



Town of Essex Planner Chad Jeffery, left, leads a tour through Sadler's Nature Park Oct. 19. More than a dozen Essex residents participated in a two-day active transportation workshop organized by Go for Green, The Active Living and Environment Program. The program is visiting 15 municipalities across the province, presenting workshops that highlight public health, safety and environmental concerns.

# Workshop encourages residents to go for green

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

There was no shortage of ideas when an active transportation workshop visited Essex Oct. 19-20.

Organized by Go for Green Active Living and Environmental Solutions, the two-day event drew a wealth of suggestions from participating residents about how to improve the safety and accessibility for those using active transportation.

Go for Green Ontario coordinator Marc Plante defined active transportation as any mode of transport that requires human power – this includes walking, biking and rollerblading.

Plante's presentation during the workshop exposed many Canadians as being immobile, lazy and in bad health.

Canada lags behind near-

ly all European countries when it comes to using active transportation, Plante explained.

In an effort to "change attitudes" and get people more active, Plante introduced a four-step plan for the group attending the workshop to follow.

Starting with awareness and followed by an assessment of the community, the group went on to create a vision statement and plan of action.

Plante asked residents to look at the town's infrastructure, institutional supports, safety, security and planning and how much they have to offer those practising active transportation.

The group funneled their suggestions down to a series of ten steps for improvement.

Some of the steps include developing a safety educa-

tion plan for schools and the community, erecting signage that would encourage motorists to share the road with cyclists and the promotion and education of active transportation around Essex.

The action plan will now be passed on to the town's administration, council and departments to be initiated over the next six months.

At that time, Plante will visit the town and discuss what aspects of the plan have been started.

He began presenting workshops to different municipalities in Ontario in June and will submit a final report to Ontario Minister of Health Promotion Jim Watson before the end of the year.

"To make an active transportation community, you need a bunch of things to come together," Plante said. "It's a shift in mentality that

starts with each individual."

Throughout the course of Plante's presentation, he noted a number of practices common among Ontarians that he says need to be changed.

He put part of the blame on an automobile dependent society for causing obesity.

"Walking short distances instead of driving improves health and sets a good example for kids," he said. "Being physically inactive can have the same impact as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day."

The presentation drew many concerns from the group, such as the need to educate and promote more active programs for school children and the improvement of local sidewalks.

Town of Essex Director of Parks and Recreation Doug Sweet said it will take a collaboration between key players in the town to successfully implement the action plan.

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