



Community Safety and Well-Being Plan



Almaguin Highlands

2021 - 2025



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INTRODUCTION

This Community Safety and Well-Being Plan has been developed on behalf of the communities located within Almaguin Highlands region. It is intended to guide local partners involved in the community safety plan and well-being planning process. It summarizes the work that has been undertaken in the development of this plan.

This plan is a living document and will be updated as communities move forward in their work in continuing its commitment to the safety and well-being of its communities. While this plan is in and of itself valuable, the most important part is for planning partners to stay organized and inform collaborating communities of identified area priorities. The most valuable outcomes from this process is to continue improved coordination of services, collaboration, information sharing and partnerships between local government, agencies and organizations and an improved quality of life for community members.

Municipalities involved in this plan throughout Almaguin Highlands:

Township of Armour
Village of Burk's Falls
Township of Joly
Township of Kearney
Township of Machar
Municipality of Magnetawan
Township of McMurrich/Montieth
Township of Perry
Municipality of Powassan
Township of Ryerson
Township of South River
Township of Strong
Village of Sundridge

Coordinator(s):

Nicky Kunkel, Clerk Administrator, Village of Burk's Falls
Melinda Torrance, Deputy Clerk, Township of Perry

COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

The community of Almaguin Highlands has a combined population of 15,866, the largest population is the age group between 15 and 64 years old, and the least populated age group is 85+ years old. 61.2% of the population are in the working age group between 15 to 64 years old.

Most residents in Almaguin Highlands are married, with the remainder of the population being single or in common-law relationships; there is also a presence of divorced and widowed households. Most of the land is residential, while other land is seasonal cottages. There is a smaller portion with several retail businesses in downtown cores. Households in Almaguin Highlands have an average annual income of \$54,120.

Stats Canada 2016 Census			
Municipality	Population	Median Total Income of Households	Age %
Township of Armour	1,414	59,648	27.6% (65 yrs + older)
Village of Burk's Falls	981	40,288	60.7% (15-64 yrs)
Township of Joly	304	50,816	63.9% (15-64 yrs)
Town of Kearney	882	56,661	62.1% (15-64 yrs)
Township of Machar	882	62,464	56.8% (15-64 yrs)
Municipality of Magnetawan	1,390	54,336	59.4% (15-64 yrs)
Township of McMurrich/Monteith	824	54,272	65.5% (15-64 yrs)
Township of Perry	2,454	58,069	65.4% (15-64 yrs)
Municipality of Powassan	3,455	66,133	59.2% (15-64 yrs)
Township of Ryerson	648	57,344	60% (15-64 yrs)
Village of South River	1,114	40,576	62.8% (15-64 yrs)
Township of Strong	1,439	60,672	59.4% (15-64 yrs)
Village of Sundridge	961	50,624	54.7% (15-64 yrs)

1. WHY A COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL BEING PLAN?

The Province's *Police Services Act* was amended January 1, 2019 to mandate every municipality in Ontario have a "community safety and well being plan". The Plan was created using a collaborative multi-sectoral approach recognizing that it is more than crime that sets the safety and well being in a community. The ultimate goal is to address root causes to circumstances creating the emergency response for residents. This achievement would then focus on enhancing social development and prevention tools and mitigating risks before they become emergencies. It is an ambitious goal that all stakeholders aspire to achieve. The creation of this document and the continuing update and work that will result from it will be a great step in realizing true community safety and well being in Almaguin.

Social Development Chart and Well Being Matrix



The Plan had been in the process prior to legislative changes as Almaguin communities and agencies realized early that change in service delivery and working in a more unified manner would assist all residents.

Impact of COVID 19

COVID 19 is a global pandemic that resulted in the Province of Ontario declaring a state of emergency and throughout this period has placed restrictions on gatherings and public meetings for the safety of all Ontarians.

The pandemic will have a direct long-term affect on Almaguin and services as well. There is increased anxiety, widespread community closures, job losses and social disruptions including on-line learning, limits on gatherings, and a new sense of caution for everyone's health.

The agencies and communities working to create this Plan all adjusted their service delivery to continue providing the necessary resources to Almaguin residents. However, it has also increased workloads and affected abilities for contributions to non-urgent assignments. Each partner does recognize the importance of the document and has done their best to ensure their voice is heard and will continue to be heard as the implementation of recommendations and relationships between agencies grow.

2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Early Consultations

To support the identification of local risks, partners involved in the development of the Almaguin Highlands Community Safety and Well Being Plan hosted community engagement sessions within their own municipalities. The Village of Burk's Falls hosted a community action stakeholders team meeting in 2015. The main issues identified by the school board were learning behaviours, violent outbursts, broken homes and parenting conflicts, as well as not enough funding for after school programs or high school programs. In addition, the team meeting identified an increase in drug addiction, a shortage of affordable housing, and poverty and hunger in families.

The Township of Perry hosted two meetings one in 2015 with community involvement and a secondary meeting in 2016 with agency stakeholders. The first session had approximately 40 participants that included representation from a variety of agencies/organizations across a wide range of sectors and members of the public. The open discussion revealed concerns of risk areas as being, email/telephone scams and cybercrime, underemployment in the vulnerable sector, assistance for victims of male abuse and community patrol/neighbourhood watch. The secondary session with stakeholder agencies held in 2016 was not open to the public. It was initiated to better understand how municipalities can assist in the needs of the various agencies and to encourage more communication and collaborate on identified matters within each agency.

There was a lot of discussion surrounding mental health and the effects it has on the number of calls the OPP and Huntsville Hospital handle. Representatives from the OPP also disclosed the need for community mobilization and working together with other agencies to identify issues and develop strategies for long term solutions for those with mental health issues or those who experience victimization.

Service Provider Consultation

While it is the municipalities steering the development of the Plan, our role is to facilitate as we do not provide direct services. However, as you will see further along, there is a role for councils to mitigate risks moving forward.

In 2019 as the Almaguin municipalities began to work together to create the full Community Safety and Well Being Plan. A survey was sent to all agency stakeholders to update the issues and concerns they are experiencing to find common themes and identify emerging issues. A summary of the results is attached in the appendix.

Public Consultation

What the community depicts as concerns is equally as important as the municipalities and the agencies who are addressing the known and on-going issues in the region.

The survey asked questions regarding: safety, security and crime; physical and mental health; experience with substance abuse; opinions on quality of life and employment information. A copy of the survey is available in the Appendix.

The survey was available to every resident in Almaguin. There was an on-line component through Survey Monkey as well as hard copies available for pick up/completion in each municipality. The survey, while anonymous, asked each participant to identify where they live, their gender, age and other demographic information. From this we know the majority of the respondents at 73% were married females aged between 36 and 55 and 86% of the respondents were permanent residents.

Residents provide a different perspective and can highlight where people are struggling or when plans and policies are already working to mitigate issues. The agency results does include areas that the residential survey does not include and vice versa. However, there are some common themes identified as well and that will be the focus of the Plan.

3. PRIORITY RISKS

The risks identified throughout this Plan were selected through the stakeholder and community surveys. Seven agency stakeholders submitted statistics, emerging trends, current programs and problems they viewed as needing assistance with.

The community survey resulted in a total of 444 responses. There were 34 multiple choice questions where some questions allowed for written comments. The surveys were sorted by municipality along with the top safety and well-being items the communities felt were of the most important.

The top three (3) community concerns that closely related to agency stakeholder concerns will be a focus in this first four year plan.

Top 3 Community Safety and Well-Being Priorities

1. *Physical Health, Access to Healthcare*

- 49.04% respondents rated the most important safety and well-being priority was the lack of healthcare physicians and services within the Almaguin region. There was an outstanding amount of concern with the fact that there are not enough doctors in our areas. Quite a number of individuals do not have a family doctor that is close or do not have a family doctor

at all. Other responses included having no access to walk in clinics or health resources such as nurse practitioners, optometrists, dentists, therapists, labs, etc.).

2. Access to Services

- A majority of responses were related to the lack of access to healthcare services and supports. 123 responses out of 444 represented 32.63%, indicating that program and clinic location has impacted their ability to receive proper physical or mental health supports. Lack of local mental health support or long wait times to get into counselling services were also expressed. There were a minimal number of responses for access to a gym, summer/camp activities for children and indoor recreational programs.

3. Employment Opportunities

- The majority of answers regarding employment were either full time workers or retired. Of those that are currently unemployed, lack of opportunity and location were the most prominent factors that were preventing people from finding a job. Precarious employment and insufficient opportunities are also a concern. Opportunities for youth employment were also reported as lacking.

Further priority risk factors that are common between stakeholders with a stronger rating from agencies are;

4. Affordable Housing

- Comments from both agency and the community surveys in 2019 expressed concerns regarding affordable housing. Whether the housing is rental or ownership, shelter is clearly a necessary item that improves many of the social development and community well being.

5. Services to Youth and Education Institutions

- In discussions, it is clearly evident that youth are affected by the factors of social development from an early age. These factors may affect ability to learn and to focus in class. It is important to identify youth who need assistance early to provide them with the best opportunities for success.

There are common social denominators, Province wide, that are widely known to effect one's development and quality of life. These are mental health, substance abuse, and violence. It is interesting to note that while agencies in Almaguin placed these among the higher rated issues that they respond to, the community survey results did not rank them high. Out of 27 issues asked to be ranked in the survey the community ranked personal safety as 9th and mental health and substance abuse as 15th and 22nd with domestic violence as 19th overall.

It is suggestive that as the top 5 priorities become addressed and people are finding security when those factors are resolved, that the response for mental health and protective services will be relatively reduced.

4. ALMAGUIN ADVISORY COMMITTEES

An Almaguin Advisory Committee was formed to delve into the issues and concerns of various stakeholders within our communities. Meetings will continue to be held to address new and continuous concerns and collaborate on ideas to assist each other. The advisory committee membership consisted of:

- Dominic Lalonde, Ontario Provincial Police
- Megan Wagué, Local Health Integration Network
- Jayme Young, District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board
- Laurie Macdonald, Canadian Mental Health Association, Muskoka Parry Sound
- Al Bottomley, Near North School Board, Trustee (representing Almaguin)
- Gisele Hebert, Children's Aid Society of the District of Nipissing and Parry Sound
- Nicky Kunkel, Village of Burk's Falls
- Melinda Torrance, Township of Perry

5. TASK FORCE AND MEMBERS

In addressing the top community priorities identified by the survey the Advisory Committee also established two task forces to gain more insight into the issues of Almaguin. These two task forces met as needed to identify needs with the community and provide recommendations on how to mitigate the concerns as they were expressed.

A. Physical Health, Access to Healthcare (Priority 1 and 2)

Health Advisory Task Force

- **Purpose:** to discuss priority one (1) and two (2) regarding how to attract and retain physicians within Almaguin Highlands and to address healthcare issues with a regional approach.

- **Membership:** the healthcare task force included representation from various sectors within the health field. Specifically, the taskforce consisted of:
 - Kevin MacLeod, Burk's Falls Family Health Team
 - Megan Wagué, Local Health Integration Network
 - Dr. Dan Pessotto, South River
 - Marianne Stickland, Almaguin Ontario Health Team, Sundridge Medical Centre
 - Councillor Rod Ward (Armour Township), Almaguin Highlands Health Council
 - Jeanette Smith, Almaguin Community Economic Development
 - Dominic Lalonde, Ontario Provincial Police

Employment Opportunities (Priority 3)

Employment Advisory Task Force

- **Purpose:** to discuss the lack of employment opportunities and collaboratively approach ideal solutions for the Almaguin Highlands community.
- **Membership:** this group includes representation from various stakeholder and agency groups whose mandate aligns with this group's purpose. Specifically, membership consisted of:
 - Jessica Busch, Women's Own Resource
 - Stacey Fidler, Labour Market Group
 - Romano Marchi, Agelic
 - Jennifer Farquhar, Almaguin Chamber of Commerce
 - Dave Gray and Jeanette Smith, Almaguin Community Economic Development
 - Jeff Degagne, Ontario Works
 - Luke Preston, Employment North - Sundridge
 - Dominic Lalonde, Ontario Provincial Police
 - Nicky Kunkel, Village of Burk's Falls
 - Melinda Torrance, Township of Perry

6. PLANS TO ADDRESS PRIORITY RISK

Priority Risk #1: Physical Health, Access to Healthcare Providers

A large amount of the population within Almaguin Highlands is without access to primary healthcare physicians and healthcare services. As a result, individuals have been on long waiting lists to obtain a family physician in the limited areas where physicians are located. Additionally, the Almaguin Highlands has not attracted several other healthcare services that are provided in larger centers. Residents have to travel long distances for specialist consultations, treatments, nurse practitioners and even walk-in clinics.

Vulnerable Group: infants, children, young families and seniors

Risk Factors: undiagnosed ailments, lack of primary care

Protective Factors: positive medical outcomes, healthcare support services, transportation service increases

Activities:

- Broker partnerships between healthcare professionals within Almaguin Highlands
- Expansion of services for after hours
- Engagement sessions involving agency stakeholders
- Meetings held every three months with healthcare committees, physicians, local health networks
- Review outcomes of physician recruitment process to consider amending and enhancing procedures
- Implement transportation services

Immediate Outcomes:

- Community is better informed of issues faced related to community safety and well-being (healthcare and employment specifically)
- Impacts of not receiving immediate healthcare, all age groups affected, continued communication with service providers, agencies and stakeholders
- Increased access to healthcare and transportation
- A coordinated approach to supporting the efforts of the advisory groups who are helping to bring primary care to our region

Intermediate Outcomes:

- Increase access to physicians

Long-Term Outcomes:

- Increase community safety and well-being through an increase in healthcare services

Priority Risk #2: Access to Services

The lack of transportation continues to affect all age groups within Almaguin Highlands. Seniors do not have the ability to leave their houses to do simple everyday tasks. Youth, young and middle age citizens are at risk of not gaining employment. There is no access to healthcare services for those that may need to travel to different centers (for OTN or to obtain specialist appointments).

Vulnerable Group: infants, children, young families and seniors

Risk Factors: poor mental health, loneliness, low self-esteem, impulsivity

Protective Factors: self-esteem, adaptability, access to/availability of resources, professional services and social supports

Activities:

- Broker partnerships between municipal and ride-hailing companies (Uber, Lyft)
- Engage local businesses to commence a ride-share committee. Possible to have volunteers pick up new or existing employees/residents requiring transportation
- Participating municipalities promote Carpool Almaguin parking lots – consider digital options for promotion and ride sharing linking, etc.
- Communicate with busing companies inquiring about the use of school buses outside of start and end times for school
- Continued support in economic development
- Create a website for ride-share options

Immediate Outcomes:

- Job employability increases
- Individuals are able to get the healthcare services they require
- Seniors will be provided opportunities to be independent and socialize

Intermediate Outcomes:

- The level of service availability meets the needs of the population

Long-Term Outcomes:

- Increase community safety and well-being through an increase in healthcare and employment services. Will also greatly increase social interaction and provide an avenue for independence

Priority Risk #3: Employment Opportunities

There is a disconnect between employers and people seeking employment in and around Almaguin Highland region. The current COVID-19 pandemic is inhibiting job seekers as the government supplies CERB and Employment Insurance which strengthens the lack of motivation. There is a declining population with not enough people to fill job vacancies and larger centers have larger projects thereby bringing in more people. The lack of transportation is also a defining factor for people not being able to commute between home and job sites.

Vulnerable Group: teens, young to middle income families

Risk Factors: lack of opportunities for young people possibly leading them to addictions or crime, not knowing whether bills can be paid can lead to emotional instability/stress/anxiety

Protective Factors: self-esteem, positive relationship with family and friends, stability of the family unit, opportunities for youth and young families

Activities:

- Engage multiple business meetings seeking what employers are looking for and assisting them with job applicant opportunities
- Implementation of settlement and retention strategy – integrate immigration into placements and assist in finding housing
- Implement strategies for advertising and promoting outside the Almaguin Highlands region
- Engage high school students asking them what they are seeking and how employment services can assist

Immediate Outcomes:

- Increase in self-awareness and pride
- Ability to self-sustain
- Connecting individuals with skills to appropriate jobs

Intermediate Outcomes:

- Job seekers are provided with the support they require to obtain gainful employment with the assistance of employment programs

Long-Term Outcomes:

- Increase community safety and well-being with job stability and housing

7. STAKEHOLDERS CALL TO ACTION

There are several actions that all stakeholders can do to improve the safety and well being of Almaguin communities. Only by working together can the activities and goals outlined be realized.

1. Advocate

Having an understanding of what the community and the service agencies consider to be the issues in Almaguin better prepares each stakeholder to advocate for change. Chronic underfunding and staffing issues are identified as issues actively affecting Almaguin.

Municipal councils can advocate and support increased funding when meeting with senior levels of government for health care services. There are several existing groups in the region who are working toward increasing access to services such as the East Parry Sound Community Service (Eastholme), Almaguin Highlands Health Council, and doctors and Family Health Teams. When councils are deciding policies, they can consider the priorities listed to ensure they are being proactive in the resolution. For instance, when reviewing official plans they can create policies regarding affordable housing, secondary units, where growth will be focused to mitigate transportation barriers and when developers approach to build subdivisions or multi-residential units agreements can be created to ensure some affordable units are made available. Creating and supporting volunteer programs/organizations and opportunities can provide residents with new skills that can be transferred to employment positions. Supporting businesses and new start-up companies and ensuring they have access to regional resources improves the overall economy.

2. Communication and Awareness

Open and two-way communication is necessary to informing advocacy as well as ensuring efforts are collaborative and not duplicating efforts. While it may be inevitable, like minded groups working toward the same goals can share notes/minutes with councils and other agencies to augment efforts instead of straining limited resources. This could be the creation of quarterly or semi-annual meetings between similar organizations (health committees, education services) to discuss new trends and emerging issues. Some such communities exist, such as HOME, the AHHC, and the OPP/Mental Health Protocols. Only by championing additional collaboration can better mitigation and prevention be obtained.

Equally important is the ability for residents to have open dialogue with all stakeholders. Transparency, accountability and creating the awareness for residents to become involved and have a voice will garner trust and with intention allow people to seek assistance.

Just as the local well being services and agencies will develop more collaboration opportunities, it is important to ensure all municipal officials and stakeholders know there are resources available to them now. While Almaguin may be underserved, it is not void of services. In the Appendix is a list of services within the region. It is important to know who to call. When it is urgent with an active crisis call 911. If the situation allows, call 211 for the right service contacts. The awareness of what assistance is available is a critical step to improving everyone's safety and well being.

3. Data Collection

It was evident in the preparation of this Plan that Almaguin specific data is not well kept by all agencies. Many local services are based regionally and have statistics for the head-office but not at the local levels that are easily obtainable. It is time consuming to track responses that become consumed in larger reporting requirements. It is important that any local office also keep statistics and bench marking tools for the Almaguin area. In trying to determine what affordable housing looks like, agencies do not keep a list of area rental rates to gauge market values in Almaguin. Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation does not have a figure for affordable rent between Parry Sound, Nipissing and Muskoka. Almaguin is combined, yet a very different community than the rest. This, then means, any developer has to complete their own study which may be a deterrent to providing affordable housing. When sitting on agencies, boards and communities, council members can advocate for better data collection opportunities.

4. Cooperation

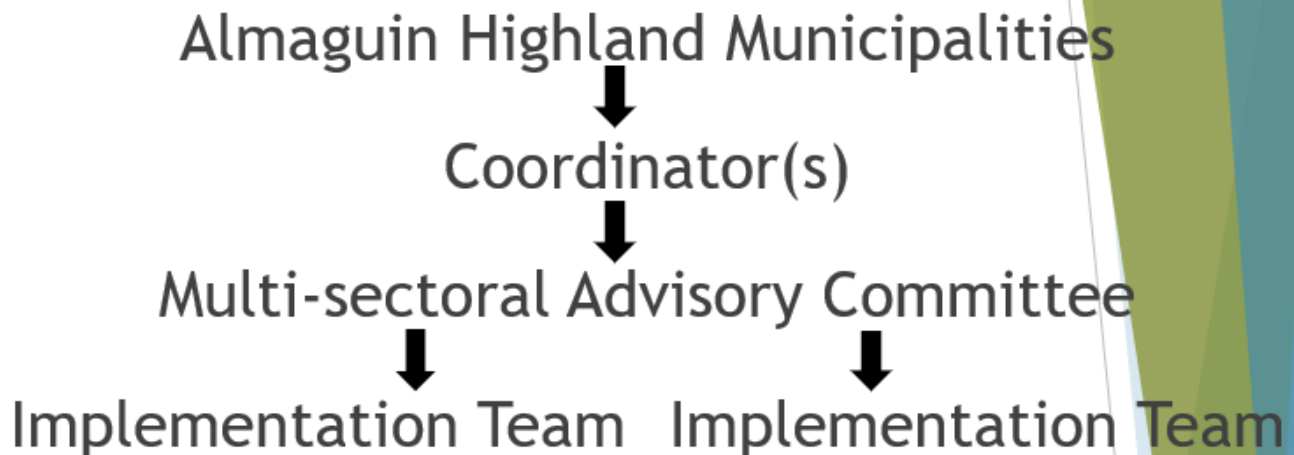
The safety of Almaguin can be gauged by the calls for service by the Almaguin OPP Detachment. It will be necessary to implement key strategies to mitigate victimization. Speeding, impaired and distracted driving on roadways and ATV/Snowmobile trails is a concern and education programs are in place to prevent these occurrences. Municipalities can assist by sharing information on social media platforms, really from all agencies that service Almaguin.

The Almaguin OPP works with the Muskoka Health Centre to streamline intake protocols, the Canadian Mental Health Association through co-response and intervention teams and they participate in a program with the District of Parry Sound Social Services for homelessness. The Almaguin Detachment Commander is required to draft a three (3) year action plan and posts an annual update on OPP.ca. The local statistics on calls-for-service identify the priorities and action steps to mitigate the most urgent of matters in Almaguin.

Community Policing Boards are being created by the Province and the Almaguin Detachment will have a Board as already determined by the municipalities to the Solicitor General. The next step for this initiative is expected early 2022. It will take this cooperation

among the OPP, municipalities, and the social agencies to bring meaningful change to Almaguin residents.

8. COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING PLANNING GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



- ▶ Commitment from local governance
 - ▶ Obtained multi-sectoral buy-in
 - ▶ Community is engaged
 - ▶ Advisory Group formed
- ▶ Healthcare and Employment Task Forces formed
- ▶ Risks are identified and prioritized
 - ▶ Key stakeholders meet
 - ▶ Plan is reviewed
- ▶ Plan is finalized and released publicly

9. CONCLUSION

The Almaguin Highlands Community Safety and Well-being Plan (CSWB) Plan establishes a framework and coordinated approach to working alongside system partners to continue promoting safety and well-being for all residents within our region. As agencies and stakeholders move into implementation, progress will be tracked with monitoring and evaluation through continuous meetings with the advisory groups and municipal partners. Throughout the 4-year course of the plan and in future iterations, we will continue to be responsive to emerging needs in our communities and create ongoing opportunities for community engagement and involvement.

With the combined efforts of our community stakeholders, we would like to thank the following:

- Megan Wagué, Local Health Integration Network
- Jayme Young, District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board
- Gisele Hebert, Children's Aid Society of the District of Nipissing and Parry Sound
- Dominic Lalonde, Ontario Provincial Police
- Kevin MacLeod, Burk's Falls Family Health Team
- Megan Wagué, Local Health Integration Network
- Dr. Dan Pessotto, South River
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- Luke Preston, Employment North - Sundridge
- Nicky Kunkel, Clerk, Village of Burk's Falls
- Melinda Torrance, Deputy Clerk, Township of Perry