

**HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**

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**WESTERN COMMON WILDERNESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**July 2, 2009**

**PRESENT:**

Mr. Bill Matheson  
Mr. Dusan Soudek  
Ms. Kelly Morrissey  
Mr. Michael Lamplugh  
Mr. Alan Kitz  
Mr. Lorne Logan  
Mr. Blake Maybank

**REGRETS:**

Councillor Reg Rankin  
Mr. Darrell Cooling  
Mr. Phillip Cochrane  
Ms. Jane Sears  
Ms. Susan Smith

**STAFF:**

Mr. Jan Skora, Coordinator, Real Property Planning  
Mr. John Charles, Planner, Real Property Planning  
Mr. Mark Calvi, Legislative Assistant

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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Bill Matheson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. at the Lakeside Recreation Centre.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - April 16 and May 27, 2009**

**MOVED BY Mr. Maybank, seconded by Mr. Logan, that the April 16, 2009, minutes be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**MOVED BY Mr. Maybank, seconded by Mr. Kitz, that the May 27, 2009, minutes be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS**

Approved as given with no additions or deletions.

**4. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES - None**

**5. PRESENTATIONS, CORRESPONDENCE AND PETITIONS - None**

**6. REPORTS**

**6.1 Environmental Design Management Plan**

Mr. John Charles, Planner, Real Property Planning, gave an overview of EDM's Concept Plan, and presented large scale, detailed maps of the Western Common and Wilderness Common Master Plan to the Committee to better facilitate decision making and planning in these areas. Discussion for the duration of the meeting centred around the plan and specific features of the map.

Mr. Charles noted that if the Concept Plan were to be approved, a draft of the Master Plan could be written. Committee approval of the Concept Plan would not by any means exclude the Committee from further input and revision to the plan, but would be the first stage of the planning process and allow the development of a Master Plan to move forward. Ideally, a draft could be produced by the end of July for Committee reassessment and consideration of a review panel. A second, finalized draft of the Master Plan could be prepared for the public by the end of August, with public consultation sometime by the end of September.

Mr. Bill Matheson commented that the map attempts to incorporate several possible futures, dependant upon whether or not DNR gives approval.

Mr. Charles commenced a walk through of the map.

Mr. Jan Skora, Coordinator, Real Property Planning, noted that the although the timeline previously suggested by Mr. Charles is manageable, it is largely dependant on consolidated effort from all stakeholders. If feedback and input are not sufficient and

timely, a delay in the process would be likely, especially given that the upcoming summer months may effectively reduce availability of staff and resources.

Mr. Dusan Soudek asked for trail clarification of multiuse and front country trails. 12'49" In response Mr. Charles stated that multiuse trails anticipate bicycles and motorized OHVs (Off Highway Vehicles), whereas front country trails do not. Mr. Matheson inquired as to whether there is an exception to this for powered wheelchairs. There are no exceptions due to trail composition, such as crusher dust, which would present safety concerns. Mr. Skora commented that this could be addressed on a local scale detail approach for specific areas. Grade is also a concern.

Typically back country trails are more of a primitive design trail, with the only involvement being protection of elements. Front country trails require some degree of engineering due to topography, such as ridges and valleys, although wherever possible proposed trails would ideally be maintained along the tops of features.

Access to the lakes within the region was discussed, and the challenges associated with portage. Gateways are labelled on the map with asterisks and are meant to illustrate proposed access points to trail heads. For example, the asterisk at the Prospect Community Centre marks a proposed parking lot in this area and indicates the easiest access to Nichols Lake and connecting trails. In contrast, MacDonald Lake residents would have neighbourhood access points, which are meant for pedestrians and local day use, with no anticipation to accommodate for parking of vehicles. However, in certain areas the only way to portage between lakes and have accessible put-in points, would be to develop a road way for vehicles.

Mr. Soudek commented that driving in is the only solution for boaters who wish to portage, otherwise access through the Indian Lake golf course would be the only other possible way to enter the lake system using existing roads.

Mr. Charles referred to the old road to the dam - the old St. Margaret's Bay Road - as another access point. Ragged Lake would have the best day use, with a boat launch and docks being a possibility in the future vision of the area. Otter Lake has the best access to the lake system of the entire wilderness common and planners initially thought this could be utilized, but it acts as a water supply for the Solid Waste Management Facility and is therefore restricted under the facility's provincial licensing agreement. 30'

Various gateways for the trail system were examined; neighbourhood, community and regional designations are given on the map.

Mr. Charles pointed out "white" areas on the map, and described these areas as potential conservation design subdivisions, with more density in a smaller area. Generally the plan calls for 80% green space, and the remaining 20% for development in these locations. Mr. Skora noted that green space usually occupies less than 10% of a given lot. These conservation design areas may have condominium style ownership in that people would own shares in the housing; there would be specific lot and road right of way requirements and a large natural surrounding area with the idea of creating a walkable neighbourhood.

Sunrise Park Cemetery will remain as is with regional park lands surrounding it.

Ms. Kelly Morrisey joined the meeting at 7:43 p.m.

There is a proposed neighbourhood entrance above Hatchet Lake where Club Road meets Prospect Road, with the key gateway at the Prospect Community Centre.

The dark green band on the map essentially follows along the Prospect Road acting as a forested buffer of approximately 100 metres. Depending whether or not this buffer is sustainable and what is located behind it, the buffer may change to park land with potential for replanting various species of trees and landscaping development. This route is viewed as an important access point for tourists continuing to Peggy`s Cove.

The issue of signage along the Prospect Road was briefly discussed. Mr. Maybank commented on the large amount of signage along the road. Mr. Charles stated that City Council had contacted the Provincial Government regarding signage in the area and asked for a response in terms of policy. Being designated as a trunk highway and not a provincial one, Prospect Road is not subject to provincial sign criteria. Signage on trunk highways is generally in support of local economies in given areas. Signs that are no longer relevant or not legally permitted can be removed; such signs along Prospect Road can eventually be phased out over time, and alternative means of advertising can be explored with various localities in the area. The master plan will address the identity of the park, the overall extent of area, and appropriate roadside signage.

The discussion then moved to focus on the use of OHVs on multipurpose trails. Mr. Charles noted that OHVs are not permitted in regional parks or wilderness recreation areas in accordance with By-Law P-600, which does not allow operation of motorized vehicles in park areas. Solid orange lines on the map illustrate multiuse trails. These trails would be roughly 12 feet wide and would offer access to bicycles and OHVs in particular, but only if these trails are built by the province.

Mr. Soudek inquired as to how it is proposed to get around the by law regarding OHVs if these trails will be incorporated into the park and motorized vehicles are not allowed.

Mr. Charles responded that a buffer would be created with the intention of moving motorized traffic away from subdivisions such as MacDonald Lake. Mr. Matheson further added in clarification that these OHV trails would be on a different category of land from the rest of the park.

The dashed lines by Otter Lake were also examined. This area has been designated as no access due to heavy industrial use from the Solid Waste Management Facility which has licensed this land from the province with the exclusion of any other land use for the next 25 years for operation. Following the 25 year operational period, another 30 year period for treatment and monitoring of this area has be allowed. Dashed lines in this area propose possible trail routes for future use when the plant is retired and the land is no longer restricted. The restricted area would be included in the Master Plan labelled as a regional park reserve for potential future use.

Discussion continued in relation to OHV trails, collector and ring roads, and right of way agreements.

The perimeter for the Indian Lake golf course remains unchanged with no increase.

Mr. Charles identified a small area of HRM land that could conceivably become part of the regional park and offer residents of Goodwood who currently do not have neighborhood access to the wilderness common, a possible future gateway.

The large complex of wetland known as Drysdale Bog was briefly mentioned. This area is privately owned but controlled by the province. Feedback from local residents reflects that people want the wetland left alone. Mr. Charles stated that there should be mention of this in the Master Plan to indicate that should the possibility arise that HRM could incorporate this area (and the old pipeline road) as part of the trail system, that this area would be a strong recreational feature as part of the overall trail system.

Mr. Logan inquired if there had been any cross country skiing in consideration when planning was developed. In response, Mr. Charles stated that this was considered and was addressed by creating stacking loops throughout the trail system, with various places of origin to allow for neighbourhood access and reasonable length routes. Existing (preferred) ski trails could be maintained and developed.

Mr. Charles noted that by establishing regional park land along Route 333 from approximately Club Road up to Goodwood, distinct communities and subdivisions with green space as a divisional element could be created.

There was a brief discussion of wildlife crossing in the area.

It was suggested by Mr. Logan that the restricted land around Otter Lake used by the Solid Waste Management Facility be labelled as wilderness reserve to imply its future designation once the facility is out of use and land restriction has been lifted. Committee members expressed agreement with this description and function.

Mr. Charles made mention of the Exhibition Park Grounds as an urban gateway for the wilderness common, noting that in the near future there would be a park and ride with daily Metro Transit service to Mumford road.

There was brief discussion of pending land purchases and the resulting trail extensions and access to Nine Mile river that the lands in question would provide.

Dashed line, limited use designations illustrate demanding waterway routes, not likely to be used by average park goers.

It was noted that an underpass or overpass may be necessary at Exhibition Grounds for pedestrian street crossing.

In the Master Plan the design for each gateways is unique; a generic gateway will not work for each area. When developing the park and ride at Exhibition Grounds, and further developing Ragged Lake, Mr. Charles noted that signal lights should be a consideration. Mr. Charles added that generally the Department of Transportation requires 400 meters between signals and that there is a signal light at the old St. Margaret's Road and Prospect Road already.

When looking at the top, green, 100 metre buffer along the highway, Mr. Charles anticipates that Ragged Lake would be the only location where some clearing behind the buffer may occur in the next decades. The intention is to maintain a "wall" of green along the highway as a major gateway into Halifax. The green line on the map shows the active transportation piece, with a view to extending a phased multiuse concept in conjunction with the Chebucto Peninsula along Route 333 as a phased active transportation route. Improvements to bike lanes with paved shoulders are being done in these areas on a go forward basis to enhance biker safety.

Mr. Skora mentioned the possibility of managing the vegetation along highway, to increase the size of bike lanes, thereby improving safety.

Mr. Charles briefly listed challenges that have been documented in the planning process for the wilderness common, such as wetlands conservation, forest types and management, replanting and the introduction of new species.

Mr. Logan inquired about private areas that will be effected by the Master Plan. Mr. Charles in response stated that pending agreements must be dealt with confidentially and in a timely manner, and that negotiations could be concluded by the end of summer.

In summary Mr. Charles stated that the next step in the process is phasing, with phase 1 being the Nichols Lake area and trail system. Within the first 5 years, a trail system up to Club Road is envisioned. Phase 2 would encompass the area from Club Road to Indian Lake. Once this is confirmed and made public, ATV access would disappear in the areas being developed. During the phasing process ATV use in other areas could continue; implementation and development would occur over time giving ample notice to local communities. The ability to enforce trail system rules and confiscate vehicles if necessary must be present, but the phasing approach is meant to simply displace ATV activity, within a 10 year window, and not abolish it in the area. As communities begin to see the trail system design and the effort behind the work unfold, park usage will become more evident. Phasing allows cost estimates to be made and makes the entire process more attainable.

Mr. Soudek inquired as to when a response may be given from DNR regarding the planning proposal. Mr. Charles responded that a meeting was being arranged and that thus far it appears as though DNR may endorse the plan in principle. Also, there is an outstanding issue regarding ATV usage in the Beechville, Lakeside and Timberlea trails. The Province supports this but HRM does not feel trails in these areas are appropriate for OHVs. A meeting will be held to discuss this in September. Mr. Charles stated that 90% of the plan directs its focus on HRM property, while the remaining 10% of the plan deals with the Chebucto Peninsula context. Intergovernmental cooperation will be addressed.

Mr. Soudek inquired about camping and hunting activities in the wilderness common. Mr. Charles responded that there is no hunting permitted in regional parks, but that camping could be looked at in more detail, possibly in the wilderness reserve, although fires would not be allowed, and health of the moose species must be the priority in this area.

Based on information provided by Mr. Charles, the next step in the process would be for

EDM to write a Master Plan draft. The plan would include chapters covering phasing, costing gateways, forestry issues, etc. and other components as laid out on the map.

The Committee gave unanimous approval of the concept map and consented to go forward and have a draft of the Master Plan written based on this map, with the first draft being available in the upcoming weeks.

7. **ADDED ITEMS** - None

8. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting date was not scheduled.

9. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Mark Calvi  
Legislative Assistant