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Halifax Regional Council
March 2, 2004

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TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Betty MacDonald
Betty MacDonald, Director, Governance & Strategic Initiatives

DATE: March 2, 2004

SUBJECT: Lands Available for Development

Information Report

ORIGIN

Council requested this report at its meeting of February 17, 2004.

BACKGROUND

Since the Ministerial Order restricting development in the un-serviced areas of the HRM was signed on January 22nd, there has been a great deal of debate over the amount of developable land available.

A staff report for the January 22, 2004 Council meeting indicated that approximately 2,700 lots were available in the area of HRM that is affected by the Ministerial Order and that this was an ample supply given that HRM issues permits for about 700 single family homes in this area each year. This total included 2,200 existing lots and 500 lots which had achieved final approval status in the subdivision application process. Subsequent to Council's decision, development industry representatives requested further detail on the these parcels.

The original data was presented to industry representatives with a clear indication that it was compiled quickly and some of the sources couldn't be considered completely reliable. The error rate was estimated to be plus or minus 15%. It was also explained to industry that the original data captured was very conservative. The original list captured lots that have a Lot Approval Date in HRM's data base. This data has only been captured since 1997, therefore any parcels registered with the Province prior to that date would not have been included. Development Industry representatives were requested to work with staff on reviewing the data until all were comfortable it was ready for distribution.

Immediately upon release, a "data cleansing" exercise was undertaken to further refine the information. A new data set was produced, providing a greater level of confidence in the information.

The "data cleansing" that resulted in the February 6th report included the following adjustments:

- The original list contained many duplicate Property Identification Numbers (PID's). The data was reviewed and duplicates netted out. The primary reasons for duplicates were:
 - ▶ Water Lots
 - ▶ Islands
 - ▶ Right of Way Parcels
 - ▶ Slivers resulting from mapping inaccuracies

Note: Some duplicate PID's have been left in for legitimate reasons, ie: parcels are "split" by roadways, waterways, etc.

- Zoning was considered incorrectly in the original data captured in Serviced Areas. All commercial and industrial properties and any that would not permit a residential use were netted out.
- Parcels were previously included from the Eastern Shore area of HRM as this part of HRM was included in the original request to the Minister. They have now been deleted.

The original parameters were still used to determine if a lot was vacant. Any property with record of a Permit or with an active Civic Address were not included in the inventory of vacant lots available. The number of available lots is now presented as 2,040 as indicated below.

Existing Lots in the area restricted by the Ministerial Order	1610
"Grandfathered" Lots Pending Approval (exempt from Ministerial Order)	430
Total	2040

(see Appendix A)

There still remain some errors in the Civic Address and Permit databases. These remaining errors can be attributed to:

- poor or missing data from legacy data bases
- data entry errors
- interfaces between municipal and provincial data bases

Over time, these data issues will be reduced as a result of the recent Hansen database implementation. This system is far more reliable and accurate in its data capture and reporting capabilities.

DISCUSSION

Additional data searches have been carried out to determine the availability of all parcels of land that are eligible to apply for permits within the area under the Ministerial Order.

The parameters for this are relatively broad:

- Lot Size (40,000 - 80,000 square feet)
- Required Road Frontage (min. 150 feet)
- No Building or active Civic Address
- Appropriate Residential Zoning

This search increases the number of “lot sized” parcels from the 2040 indicated above to about 4700. There are 900 additional parcels eligible to apply for permits, which are large enough to be further subdivided into approximately 3,500 more lots eligible to apply for permits because of the amended Order. Adding the lots which are exempt from the Order because they are complete in the subdivision application process brings a total of about 9,790 parcels eligible for permit applications after the amendment to the Order.

Industry Perspective

Staff have met with industry representatives in an effort to “rationalize” the data being provided to the public and council and it has become apparent that we are actually measuring different things:

- ▶ Industry is capturing only lots they define as available. This narrows the parameters considerably, since only those parcels of land that are deemed “marketable” are included. This takes into consideration such factors as:
 - physical constraints (grade/rock etc.)
 - price
 - lot size
 - in a “Subdivision”
 - currently available for sale

Staff are not able to provide an opinion on whether or not a lot is available or marketable under criteria such as those listed above. HRM's role in the development process is strictly defined by the limits of a property's potential under the relevant regulations.

Impact Of Amendment to Ministerial Order

Under the amended Ministerial Order, there are considerably more parcels of land available for development. These new parcels fall into two categories:

- ▶ Parcels that are **eligible** for subdivision
- ▶ Lots that are **in the process** of being created through Tentative Subdivision Applications. (These presumably fall into the "industry" category of **Lots**)

This latest search, based on the amended Order brings the total to more than 9,700 potential parcels, including Subdivision Applications completed to the Tentative Stage. Also included are the 900 parcels which represent 900 individual property owners, many of whom expressed concern over the restrictions of the original Order. These owners will now be permitted to subdivide their lands and apply for permits. A summary of the parcels available as a result of the amended Order is included as Appendix B.

Market Need

Staff had originally reported that about 700 permits are required each year for areas outside the servicing boundary. This has been revised to 670 to remove the Eastern Shore area of HRM not covered by the Ministerial Order. This was done to maintain a valid comparison with the available parcels data which now only reflects lands directly effected by the Order. It has been reported by industry representatives that the Provincial Department of Environment issues permits for about 1,400 new septic fields in HRM each year and therefore questions staff's statement concerning the number of permits issued each year for residential units. Staff do not feel that the figure of 1,400 is useful in this analysis because it includes all septic installations including replacements and repairs. Provincial staff have indicated that they could not break out new construction from replacements without a manual check of all records.

Inside the Servicing Boundary

The January 22, 2004 report to Council also included data on lots inside the servicing boundary. This area is not affected by the Ministerial Order. The report indicated an additional 2,000 lots were available with additional lots to be created. Appendix A indicates an updated figure of 2,395 lots either approved or in the final approval stage within this area. In addition, large areas recently approved by Council for development such as Bedford South, Westgate and other major areas include sufficient land for approximately 8,000 housing units.

Other Municipalities

Staff have reviewed practices of other municipalities in setting out long range development objectives to better understand how much land is typically set aside to avoid undue pressure on the demand-supply relationship. Most areas prepared an analysis of the demand for new development based on demographics and population projections. Factored into this demand was either a desired

or politically acceptable density and the need for space for commercial and public services. In addition, a market factor (typically 10-20%) was applied to the total calculated requirements to ensure enough land will be available “to ensure freedom of choice of both location and housing type for residents.”¹ Some areas applied larger market factors ranging from 15 to 25 percent.

The availability of parcels of land eligible for permits in HRM is many times the anticipated requirement.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications.

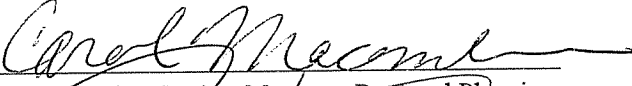
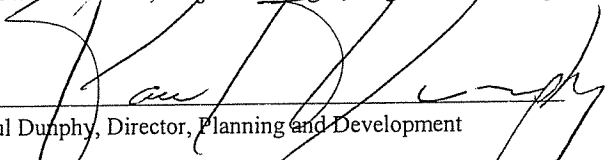
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality’s Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Summary of Lot Inventory Totals - Post 1997 Lot Approvals in HRM Database

Appendix B: Land Parcels Eligible for Development - March 2, 2004
Lot Consumption Rate of Past 6 Years

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.		
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¹Easley, V. G. undated. Staying Inside the Lines. American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service Report No. 440

APPENDIX A

**Summary of Lot Inventory Totals
Post 1997 Lot Approvals in HRM Database**

Un-Serviced Areas (affected by the Ministerial Order)	
Lots with HRM Lot Approval (since 1997) 30,000 - 87,000 sf	920
Lots with HRM Lot Approval (since 1997) 87,000 - 130,000 sf	350
Lots with HRM Lot Approval (since 1997) greater than 130,000 sf	340
Lots Pending Approval (exempt from Ministerial Order)	430
*Total Lots with HRM Lot Approval (since 1997)	2040

Serviced Areas (not affected by Ministerial Order)	
Approved Lots	1345
Currently in Process, Pending Approval	1050
Total Serviced Lot Inventory	2395

*** This figure of 2040 is included in the “total parcels eligible for a permit” of 9,790 in Appendix B.**

APPENDIX B

**Land Parcels Eligible for Development
March 2, 2004**

Un-Serviced Areas under the Ministerial Order (After Amendment to the Ministerial Order)		
Parcels not eligible for subdivision, but eligible for Permit Applications	4730	4730
Lots Pending Approval (exempt from Ministerial Order)	430	430
Lots Pending Approval (exempt as a result of Amendment to the Order)	1130	1130
Parcels eligible for Subdivision and/or Permit Applications	910	
Existing Parcels eligible for permit applications after the Amendment	7200	
Potential Parcels resulting from 916 “larger” Parcels above		3500
Total Parcels eligible for Permit Applications as a result of the Amendment		9790

Lot Consumption Rate of Past 6 Years (New Singles)Year Serviced

Lot Consumption Rate of Past 6 Years (New Singles)			
Year	Serviced	Un-Serviced	Totals
1998	654	579	1233
1999	768	747	1515
2000	683	654	1337
2001	582	544	1126
2002	929	771	1700
2003	759	715	1474
Average	729	668	1398