



Environment  
Office of the Minister

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JUN 23 2010

Mr. Fred Morley, Chair  
HRM Regional Plan Advisory Committee  
PO Box 1749  
Halifax NS B3J 3A5

HALIFAX REGIONAL  
MUNICIPALITY  
  
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S.G.  
MUNICIPAL CLERK

Dear Mr. Morley:

Thank you for your May 10, 2010, letter bringing forward the concerns of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Regional Plan Advisory Committee (RPAC) related to the new wetland policy that my department has drafted for the province.

As you know, the *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act* commits the government to establishing a policy to prevent the net loss of wetlands in Nova Scotia. We released a draft of the policy for public consultation last fall, and we appreciate the thoughtful response you provided during that process.

I agree that a balanced approach toward environmental protection and development is essential to an environmentally and economically sustainable future. Recognizing this, the new wetland policy is intended to provide effective wetland conservation, while also allowing for sustainable development in and around our communities. Like the HRM Regional Plan, the wetland policy will be implemented on a watershed basis, so decisions about alteration approvals will certainly consider the planning initiatives developed by municipalities and the likely impacts on our watersheds.

While we must be careful to attend to the concerns of a wide range of stakeholders, we agree that it will be important to adopt a wetland policy that respects the intent of municipal planning directives and does not undermine the ability of municipalities to direct growth to particular areas. With this in mind, my staff would be very interested in meeting with you, HRM planning staff, and members of the advisory committee to discuss the spatial analysis that your committee completed to help identify where the proposed policy will be overly restrictive.

As a reminder, our current policy applies to all wetlands, regardless of their size, includes no other exemptions that are applicable to urban development and requires compensation projects be carried out by the developer at a minimum of a 3 to 1 ratio of area restored to

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area altered. In contrast, the proposed policy exempts wetlands less than 1000 square feet (100 square metres) and secondary roads, such as driveways, that are less than 10 m wide and 60 m long through shrub and wooded swamps from regulation. It also allows for a compensation fee option where the proponent pays into a restoration fund that the province administers. In addition, compensation ratios are based on the functional significance of the wetland, as requested by the Urban Development Institute, and typically ranges from 1 to 1 up to 2 to 1. Thus, the proposed approach offers considerably more flexibility, regulates many fewer wetland alterations, has lower compensation requirements, and would provide a significantly more balanced approach to wetland conservation.

We want to assure you that the government is committed to streamlining regulatory processes and reducing administrative burden while at the same time integrating environmental conservation with sustainable development. We recognize that undesired consequences of regulations and policies can affect economic competitiveness, but also understand the need for vigilance over development in and near sensitive habitats such as wetlands. We are developing implementation procedures to support the policy that will be clear, fair, consistently applied, and provide effective wetland conservation.

My staff would appreciate any additional input from RPAC about adjustments that may be necessary to improve the effectiveness of our implementation approach.

Thank you for taking the time to express your concerns and provide recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sterling Belliveau". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S".

Sterling Belliveau  
Minister