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Item No.
Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee
November 19, 2015

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

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by

Bruce Zvaniga, Director of Transportation and Public Works

DATE: October 5, 2015

SUBJECT: **Connector Trail Between St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School and the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

June 23 2015, Regional Council, Item 12.1. On behalf of Councillor Whitman, it was moved by Councillor Johns, seconded by Councillor Walker that Halifax Regional Council request a staff report on the feasibility of developing a connector trail from the St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School to the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails trail system.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter; section 79(1)(ah) authorizing Council to spend money required by the municipality on trails, and section 79(1)(av)(v) authorizing Council to spend money required by the municipality for grants or contributions to organizations within the Province including those which are community focused and/or recreation in nature.

BACKGROUND

The St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails is a 30 km multi-use trail that is operated by the community group St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails Association. The trail is a three to four metre wide facility with a crusher dust surface that is accessible for pedestrians, bicyclists and off-highway vehicle users. The property is owned by the Province of Nova Scotia and the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails Association has a letter of authority from the Province to operate the trail. The Association is a member of the Halifax Regional Trails Association (HRTA) and is eligible for support from HRM through the municipality's maintenance agreement with HRTA. A current priority for the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails Association is to improve the surface of the existing trail.

The 2014-2019 Active Transportation Priorities Plan was approved by Regional Council in September 2014. That plan formally established the regional greenway network vision as the primary off-road active transportation network. The St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails is a segment of the main spine of this vision. The Plan endorses the continuation of the community development model with HRTA as the approach for HRM to participate in the development and maintenance of facilities such as the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails. Under the community development model, community groups establish plans and priorities for their facilities and HRM collaborates on developing and implementing these plans and priorities through HRTA, subject to budget availability and consistency with the Active Transportation Priorities Plan.

While the Plan does not identify any proposed routes in this community aside from the 30 km primary multi-use trail, it does have a general recommendation to improve connections between multi-use trails and nearby communities. However, there has been no formal planning process by the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails Association, HRM or any other body to plan connector trails to this facility.

St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School serves approximately 350 students in grades primary through six. It is located at 24 Ridgewood Dr. Head of St. Margaret's Bay. This location is approximately 800 metres from the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails. Please see the map on the attached Schedule A.

DISCUSSION

The feasibility of developing a secondary connector trail between St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails and St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School is influenced by a number of factors as outlined below.

- 1) Distance. The approximate distance between the school and the trail is 800m. However, it could be more depending on the alignment chosen.
- 2) Property Ownership. There appear to be between two and six private property parcels between the school and the trail, depending on the alignment and whether or not adjacent local streets are part of the route. Acquiring permissions from private property owners to develop trails is rare and can be a challenging process. This would increase the complexity of the project and potentially the cost.
- 3) Physical Geography. The geographical features between the school and the trail are mixed depending on the alignment. The most direct route would be predominantly through wooded areas. Such factors as the presence of wetlands, water courses, rough terrain or other physical factors would require further study and analysis. The fact that most potential alignments would be through undeveloped areas adds complexity to such a project.
- 4) Human and Financial Resources. While there are typically staff, community and capital budget resources available for the development of greenway facilities, these are limited and must be shared across the municipality. Due to limited resources, projects proposed for implementation are reviewed according to criteria connected to the Active Transportation Priorities Plan to ensure that they are consistent with the direction Council has endorsed.
- 5) Local Active Transportation Plan. The final factor impacting feasibility is the presence of local planning and analysis of active transportation facilities and desired connections. Currently there is no local strategy for improving walking and bicycling infrastructure in the Head of St. Margaret's Bay and neighbouring communities. The St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails Association does not have a plan that addresses community connections to the trail.

Given the above information, the development of a connector trail between St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails and St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School will require significant time and effort to accomplish. Staff has discussed this request for a connector trail with the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails Association. While the Association understands the potential benefits of such a connection, they have

**Connector Trail Between St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School
and the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails
Community Planning and Economic Development Information Report**

- 3 -

November 19, 2015

other priorities at this time. Should the Association wish to make such a connector trail a priority at a later time, initial steps should include development of a planning study to understand potential use, alignment options, costs and property implications. Planning studies are eligible for funding from HRM through the HRTA process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications related to this request.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There has been no direct community engagement related to this request. There was significant community engagement for the development of the Active Transportation Priorities Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

This is not relevant at this time.

ATTACHMENTS

Schedule "A": Map Illustrating Location of St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails and St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/SCcped/index.php> October 15, 2015, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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Schedule "A": Map Illustrating Location of St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails and St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School.

