

SPY Camp

Sustainable Planning for Youth

Final Report

Submitted to the
Village of Port Elgin

By

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Introduction

"A child is not a vase to be filled, but a fire to be lit."

Francois Rabelais

As Canadian society continues to develop into the future, many communities, in both urban and rural settings, are beginning to assess the sustainability of their communities and what their community may look like not only in five years, but also for decades and generations to come. When thinking about community in terms of long-term goals, an important question arises: *Who will be living in this community in the future?* The answer to this question lies within the youth of communities across the country. The youth of today will become the leaders of tomorrow and while today's youth may be able to access education and pursue further knowledge, it is a rare occasion that they have the opportunity to express their voices and perspectives on their community and have an active hand in community planning and change.

While municipal councils and planning commissions develop strategic community plans, younger members of the community are often not consulted. Discussions with youth are extremely beneficial for community development as today's youth have a great understanding of the pros and cons of their community and also have intriguing ideas for the future. With all of these ideas, it would be feasible to believe that many of today's young minds could find their niche in community planning; however many youth are unaware of the field or what it takes to become a planner.

During the summer of 2007, the Rural and Small Town Programme (RSTP) addressed the above gap by organizing and facilitating S.P.Y. Camp (Sustainable Planning for Youth) as a rural community planning day camp for youth in New Brunswick. RSTP is a research and community planning office at Mount Allison University that prepares people and organizations to adapt to change and act on opportunities for developing sustainable rural communities and small towns. RSTP links research and action by generating and sharing new knowledge, developing self help tools, and providing information and educational services, which lead to innovative approaches and solutions.

In 2010, with funding from the Village of Port Elgin, through the Picture Port Elgin Integrated Community Sustainability Plan, children in the village of Port Elgin were offered the unique opportunity to work in a team setting to explore and investigate their community with the goal of learning about sustainable planning. SPY Camp was planned around two full days of learning about sustainable development, culture and history, environmental issues and community planning. The newly formed Port Elgin SPY Camp used group and teamwork as the focus

as the camp members began to view their community from a wide variety of perspectives, with responsibility and good citizenship being strongly encouraged.

It was the hope of everyone involved with SPY Camp that camp participants take action in helping their community, in both the present and later in life. Through group discussions the camp members gained a greater awareness of issues in their community, the responsibilities they hold as members of their community and the variety of ways they can contribute to their community. By using a wide variety of topics, members of SPY Camp were able to see the interconnectedness of the four pillars of sustainability: social, environmental, economic and cultural and how they all relate with one another. As the world becomes more environmentally aware in its planning processes it is our hope that the members of SPY Camp take a sustainable mindset into the planning profession (for example) as a career choice to address the social and environmental challenges that New Brunswick faces in the present and future.

Objectives

The objectives for Port Elgin SPY Camp were:

- 1) The camp members will have an increased awareness about rural community issues including community planning, local environmental issues, sustainable land use planning, culture and heritage.
- 2) The camp members will learn their responsibilities towards their local environment.
- 3) The camp members will learn the benefits of living and growing up in a rural community.
- 4) The camp members will draw up a wish list for youth in their community and write a formal letter to village council that demonstrates their findings.

The above objectives of knowledge and skill acquisition were measured through group discussions, individual/personal experiences of the participants' new skills and knowledge. Feedback on the success and popularity of the camp was obtained through evaluation forms from the campers, their parents and local municipal officials.

Methods

In the early months of summer 2010, the village of Port Elgin wished to have SPY Camp, run by RSTP, come to their community. Funding was generously provided through the Picture Port Elgin Integrated Community Sustainability Plan project. The camp was planned and facilitated by Josh Davies, a fourth year geography student at Mount Allison University. As Josh has a keen interest in the

planning profession this experience provided an invaluable leadership opportunity. Gwen Zwicker, Amanda Marlin and Cheryl Veinotte, full time staff members at RSTP also provided valuable tools and advice to enhance the quality of SPY Camp in Port Elgin.

As the village of Port Elgin is currently in the process of developing their own ICSP (Integrated Community Sustainability Plan), it was decided that the youth of the area be consulted in the process. Handouts were given to the village office along with an article in the Sackville Tribune Post, where the SPY camp could be advertised to its potential members. It was planned that SPY Camp be offered to a variety of youth in the area with a target age group set from 8 to 14 years old.

In Port Elgin, nine children registered for the camp. On August 17th, the Port Elgin SPY Camp gathered at the village office for their first meeting. The day plan followed a variety of discussion topics and activities were conducted to assess how the youth of Port Elgin and its surrounding areas (some campers lived in Baie Verte) felt about their community. Numerous activities and games were also planned and fit in well along with the final group activity, which was to plan and develop a dream community.

Port Elgin SPY Camp 2010

With funding in place, research began into existing materials, resources and programs that would accommodate the goals for the 2010 Port Elgin SPY Camp. Ideas were adapted from the Canadian Institute of Planners' *A Kids Guide to Building Great Communities*, Tom Jackson's *More Activities that Teach*, as well as the 2007 *SPY Camp Sustainable Planning for Youth Programme Guide*, along with other resources and several original activities.

As kids today are becoming increasingly aware of environmental and community issues, this two day camp was designed with comprehensive discussion and fun in mind. Topics were initially brought up by the camp leader, with the core of the discussion to be made by the participants of SPY Camp. It is a goal that the creative and imaginative side of the campers be evident through the variety of activities and games that focused on environmental and community issues at the local level. Camp was also designed with a rural community in mind, as it is important that camp participants learn the values and benefits of living in rural communities, which can often be stereotyped as a "boring" place for youth to live. With the goal of engagement in their community in mind a variety of activities were developed to suit the community of Port Elgin.

Day One

On August 16th SPY Campers and camp leader Josh Davies assembled at the Port Elgin Village Office for their first day as a group. The morning began in a spy theme, as campers were required to pass a "spy" clearance test, so it could be

assured that they could be trusted. Once spy clearance was given, each camper received a SPY kit, which would help him or her throughout the group's community investigation. A top-secret case file was left on the table from SPY Headquarters. Its contents revealed the day's missions.

The first mission was to walk around and explore the community of Port Elgin, with a focus on local services, businesses, social and health services, land uses, village characteristics and historical information. As the group observed their surroundings they came across a museum, which was full of area history. A guide walked the campers through the museum and valuable information was received. Many campers learned new things including the history of Port Elgin. The walk continued after the museum. As the campers filled in a community survey, they had many comments. On the positive side they said, "there are never any traffic jams in Port Elgin." "There is a health centre if you are not feeling well." "There is a school, museum and library that offer learning opportunities."

The campers also commented on many things that they felt could be improved. They said that bike trails and roads need improvement. They explained that you can get your "basic needs" in the store in Port Elgin, but you cannot buy everything you want in the village. For example, the campers said they have to go to Sackville, Amherst or Moncton to buy toys, games, movies, clothes, and electronics. There are some in Port Elgin, but there is "limited choice." The camp participants mentioned that a new park is not finished yet and that it is not as good as it was. They would like to see more green spaces and more spaces specifically for kids. They commented that while they think there are enough trees in the downtown area, wildlife seem to be disappearing. The campers felt the trees look healthy but less so at the school. They said you can see a variety of wildlife in town, but that the numbers of all species seem to be "going down". The campers also felt there is a lot of garbage in the ditches and along the "Rails to Trails" path and they did not like this. They thought the garbage along the roads was from drivers not people walking. They said there were limited places to see cultural exhibits such as paintings, film, etc. other than at the museum and in nearby Baie Verte.

Finally the campers commented on the things they feel make Port Elgin unique such as the Race Track, Coles Hardware, the families that live in the village, and that it is a "close-knit, friendly place."

Once the community survey was finished, the group assembled in the council chambers to further discuss what they like and dislike about Port Elgin. Topics discussed range from the safety and benefits of living in a small community to what campers wished they had in their community. For example, campers were heard saying "I like Port Elgin because it is a safe place to live because it's small." They also liked the fact that "everyone knows everyone" which is a great thing to have, especially when trying to bring the members of the community together for various functions and activities. They also stated how much they enjoyed spending their free time at the local school, where playgrounds and

basketball and a tennis court were at their disposal. They liked that you could get the “basics” you need in Port Elgin, which has a small grocery store, hardware store and pharmacy.

There were also a handful of areas that campers hoped could be worked on in the future. Many of them said “there aren’t many things to do here [in Port Elgin], and this seems to lead to other problems like people leaving garbage around and just hanging out and making trouble.” They said this was especially true of the youth and teenagers. The camp members also decided that they would like to see some changes be brought to their downtown. They talked about the poor road conditions and how some people speed, which they felt was “dangerous.” The concept of a community market in the area was also discussed, as it would relate to the four pillars of sustainability (environment, economic, social and cultural/historical). In particular the campers liked the idea of showcasing local artists and their work at such a market.

In general the camp participants like Port Elgin a lot and hope to still live in the village when they are adults but they said they are worried about the future variety and availability of jobs.

After lunch the campers took part in an open-ended play about a mock land use conflict in the fictitious community of Sustainableville. Each member of SPY Camp went “under cover” and dressed in costume, playing the part of a stakeholder or concerned Sustainableville resident. The issue at hand was a new housing subdivision that was to be located near a vulnerable forested coastline. As each actor read out his/her part it became clear that the issue was divided among the participants. It was the goal of the open-ended play to have the group work together to resolve the issue, which was done in an orderly fashion where the group came up with a final idea that suited all parties. In the end the campers decided to come to an agreement where only a small percentage of the forest would be cut down and they also made the decision to alter the original street plan to better address and prevent coastal erosion by allowing space for coastal salt marsh to remain. Photos of land use maps and drawings created during the play can be found in Appendix A. This was a great exercise to do with the group as this scenario could be relevant in a community like Port Elgin.

The day ended with a fun game of Foxes and Mice in a local green space where the SPY campers learned about wildlife, food chains, and predator-prey relationships while getting the chance to run around and enjoy the great weather. SPY campers also learned how to take their ecological footprints.

Day Two

On day two of SPY Camp, the group was once again faced with the task of investigating their community and their investigative skills were once again put to the test as they partook in a cultural scavenger hunt of the Port Elgin area.

Amanda Marlin joined the camp to lead one of two groups as they explored the community using photos to collect and document their answers to the riddles and clues supplied from SPY Headquarters. The groups returned together and shared their findings. The campers said it was a very fun way to learn more about their community. They also realized that there was more than one correct answer to some clues. They talked about the variety of crafts made locally for example.

The next mission had the group write a formal letter to council with some suggestions that would help benefit the youth in the area (see Appendix B). Highlights of the letter included refurbishing the basketball and tennis court at the school, which are used frequently by youth in the community.

After lunch, the campers played more games that simulated the needs of wildlife and the careful balances that are needed in nature.

The last mission of SPY Camp was to design “dream communities”, or the Port Elgin of the future. The campers were divided into three groups of two. Each group took different approaches to their communities, ranging from large cities to small communities similar to current-day Port Elgin. In general the camp participants commented that in order to keep Port Elgin sustainable in the future, there needs to be “more businesses” as well as ways to attract more tourists and people who want to live in the village. Photos of dream communities can be seen in Appendix A.

The camp concluded with the campers discussing what they liked about camp. An evaluation form was given to both parents and camp members. Some comments included:

“Maybe a longer SPY Camp, the kids loved it” – Parent

“I liked everything!”- Camper

“The way the kids talk, they loved it.”- Parent

“I liked to play the games!”- Camper

“I wish we had more time!” Camper

Each camper was thanked for their great spy work and given a certificate of completion of SPY Camp Port Elgin 2010 before leaving.

Learning Outcomes and Conclusions

Upon the completion of SPY Camp, we feel that the camp enjoyed immense success. Camp members got the chance to see their community in a completely different view than they had been previously accustomed to. Instead of walking to

and from the store for a snack, each member began to develop a greater understanding as to why certain buildings are in certain places and what services the businesses within those buildings can offer to their community. By doing some hands-on investigating, this young group was able to take their findings, develop a strong formal letter to council that presented their opinions in a sophisticated manner. Needless to say, the 2010 Port Elgin SPY Camp was a great success, which was evident as many of the members hoped that SPY Camp would return next year.

The group, which in the end consisted of five boys and one girl, had an excellent time and learned valuable lessons about issues in their local area and community. While the group only assembled for two days it was very evident that through our time together they had not only made a valuable contribution to their community, but they also developed strong leadership skills, in both group and individual settings. By pairing up the knowledge learned from their community investigation and improving on their leadership qualities, the members of the 2010 Port Elgin SPY Camp will certainly continue to look at improvements in their community!

Parents were very supportive of SPY Camp and really liked that the camp was not only educational and fun but also community based. While many youth in Port Elgin would prefer to spend their free time in a larger area such as Moncton, the members of SPY Camp were able to see the wide variety of activities they could be a part of in their own community. The parents were also very satisfied that their children would have the opportunity to learn about their community, with no cost to them.

There are many important outcomes of Port Elgin’s SPY Camp. While the members of the SPY Camp obtained new skills and knowledge about community planning, the Village of Port Elgin also saw some benefits. As the youth in the area have had little interaction with the village council and are prone to just “hanging out” the village council needed a way to get youth involved in their community. By bringing SPY Camp to their community, the Village of Port Elgin was able to include local youth in the planning process, most notably in their most recent project, an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP). The value and importance of a youth perspective in community planning and taking their opinions into consideration for future community planning will be invaluable for the village going forward.

The table below summarizes some of the key points the young community planners made.

Good things about Port Elgin	Things that could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The families that live in the village. • A “close-knit, friendly place”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bike trails and roads need improvement. • Basketball and tennis courts need upgrading. • Solve the problem of speeding in town. • To be able to buy games, movies, clothes, and

Good things about Port Elgin	Things that could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Race Track. • Coles Hardware. • You can get the “basics” you need. • There is a health centre if you are not feeling well. • There is a school, library and museum for learning opportunities. • It is a safe place to live because it’s small. • Everyone knows everyone. • There are a variety of crafts made locally. 	<p>electronic locally instead of going to Sackville, Amherst or Moncton (there is limited choice in Port Elgin).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability and variety of jobs, especially for the next generation. • More green spaces and more spaces specifically for kids. • While there are enough trees in the downtown area, wildlife seem to be disappearing. • There is a lot of garbage in the ditches and along the rails to trails. • Limited places to see cultural exhibits such as paintings, film, etc. • There aren’t many things to do and kids get into trouble. • Have a community market which would address all four pillars of sustainable development and showcase local artistic talent.

Due to its success and the positive feedback from campers, parents and village council, it would be wonderful to offer SPY Camp in Port Elgin again in the future.

Some of our best practices include:

- Partnering with local people for the facilitation of certain community-specific activities such as at the Monro Heritage Centre.
- Offering a wide variety of activities- reading, acting, drawing, investigating etc. on a diverse set of topics such as history, culture, land use, and more. There was something that each child excelled at and enjoyed while they also got to improve on other skills.
- Focus on hands on activities. Participants learned more and remained engaged by exploring and examining their community, which lead them to both positive and negative notions towards their community.

Some improvement and suggestions that could be made to SPY Camp are:

- Find ways to encourage enrolment. While six is an adequate number the overall experience could have been larger.
- Offer a longer camp to enable time to bring in the local mayor, economic development officer, environment officer, etc. from the municipality to talk to camp members about more local issues.
- Include a section on budgeting and municipal finances.
- Create more role-playing and fast paced games that teach lessons about community and environmental issues. These types of games and activities were what the camp members enjoyed most.

- Partnerships are key for the success for the SPY Camp. Having an active role for local planners, historians, and others is critical to the validity and relevance of local content in the SPY Camp program.
- The program contents could be changed to explore other community issues. This could attract more participants.
- With further funding, find ways to make the operation of SPY Camp even more sustainable and environmentally friendly such as buying a set of reusable plates and cups for snacks.

Appendix A Photos



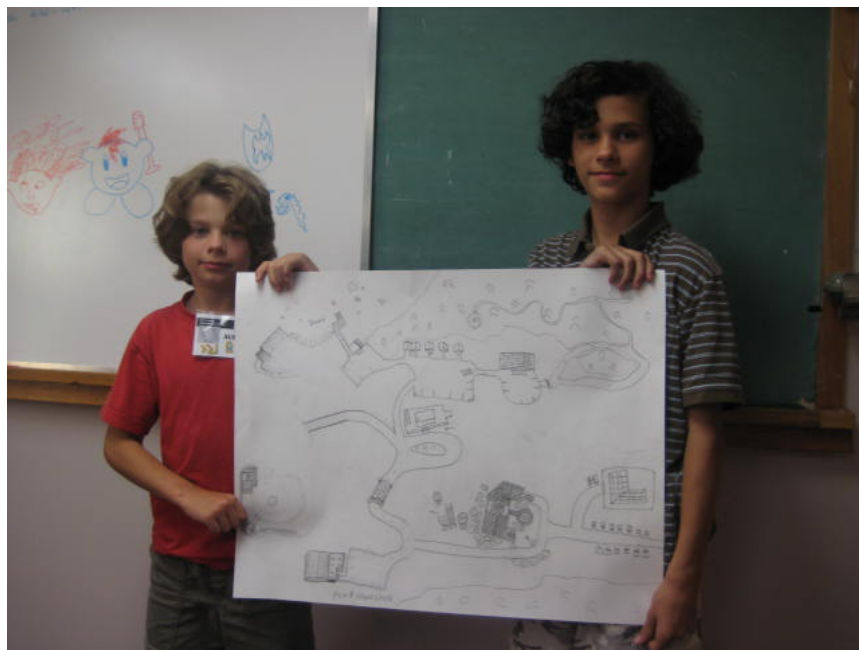
A land use dilemma in Sustainableville



A new plan for Sustainableville



Working on dream communities



A dream community

Appendix B Letter to Council

Wednesday, August 18, 2010

Mayor and Council
Port Elgin, NB

Dear Mayor and Council,

On behalf of the 2010 Port Elgin SPY Camp, we see many opportunities for improvement in our community for local youth.

The recreational area could be fixed up. The basket ball court is uneven and cracked and the hoops are too small which makes playing very difficult. The tennis courts are in need of new nets and the surface is in rough condition. It is great to have these but they should be kept up. We would also like to see the play ground at the school improved such as new play sets for both the younger and older kids.

We would also like to see more activities for youth. Some ideas we have include a sports week where you play a different sport each day. We would like more and longer SPY Camps, like for a month, so we could make videos about the future of our town. We would love to see more activities for youth in general.

Not many people know about the history of Fort Gaspereaux. Therefore we think the historic site could be better promoted to attract more tourists to our town. For example, more displays more activities, etc. would be attractive, like at Fort Beausejour. The beach should also be cleaned up.

We have learned through SPY Camp that there are always opportunities for improvement in our community. We thank you for having the chance to express our ideas.

Sincerely,

The participants of SPY (Sustainable Planning for Youth) Camp Port Elgin 2010

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