically used trails in motorized ways and feel they may lose future motorized access. Some felt that the very nature of a trail planning exercise would lead to a restriction of uses. Others felt strong ownership on trails they had developed despite being on public land, and had mixed feelings about publicizing and sharing their existence to others.



Sharing

People shared strong opinions about sharing. Generally, the notion of sharing trails was a question of ‘how’ and not ‘if’. Some more historic users feel that newer users want to change how trails should be shared, and believe trails should continue to be used how they ‘always have’. Others believe there are some people who do not want to share the trails. Some cross-country skiers were grateful that snowmobilers helped pack down the snow, but also noted that sometimes track-sets were being destroyed either through negligence or lack of awareness. Several people felt the key question was: how do we make a multi-use system work for all users and so that no one user-group is overly compromised by other users?

Trail Planning Process

Many people spoke about the trail planning process as an important means of community development. Themes included the need to an inclusive and transparent process where all voices matter. Others suggested the planning process, and final plan, should consider a set of principles and / or decision making criteria including: accessibility, connections, community owned, and community pride.

“I think the question is: how can we strengthen community through trail development?”

Visitors

Many people believe there is a link between economic development and trails by providing an experience for visitors. Many people feel that trails can be an opportunity to stay in the Village and hopefully spend more money. Ideas ranged from focusing on obvious stopping points and ‘trailheads’ such as DaKu. Other ideas included using community art as way to explore the village, similar to the painted animals scattered around a city (e.g. polar bears in Winnipeg, moose in Toronto, and orcas in Vancouver). Many people felt a good map and on-the-ground wayfinding would support more local as well as visitor-use. However, an important sub-theme also emerged: to what extent does the Village want more tourism? Does Haines Junction want to be Canmore, or does it want a Carcross Commons?



Youth Empowerment

Several people noted the opportunity to empower and build youth capacity through trail development. Many people felt that the Single Track to Success model (S2S) in Carcross was a success story and could be applied to Haines Junction. A few people were aware that CAFN is exploring the S2S model and felt that was a great opportunity. Youth and adult responses noted instances where youth experience and safety was compromised due to poor communication regarding trail regulation. Encouraging young people to access trails should involve more youth focused education on trail and road regulations from enforcement (RCMP) and other user groups (horse riders).

“Inner-community trails will incentivize more locals to use trails, beyond those who already use the larger and harder trails outside of the Village. Where you see the younger kids start, and maybe people less experienced.”

Where People Generally Agree

Improving Connections

Increased connections between trail networks within the municipality will allow for a better local experience. Some trails would be improved through connections to extend their length, while others would be improved by connecting to other areas within the community. Improving connections to trails outside of the municipality has also been considered. These connections could support access to tourists and residents to further their trail experience and reduce the need to drive to trailheads. Additional connections specific to motorized users could also increase access to commonly used trails while also increasing community safety by designing a motorized corridor.

Improved connections to community spaces such as Daku and Willow Acres will increase active transportation, safety and general community access and walkability.

Maps and Signage

Many respondents are looking forward to having a map developed to increase their access to trails. Respondents are also interested in investing in signage and/or basic trail markers for commonly used trails to improve safety and increase access for new residents and visitors. As bear activity has been highlighted as a concern, some community members would like to see bear awareness highlighted on some of these signs.

Some groups suggested looking into app development for the final trail map product.

Maintenance and Improvement of Existing Trails

Community members are interested in seeing an increase in general maintenance to existing trails within the municipality. While there are questions as to how realistic regular maintenance can be given budget and time restrictions, there is a general sense that many commonly used trails could be improved with basic levels of maintenance. Some suggested creating partnerships with organized user groups in order to share the responsibility of trail maintenance that are designed for specific activities.

The following trails/routes have been highlighted for improvements and/or general maintenance:

- Pine Lake Trail (Trans-Canada Trail)
- Dezadeash Trail (in partnership with Parks Canada as per the trail management agreement)
- Improved access Willow Acres
- Improved access to Daku
- Firebreak behind Willow Acres

Where Some Have Different Perspectives

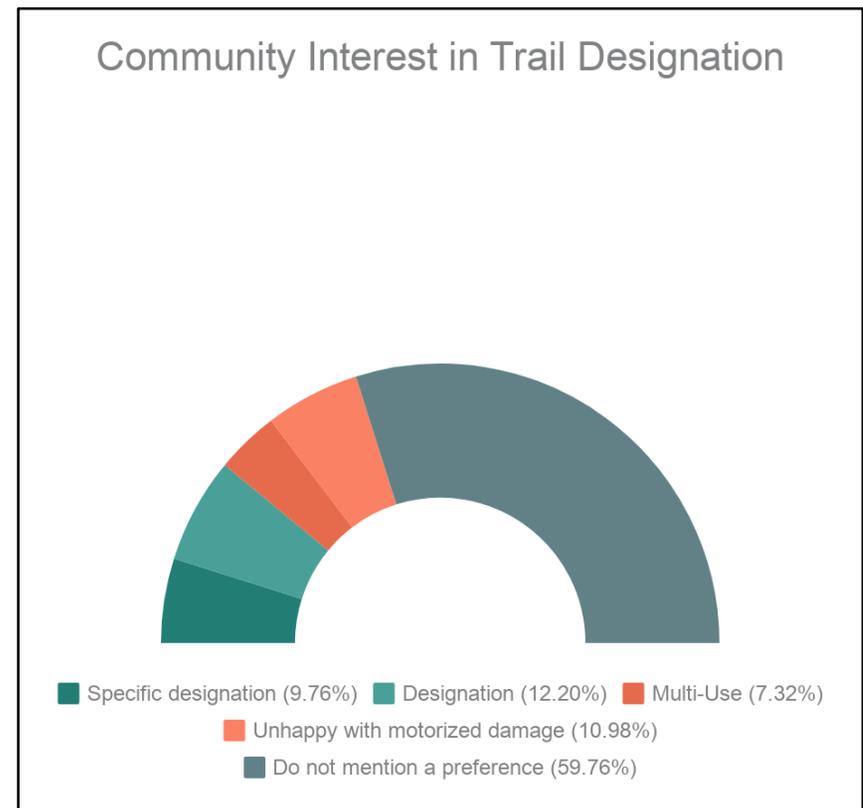
Trail Designation

Survey Respondents have been categorized in the following graph:

Multi-Use - all trails should remain multi-use.

Designation - would like to see trails designated according to a specific activity or complimentary activities.

Specific Designation - specific trails (e.g., ski and/or horse trails) should be designated but all remaining trails remain multi-use.





Unhappy with motorized damage - views trail damage by motorized users as an issue (by ATV, trucks and/or snowmachine), but does not mention designation or multi-use as a solution.

Focus groups demonstrated a very polarized response to trail designation. Youth and St. Elias Lions (both predominantly motorized users) believe the multi-use trails are an asset to the community. Municipal trails are a safe place for young people to experience motorized recreation and develop their skills in the activity, and access to a large variety of safe trails is very important to the community.

The ski club is interested in designated, non-motorized trails on the Forestry trail network as they have experienced a negative impact on the quality of the trail network due to ATV use in the summer (outside of the Poker Run corridor) as well as destruction to the track set throughout the winter by snowmobile. The survey highlighted requests from some community members to see an increase in the ski trail network and a groomed and track set trail from town leading to the established trails. However, this level of increased access is not an option without some level of designation due to the risk of motorized damage to volunteer efforts to maintain a quality track set.

Prioritizing Trail Users

As previously mentioned in the overall themes, ownership of trails is a complex issue that has been raised throughout the consultation process. Further to that discussion, is the question of how to prioritize the needs of the residents while still viewing trails as a viable benefit to Haines Junction's tourism market. Many residents see trail development with tourism in mind as an important next step, whereas others do not feel comfortable with the potential of having to share local trails. Some residents fear their trails experience will be compromised due to tourism based development.

Opportunities

The following opportunities are direct quotes from community members on opportunities to consider moving forward.

<p><i>'Connecting the existing trails (with short connectors) to other trails allows people to make loops.'</i></p> <p><i>'Work hand in hand with Champagne and Aishihik First Nations'</i></p> <p><i>'Municipal trail planning should consider "linking" to longer trail systems outside of the Municipality'</i></p> <p><i>'True listening and education re: multiple user groups'</i></p> <p><i>'Maybe businesses could pay to advertise on trail signs or maps, or "sponsor" a trail.'</i></p> <p><i>'More connectivity between residential areas'</i></p> <p><i>'Need trails that lead into the alpine; a solid network in and around town'</i></p> <p><i>'I think it is important that we have some multi-use trails AND that we have a education component for respectful sharing'</i></p> <p><i>'Ensuring safety is paramount and ensuring there are road crossings for snowmachines/ATVs and dirt bikes as well.'</i></p> <p><i>'More promotion of the trails in and outside of Haines junction. Names in southern tutchone for trails with history'</i></p>	<p><i>'I would like to see user groups, or volunteers organized and sanctioned to do much of the trail maintenance.'</i></p> <p><i>'Trails could be acknowledged as an asset to the Village and made a higher priority when it comes to investment.'</i></p> <p><i>'Trail maintenance could be taken on by volunteer groups (the Rangers , Lions Club, school kids, Brownies, etc.), or funding for maintenance be sought from local investors.'</i></p> <p><i>'Purpose built trails to connect the community and enhance recreation.'</i></p> <p><i>'Defined walks and trails are needed'</i></p> <p><i>'Work with different user groups and committees. Maybe different groups could "adopt a trail" to help with very general maintenance.'</i></p> <p><i>'Build a network of purpose built single track for mountain biking...this could be a major asset for the community youth, adults, and visitors'</i></p> <p><i>'Maybe we can even make use of the trails for annual events, like a trail run/marathon or mountain biking race. I would also love for a disc golf course to be put together along one of the trails!!'</i></p>
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Participant Tone

On the whole, the planning team believes that Haines Junction residents want to pursue this trail planning conversation. While there is caution, there is also hope and interest for more trail connection in the hope that they manifest into broader community connections. Many view trail planning as an exercise in community development.

Next Steps

Once this document has been shared with the CDC, the planning team recommends sharing this document (using a variety of TBD methods) to citizens and key stakeholder groups with the following questions:

- *Here is what we heard, are we missing anything?*
- *What do you think about these themes? Are there any surprises, areas of alignment, or possible tension?*
- *From a process point of view, what is your best advice to the planning team as it considers the next phases in the planning process?*

The planning team believes it is important for participants to see their views reflected, and to deliberate on the themes that emerged. The planning team also believes it is important for residents to see and deliberate where there is alignment and where there is tension because if not, these themes will linger throughout the process and may impact the final plan as well as successful implementation.

Note: the planning team will work with the CDC and the Village to determine how to best continue working with CAFN and to consider how its involvement fits in the context of the remaining planning work to be undertaken.