

# Active St. Mary's

## What We Heard Report

December 2023



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What We Heard Report  
December 2023

This report was prepared by UPLAND Planning +  
Design for the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's

**UPLAND**

Cover photo: Nova Scotia Tourism



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# 01 INTRODUCTION





## 1.1 WHAT IS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION?

Active transportation is a broad term that refers to all modes of human-powered transportation, including walking and wheeling (referring to the use of assistive devices), cycling, rollerblading and skateboarding, seasonal activities such as kayaking, canoeing, skiing and snowshoeing, and some motorized forms of transportation like e-bikes and electric wheelchairs.

Some people depend on active transportation to get where they need to go due to lack of alternative transportation, while others choose to use active transportation as a preferred form of commute, exercise, recreation, or leisure.

Active Transportation is typically used for two different purposes:

- » Utilitarian active transportation includes trips where active transportation is used to get to a destination, such as work, school, the store, or appointments.
- » Recreational active transportation includes leisure, recreational pursuits, and fitness (e.g. dog walking, hiking, paddling, etc.) and often takes place in off-road locations. In some cases, both utilitarian and recreational active transportation can occur at the same time.

Encouraging greater participation in active transportation can improve the physical and mental health of users, reduce carbon footprints, attract visitors, and boost local businesses through increased traffic. Building active transportation infrastructure may also improve the equity of travel options, contribute to a more accessible public realm, and create safer, more liveable communities for everyone.



## 1.2 ABOUT THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to develop an Active Transportation (AT) Plan for the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's. This Plan will aim to enhance the movement of both residents and visitors throughout the Municipality, fostering a healthier and more sustainable community where transportation is not only safe and practical but also an enjoyable experience for all.

The final AT Plan will include a comprehensive network plan, recommendations related to programs and facilities, and a phased implementation strategy based on variables such as population density, development, traffic volume, safety concerns, and more. The data contained in the Plan may be used in budget forecasting and future project planning, providing both staff and Council with a clear direction on where active transportation development should take place each year and why.

## 1.3 PROJECT PHASES



### Phase 1: Discovery

Late Summer - Early Fall 2023

This phase of the project was focused on project mobilization and information gathering. The project team collected and reviewed all relevant information and geospatial datasets that would be useful throughout the duration of this project. Phase 1 resulted in an informative Background Report ([click here to view](#)) that was used to develop a strong understanding of the key issues and potential opportunities for this project.



### Phase 2: Formative Engagement

Fall 2023

Communication is critical to the success of this Active Transportation Plan, and effective formative engagement with community members and stakeholders contributes to realizing a shared vision for the project. A combination of virtual and in-person techniques were used to consult with the community, which are explored further throughout chapter 2 and 3 in this document.



### Phase 3: Plan Development

Early - Mid Winter 2024

In this phase, the project team will be well equipped to begin developing the draft Active Transportation Plan. This Plan will provide recommendations and directions for the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's over the next ten years.



### Phase 4: Final Plan

Late Winter 2024

Based on input and feedback from the Municipality's project development team, stakeholders, and the public on the Draft Active Transportation Plan, the project team will proceed with putting the finishing touches on the final Active Transportation Plan. This phase of work will offer important details on how the plan will be implemented.



## 1.4 ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report encompasses a summary of “What We Did” during the engagement phase for this project and “What We Heard” from residents and stakeholders along the way. The majority of the reporting in this document does not utilize direct quotes, rather it represents the efforts of the project team to develop a cohesive narrative from the various engagement activities and the wide range of information received.

The information in this report aims to provide the reader with an opportunity to learn about what the community has shared so far and to see their own input reflected if they were a participant themselves. Furthermore, the Background Report, the What We Heard Report and the more detailed findings from our engagement, will set a foundation for the draft Active Transportation Plan.



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# 02 WHAT WE DID





## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Input from the community was critical in order to understand the current state of active transportation in St. Mary's and to ascertain the key issues and opportunities. Recognizing this, the project began with an extensive initial engagement process in order to lay the foundation for the development of the draft Plan. Residents and stakeholders were invited to share their perspectives and insights on their vision for the future of Active Transportation in the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's through various methods. This chapter provides an overview of the engagement activities undertaken and who participated in each.

To kick off engagement, the Active St. Mary's website was established ([www.activestmarys.ca](http://www.activestmarys.ca)) to serve as a centralized hub for project information and updates. The website was first promoted during the project launch, which was advertised using various platforms including the Municipality's website, Facebook page, and newsletter. The website provided the public with information about the project, while encouraging participation in engagement activities. The website also offered an option for those interested to subscribe to a mailing list to receive updates on project events and milestones. Alternatively, participants were invited to contact the project team using the submission form on the project website. In total, the project website had 175 visitors and 90 unique users.

## 2.2 COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT

As elected representatives, the Municipal Council has a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities in their community. As councilors are also residents, they provide a vital knowledge link between the administrative management of the Municipality and the real-world effects. Therefore, the project team believes that it is important to provide updates to the St. Mary's Council throughout the project. Providing updates during council presentations is also another way to reach the community, as the meetings are made publicly available.

To date, the project team has presented an update about Active St. Mary's during the following council meetings:

- » Wednesday, August 2, 2023
- » Wednesday, November 1, 2023
- » Wednesday, December 6, 2023

To access the recordings from these meetings, [please click here](#).



## 2.3 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Upon the project launch, approximately 30 stakeholders were identified to participate in various engagement activities. Each stakeholder was sent an email providing them with an overview of the project, a list of public engagement opportunities, and an invitation to participate in a stakeholder interview.

Stakeholder interviews were completed virtually throughout the months of October and November. These sessions enabled stakeholders to gain an understanding of the scope of the project, to provide feedback and to ask questions. In total, 10 stakeholders participated in one of these sessions.

## 2.4 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Between September and December 2023, the project team hosted a series of in-person and on-line public engagement activities. To ensure that the findings accurately represented the diverse population of St. Mary's, multiple methods of engagement were used.



### Take Home Activity Kits and Questionnaire Paper and Electronic Versions Made Available

Take Home Activity Kits were designed as an offline participation option. Each kit included an overview of the project, followed by a short questionnaire that could be completed anywhere. Paper versions were available for pick up from the Municipal Office and the Sherbrooke Public Library, and could be dropped off to either location. Electronic versions were available on the project website, and a copy of the questionnaire was also available on the social pinpoint page for those who wanted to complete both at the same time. In total, the project team received 16 completed questionnaires. All responses can be found in the Appendix.



### Walk and Roll Tours 4 Sessions Across the Municipality

From late October to early November, the project team hosted 4 Walk and Roll tours. These sessions provided participants with the opportunity to learn more about the project and share their feedback while exploring a trail or section of the Municipality. Although this engagement activity had the lowest participation of all methods, with only 4 participants in total, the information received from these sessions was invaluable and participation was greatly appreciated.



### Social Pinpoint Online Mapping Activity

The online Social Pinpoint map invited residents and stakeholders to place location specific comments on a map of St. Mary's and to view comments left by other participants. The map showed any existing active transportation facilities and key destinations, and prompted discussion about existing conditions, places people liked or disliked, and ideas for the future. This engagement platform was open for participation from late September 2023 to mid-November 2023 and in total the map had **199 unique users**, with 64 direct comments, upvotes or downvotes.

Feedback provided through this platform will be explored further in the next chapter and all comments can be found in the Appendix.



### Youth Workshop St. Mary's Education Centre/Academy

To ensure that the youth of the community were involved in developing objectives for the Plan, the project team hosted a youth focused workshop at the St. Mary's Education Centre/Academy in early October. The purpose of this workshop was to seek ideas and opinions from younger residents, while enhancing their awareness about active transportation.

In total, 32 youth participated in this session all providing invaluable feedback to the project team. The information received from the youth participants will be explored further throughout the next chapter of this report.



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# 03 WHAT WE HEARD





## INTRODUCTION

The activities undertaken in the Engagement phase generated a well rounded collection of thematic and location based feedback. This chapter explores that feedback, grouped into themes. A portion of this feedback will contribute to shaping the draft Active Transportation Plan, some will be forwarded to the Municipality for consideration in various aspects of their operations, and the rest will be shared to accurately reflect the priorities and issues identified by residents and stakeholders.

## ACCESSIBILITY

Inaccessible spaces make active transportation less comfortable and can make navigation not only difficult but impossible for some users. Addressing issues related to accessibility was a clear priority for most engagement participants, and some even made specific recommendations including:



Widen infrastructure to allow for strollers, wagons and assisted devices



Improve infrastructure and opportunities near more isolated communities



Consider the needs of **all** users participating in **all** forms of active transportation



Implement programs and initiatives that aim to reduce barriers



Ensure there is a plan for the maintenance of routes in the winter months

## SAFETY

Safety was also a top priority and commonly discussed across engagement activities. Recurring themes that emerged related to motorists, wildlife, and extreme weather conditions. Specific recommendations made by participants include:



Provide opportunities for individuals who feel unsafe participating in active transportation on their own to engage in a groups setting (e.g. walking clubs)



Implement signage to remind motorists about sharing the road, especially in areas where the road narrows or bends



Offer workshops on topics related to safe active transportation use



Improve routes to St. Mary's Education Centre/Academy and other key destinations for youth



Address vehicles speeding in residential zones and focus on traffic calming




Increase shoulders or physically separate motor vehicles from active transportation users











## AMENITIES

Amenities are an essential piece of the active transportation network and help to create routes and spaces that are safe and enjoyable. Some participants remarked that they would be more likely to try new modes of active transportation if amenities were added or improved. We received a wide range of insight into what residents and visitors would like to see. Recommendations made by participants related to amenities include:

-  Increase bicycle parking options at community gathering areas and other key destinations
-  Improve lighting across the active transportation network and increase visibility at crosswalks
-  Improve wayfinding on trails and provide user friendly maps at trailheads
-  Provide garbage cans on trails and at key destinations within the network
-  Offer and promote “you made it!” destination points to encourage use of trails (e.g. benches at viewpoints, geocaches, or signage)

## EDUCATION, PROGRAMMING AND PROMOTIONS

Education and programming can help disseminate new knowledge about active transportation, address barriers to adopting active transportation, and build capacity among local agencies and individuals to support active transportation. Several participants indicated that they did not know where to find out about local routes and opportunities, and identified opportunities to better promote future active transportation options. Other recommendations made by participants include:

-  Provide general information and tips about active transportation in St. Mary's online (e.g. the Municipal website) and in community spaces (e.g. infographics on bulletin boards)
-  Indicate the time that it might take to complete a certain activity so that users know what to expect and how to schedule it in
-  Support the development of group walking/cycling programs and other social activities
-  Provide and promote user-friendly maps that can be found online, at trail heads, and in community spaces that include details about difficulty level, available amenities, accessibility barriers, trail conditions, route types, and key destinations
-  Improve access to facilities and equipment that support active transportation
-  Implement information kiosks in each community to highlight what the community has to offer
-  Offer workshops on topics including bicycle repair, wildlife safety, and defensive cycling
-  Provide information on responsible trail use and trail etiquette

## ST. MARY'S RIVER

The St. Mary's River was one of the top mentioned locations throughout the engagement phase. Many participants referred to the St. Mary's River as the “heart” of the Municipality, and some remarked that it is one of the most desirable destinations for both residents and visitors. Common threads that emerged during engagement activities were related to equipment rentals, promotion, access points, partnerships, and programming.



Make equipment more accessible for those looking to paddle on the river



Improve overall communications and promotion for the river



Strengthen relationships to support existing and future St. Mary's River Association (SMRA) programming



Increase parking options and access points along river



Develop a loop trail along the river

## BARRIERS

Improving active transportation options is not always easy, and in rural areas such as St. Mary's, there are often other unique challenges. However, with dedicated consideration these challenges can be addressed. The following list highlights the barriers identified frequently by participants when asked what is stopping them from participating in active transportation more often.



Drivers not providing enough space and high traffic speeds



Physical limitations and accessibility concerns



Distance between destinations and time constraints



Harsh weather conditions and lack of appropriate seasonal equipment



Lack of connectivity between communities and key destinations



Low interest from family members or no one to go with



Unsure of where to go or what is available



Lack of resources or equipment



## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- » One participant expressed a desire to see indoor walking options available for bad weather days and inquired about the use of the track at the rink.
- » We also heard several times about the importance of providing support to trail groups.
- » Another recurring theme was the idea of traveling part way using active transportation. One participant suggested having designated areas where you can park your vehicle and then switch to another mode of transportation.
- » Off road vehicles came up frequently across engagement methods, especially during the youth session. It became apparent quickly that this form of transportation is very important to many.
- » Various opportunities for paddling routes were brought up. These specific location based comments and suggestions can be found in the Appendix.
- » We heard about a decrease in residents walking to get their mail due to the new locations of community mail boxes.
- » Several participants made comments about the value of community spaces including the library and community centres
- » Various suggestions were made for the expansion of existing trails and location that new trails and parks could be developed. One participant made a recommendation for a Provincial or National Park. These location specific comments can be found in the Appendix.
- » We also heard about a desire to see a skate park in the community.
- » Although there were suggestions made for how to enhance various parks, trails and open spaces, we also heard a lot of positive comments about what currently exists.
- » Participants at a Walk and Roll Tour expressed that they miss the Aqua-fit Program that they used to attend in Liscomb.
- » An appreciation for the sidewalk improvements in Sherbrooke was remarked by many participants, as well as recommendations for sidewalks elsewhere.
- » Another participant stated that they are pleased with the recent streetscape improvements and would like to see more in that direction as they believe it not only improves the look of things but also makes people feel safer.
- » Participants brought up the desire to participate in more forms of AT during the winter months.
- » We also heard a lot about an appreciation for the St. Mary's Education Centre/Academy, as well as a desire to see support for transportation from after school programming, for those who do not have access and cannot participate because of this.
- » Finally, several participants stated that they believe participation in AT has increased in the last several years and that this is good timing for this project.



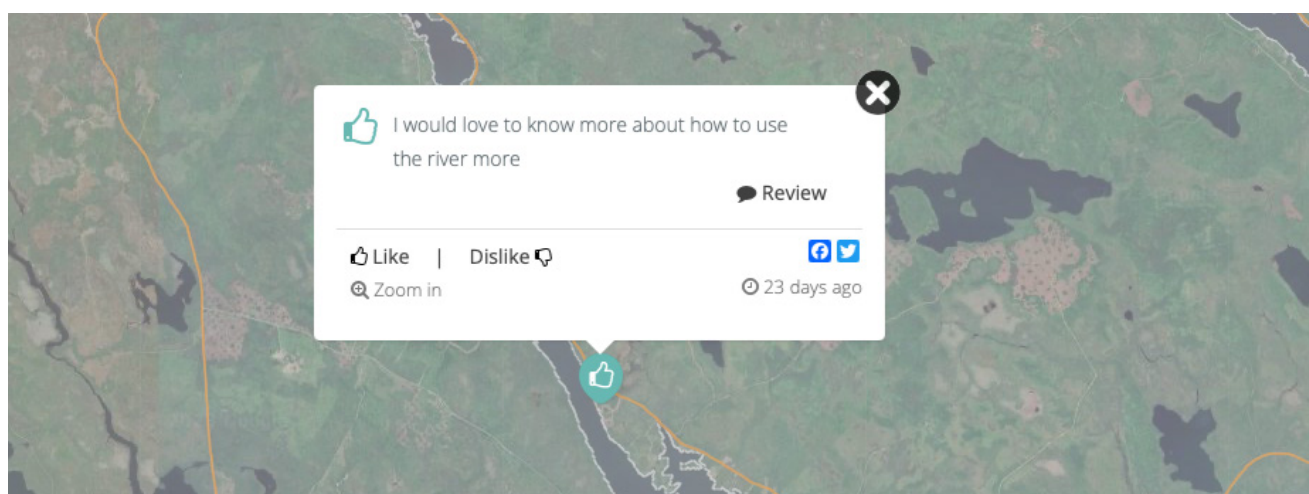
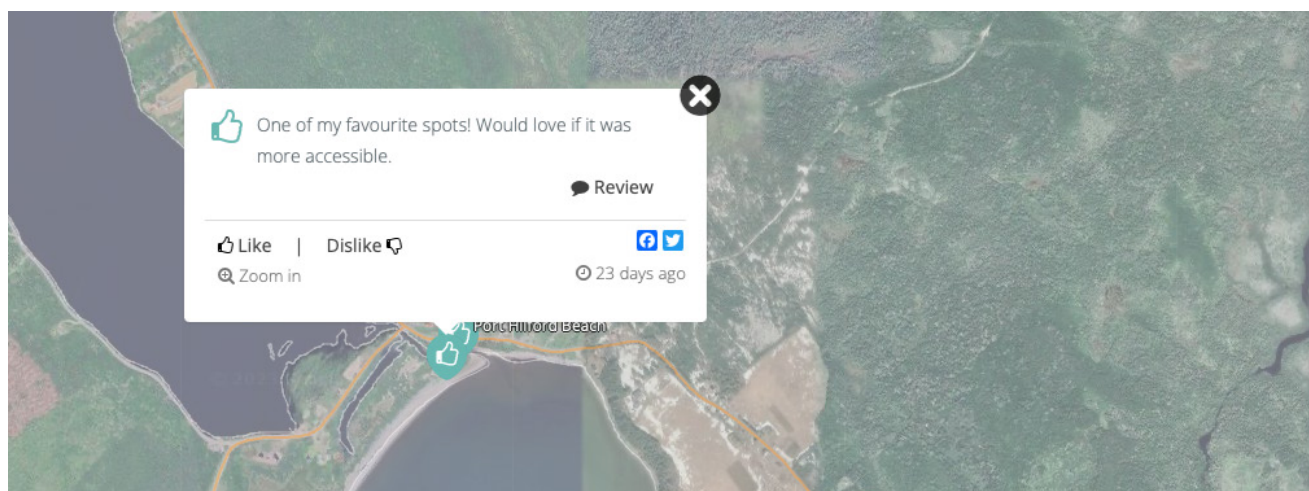
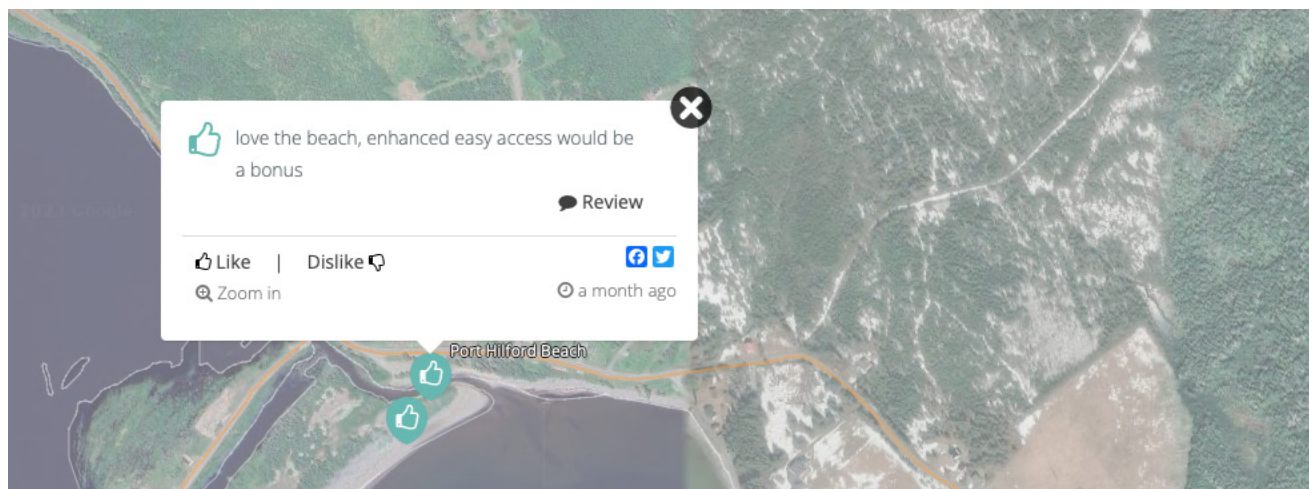
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# 04 APPENDIX

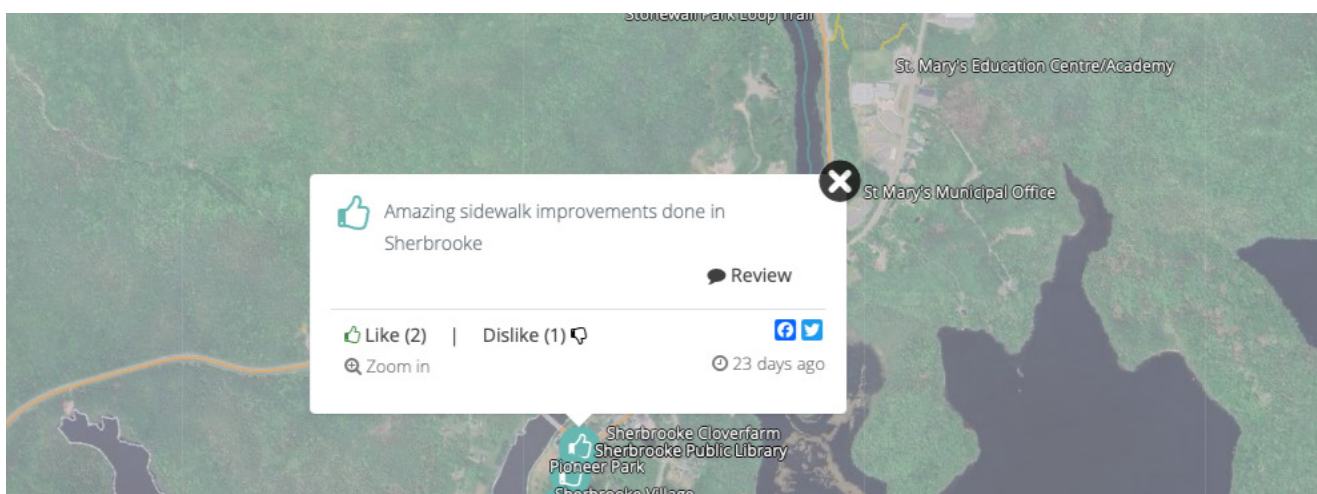
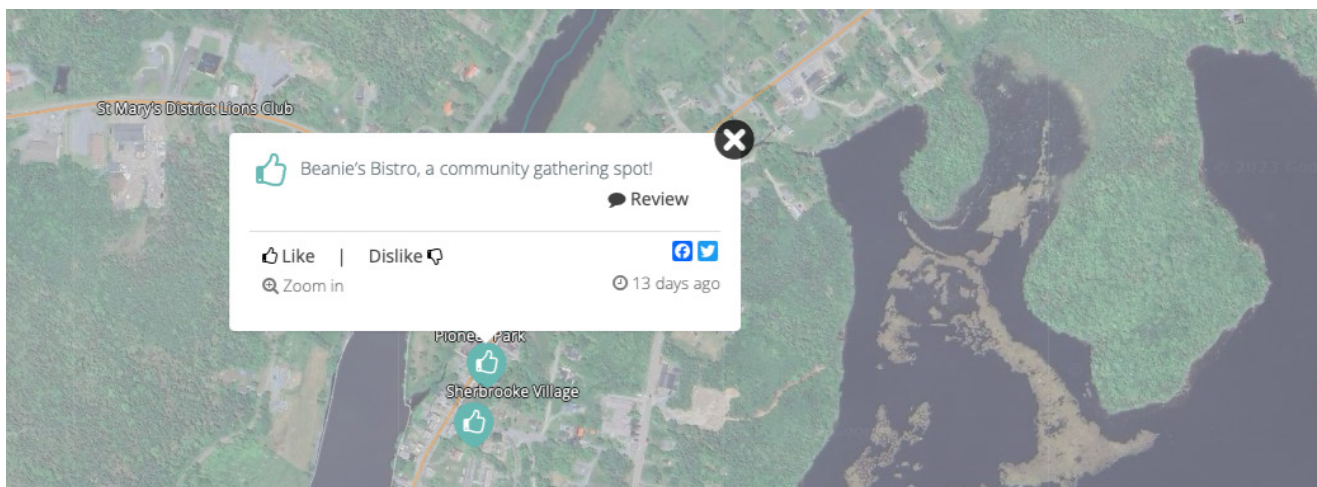
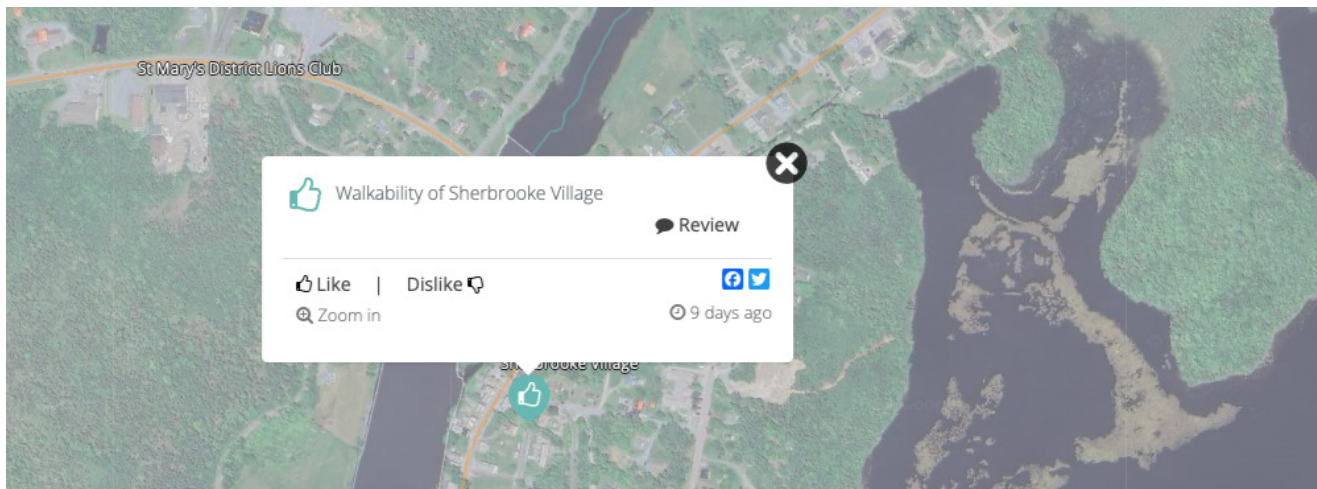




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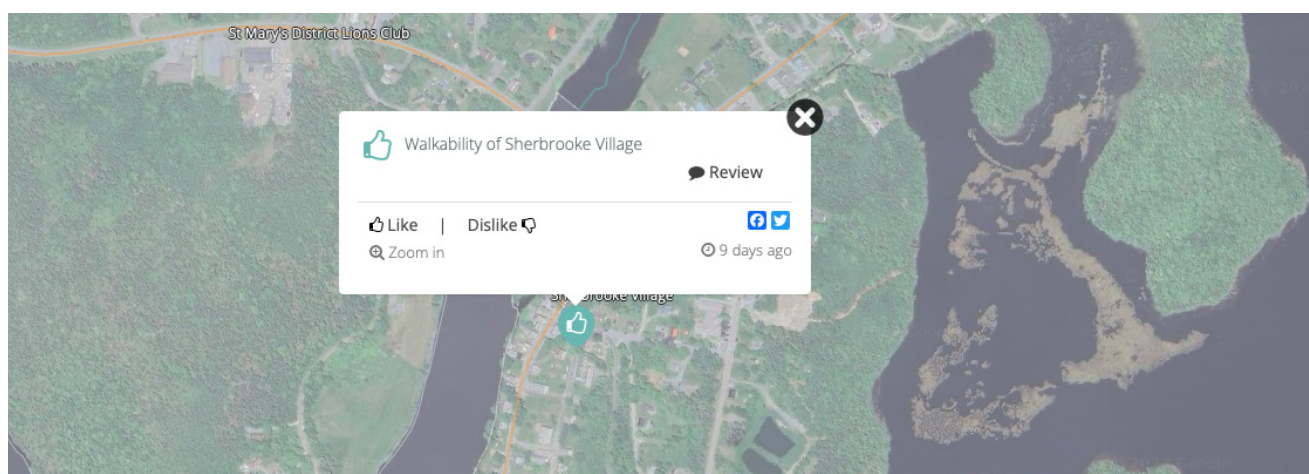
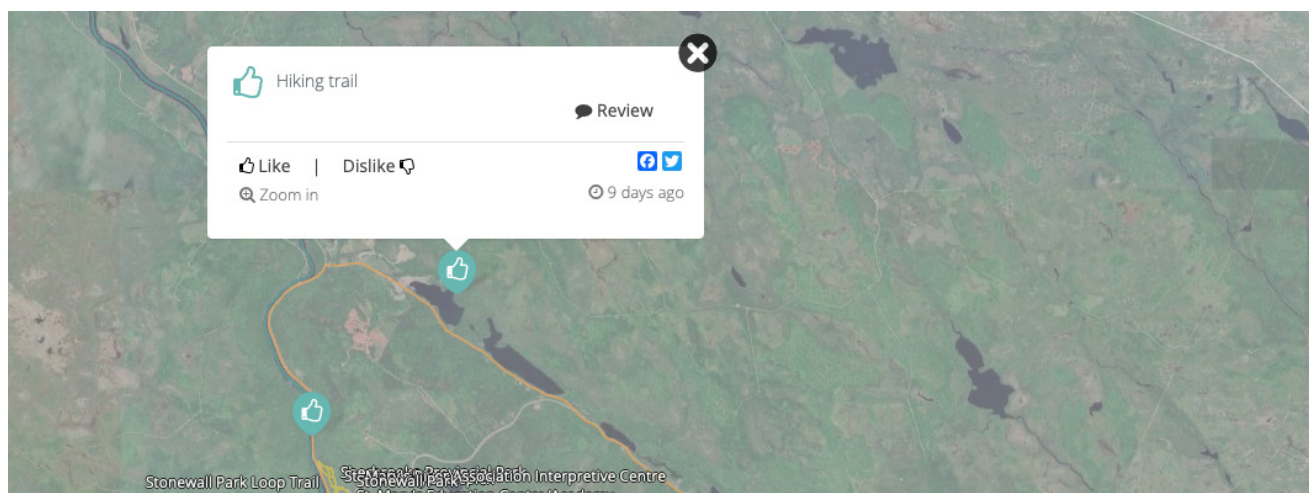
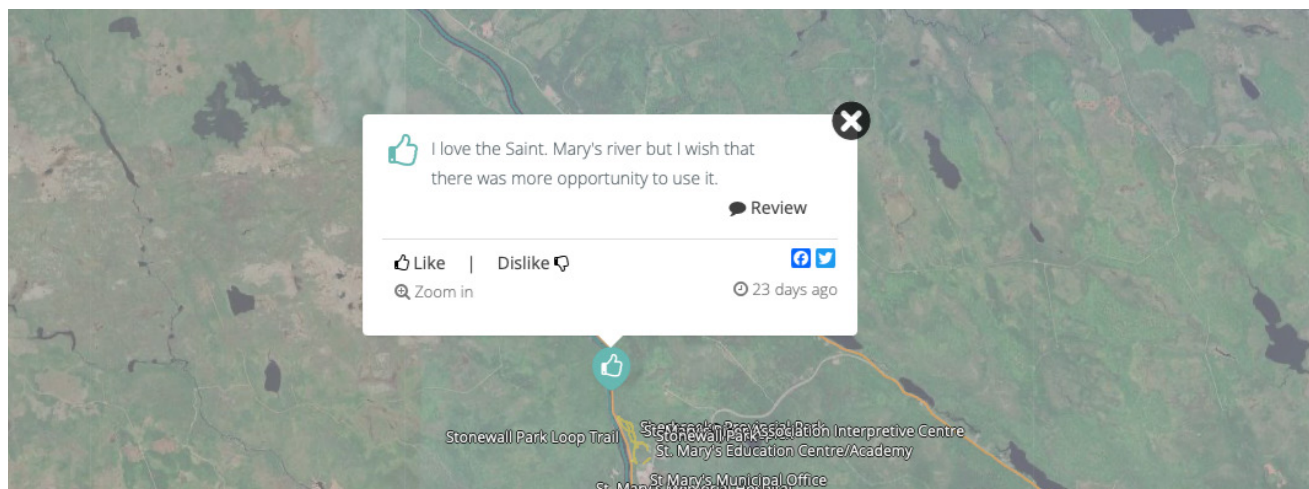


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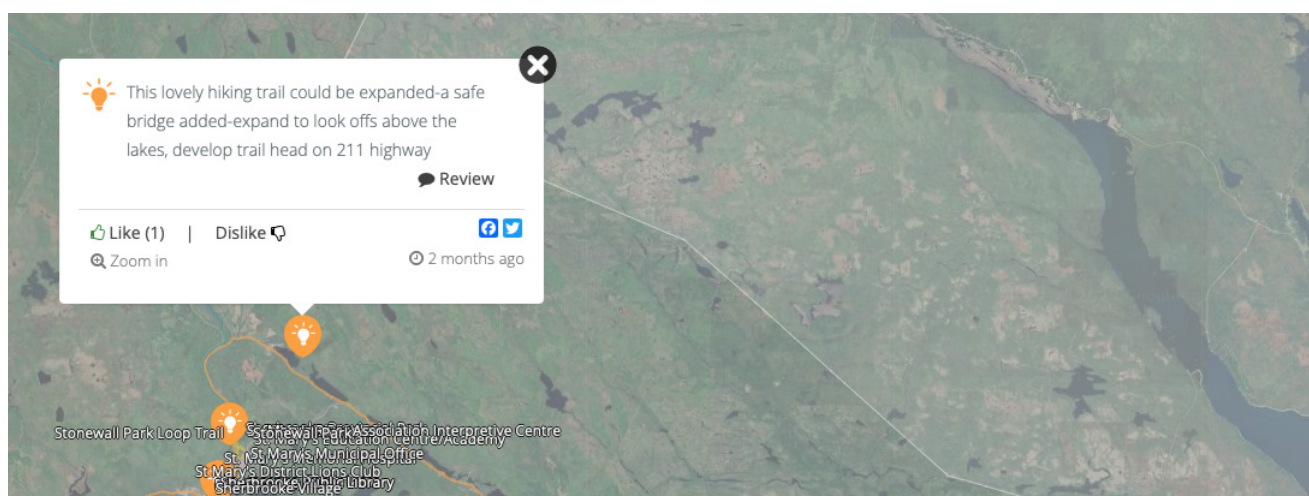
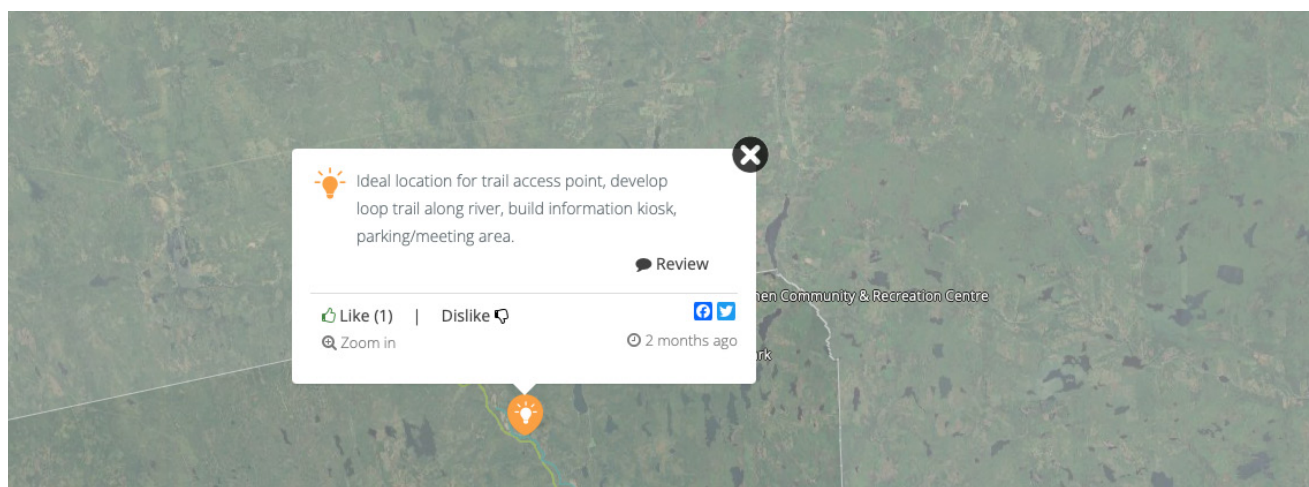
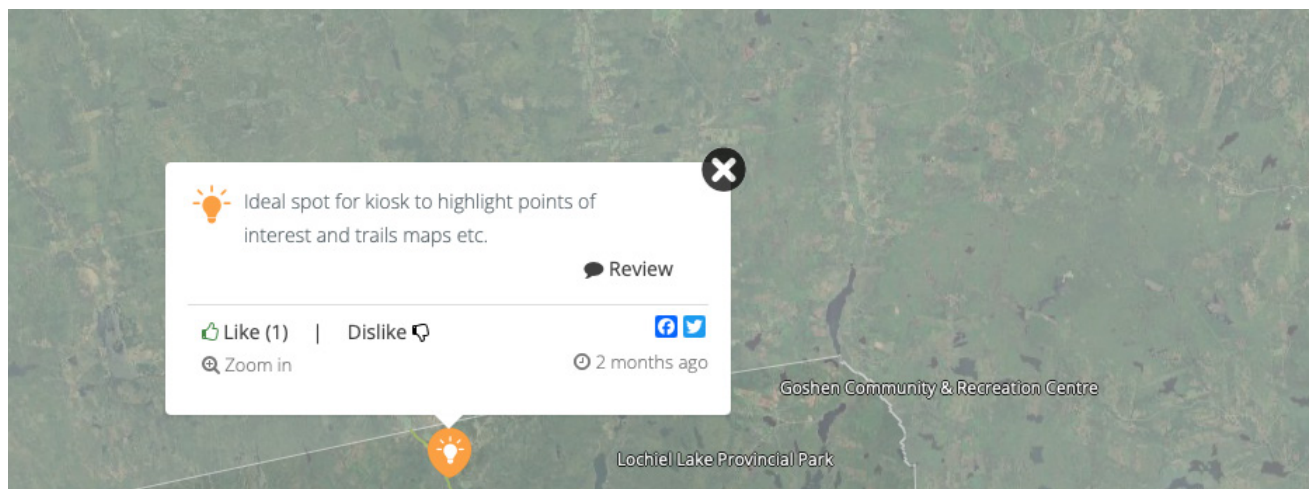




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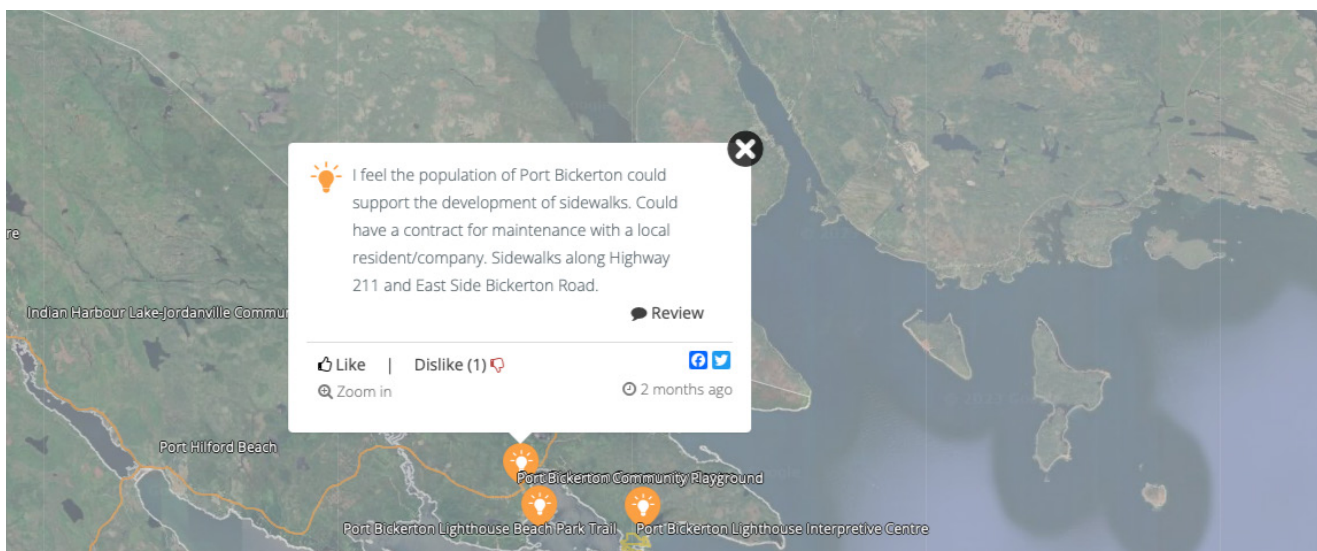
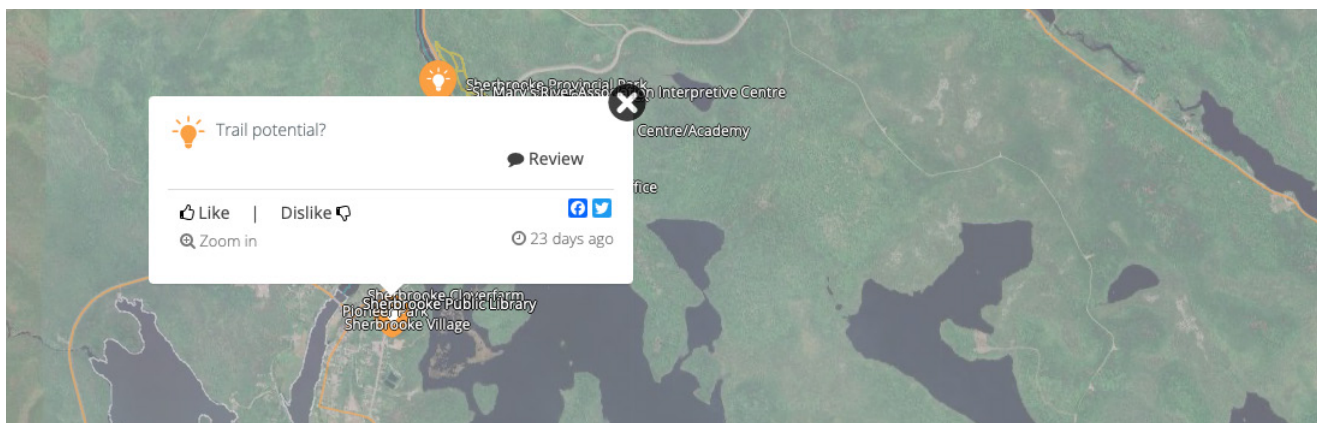
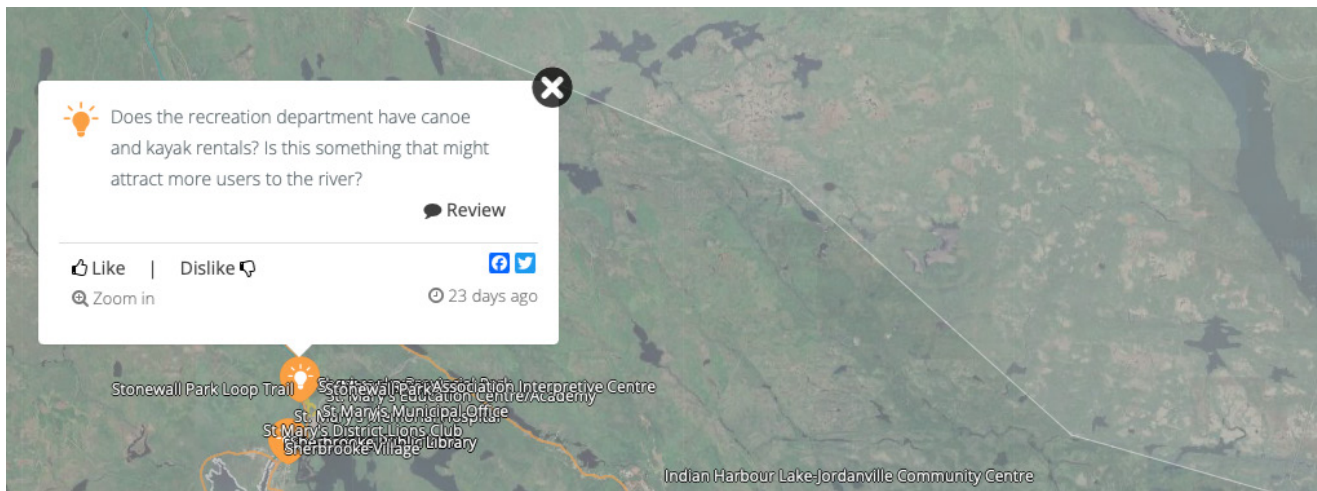


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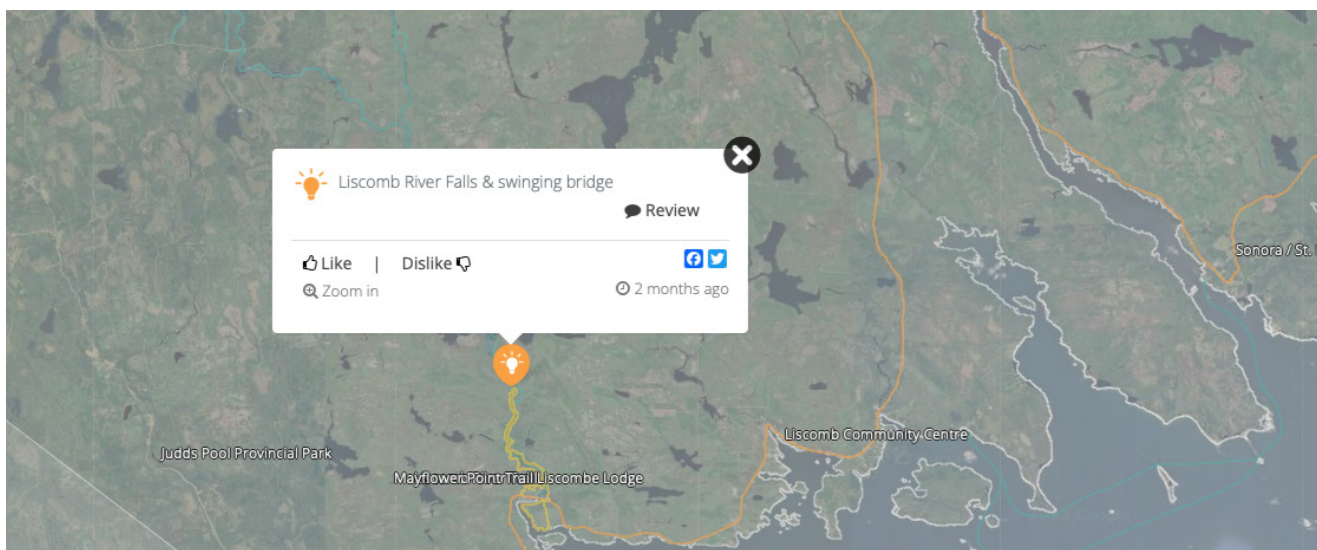
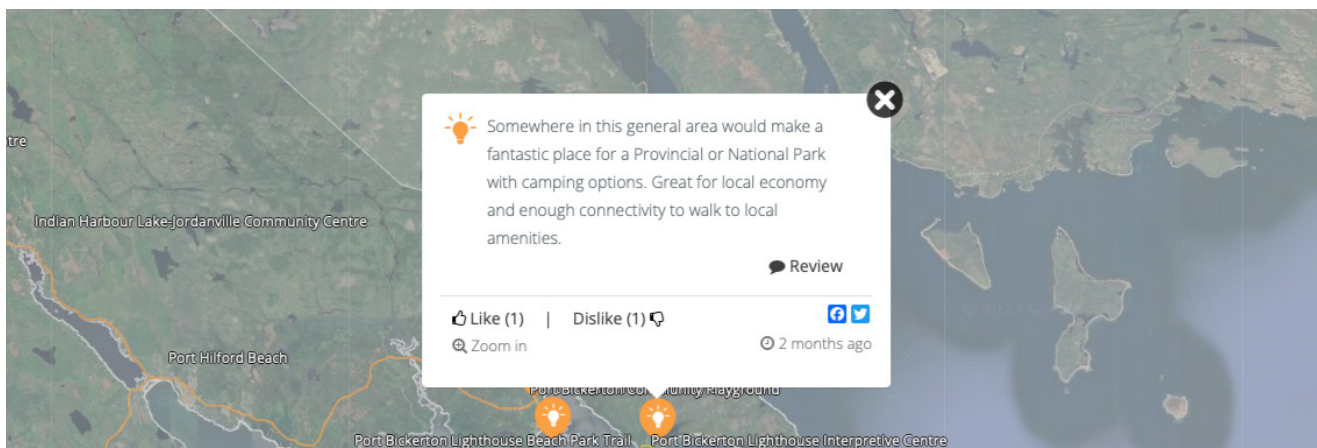
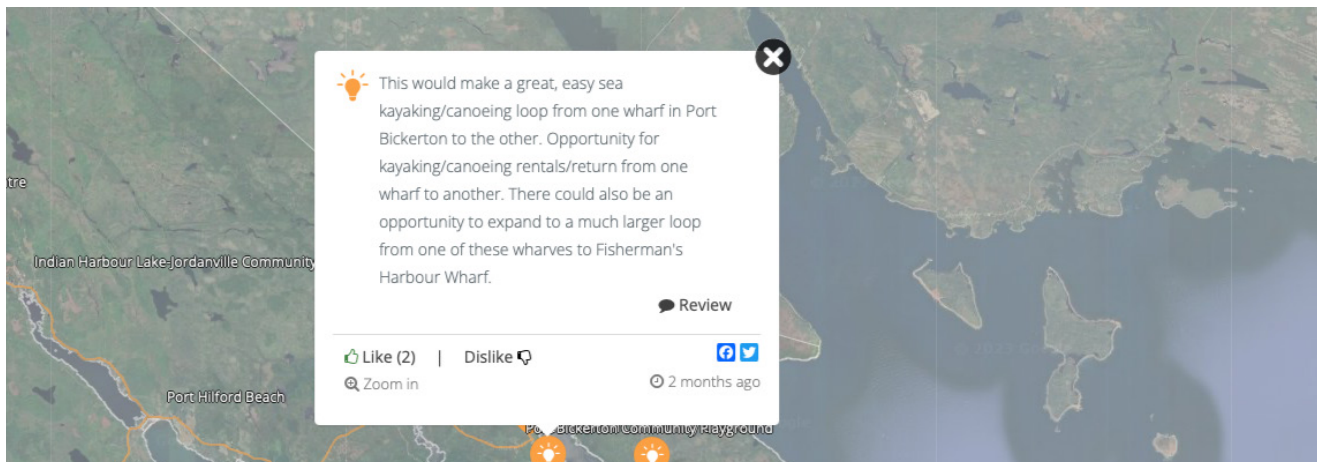


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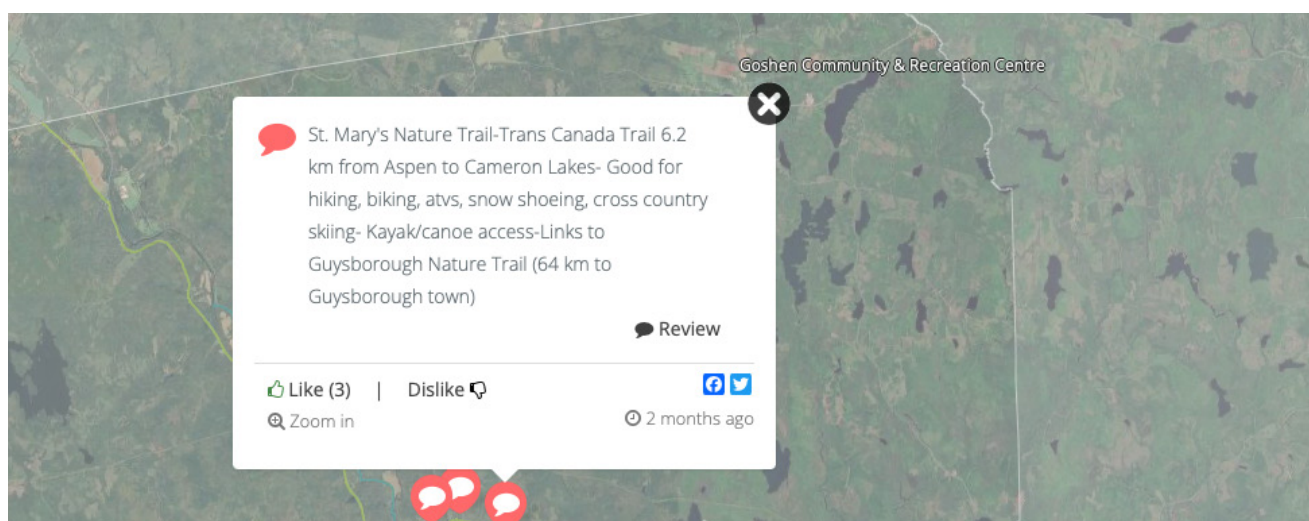
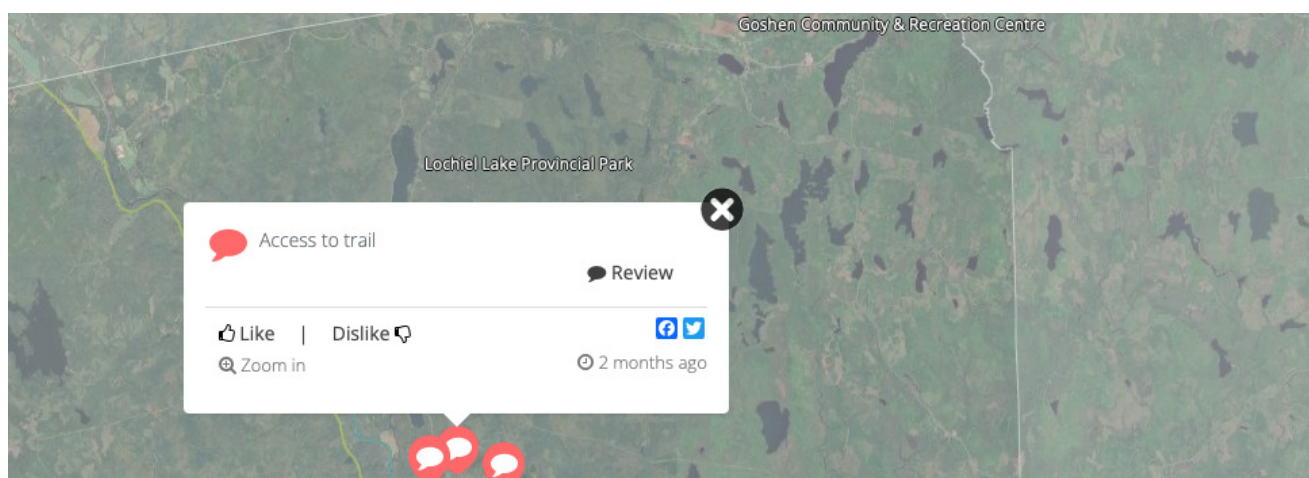
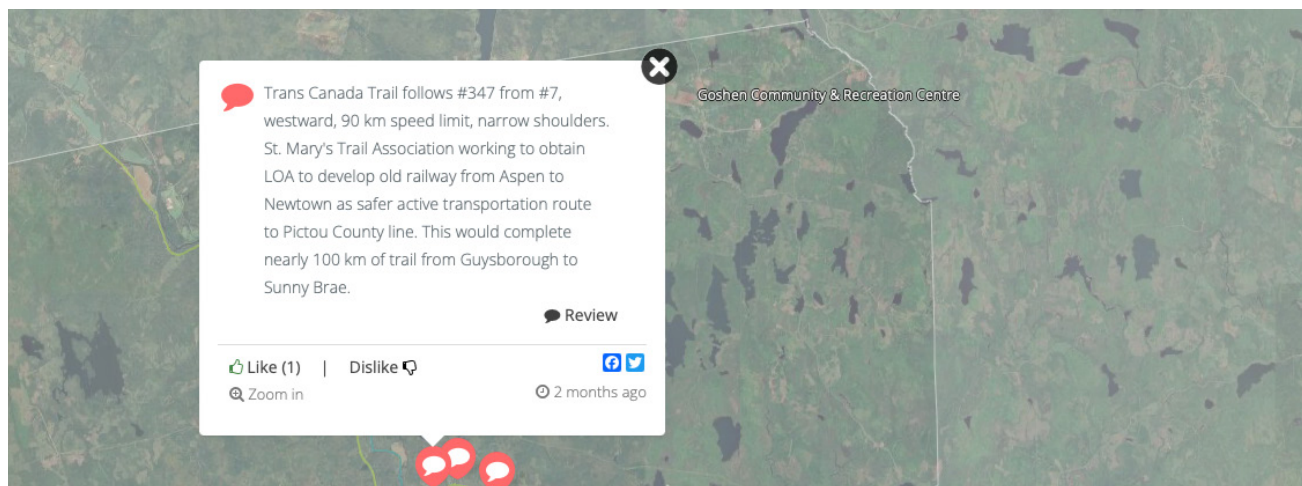




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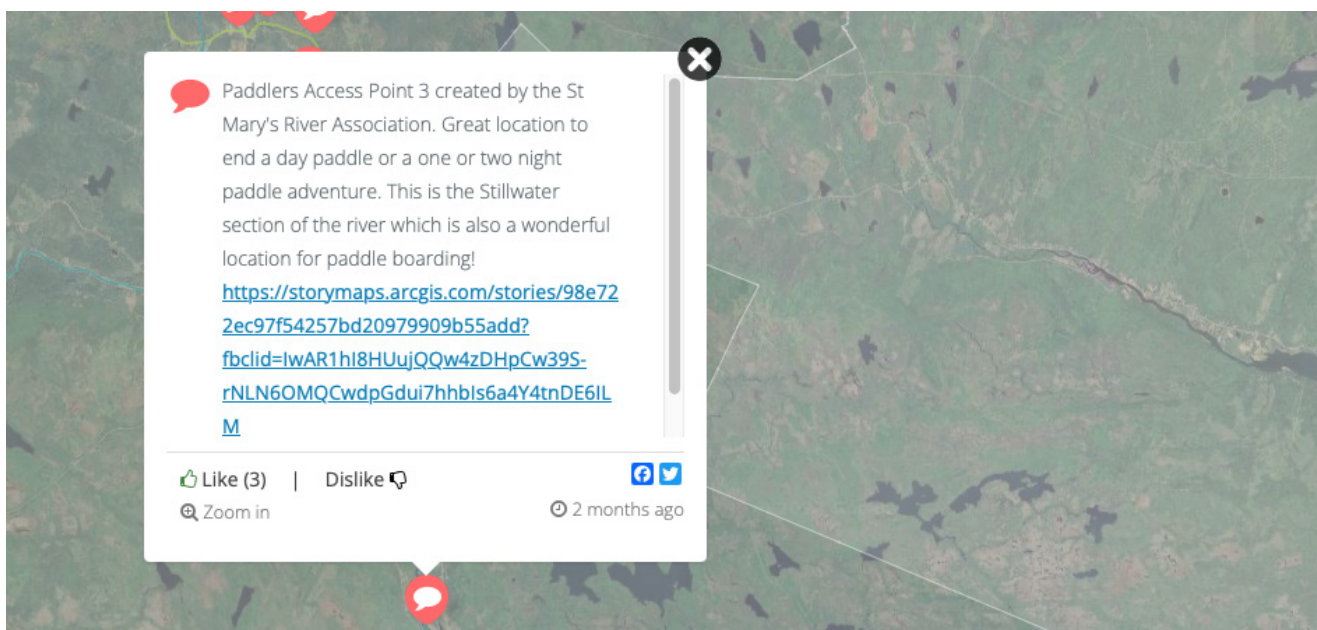
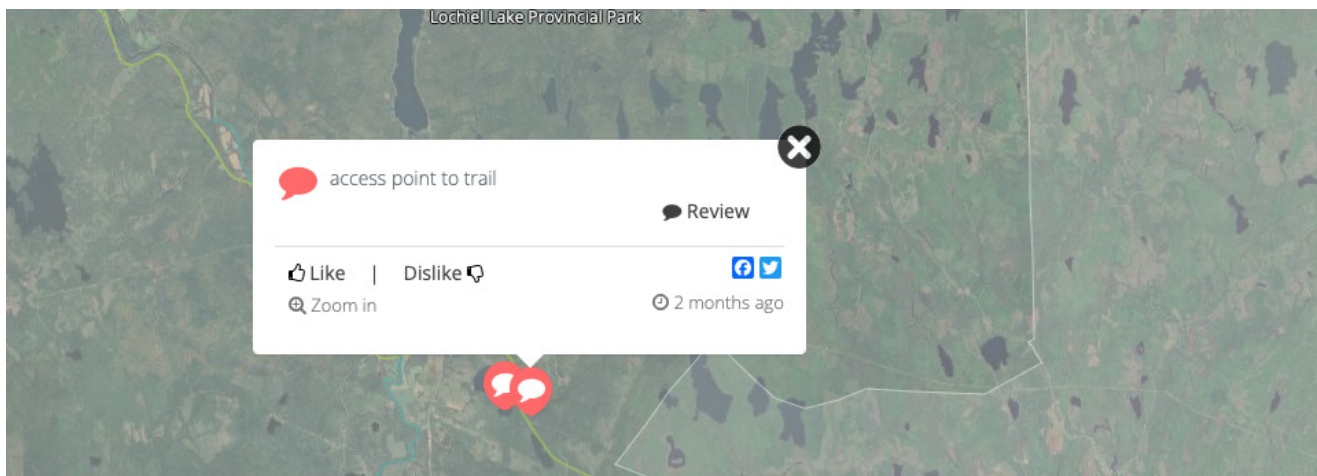
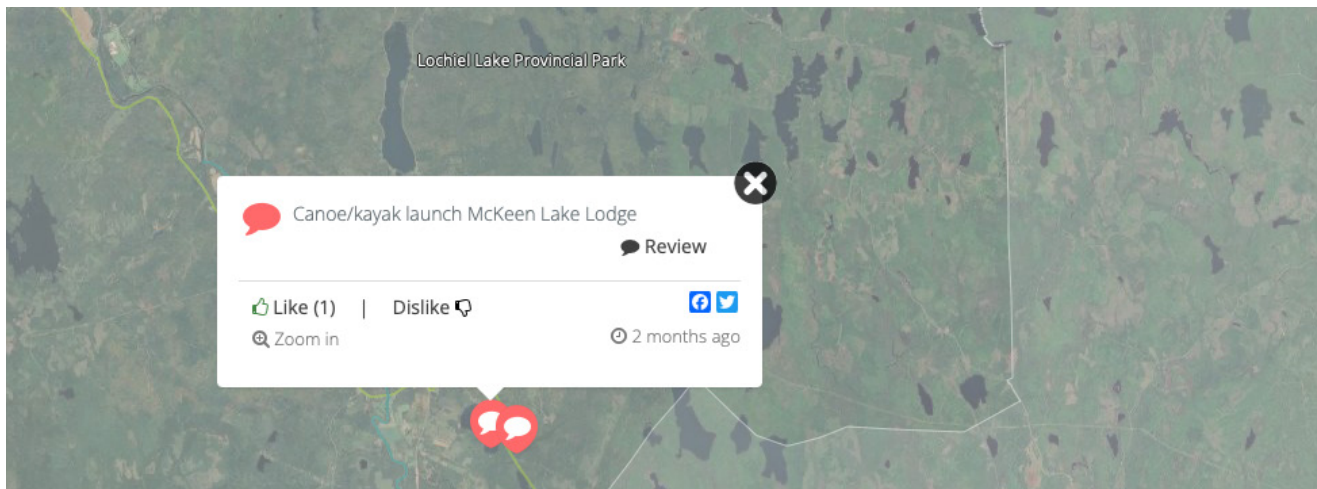


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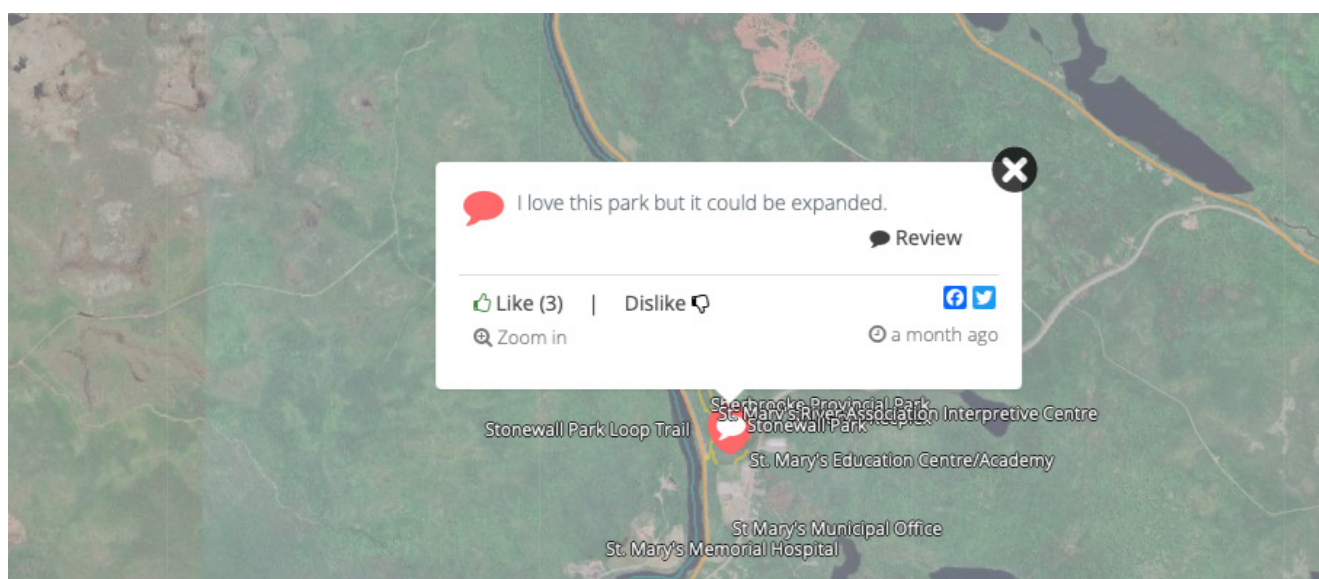
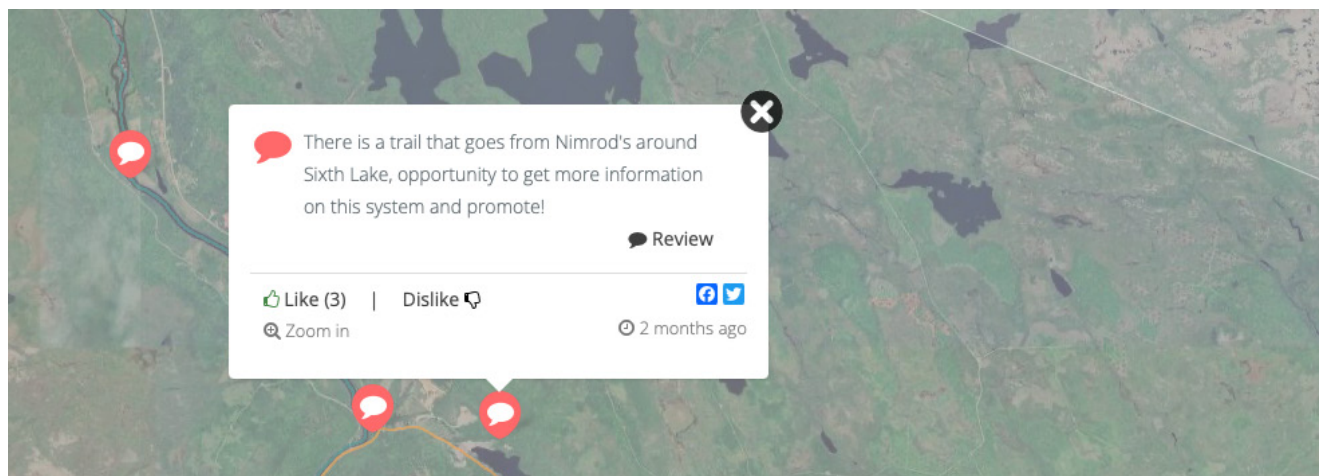
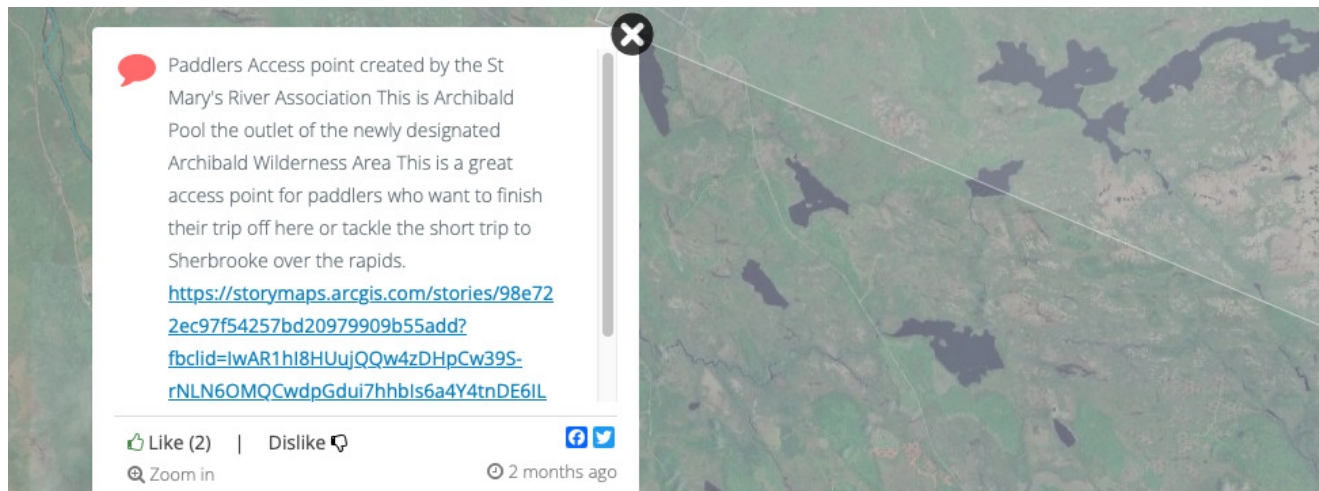




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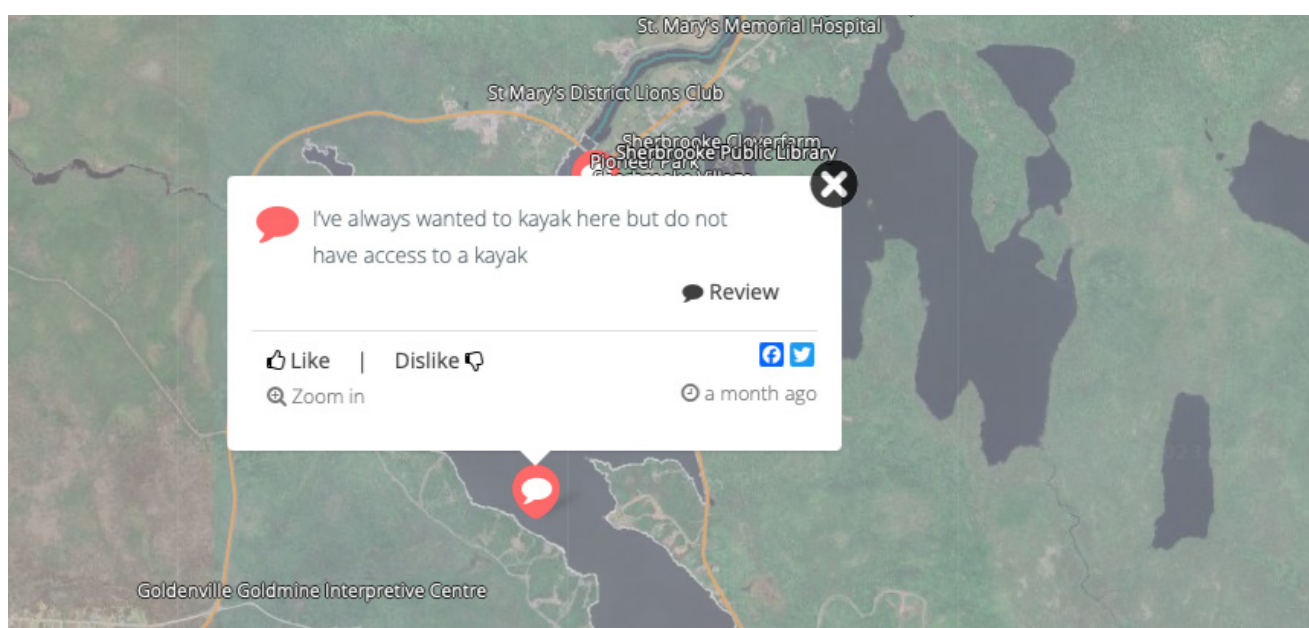
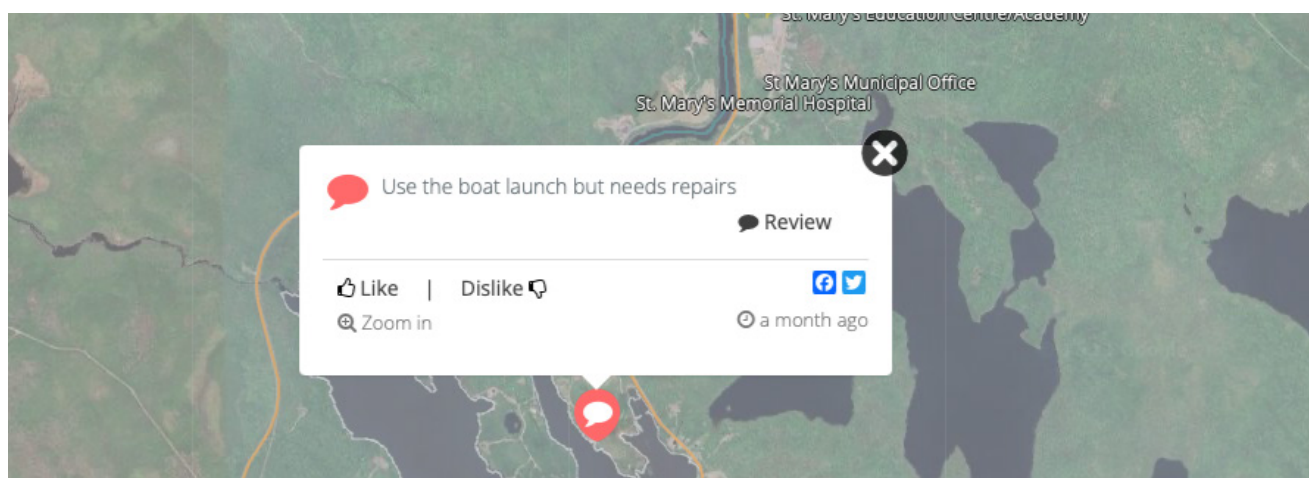
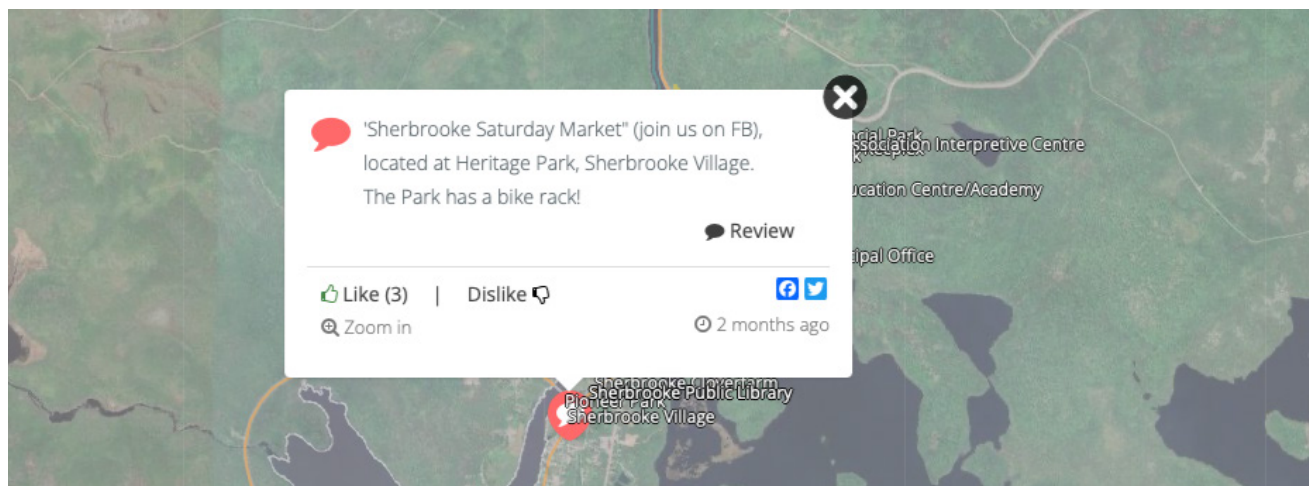


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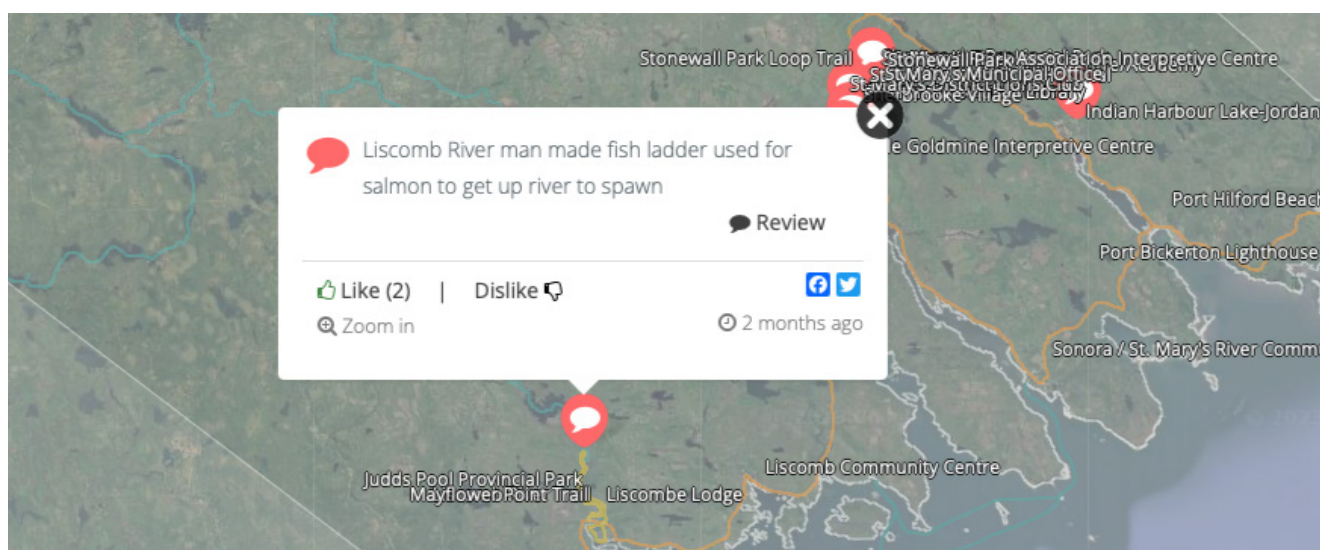
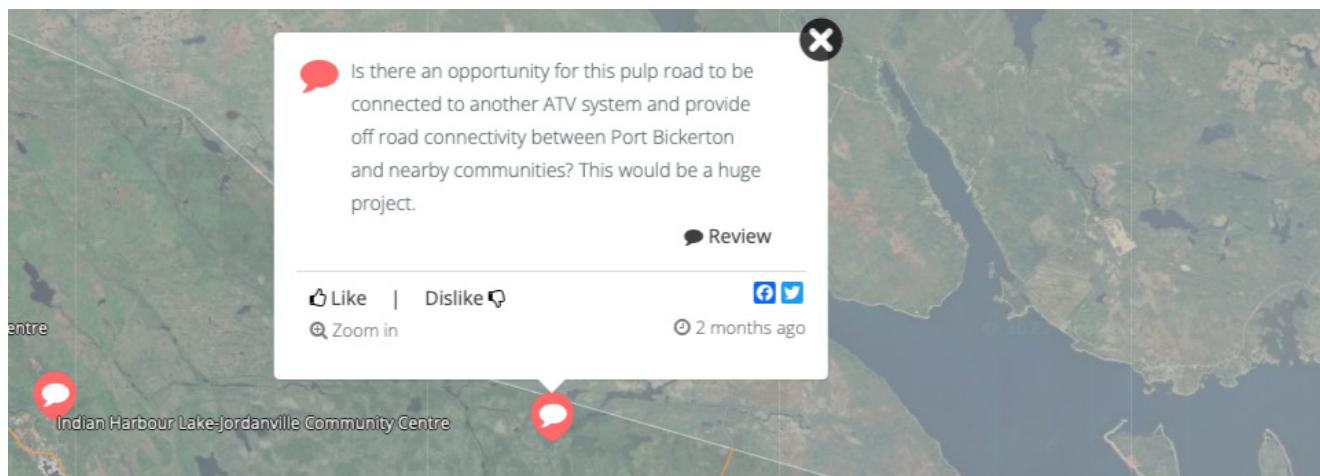
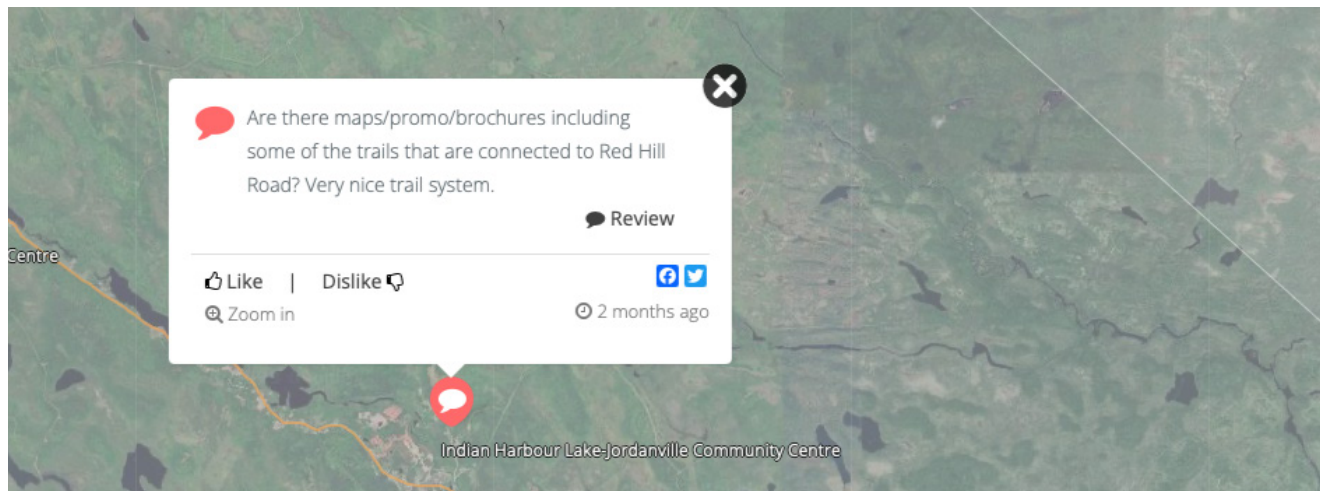




## SOCIAL PINPOINT “LEAVE A COMMENT” COMMENTS



## SOCIAL PINPOINT “LEAVE A COMMENT” COMMENTS





## YOUTH WORKSHOP RESPONSES

<b>What form(s) of AT do you currently use? How often do you participate?</b>
Paddleboarding all of the time in the summer
I go on a walk a day
I usually drive around with my mom and sometimes kayak on the ocean!
Walk bike driving
I walk to my friends house after school every day
Walking mostly. Sometimes I bike.
Bus and Matthew's car (Jayme driving it)
I take the bus to school but I sometimes walk. After school I walk 1-3 km a day
I go on a daily walk after supper
I walk or drive
Two a day I go biking
I go biking every day I bike on my road
Walking, biking, swimming
Ride horses
Skateboarding 3-5 times a week biking 1-2 times a week walking 4-5 times a week canoeing/kayaking/paddleboarding 2-3 times per week ATV trails every week
Walking and biking
School bus, I drive, my dad drives. I walk.
Biking, rarely
I walk with my friends all the time, but mostly on the road
None. Never
I ride my horse to places and I walk to places
I walk
I go biking almost every day. I go walking often.
Electric scooter, car, truck, four wheeler, street and trail bike, e-bike, walking, snowmobile.

## YOUTH WORKSHOP RESPONSES

<b>Are there any specific forms of AT that you haven't tried but would like to? Is there anything specific stopping you?</b>
I would like to ski but don't have the equipment
Canoe
I would like to bike to school, yes it would take hours
I want to bike to school
Zip lining, don't have equipment
I would like to drive a vehicle but I am not old enough
I would like to bike
Nah I've pretty much tried everything but not a car or plane
Kayaking but I don't have a kayak
I do not do any due to my arthritis causing limits
Roller skating (good skates) don't have equipment. Skate park?
Paddleboarding don't have equipment
I want to go to school by helicopter (crossed out). No
Skydiving, the price
I'd like to go kayaking more often but I don't have time.
I would like to ride my bike to school but I live too far away
I want to bike
Snowboarding

<b>Is there anything else that you would like to share?</b>
I don't know what this is for but I'm excited!
I am excited
Thank you I had fun
Does active transportation include motorized bikes or scooters?



## ACTIVITY KIT AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

<b>What form(s) of <u>recreational</u> active transportation do you use and how often do you participate?</b>
Walking my dog seven days a week
Hiking a few times a week, cycling periodically, kayaking periodically
6-7 times a week
Walking a couple of times a week
Walking every day
I try to walk as often as i can but less in the winter
Dog walking most days unless a family member does it and I am too busy
Walking when I can, kayaking in the summer
2-3 times
Not sure
Walking on trails a couple of times a week, walking on the road most other days
<i>Question skipped 5 times</i>

<b>How often do you participate in <u>utilitarian</u> active transportation and for what purpose?</b>
Twice a week for errands
No suitable routes in my community without using busy highway
2-3 times a month to walk to work
Walking most days
Walk to the post office twice a week
I try to walk where I can and occasionally i'll bike to Sherbrooke to run errands but mostly in the summer
Not very often everything is too far
From time to time
I no longer work so most of the time that I walk it is just for fun anyway!
Walk 5 times a week
<i>Walking - every day weather permitting 50-60 minutes per day</i>
<i>Question skipped 5 times</i>

## ACTIVITY KIT AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

<b>How did you hear about this project?</b>
facebook, e mail, web site
I am a municipal councillor
Facebook
Municipal Facebook page
Facebook
Email and project website link sent
Facebook
Facebook
Newsletter and facebook
Newsletter or facebook
Community bulletin, St. Mary's site
<i>Question skipped 5 times</i>

<b>What is your preferred way to hear about what is happening in St. Mary's?</b>
Facebook page
Facebook, e-mails
Newsletter/Municipal Website
Municipal Facebook page
Facebook
facebook
Bulletin
Facebook
Bulletin, St. Mary's site, do not have facebook
Facebook
Newsletter or offline
<i>Question skipped 5 times</i>





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