

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

WESTERN COMMON WILDERNESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

May 27, 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
Mark Calvi, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Bill Matheson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. at the Lakeside Recreation Centre.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - April 16, 2009

Approval of the April 16 minutes was deferred until the next meeting.

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

It was agreed that item 6.1 would be dealt with before any other items.

Added item:

7.1 Prospect Road Community Centre Ground Breaking Event

The Agenda was accepted as amended.

4. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

4.1 Brief Report McDonalds Lake

This item was deferred due to time constraints.

4.2 Blue Mountain/Birch Cove Lake Area

This item was deferred due to time constraints.

5. PRESENTATIONS, CORRESPONDENCE AND PETITIONS - None

6. REPORTS

6.1 Western Common Wilderness Concept Discussion & Stakeholder Feedback

A presentation was given by Mr. Trevor Hume, Environmental Design Management, regarding the proposed Western Common Lands Future Plan. A discussion developed in relation to this.

Key stakeholders were consulted in relation to the plan, including the Wilderness Coalition, Ecology Action Centre, DNR Wildlife, DNR Planning; and representatives from various ATV groups.

The layout for the Wilderness Common follows the Parks Canada model breakdown of front country, with basic amenity oriented trails and parkland; back country, comprising of wilderness with no development; and restricted use zones beyond the back country which serve to offer habitat for moose populations and therefore the boundaries must be somewhat flexible.

Pink areas on the map represent areas for potential future residential development.

Mr. John Charles, Planner, Real Property Planning, stated that the objectives of the plan were to carry forward the 1999 Concept Plan maintaining designated developable land accordingly. This land has been reconfigured, and not increased, based on topography, soil data and land profile.

There was concern expressed from Committee members regarding development in the drumlin areas of Brookside and along Prospect Road. However, long term projections for both wilderness regions and developmental areas must be considered in the plan.

The following points were discussed regarding multi use trails:

- access points
- crown parcels of land versus private ownership
- proposed ATV sections
- access between back country (Nine Mile River) and front country, access to the river in some capacity
- continue to use old trails with moderate improvements or develop environmentally sound new trails in possible alternate locations

Mr. Bill Matheson, Committee Chair, called for clarification from Staff regarding the issue of conserving the amount of development land.

Staff responded noting that In 1998-99, consultation with Council and the general public reflected an interest in maintaining land for local development in both the Brookside and Ragged Lake areas, while also preserving the area known as the Wilderness Common. There has actually been growth in the Wilderness Common in terms of overall area and acreage.

Another location of concern was along the ridge line and hard wood forest region of the Wilderness Common where Committee members wanted to see a preservation of this area. Ms. Margo Young, Environmental Design Management, stated that the line was hand drawn and is intended to be below the ridge line, excluding the hard wood region from any development.

Mr. Blake Maybank echoed Mr. Matheson's concern that in the Terms Of Reference for the Western Common Wilderness Advisory Committee, there has been no mention of conserving the amount of development land being part of the Committee mandate.

There was further discussion around the pink (potential future development) areas of the plan and comparisons were made to the 1999 plan. Potential development around the areas of Otter Lake and Nicoll's Lake was not supported by some Committee members.

Mr. Jan Skora, Coordinator, Real Property Planning, commented that any divisional lines drawn on the plan are not perfect and adjustments can be made according to science, knowledge, and the design of the plan.

Mr. Matheson inquired if there were any time lines in place for residential development around Nicoll's Lake specifically.

Mr. Charles stated that development can be approached either as spreading out along Route 333, or towards a more traditional community approach which then calls into question the demographics of the area.

Mr. Maybank commented that HRM needs to employ innovative ideas for population growth in relation to development without impinging on wilderness areas.

Mr. Dusan Soudek further added that with so much private land in the area, city owned land may not necessarily need to be developed.

Ms. Young noted that some of the points made relate to mandate issues, which can be examined further by the Committee, but that the Environmental Design Management team can better speak to how and why adjustments are made to the plan. Ms. Young stated that previously, development plans had been more dense in these areas, that the new plan preserves any lake frontage as public land, and that municipal lands link to crown lands. Some of the restricted use land is being brought forward.

Mr. Matheson asked for clarification regarding real property planning versus business parks, and if they were separate in terms of process. Staff responded that efforts by HRM are towards a unified approach, optimization of concentrated areas and greener efficiencies.

There was some discussion regarding how communities are defined in terms of identity and needs. Staff clarified that proposed development is meant to be community use, not necessarily residential and not commercial. Extensive public consultation revealed that within the areas in question, there is a demand for sense of community, public transit, and school facilities. From this feedback a series of areas have been identified for growth, retirement, schools. Brookside is an area designated for growth.

ATV trails within the Wester Common Wilderness region were discussed. ATV riders and groups provided feedback that they are open to the concept of new routes with access to more communities. Fishing areas and enforcement were areas of concern. DNR is responsible for the trail system; ATV groups would work with their members and the community to set and enforce rules.

Moose population was also a concern addressed by the Committee. The situation needs to be monitored and based on science. Restricted areas should provide some flexibility to allow moose to be relatively undisturbed and try to adapt to their surroundings. Sometimes trails should be closed due to changes that the wilderness demands such as the endangered moose population. Whether or not canoeing has any impact on moose species was also discussed. Restrictions and prohibited areas need clear definitions. Funding is minimal and thus there is a need to address the science community and educate the general public on how to contribute to wilderness protection. It was generally agreed that the Western Common Wilderness may provide the best opportunity thus far to rescue the moose population.

Mr. Matheson inquired as to the next steps in the overall process and any potential time frame in which to proceed.

Mr. Charles relayed that DNR was impressed with various aspects of the plan, such as connectivity to Long Lake, and that resolutions for some issues were found. With regard to moose population, DNR stated that there are big challenges to rescue the species and that this could be the best chance yet. The ATV issue continues to present some challenges. DNR senior management has made a commitment to formulate support for the plan. With their support and that of the Environment the plan can move forward.

Mr. Hume stated that the next step for the master plan would be to revise details based on comments from the Committee, but moving forward would require a definitive response from DNR, whereby they would sign off on approval of the plan.

One of Mr. Maybank's main concerns was that the boundary and areas surrounding Nicoll's Lake and Otter Lake be re-examined.

Ms. Young stated that if an area is designated as back country, the function of such an area should be set for any future use or development, and that consultation with the public would be a necessity in order to change the status of the area.

It was discussed that there may be a need for back up plans depending on the final response from DNR. The plan generally incorporates the idea that public consultation dictates the value of any given area, whether to develop or how to proceed.

Ms. Morrissey requested that each Committee member have a copy of any diagrams and maps and Staff responded that they would provide this. She also echoed Mr. Maybank's concern for any development around Nicoll's Lake, stating that there are enough other areas for development such as along Prospect Road.

Mr. Charles said Staff would undertake to provide any maps requested, specifically a map of the community center area and trail system within the local context that clearly shows gateways and amenities.

7. ADDED ITEMS

7.1 Prospect Road Community Centre Ground Breaking Event

Date: Friday, June 12, 2009 from 11:00 am - 12:30 pm

Place: Future site of the Prospect Road Community Centre, 2141 Prospect Road.

Ms. Kelly Morrissey made mention of this event for those interested in attending.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date was not scheduled.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 p.m.