

**URBAN DESIGN TASK FORCE
MINUTES
January 21, 2010**

PRESENT:

Ms. Dale Godsoe (Chair)
Mr. Paul McKinnon (Vice Chair)
Mr. Paul Shakatko
Ms. Louisa Horne
Mr. Frank Palermo
Ms. Sally Camus
Mr. Lorne Perry
Mr. David Garrett
Mr. William Hyde
Mr. Stephen Terauds
Mr. Bernie Smith
Mr. Patrick LeRoy
Ms. Mary Jane Adams
Councillor Mary Wile
Councillor Jim Smith
Councillor Dawn Sloane

STAFF:

Mr. Andy Fillmore, Project Manager, Urban Design
Ms. Barbara Coleman, Legislative Assistant
Mr. Luc Ouellett, Planner 1, Planning Applications,
Community Development
Mr. Richard Harvey, Senior Planner, Planning Applications
Ms. Kelly Denty, Supervisor, Planning Applications
Ms. Shannon Pictou, Urban Design Technician

GUEST:

Ms. Karla Nicholson, General Manager, Quinpool Road
Main Street District Association

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 11:40 a.m.

2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Dale Godsoe, Chair, welcomed the returning and new members. She requested that if members were unable to attend a meeting, they send regrets to the Legislative Assistant prior to the meeting. A round table of introductions followed.

3. REMARKS BY CHAIR

Ms. Godsoe provided a brief overview of the Committee's work to date and the proposal for work in the future, as follows:

- the Committee is currently in Phase III of Urban Design Project which will continue to build on Phase I
- Phase II is the Downtown Plan
- the Committee will recommend to Council the philosophy, parameters and guidelines for the approach to neighbourhood planning in the regional center and for about 20 neighbourhoods
- Committee will not work in detail, but at the higher level to inspire and guide the future work
- the Task Force will monitor and evaluate HRM by Design Downtown Plan including its functional plan according to our five-year evaluation mandate.
- functional plans are ongoing and not in the scope of the Committee, however the Committee will receive a brief synopsis of all functional plans
- staff will update the Committee after the January 28, 2010 staff session which is intended to ensure an integrated approach
- milestone updates will be provided from time to time to show how the plan is progressing
- the Committee will work on a more strategic level than Phase II
- the goal of the Committee would be to report to Council by year's end

Mr. Paul MacKinnon, Vice Chair, advised that what he brings to the table is the business Community's perspective. He noted that the HRM by Design Project was very successful. Mr. MacKinnon noted that the Committee is not a regulator but an influencer. He indicated that he believed the Committee will play an influential role in the Regional Plan and the Economic Strategy, both of which are coming up for review within the next year or two.

Ms. Godsoe advised that the Committee will have some influence because economically the Regional Center, being more dense and more vibrant, needs to be at the heart of the Economic Strategy.

Councillor Smith asked how the priorities for this Phase will be determined.

The Chair noted that staff would respond to this later in the meeting.

4. UPDATE ON STATUS OF DOWNTOWN PLAN, AND ITS EFFECTS TO-DATE

Mr. Fillmore gave a brief update on the status of the Downtown Plan. The new Design Review Plan Committee(DRC) has been struck with their first meeting tomorrow. He noted that the DRC would not consider an application at their first meeting but would review the DRC Binder and the processes that would be part of their deliberations when making decisions. Mr. Fillmore explained the DRC has one planning application, 1652, 1656, 1662 Barrington Street, Halifax, that will come before them at their second meeting. He noted that the application entails a rooftop addition to the three buildings making it into basically one building. Mr. Fillmore noted that there is a package of legislative amendments that are in the early stages of being drafted and a portion of these amendments are in response to this Committee's work (e.g. broadening of density bonusing). Efforts have been made to have a downtown circular shuttle put in place.

Mr. Fillmore advised that a business writer for the Chronicle Herald, Ms. Suzanne Rent, will be doing some research on the Downtown Plan. She has been looking into some the application packages, the incentive program and the sustainability vectors. The Chronicle Herald's Annual Business Review will contain Ms. Rent's views on the Downtown Plan in the next week or two.

In closing, Mr. Fillmore advised that an RFP will be issued in the near future regarding the Heritage Functional Plans after which the Conservation Plans will be considered.

5. PRESENTATIONS

Mr. Fillmore, providing some context advised that the Committee will be working on the greenprint (a flexible framework) for neighbourhood planning. The Committee will not be prioritizing the neighbourhoods, but will provide the criteria for Council to make those decisions. Council will prioritize the neighbourhoods, neighbourhood visioning will occur and finally legislative changes will be made.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the boundaries of the exercise. In response to a suggestion that the greenprint might provide more detailed planning for areas such as Quinpool Road which is the mainstreet for a number of local neighbourhoods, Mr. Fillmore noted that he envisioned that the plans for these 'Corridor' neighbourhoods would be undertaken first, but by local residents rather than this group.

5.1 Why Undertake Neighbourhood Planning?

Mr. Fillmore presented two short videos prepared by the Office for Urbanism regarding low carbon neighbourhoods.

Using a Transect Diagram, Mr. Fillmore briefly reviewed with the Committee the neighbourhoods which the Committee will be considering and went on to outline the types and styles of uses/builds within those neighbourhoods.

5.2 An Overview of HRM by Design's "Greenprint" for Neighbourhood Planning

Mr. Richard Harvey, Senior Planning, introduced the documents to be circulated over the next month and the work to be undertaken. Mr. Harvey referred to two documents prepared by the Office for Urbanism, Reurbanization Strategy and Urban Design Guidelines and Regional Center Building Policies. Mr. Harvey noted that the Dartmouth and Halifax Municipal Planning Strategies contain policies which do not provide sufficient guidance. He went on to indicate that much of the task of this group will be to provide some legibility to the Municipal Planning Strategies as a way to move forward.

Mr. Harvey noted that the intent is to review the Regional Center neighbourhoods based upon the Transect. This will provide the Task Force with information on the character of the existing neighbourhoods which will provide insight into the various types of neighbourhoods. The purpose is to identify the key characteristics about a given neighbourhood, but also the character of adjoining neighbourhoods. Mr. Harvey indicated that residents want to know what can happen in their own neighbourhoods, but are also interested in what can/will happen in surrounding neighbourhoods.

Mr. Harvey advised that the Task Force will look at the neighbourhoods from the perspective of their stability and the potential for change. The intent is to strengthen neighbourhoods and their character. Change is not necessary, but there are neighbourhoods which could benefit from change (neighbourhoods containing large parking lots). Mr. Harvey went on to note that there were guidelines which identify appropriate ranges of development for various neighbourhoods and provide greater detail which will improve already great neighbourhoods.

Mr. Harvey advised that in addition to these guidelines there is essentially a toolkit which will ensure that when various housing forms are discussed, there will be examples of exactly what that form can be (i.e. single family dwelling, stacked)

Ms. Godsoe noted that the work to be undertaken by the Committee will provide some flexible predictability for neighbourhoods.

Mr. Frank Palermo suggested that in order to minimize anxiety for residents, those areas that are stable, which will not change very much should be identified first. He further indicated that the areas that this group could then work on those areas for which more change is envisioned (i.e. main streets such as Quinpool Road). Mr. Harvey noted that the intent was that 'corridor' neighbourhoods will be dealt with first and that area residents will undertake detail planning.

Mr. McKinnon noted that re-population of the downtown was the central point of this exercise. He went on to indicate that he believed that it was important to ensure this was explicit in communications. In addition, it is not enough to just predict where people want to live, but direct growth. Mr. McKinnon noted that residents will have significant input into how/where re-population will occur.

Mr. Paul Shakatko expressed concern that the only message would be re-population. He suggested that if this is the only message, the Task Force is not hitting the mark in terms of the work it will be undertaking. He indicated that he believed the group was about the fundamentals of great neighbourhoods (ease of access, green space, connectivity) and stressed that discussion in this regard is needed. Mr. Shakatko reiterated that the purpose of this group is to build vibrant and magnetic neighbourhoods, a component of which is re-population.

Mr. MacKinnon indicated that he was in total agreement with Mr. Shakotko.

Councillor Sloane, agreeing with Mr. Shakatko, noted that she believed that the purpose of this work is to build great neighbourhoods and it is necessary to build on that focus.

Mr. Harvey reiterated that the intent is to identify the stable areas where not much change can be expected, however, there are huge car lots in neighbourhoods which could use change (i.e. development in keeping with the area). There are also areas where the level of densification is not appropriate (i.e. north Dartmouth) and in this instance the Task Force may want to look at ways to reduce that density.

The Chair indicated that it was now 2:00 p.m. and that this discussion will be continued at the next meeting.

6. PUTTING THE GREENPRINT IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER MUNICIPAL INITIATIVES

This matter was not considered due to time constraints.

7. DISCUSSION

See 5.2 above.

8. SET MEETING SCHEDULE FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Task Force is Wednesday, February 17, 2010 at 12 noon in Halifax Hall.

Meeting dates for Urban Design have been set for the third Wednesday of the Month. The Legislative Assistant will send the meeting schedule for the year out to members of the Committee. The Committee requested that Halifax Hall be the meeting room.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Prepared by
Sherrill Murphy
Deputy Clerk