



**SCHMIDTVILLE HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT
STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE
MEETING #2
MINUTES
October 29, 2015**

PRESENT: Mr. William Breckenridge
Ms. Mary E. Donovan
Mr. Larry Haiven, Chair
Mr. Benjamin LeBlanc
Ms. Beverly Miller
Ms. Janet Morris
Mr. Lyndon Watkins

REGRETS: Ms. Kristina Chapman

STAFF: Mr. Seamus McGreal, Heritage Planner, Halifax Regional Municipality

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

Supporting documents and information items are available online:
<http://shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/schmidtville>.

The meeting was called to order at 5:52 p.m. and adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:52 p.m. in the TD Building. Quorum is reached.

MEETING OVERVIEW

Mr. Seamus McGreal outlined the objectives of the meeting. These included approving the past meeting minutes, a review of community feedback as collected from the public meeting and the online survey, a review of the community engagement strategy and a motion from the committee to adopt the community engagement strategy and secure a timeline for moving forward, a discussion around community engagement activities and what format these should take and deciding on the community engagement roles for committee members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES (JULY 29, 2015) AND ORDER OF BUSINESS

Chair, Mr. Larry Haiven, gave the committee time to look over minutes from previous stakeholder workshops and asked Mr. McGreal whether the issue of boundaries will be discussed at the meeting. The committee decided that boundaries should be discussed.

Ms. Beverly Miller asked if it is possible to have council approve the boundaries, after which the committee would work out the details. Mr. McGreal explained that the boundaries will need to go before Regional Council for approval at the same time as the HCD Plan and Bylaw. Mr. William Breckenridge added that the majority of the public agreed on the proposed boundaries in the online survey and at the public meeting.

Mr. Haiven proposed a motion to adopt the minutes. Mr. Benjamin LeBlanc seconded the motion. All approved of the minutes, and the motion passed.

REVIEW COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Mr. McGreal provided an overview of the public feedback received. He began with the online survey and provided a summary of a document which presents the survey results based on total submissions with those respondents removed who identified as not having a physical presence in the community. This was done to compare the responses of those who live or operate a business in the area with the responses from the general public. He explained that the responses of both groups remain consistent; however, there is some difference on the issue of affordable housing. Affordable housing units and the increased density these would provide were less supported by those who live in the area.

Ms. Miller asked whether a definition was provided for affordable housing, and Mr. McGreal explained that the description read "additional units in historic units that would create affordable housing". An important tenant of affordable housing is an increased number of smaller units in a downtown area. Mr. Haiven asked if perhaps the reason that those who lived in the area were not in support of affordable housing was because they know that many buildings there are already subdivided and are fairly affordable. Mr. Breckenridge suggested that the question was too vague and that there is a stigma attached to affordable housing that could have dissuaded the respondents who live in the area.

Mr. McGreal continued to review the online survey results explaining that respondents who reside in the area were in greater support of detached housing units provided in the rear of lots. There was also a difference on opinion on architectural guidelines (specifically what materials should be used to construct

new buildings) and concerning the bylaw to demolish historic buildings. People living in the area preferred greater flexibility concerning demolition.

Mr. McGreal then turned to the results from the public meeting explaining that similar questions were posed as were asked on the online survey. Many respondents felt that the proposed boundaries were good while there were some suggestions to extend the boundary north to Sackville Street and to include a few buildings along South Park Street also to extend the boundary east of Queen Street, south of Morris Street.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Breckenridge proposed that the area east Queen Street should be made into its own heritage district and explained that the Old South Suburb (OSS) traditionally extended to Queen Street. If Park Victoria was not there Mr. Breckenridge could see the heritage area extend further. He expressed his approval of the current boundary but added his concern that the liquor store site and Brenton's Place area is currently under the most direct threat. The liquor store is under threat of being sold for development. Mr. Breckenridge asked whether a formal request should be sent from the city to the province asking them not to sell until the site is approved into the HCD plan. Losing these sites would have the most adverse effect on the area.

Mr. Breckenridge explained that the Fresh Water Brook runs through Victoria Park. Everything on Brenton Street is part of the river delta and these buildings are settling into the ground. Mr. Breckenridge was advised not to purchase space in these buildings because of this effect. He added that developers all seem to interpret the rules of HRM by Design very literally.

Mr. Haiven and Mr. Breckenridge continued the discussion of the heights and proposed plan for buildings in the Brenton Street area.

Mr. Haiven explained that the liquor store is not part of HRM by Design or of the Downtown Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy. He relayed that the NSLC has agreed that they would not do anything with the building until the HCD plan is approved. Mr. Breckenridge maintained that he has heard conflicting reports and that the building is already being bid on. Ms. Donovan suggested that a move to sell the liquor store building was overruled by the Minister. Ms. Miller maintained that it is unclear whether any agreement from NSLC has been made in writing and that this should be looked into. She reminds the committee that some developments in the area still do not meet HRM by Design.

Mr. McGreal and Mr. Breckenridge discussed the commercial zoning heights of various buildings and Mr. Breckenridge expressed concern that these buildings could be grandfathered in.

Ms. Miller explained that the existing plan dictates the heights of buildings in the area regardless of zoning.

Mr. Breckenridge relayed that an MLA he spoke with wanted to pass on the message that he would not put in a demolition order as long as the city requested that he do not. Mr. Breckenridge suggested that writing an informal letter from the city to the province would help put the HCD process through.

Ms. Miller asked the committee what they wished to do about the proposed informal letter.

Mr. Breckenridge proposed that a formal letter should be sent from the city to the province and that an informal agreement should be set in place.

Ms. Janet Morris expressed concern that the buildings to the north of the area could also be lost. Mr. McGreal explained the rationale for why the current boundary was chosen based on criteria set in the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy. The MPS references criteria that historical properties should be continuous and not broken up by modern development.

Ms. Donovan expressed some concern that while this continuity helps avoid interruption in the area, most of these heritage areas are already interrupted and are, therefore, left unable to move forward under this restriction. Mr. McGreal maintains that while this criteria will be re-evaluated, it does still currently apply.

Ms. Miller expressed concern that a decision needs to be made concerning the boundary before the buildings in the area are affected. She suggested that the committee could ask council for a moratorium on the area.

Mr. McGreal explained that he has sent a report to council outlining suggestions for how the municipality could suspend development while the HCD is underway. These recommendations were based on what other provinces have done in this instance.

Mr. Haiven expressed concern that creating an HCD area in Schmidville could in fact encourage buildings outside of this area which do not fall under the heritage protection to be torn down because they will not be considered heritage.

Ms. Donovan suggested that a policy could be written to prevent this - one which maintains that the designation of one heritage area does not provide a basis for the increased demolition of buildings in nearby areas.

Mr. McGreal explained that his department is preparing a Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan which would identify larger cultural landscapes over the peninsula and specific urban areas that could benefit from municipal planning guidelines and conservation measures to protect their cultural heritage.

Ms. Morris proposed that the municipality should allow and encourage neighbourhoods to remain as they are and respect that the entire peninsula is of cultural interest.

Ms. Donovan suggested that the committee could pass a motion at the meeting to agree that boundaries to Schmidville be approved as the designated area but that an amendment to the MPS should also be made to assure that the heritage area would not contribute to the denigration of the immediate areas outside on the HCD.

Mr. Lyndon Watkins expressed his regret that modern buildings that are out of character with the rest of the area had ever been developed. He maintained that some sort of architectural control should be placed on the character of these areas.

Ms. Donovan recommended that the committee takes a motion.

Mr. Haiven recommended that the city call a moratorium for a year on Schmidville and the area surrounding it.

Mr. McGreal explained that the Heritage Property Act does not currently have a provision to suspend development while the HCD is being developed.

Mr. McGreal reminded the committee that they need to get the HCD adopted before they can amend the MPS. The MPS could be amended as part of the HCDs adoption. However until then, the committee will

need to focus on preparing the two documents to be proposed to council, and once they are adopted the MPS could be amended to include a broader policy around HCDs.

Ms. Donovan said that a temporary moratorium had been put in place to cover the entire municipality until the Regional Plan was adopted. She also expressed her concern that the development pressures are so intense that it is making the HCD process very difficult.

Mr. McGreal explained that Regional Council is addressing this through a report that was sent to the Minister. The only option for the committee currently is to approach the developers about the buildings under most immediate threat and try to negotiate a solution.

Mr. Breckenridge told the committee that he has already spoken with this developer and could continue this discussion with him.

Mr. McGreal maintained that the committee should take a more strategic approach to the negotiations - one that would offer the developers a more interesting option than those they currently have. An agreement would necessitate that these buildings should be maintained. Mr. McGreal proposed that he, the Chair, and the Vice Chair follow up on Mr. Breckenridge's lead and approach the developer with a proposal to maintain these buildings in exchange for something more appealing.

Mr. Haiven asked the committee for their opinion on the density bonus option. Ms. Morris warned that this approach may create problems elsewhere.

Mr. Breckenridge told the committee that the O'Brian houses etc. are privately owned by developers, and that the committee should try to work with them rather than fight with them in order to build a stronger relationship.

Ms. Miller suggested that the committee follow up with Ms. Donovan's proposal for a motion, so as not to leave the boundaries decision up in the air and vulnerable to developers who may want to shift the boundary line for their convenience.

Ms. Donovan offers a motion that the boundary be set where it is currently outlined on the plan. The motion is seconded by Ms. Miller.

Mr. Watkins explains that he is reluctantly in favour of the motion. He expresses his dismay that Schmidtville is a wasted asset and the HCD is a form of tokenism. He maintains that he is skeptical and cynical of the process. Ms. Donovan related that it is important to align motions made by both the committee and the public as much as possible, in order to show strength of agreement in front of council. Mr. Haiven maintained that it is still important to save the remaining buildings.

Ms. Miller reminded the committee that there was overwhelming support from the public present at the last meeting concerning the proposed boundary and that there should be no argument on the proposed boundary considering the public process that the proposed plan has gone through.

Mr. Haiven suggested that the motion is instead seen as a vote of confidence and Mr. McGreal agreed that this would help the committee move forward with confidence on this issue.

Mr. Haiven called for a vote for the proposed boundary line. Six committee members were in favour. There was one abstention.

Mr. McGreal suggested that the committee move to a discussion around the community engagement strategy.

REVIEW COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Mr. McGreal provided an overview of the community engagement strategy which uses such tools as interpretive signage, online portal and survey. The Shape Your City page has received substantial visitor traffic.

The Committee reviewed the Community Engagement Strategy and agreed to proceed with it.

Ms. Donovan requested to see a timeframe associated with the Community Engagement Strategy. Mr. McGreal explained that he would provide a timeframe to the Committee.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Haiven suggested that it is difficult to collect community narratives from the website.

Mr. Benjamin LeBlanc suggested that there is a need for more community engagement, and Mr. Haiven added that the committee should be asking people directly to tell their story. Ms. Donovan agreed that the committee should be collecting stories more actively. Mr. Breckenridge suggested creating an art exhibit to share stories.

Mr. McGreal explained that there are limits on the amount of time he would be able to invest on more actively collecting these stories but encouraged the committee to think of ideas.

Ms. Donovan explained that Schmidville was part of the incentive for the developers of the Trillium and Marianne sites to build in that area because of the unique, livable neighbourhood and park nearby. She argued that the existence of Schmidville supports the sale of units in these developments and that stories should be collected and shared from residence of these developments to help explain that communities like Schmidville act as economic incentives for development. Ms. Miller agreed and added that the condos below Agricola Street are an example of marketing the surrounding historic area.

Mr. McGreal told the committee that he has been publishing news stories about the area to the website but believes that the video would be very useful.

Ms. Miller suggested that the committee print a brochure for walking tours that could be left in nearby stores. Mr. Breckenridge suggested that the information he put together about the neighbourhood in a presentation could be used for a video. Ms. Miller proposed that signs and shop brochures would help people understand the area.

Mr. Haiven asked if perhaps shop owners on Spring Garden Road would allow the committee to put up a video screening the Schmidville film and Mr. Breckenridge suggested that Jennifer's of Nova Scotia would be a good location.

Mr. McGreal outlined the remaining community engagement activities to be carried out. These include holding two planning workshops (one has already been held and the second should one be done once the committee is prepared to make the draft plan and bylaw public). Open work spaces, such as the walking tours could also be held.

Mr. Haiven proposed that the committee also approach the library to run the Schmidville video.

Mr. McGreal proposed that three more workshops be held as part of stakeholder outreach and Ms. Miller asked how these will be distinct from the workshops that have already been held. Mr. McGreal explained that the workshops will be held around specific subject matter: new construction, design, and massing;

traffic, parking, and commerce; and general public incentives (including streetscapes). Mr. McGreal will be sending out a newsletter to invite households in the area to these meetings.

Mr. Breckenridge referenced the idea of fixing the front plaza area in front of the school. Mr. Breckenridge asked if this could be added into the streetscape plan as this space is a key view point. Fixing up the area could include putting in more flowers, bench, etc. and to make it more friendly and approachable. He explained that the school principal is open to it from a security perspective.

Ms. Miller asked if steps 8 & 9 (plain language guide and staff working groups) on the community engagement strategy will have to be completed before the HCD can be approved. She asked for clarification on what a “clear language guide” is. Mr. McGreal explained that this guide would help explain the guidelines visually to the public. Ms. Donovan suggested that a different term be used to describe this guide. Mr. Haiven explained that these steps do not have to precede the council vote and Mr. McGreal added that the guide would be for public use only and that the community engagement strategy goes above and beyond what council requires.

Mr. McGreal clarifies that the proposed staff working groups would be internally conducted to discuss policy etc.

Ms. Miller asked how the committee could move the HCD process along and avoid any pitfalls with council.

Motion to accept the community engagement strategy was put forward by Ms. Donovan and seconded by Mr. Breckenridge. Vote was held, and all committee members agreed.

Mr. McGreal explained that he has an internal timeline which he will provide to the committee.

Mr. Haiven maintained that there was a good consensus at the Schmidtville community meeting and that council seems to be in favour of this project.

Mr. McGreal expressed his concern about shifting priorities by council (such as a shift to cultural landscape planning, for instance) and the importance of keeping the project a priority.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ROLES OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mr. McGreal provided renderings that could be presented to the workshop.

Ms. Miller asked is it necessary to discuss density in the area at the meeting. Ms. Donovan warned that not discussing density could discourage home owners from improving their buildings (ie. new kitchen). Mr. McGreal and Mr. Breckenridge agreed that density is a necessary conversation for the public meeting.

Mr. McGreal maintained that the committee needs to tackle the complexity of the density issue because one of the most important things for maintaining the character of the area is to maintain the existing heights. He explained that there is an option to allow development in rear yards instead of raising heights along the streetscape.

Mr. Breckenridge questioned what this might do to the lots in the back. Mr. McGreal explained that there would need to be a rear yard. Ms. Donovan maintained that a 20 ft set back in the rear yard is not enough

and that 30 ft would be more appropriate in Schmidville. Mr. McGreal suggested that the question then becomes whether there is heritage character in the rear of these lots and asked whether the committee should be discussing both massing and design in the same community meeting.

Ms. Miller recommended that the committee provide clear directions at the start of the meeting clarifying that these discussions are based on the feedback already received by previous public meetings.

Mr. Haiven relayed that the NSLC is considering redesigning their building to make it more compatible to the area.

The community engagement roles of the committee members were then decided upon.

Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. Watkins agreed to lead the New Construction and Architectural Design Guidelines and Massing Meeting.

Ms. Donovan agreed to lead the Commerce, Parking, and Traffic Workshop, and suggested that safety should be discussed for school children.

Mr. Breckenridge, Ms. Miller, and Ms. Morris agreed to lead the Streetscaping and Public Incentives Meeting.

Mr. Watkins agreed to approach the library in regards to the video display.

Mr. Watkins and Mr. Breckenridge agreed to accompany Mr. McGreal to approach the developers of a building under threat of demolition.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.