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Item No.
Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee
October 15, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by

Brad Anguish, Director, Parks & Recreation

Original Signed by

Bob Bjerke, Chief Planner and Director, Planning & Development

DATE: October 2, 2015

SUBJECT: Halifax Green Network Plan – Process update and Interim results

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

- June 25 2014 Regional Council motion:
  MOVED Councillor Nicoll by seconded by Councillor McCluskey that Halifax Regional Council: repeal the existing HRM Regional Municipal Planning Strategy and adopt the proposed HRM Regional Municipal Planning Strategy as contained in Attachment A of the January 14, 2014 staff report;….MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

- 2015/16 Business Plan CDE00105 and CDG01283 - Greenbelting and Public Open Spaces Planning" Greenbelts and public open spaces provide opportunities for recreation and leisure activities for Halifax residents, protect valued natural and cultural assets, and shape our communities. The municipality will develop a Greenbelting and Public Open Spaces Priorities Plan as called for in the Regional Plan."

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

- *Halifax Regional Charter*, Section 229: "a municipal planning strategy may contain policy statements regarding the protection, use and development of lands within the Municipality; studies to be carried out; and municipal investment for public and private development and the coordination of public programs relating to the economic, social and physical development of the Municipality"
- *Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy Policy* E-12: "HRM shall prepare a *Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan* to protect and preserve connectivity between natural areas and open space lands, to enable their integration into sustainable community design, to help define communities, to benefit the Municipality's economy and the physical health of its people, and to reflect and support the overall purposes of this Plan."

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to inform Community Planning Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) and subsequently Regional Council of the work to date and the ongoing planning process for the completion of the Halifax Green Network Plan. The Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (Regional Plan) identifies the need for a priorities plan to address the conservation and use of a regional network of natural and public open space lands and aquatic resources. Key to advancing this goal is the identification of an interconnected open space network and a planning framework that will work toward its long-term sustainability. Toward this aim the "Greenbelting & Public Open Space Priorities Plan" was identified under Regional Plan policy and advanced by Regional Council as part of the Parks & Recreation 2014-15 Business Plan and budget. The planning process is now being carried out under the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP) project which will establish a strategic vision and decision-making framework to guide the long-term management of open space resources across the municipality, based on a regional ecosystems approach to advance multiple community planning objectives.

On May 19, 2015, a three-phased process to develop the HGNP was launched. The first phase of a region-wide public engagement program and a course-grained GIS and spatial assessment of the regional landscape have been completed to understand key issues, opportunities and values. The primary outcome of Phase I is a "*State of the Landscape Report"* which will be used to form the foundations of the Halifax Green Network Plan and has created a baseline of information for the next phase of more detailed planning. Due to the size of the document, the Executive Summary of the "State of the Landscape Report" (SOL) plus key maps that are indicative of the SOL findings are presented as Attachments 1 - 4. The full SOL report can be found at: (www.halifax.ca/halifaxgreennetwork).

At this milestone point in the process, this report is being presented to provide an overview of key insights from Phase I with respect to public input and the existing landscape conditions along with next steps in the planning process.

DISCUSSION

Priorities plans are intended as management plans that establish detailed planning and implementation frameworks and actions to assist in carrying out Regional Plan policy. The three planning phases will result in a plan that is integrated with multiple regional and functional planning objectives and priorities and will provide outcomes that help to advance planning goals. As a result, the following broad-scale goals were identified for the HGNP:

Planning Goals

Public service delivery:
- The provision of public open space lands and park facilities, strategically located and programmed, to meet the needs of developing and urbanizing communities;
- An appropriate quality and quantity of parks and corridors distributed across spatially and culturally diverse areas to support walkable, well-connected, and healthy communities;
- Focussed land investment and asset management for more impactful and sustainable allocation of public open space resources.

Conservation:
- Protection of vital environmental and ecological functions including water resources, animal and plant habitat, and areas of natural and cultural heritage;
- Protection of open space in support of water resource and climate change management;
- Open space conservation in support of economic development including natural resource management, eco-tourism, and the provision of goods and services.

Community shaping:
- Designation of open space lands and to physically shape development patterns for more contiguous and serviceable communities consuming less land and environmental resources;
- Parks, trails and community greenspace to help socially and culturally shape more healthy, vibrant and prosperous communities and neighbourhoods.

In order to assist in achieving those goals, a decision-making framework of guiding principles, policy objectives, landscape evaluation methodology along with implementation tools and recommendations will be developed. This HGNP will provide direction for more focussed and rational public lands investment as well as guidance for land-use planning to help conserve the "*right lands in the right location for the right reason".*

In addition to a number of HRM regional and community plan policy objectives and functional plan priorities, there are four provincial statements of interest that are pertinent to the HGNP including:
- Protecting Municipal drinking water supply areas
- Making the best use of existing infrastructure
- Reserving high quality farmland, and
- Preventing development on known floodplains

The HGNP will guide future land-use planning and public lands investment so as to advance Municipal and Provincial interests in conserving open space. Although the HGNP will not contain new land-use regulation or legislated changes to current secondary plans, it will provide the necessary open space assessment methodology and implementation tools to inform future planning and investment.

Planning Process & Engagement

Public engagement is important to help inform the HGNP's development. Therefore, a range of communication and consultation activities to share information and seek input have been used in Phase 1 and will continue to be used in future phases.

Phase 1: Foundations May-October 2015
Understanding what we have, what we value, and where we want to go
Output: State of the Landscape Report detailing key issues & opportunities plus community values (Completed)

Phase 2: Planning Directions October – March 2016
Assessing landscape impacts, evaluating and refining open space scenarios and options, and developing planning and implementation directions
Output: Report with a policy framework and detailed ecological and planning assessment

Phase 3: Draft and Final Plan March – June 2016
Developing preferred network scenarios and planning solutions – finalizing the plan
Output: Report with a comprehensive planning and implementation framework

Phase I sought input from a broad range of stakeholders on open space values and issues using a variety of on-line and in-person engagement methods. An on-line map tool, multiple community events, stakeholder interviews, cultural landscapes workshops, and a public survey resulted in detailed input from approximately 560 people from across HRM. The on-line map tool alone gathered 1,184 points of information. The engagement strategy was designed to encourage representation from all communities using decentralized "pop-up" events at existing community venues such as farmers markets, in addition to conventional open houses closer to the Regional Centre.

All of the public input was gathered into a single data-base using five open space themes – *ecosystems, working landscapes, communities, recreation and trails, and cultural landscapes.* Over 9,000 comments were then categorized under 36 sub-themes. Multiple relationships between public input were identified to

help inform the State of the Landscape report (SOL) report and to provide reference for the technical research and data assessment undertaken by the project team. The public input has been consolidated into a "What We Heard Report". A summary of the findings gathered through phase 1 are outlined below. The full report can be found at: (www.halifax.ca/halifaxgreennetwork).

Summary of Phase 1

Insights from Phase I – *What we heard:*

The public consultation has provided information related to the community's interests and concerns regarding open space. The intrinsic environmental, social, cultural and economic connection to open space is important to the people of HRM. Phase I of the HGNP process has determined that public interest and concern for the sustainability of open space resources continues to grow. However, there is also strong support for an open space plan that will support healthy ecosystems, environmental assets, high quality lifestyles for citizens and the ability to attract people and investment. Value statements have been crafted and will be help shape the vision, principles, and objectives in the next phase of the process. Key themes that have emerged which emphasize core values include ecological and community connectivity, water protection and environmental preservation, cultural connection to the water and the land, and nature-friendly economic development.

Insights from Phase I – *State of the Landscape*:

The HRM landscape is characterized as having ecological and cultural quality with diverse natural coastal and inland landscapes. At a broad scale, the regional landscape is largely intact but there are growing demands on open space resources that must be identified and managed. A systems-based approach to managing open space is needed but is reliant on reducing landscape fragmentation and pressures on diverse landscapes, ecosystems, and habitats. This comes with its challenges as open space lands cross over multiple jurisdictions and land-ownership. Integrated landscape management policy and practice that is driven by common goals would provide the best opportunity for joint stewardship and collaboration.

SOL is an initial step in understanding the current landscape conditions and planning context at a broad scale. This high-level overview forms a baseline of information, issues and opportunities which will provide the context for a finer-scale assessment and recommendations in the next phase of the HGNP development.

Key Issues & Opportunities

In order to understand the existing open space conditions or "*State of the Landscape*", a number of key issues and opportunities have been identified for further study in Phase 2 using GIS modelling and impact assessment. These include:

Ecosystems + Biodiversity:

1. Water-quality and source water[1] protection is a major concern exacerbated by shallow ground water depth and expanding development
2. Landscape connectivity, habitat loss and fragmentation surrounding urban areas, in conjunction with natural resource extraction and infrastructure corridors, is an issue
3. Recognition and protection of diverse coastal areas and highly productive estuaries is required
4. Much of the available biodiversity data is opportunistically and locally collected

Working Landscapes:

1. Mining and aggregate extraction is challenged by land-use conflicts and protected area designations

[1] In this context, source water means all surface water and ground water that may be used as a supply of drinking water for domestic, municipal, or other purposes.

2. Private ownership of forested lands challenges integrated natural resource management
3. Erosion of critical industrial lands which are dependent on large open space areas such as land dependent industrial uses and waterfront lands
4. The local food system should be strengthened through increased protection of the limited supply of agricultural lands and increased opportunities for urban agriculture
5. Tourism is critical for rural communities and the regional economy but land-use, transportation, and natural resource conflicts need to be managed

Communities:

1. Natural edges of communities are compromised by land consumptive development patterns
2. Urban forests require extensive maintenance and replanting efforts
3. Substantial tree removal for development is compromising the open space system
4. Broader open space objectives as part of the design of parks and developments is needed
5. The amount, quality and location of parkland in some communities is not sufficient
6. The open space function of streets and Right-Of-Ways is underutilized

Recreation & Trails:

1. HRM has a good supply of regional and wilderness parks in close proximity of settlement areas, but access, amenities, and connectivity is an issue
2. Public water access in many parts of HRM is limited and often fragmented by private property
3. HRM has good trails and AT routes but lacks a comprehensive connected corridor system
4. Incomplete data for trails and unofficial corridors challenges planning and prioritization

Cultural Landscapes:

1. Cultural landscape information, policies and programs are lacking. Planning and program development is at a very early stage, both at the municipal and provincial levels
2. The lack of mapped data on the pre and post contact landscapes of indigenous peoples reduces the ability to identify a complete range of landscapes with potential cultural significance
3. HRM requires a criteria-based framework to identify and categorize potential significant cultural landscapes for further investigation and potential conservation
4. The cultural integrity of important landscapes is under pressure such as coastal villages, hunting and gathering areas, waterways, scenic views, traditional gathering places, etc.

Next Steps

Phase 2 of the HGNP will be launched immediately following this update to Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee. The next phase of work will include the development of a high level policy framework plus spatial scenarios, or open space network options, that will be assessed and modelled to understand multiple impacts of various potential directions. This will produce a finer-scale evaluation of multiple ecological, economic and socio-cultural activities and regional planning objectives. Phase 2 will also consider the required coordination of the HGNP with other policy, land-use plans, and development activities. This detailed network assessment and a draft planning framework will be presented to the public for input prior to Regional Council's consideration. Table 1 illustrates the deliverables and path for the final draft plan to Council expected in June, 2016.

Table 1 Deliverables and Path for the Completion of the Halifax Green Network Plan

Phases 2 & 3 - HGNP		
Deliverables	**Engagement**	**Target Time-line**
Vision, principles & objectives (Using phase 1 input)	Public information	Late October
Performance indicators (Using phase 1 input)	Public Information	Late October
Cultural landscapes identification	Stakeholder workshops Public information	Late October

Open space network scenarios development and modelling (Geo-design methodology)	Stakeholder consultation Public information	November-January
Preferred network & planning framework	Public consultation Public information	January - February
Draft implementation framework (Public lands management + land-use planning)[2]	Public information	February - March
Draft Green Network Plan	Public consultation Public information	March - May
Final Green Network Plan & recommendation	Public information	May – June 2016

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A key objective and deliverable of the HGNP is broad community and stakeholder input that supports development of a balanced planning and land management framework with priorities for implementation. Each of the three planning phases will include an engagement program with multiple avenues for information sharing, consultation and participation. Phase I included an eight week engagement process with multiple avenues of input including public meetings, “pop-up” events, stakeholder workshops, an on-line opinion survey, and an on-line interactive mapping tool. The next two phases will also include a targeted engagement strategy.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Executive Summary State of the Landscape Report
Attachment 2: Map 23 Generalized Landscape Connectivity
Attachment 3: Map 40 Parks & Protected Areas
Attachment 4: Map 52 Cultural Landscape Elements Phase 1

A copy of this report can be obtained online at http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.php then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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Report Approved by: Original Signed by
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[2] Greenbelting along with other land-use designations and planning tools will be considered.

ATTACHMENT 1

HALIFAX GREEN NETWORK PLAN
STATE OF THE LANDSCAPE REPORT OCTOBER 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The importance of open spaces for the economic, social, and environment health of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is recognized in the 2014 *Regional Municipal Planning Strategy* (the Regional Plan), which calls for a *'Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan'* for the region. This 'priority plan', renamed the *Halifax Green Network Plan* (HGNP), will establish a planning and land management framework for open space to help advance the multiple environmental, social, cultural, and economic objectives of the HRM, and a means to inform future development and growth patterns. The following *State of the Landscape Report*: *Issues and Opportunities* (the Report) is an initial step in the development of the HGNP. The Report provides a summary of the current state of the open space system and an overview of the key issues and opportunities that will influence and guide the Plan's development. This Report also provides baseline information to be compared with the performance indicators of alternative open space scenarios as the HGNP evolves.

Few areas in the world offer the diverse landscape as can be found across the Halifax Regional Municipality including its exceptional natural coastal and inland open space areas. Managing that landscape in an integrated and sustainable way is critical to the future growth and livability of the Region and requires a coordinated understanding of the context of open space function and ownership across jurisdictions and land ownership. The HGNP will provide an important framework for identifying and categorizing the landscapes that need to be conserved and managed long-term.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement

The HGNP will engage public and stakeholders throughout the development of the plan. The first phase of engagement, *Phase 1 - Foundations*, sought input on open spaces values, issues, and goals to help inform the Report. Five core open space themes were used to frame the discussion throughout the engagement process: ecosystems, working landscapes, recreation and trails, communities, and cultural landscapes. The Report is organized around these five themes.

Open Space Themes

Public and stakeholders input was used to develop a high level value statement for each of the five themes. These value statements represent which open space functions, attributes and/or benefits are important to Halifax citizens. This input will inform the development of performance indicators to evaluate and refine alternative open space scenarios and options during the second phase of the HGNP (*Phase 2 - Planning Framework*).

The following table presents the open space themes and values:

Open Space Themes and Values

△	**ECOSYSTEMS: Natural systems that support plant and animal life.** *Value Statement: Diverse and healthy ecosystems provide a series of important ecosystem services and benefits, such as provisioning (water, food, and fiber), regulating (climate and water), and supporting of natural and built environments (habitats, water quality).*
▽	**WORKING LANDSCAPES: Places that support economy activity.** *Value Statement: Working landscapes provide important economic development opportunities, while ensuring the viability of ecosystems in the long-term. The preservation of traditional land-uses, food security and the viability of rural communities all strongly depend on a thriving working landscape.*
◇	**RECREATION AND TRAILS: Places we go for fun and facilities we use to move around.** *Value Statement: Connected parks, wilderness areas, and trails provide a wide range of recreational and active transportation opportunities within reach of communities, which can help promote active lifestyles, contribute to quality of life, and stimulate economic investment.*
○	**COMMUNITIES: Places we live and work, and play close to home.** *Value Statement: Parks and open spaces contribute to the unique sense of place, as well as help shape community identity and community form. Strategic open space protection helps to ensure that growth management objectives are achieved through sustainable development patterns. Accessible urban open spaces are connected by foot, bicycle, and transit, and promote an active lifestyle, as well as contribute to overall quality of life.*
⊞	**CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: Places that connect us to our history and define our regional identity.** *Value Statement: Cultural landscapes, including their historical context and land uses, are the foundations for the communities' sense of place and identity.*

Open Space Assessment

The HRM is an area of outstanding ecological and cultural quality and, as Nova Scotia's capital, plays a vital role in the province's economy. Section 2 of the Report outlines the biophysical, economic, socio-cultural, and historical contexts of the Region. Since the HRM comprises both public and private lands across a number of jurisdictions, multiple governmental parties are involved in the management of land and water. Section 2 provides a review of the current policy and land management context to provide an understanding of federal and provincial government's policies, plans, regulations that directly affect and constrain what the HRM could do within its boundaries and how its open space is managed. Section 3 presents the open space

assessment for each of the five core themes and includes a set of identified issues and opportunities for each theme.

The open space assessment integrates public and stakeholder input, with government data sets and existing policy direction, supplemented by spatial analysis using GIS. During the course of the public and stakeholder engagement, preliminary issues and opportunities were identified. These helped direct the spatial analysis, which in turn, refined the set of issues and opportunities.

The open space assessment presents the key issues and opportunities, followed by a general discussion of the sub-themes. The following table presents a summary of key findings for each of the themes:

Summary of Key Findings

ECOSYSTEMS AND BIODIVERSITY

1. **Water-quality** is negatively impacted by increased development that compromises source water protection areas and watersheds, which are facing extensive run-off and contamination issues. The shallow depth to groundwater makes contamination of wells a major issue in many areas, particularly those served by dug wells.
2. **Landscape connectivity** and **habitat loss,** including extensive fragmentation surrounding urban areas, are increasing concerns. Critical areas are vulnerable to expanding residential development, natural resource extraction, and utility/transportation corridor expansions. Areas in the Chebucto Peninsula will imminently be completely cut off from the broader regional landscape by roads and other development.
3. **Coastal areas** are of high value ecologically, socially, culturally, and economically but are not adequately recognized through current planning and land management practices. Productive estuaries are of particular concern.
4. Much of the available **biodiversity data** is opportunistically and locally collected, and a thorough survey and inventory of the broader region is called for.

WORKING LANDSCAPES

5. **Mining and aggregate extraction** are important economic activities but are threatened by encroaching development, competing land uses, and protected area designations.
6. The majority of **forested lands** are privately owned, making consistent sustainable management and coordination of objectives, a challenge.
7. The local food system is threatened by the loss of an already limited supply of **agricultural lands,** as well as the impact of climate change.
8. Critical **industrial landscapes** are challenged by land-use conflicts and conservation objectives, particularly near urban areas. Greater attention to locating and developing industrial landscapes in an ecologically sensitive and broader landscape manner is needed to ensure the long-term viability of industrial activities and the regional economy.
9. **Tourism** is critical to the viability of rural communities, but potential conflicts with other activities, such as forestry or settlement, can have a negative impact. Beyond individual sites and opportunities, tourism requires a high quality, broader landscape context. Ribbon development along scenic travelways is having a negative and serious effect on the scenic quality of the region.
10. **Wild harvesting areas,** including hunting and fishing, need to be sustainably managed for habitat production, and public use and access.

RECREATION AND TRAILS

11. HRM has a good supply of **regional and wilderness parks** within, and in close proximity to settlement areas, however access to parks, water (inland and coastal), and amenities, as well as connectivity to and between open spaces are serious issues.
12. **Water access** to both coastal areas and inland waters is limited in many parts of the HRM. While many areas are publically owned, access is limited and fragmented by private property.
13. The HRM has a wide variety of **trails and AT routes**, but lacks a comprehensive corridor system that is connected, accessible, and diverse. There is an incomplete mapping of trails, including many unofficial trails, which challenges planning and prioritization.

COMMUNITIES

14. **Natural edges** of communities and the access to green spaces edges provide, contribute to community identity and sustainable growth patterns, but they are threatened by inefficient development and leap-frog development; "sprawl."
15. Broader open space objectives need to be considered in the design of parks in individual developments in order to maximize the benefits of the entire open space system.
16. **Urban forests** across many areas will require extensive maintenance and replanting efforts in the near future. Substantial tree removal in certain suburban and waterfront developments is an issue.
17. The amount, quality, and/or location of **park space** in some communities creates areas where open space is either not sufficient or is underutilized. This is particularly true in more recent developed communities.
18. The open space function of **streets** is underutilized throughout the urban areas. Greater use of the street right-of-ways for stormwater management and as an urban amenity is needed.
19. HRM lacks a detailed **park system plan** to inform the potential reconfiguration, acquisition, and/or removal of open space at strategic locations.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

20. Cultural landscape **information and program** focus is lacking. Planning and program development is at a very early stage, both at municipal and provincial levels.
21. The identification and management of significant cultural landscapes is vital to the HRM's sense of place and long-term prosperity.
22. The lack of **mapped data** on the pre- and post–European contact landscapes of **indigenous peoples** is an issue, limiting the identification of the complete range of potential culturally significant landscapes.
23. In order for cultural landscapes to be identified and categorized for their potential significance, the HRM must develop a **criteria-based framework** founded on regional thematic elements (including sites of worship, indigenous use, ethnic settlement and resettlement, military use, transportation, urban landscape, natural resource use, natural features, and regulated heritage sites).
24. The citizens of the HRM are key stakeholders in the identification of landscapes of cultural significance to the communities in which they live and work. Their **ongoing engagement** is vital to identifying these landscapes and to determining the future of these unique resources.
25. The threat of **inappropriate development** to the landscape and sense of place in the HRM's coastal villages, its waterways and coastlines, and to much-loved scenic views is a concern that communities have identified as an important issue that needs to be managed. Similar threats to traditional hunting and gathering areas exist and need to be addressed.

MAP 23 | GENERALIZED LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY

HALIFAX

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Revised Sept. 23, 2015

LEGEND

- First Nations
- Road
- Active Rail Line
- Airport

Likelihood of Wildlife Movement*

High

Low

* Raw connectivity values are smoothed using a 100m moving window, highlighting broad corridors and areas with a high density of pinch points. Higher value areas are expected to experience more movement of wildlife, while lower value areas are those that are typically avoided when moving across the land. Mid-range values are seen in areas where there are multiple potential paths through the landscape.

MAP 40 | PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS

HALIFAX

LEGEND

- First Nations
- Roads
- Active Rail Lines
- Airports
- Municipal Parks and Open Space Areas
- Provincial Parks
- Provincial Wilderness Areas
- Provincial Nature Reserves
- Crown Lands
- Candidate Protected Areas
- Potential Additional Regional Parks (conceptual)
- Primary Trails
- Secondary Trails
- ATV Trails
- Trans Canada Trail

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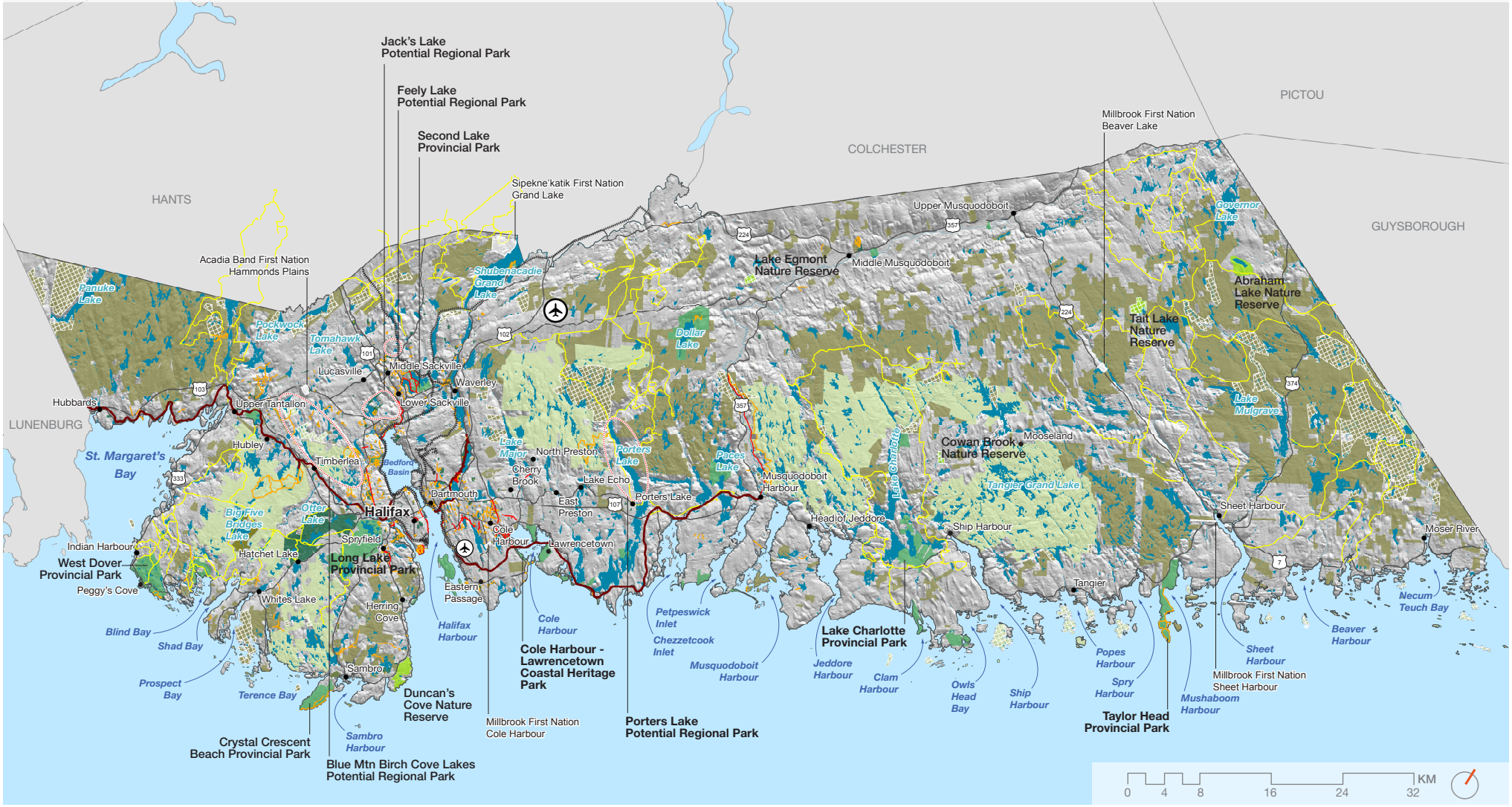
Revised Sept. 23, 2015



MAP 52 | HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS – PHASE 1

HALIFAX

LEGEND

- First Nations
- Roads
- Active Rail Lines
- Airports
- Archaeological Significance
- Coastal Villages
- Heritage Regulation
- Ethnic Settlement and Re-settlement
- Indigenous Use
- Military Use
- Commemorative Sites
- Natural Feature
- Natural Resource Use
- Sites of Worship
- Transportation
- Urban Landscapes
- Viewsheds

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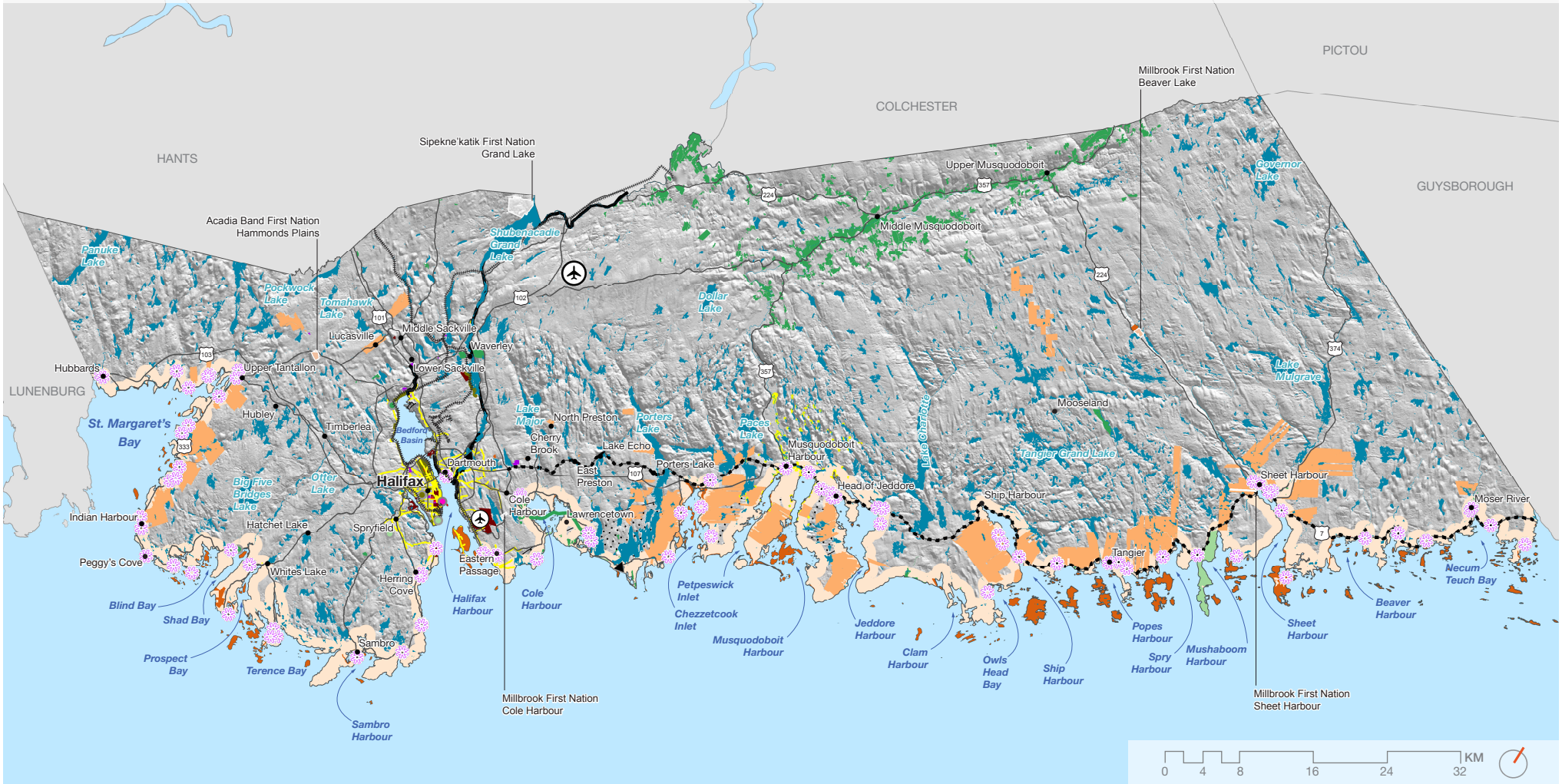
** Details regarding the above classification scheme can be found in **Section 3.5.2 - Cultural Landscape Elements** of the **State of the Landscape Report.***