

*Irish organization  
outlines plans for gaelic  
linguistic and cultural  
hub near Tamworth*

# Stone Mills to become gaelic home base?

By **Seth DuChene**  
*Editor*

Traditional Irish language and culture could find a lasting foothold in Stone Mills Township.

With a 60-acre site already purchased on Gilmore Road north of Tamworth, a non-profit group is looking to establish a 'gaeltacht,' where the Irish language (gaelic) and culture will be preserved and celebrated. While gaeltachts do exist in Ireland, if successful this will be the first such site outside of that country.

Representatives of the Cumann Na Gaeltachta, the group which will take over ownership of the land (which is currently being held in trust by two shareholders in the group), presented their plans for the gaeltacht at Stone Mills' regular council meeting Monday night. The group hopes to hold an official opening at the site on June 16.

Their plans have already gained significant attention in Ireland. According to Aralt Macgiolla Chainnigh, news of the gaeltacht effort has made the front page of Ireland's main gaelic newspaper, and has been covered by Ireland's national print and television media — even though there has been no effort to seek publicity for the project. "It's very dear to the heart of absolutely everybody in Ireland in a way that you would not believe," he told council. Later, he said that the Irish ambassador to Canada is anticipated to be in attendance at the June 16 opening. "There is a lot of interest in this project."

He said the key to the site will be the usage, instruction and promotion of Irish gaelic. "If the Irish language is there, then all the other aspects of the culture fall in naturally," he said. "It's a matter of identity... the language is the centre-piece of any culture."

Both Macgiolla Chainnigh and fellow project member Steven Rayner — both of whom are from Kingston — said that the development of the gaeltacht site would proceed gradually, and would only proceed as far as demand would take it. "The initial intention would be to go very slowly, and at all stages we would conform to whatever requirements are necessary to make this project a success," said Rayner.

"The position where we are now is very much a grassroots position, and these kinds of ideas (that are envisioned for the site) are something that we would not be able undertake tomorrow, by any stretch of the imagination," said Macgiolla Chainnigh. "We are satisfied with very modest progress, and would only seek to develop at the level that level was expressed."

That said, the group's plans are ambitious. Within the next two years, the group hopes to rebuild at 3-4,000-square-foot building on the property with a large multipurpose open area, and improve trails on the property. A summer camp would be run on the site for 20-30 people, plus one- or two-day events such as dance or music workshops.

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Within the next five years, they hope to construct tent platforms, establish other cultural programs and construct a playing field for traditional Irish sports. Ultimately, the group hopes to establish enough sleeping cabins to accommodate up to 100 people at one time.

Macgiolla Chainnigh said those who speak Irish gaelic in North America are part of a small, transient yet tight-knit community. Several gatherings are organized every year, including one in Kingston that usually attracts 100 each year.

After hearing the group's presentation, council members were generally supportive of the project, saying that the gaeltacht could provide a needed tourist attraction for the municipality.

"I don't see why we wouldn't (support it)... It's good cultural heritage, and as long as you're going to work within the rules, I for one would not have a problem with it," said Ward 3 (Camden East) Councillor Doug Davison.

"I think this is a step forward for Stone Mills Township," said Reeve Deb Thompson, who encouraged the group to contact the Lennox and Addington County Economic Development department and advise them of its plan.

