

Chapter 6. Regional Centre – received up to July 5, 2013

PROPOSED POLICY CHANGE	SUBMISSION BY	Ref #	COMMUNITY FEEDBACK	STAFF RESPONSE (Where no response indicated means Staff believe the proposed Regional Plan addresses this adequately or has been previously addressed)	CDAC Direction
6.4 Centre Plan	Our HRM Alliance		<p>Invest in the downtown core and growth centres</p> <p>The inclusion of a chapter on the Regional Centre is a positive addition to the RMPS. However, the details provided by the plan are scant. It is imperative that the municipality makes “investment in the Regional Centre” a budget line item. In the revised RMPS, HRM abandons the use of the Visioning process and instead opts for the use of secondary planning for growth centres.</p> <p>The boundaries of the growth centres must be defined and reinforced within the municipality's Greenbelting policy. In the current draft, Conservation Design Development is to become "as of right" throughout the vast Rural Commuter, Agricultural, and Rural Resource areas shown on Map 2, "Generalized Future Land Use" with the Option 3, the "Rural Growth Centre Conservation Design" targeted only for the Rural Growth Centres themselves.</p> <p>Contrary to public input, the Growth Centres have not been significantly reduced in number and their boundaries have not been defined. The Rural Settlement Designations have been shortchanged, and the current draft encourages uncontrolled growth in unserved areas further over-extending municipal services at the tax payers' expense.</p>	<p>The staff cover report will highlight major initiation recommended in the draft plan regarding the Regional Centre.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Centre Plan Chapter and Process b. Urban Transit Boundary c. Infrastructure Investment d. Public spaces component of Greenbelting and Public Spaces Priorities Plan e. Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan, including 3 new Heritage Districts f. Limits on commercial development in HRM business parks 	

	Nevo, A.		<p>My specific comments relate to the proposal for a new regional centre plan. It is a shame that we have fallen short of urban growth targets but frankly this is a direct result of current constraints on development and the current short term unrealistic vision of HRM. We need to focus on density. Our downtown is dead. It's a crumbling mess and has been for many many years. I'm tired of seeing empty lots, boarded up buildings, limited residential condos downtown which cost egregious amounts of money, and the countless business closures over the last few years. What we are currently doing is obviously not working, so please let's make significant changes immediately. Condos in the downtown core are currently unaffordable (ie. The Trillium) because developers cannot build high enough to allow them to offer a price point that is affordable to the average consumer. HRM by Design might be a good idea in theory, but the rules are still too restrictive. Let developers build higher. This will help increase density and will bring more affordable residential housing options to the downtown, which in turn will create a vibrancy to our downtown that just isn't there after 5:00pm when everyone goes home from work. Anyone who thinks we have a vibrant downtown clearly has a different definition of those words than me. Our downtown needs to be reinvigorated.</p>	<p>The Plan recommends that secondary suites are a required consideration under secondary planning processes.</p> <p>The Centre Plan chapter and process are included in the Draft Plan to emphasize the need for greater clarity and predictability in Regional Centre and as a regulation.</p>	
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	Nevo, A.	<p>1. Allow ALL homes in HRM to have basement apartments. This can be done in a way that will not hurt the fabric of neighbourhoods, such as not requiring extra parking spots for those units, having the entrance doors only on the sides or the back of the house, etc. You could even allow two basement units in a home if you followed these guidelines and the neighbourhood would still maintain its integrity while significantly increasing density. This not only positively affects density, but allows more affordable living options for HRM citizens both for renter and for new home buyers who can enter the home ownership market due to cost offset from the rental income.</p> <p>2. Allow developers more flexibility with developing properties. Loosen the rules so they can build bigger, taller, buildings thereby making it more profitable for them to do so. This would create more units per area, thus more density, and would allow the developers to keep costs low and condos more affordable for the average citizen. Affordable condos are not a current reality in Halifax, particularly on the peninsula. Find a decent condo on the peninsula under \$300k – it doesn't exist. Yet it does in Toronto – can you believe that? And people complain about lack of affordable housing in Toronto when really it is worse in Halifax (at least for condos) because of the limited options available.</p> <p>3. Allow more units to be added to existing multi-unit buildings through internal conversions. For example, allowing conversions from 2 units to 3 units, or 4 units to 5 or 6 units, etc. Provided the exterior building envelope remains unchanged, such conversions will ensure that there is no change to the fabric of the neighbourhood. There are likely hundreds of examples of such possible internal conversions in HRM, which represents an opportunity for hundreds of affordable housing units to be added to the inventory at no cost to the tax payers and no requirements for changes in infrastructure</p>		
	Aikins, G.	<p>The word “replace” in Section 6.4 should be changed to “supplement”. Note: The existing rules allow for 35,000 new housing units in the urban core, that is enough to supply the demand for housing units in the urban core (peninsular Halifax for 63 years. There's no need to change the zoning rules for decades.</p>		
	Bennett, E.	<p>The word “replace” in Section 6.4 should be changed to “supplement”. NOTE: The Halifax MPS has 276 pages, and there is no way staff can develop now policies with that level of detail in a year. The Dartmouth and Downtown Dartmouth SPSs have similar detailed protections.t</p>		

	Emodi, T.		Centre Plan urgency - Staff response to questions about what strategy(ies) will bring HRM back to its growth targets focus almost exclusively on the upcoming Centre Plan. Undoubtedly the Centre Plan will help in the medium to longer term, but it cannot address the serious challenges HRM faces in the short to medium term. According to staff Centre Plan will be three to five years in the making. There are short term actions which could assist in the reversal of HRM's serious target drift. Among them are: • serious attention to R2 zone: relaxing just a few rules, applying simple urban design principles, and providing incentives would likely result in several thousand new residents (some in affordable housing) in the Regional Centre • a serious overview and critical examination of projects currently caught in the approvals process. It is likely that prioritising these would release significant development in the places where development should occur according to item 2 above.		
	Plache, B.		Section 6.4 proposes to "replace" the existing Municipal Planning Strategies & Land-use bylaws. I think an overall replacement is premature, vague, and unrealistic at this point in time. I think, the existing strategies and by-laws better be adjusted or amended, as needed, rather than wholesale replaced. [Maybe such amending was intended by the wording, but it is not clear to my reading.]		
Public Space	Dalhousie Student Union		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transforming Argyle St. and University Avenue into pedestrian zones. 2. Monthly "open street" events during the spring, summer, and fall. 3. Supporting the development of a greenbelt. 		
Downtown Plan – natural gas installations	Heritage Gas		Request an exemption to By-law 3.5.1 f whereby allowing a natural gas meter to be placed on the front of the building when other meter placement options are not available.	Staff would like to encourage Heritage Gas to propose a design solution for downtown and heritage properties to expedite the permitting process.	
Commercial Development	Craig, E.		Where are the policy statement and the action to discourage major office buildings outside of the Regional Centre? How can this revised plan be silent on this major issue??	Limits on retail in HRM owned industrial parks are addressed in policy EC-2 and EC-3.	

		<p>I see a proposed chapter on the Regional Centre which I suppose is an improvement. This section offers nothing but an empty promise, that a new Centre Plan will be done. When? How can HRM walk away from the Corridors work? So much was good, and could have been adopted through the revised MPS to help encourage densification.in the short term. After all the work and talk on the Corridors, how can there be nothing substantial? Did Council agree to halt the project and disregard the work?</p>	<p>Work completed as part of Centre Plan Phase 1 will be further developed through the full Centre Plan.</p>	
		<p>Why no goal to discourage suburban commercial development that erodes the viability of existing commercial facilities, especially in the Regional Centre?</p>		
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY COMMENTS FROM JUNE 13 FALL RIVER OPENHOUSE</p>				
Regional Centre		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More nature in the city core will help to attract people to live in the city i.e. daylight , steams, wetlands, hearing peepers in spring • Grocery store within walking distance • Need to bring children out of doors but not necessarily into the streets • More parks, not just the Halifax Common • Stop the big – box craze; Dartmouth Crossing should be in downtown HRM • Shuttles – park and ride to shopping areas in places with places to store parcels/goods • Encourage delivery for groceries so people don’t need cars to get groceries 	<p>This wil be considered in Centre Plan.</p>	