



**SOUTH  
ALGONQUIN  
BUSINESS  
ALLIANCE**

August 11, 2025

**Dear Councillor Pigeon and Economic Development Committee,**

Thank you for your interest in SABA and EOTA's Spectacle Lake Parking Lot project. I understand you'd like more information about the MTO Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). See attached for the MOU.

Unfortunately, the parking lot is only one small part of a bigger challenge, and even if you agree to take on the MOU the project cannot go forward at this time. Instead of focusing on the MOU, what we need is clear direction from a Township Trails Master Plan to understand what everyone's roles are and how to fund the ongoing repair and maintenance of our entire trail network, including parking lots like the SLBM trail parking lot.

There is no point building a parking lot in a system that has no overall ownership, scope, maintenance plan or budget.

**Why Trails Matter**

We estimate that South Algonquin has over 200 km of trails, plus another 50 km that could be developed into a world class attraction in all seasons. These trails bring visitors year-round, boost local businesses in the off season, and could support accessible tourism, which has a multiplying economic impact. With our economy struggling severely and many operators losing money from October to May, trails are both a major economic driver and an opportunity for sustainable economic improvement.

**Our Efforts and Ongoing Problems**

Since 2021, SABA and EOTA have raised over \$500,000 for trail rehabilitation, with clubs adding another \$300,000+. But even with everyone working together optimally, problems remain:

1. **Not enough capacity** – Volunteers don't have the resources to keep up with repairs.
2. **Burnout** – Unpaid work replaces paid jobs our community needs.
3. **Unsustainable funding** – Upgrading and repairs are costly and often wash out very quickly leading to wasted resources.



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4. **Extreme weather** – Storms and flooding contribute to trail deterioration faster than ever.
5. **No overall strategy** – Maintenance is patchwork, not coordinated (which matches funding availability).
6. **Bureaucratic delays** – Permits and funding can take years, stalling projects like the SLBM parking lot.

### The Situation

The 2025-2026 snowmobile season is in jeopardy as parts of the trail are in such disrepair they are currently closed for safety reasons with no way for any of the clubs or non-profits to commission repairs, either alone or together. If the trails don't open this winter, our winter operators will be in trouble.

EOTA estimates it costs \$1,000 per kilometre per year to maintain trails—about \$200,000–\$250,000 annually. Without a funded maintenance plan, EOTA has stopped all new work in South Algonquin, including the SLBM parking lot because it doesn't make sense to invest taxpayer resources in something that will immediately deteriorate.

The EOTA generously covers copays for trail work, and SABA both depends on their financial support and supports their position. We will not take on new projects until a maintenance plan is in place. We simply cannot keep writing grants and organizing volunteers to improve trails we don't own with resources we don't have – especially when there is zero chance we can keep up, or even catch up.

Council, on the other hand, has policy tools at their disposal to begin to remedy the situation in the short term.

### What We're Asking Council To Do

1. **Hold an emergency Economic Development meeting** in August or early September to apply for NOHFC funding for a Trails Master Plan before the September 24, 2025 ROD program deadline.
2. **Form a Trails Working Group** so community members can share local knowledge and align volunteer work with Council's goals.
3. **Commission a Trails Master Plan by spring 2026** to guide sustainable resource and volunteer management.
4. **Explore sustainable funding models** for maintenance, repairs, and upgrades.



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5. **Work with EOTA and the Ministry of Tourism** to develop a plan and to secure provincial investment to build a competitive trail network.

A trails master plan will help everyone in the community understand responsibilities and opportunities, and specifically where the SLBM parking lot (and other parking lots at other trailheads) sit in the comprehensive priority and funding list. It would make more sense to discuss the parking lot MOU at that point.

### **The Potential Payoff**

EOTA's 2025 Rockin' the Trails Rally in Tweed brought in over \$600,000 in direct spending in one weekend, with a 6:1 return on investment, and nearly one million dollars in multiplier effect. South Algonquin could see similar results—but only with a coordinated plan that sees our trails brought back to pride of place in our community.

We urge Council to act now so we can protect our trails, our businesses, and strengthen our economy. SABA is ready, willing and able to be part of the solution. Please reach out with questions.

Sincerely,

Angela Pollak, BA, MA, MLIS, PhD  
Chair, South Algonquin Business Alliance