

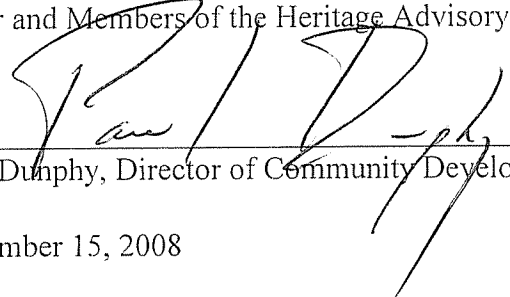
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PO Box 1749  
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Heritage Advisory Committee  
January 21, 2009

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Heritage Advisory Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:**   
Paul Dunphy, Director of Community Development

**DATE:** December 15, 2008

**SUBJECT:** **H00220: De-registration of 170 Exhibition Grounds Road, Middle Musquodoboit (a municipally registered heritage property)**

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**ORIGIN**

The Middle Musquodoboit Agricultural Society has applied to de-register a municipally registered heritage property known as the Harrison House, located on the Halifax County Exhibition Grounds at 170 Exhibition Grounds Road, Middle Musquodoboit.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**It is recommended that the Heritage Advisory Committee recommend that Regional Council:**

- (a) set a date for a public hearing to consider the de-registration of the Harrison House, located at 170 Exhibition Grounds Road, Middle Musquodoboit, as shown on Map 1; and
- (b) approve the de-registration of the property.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Reason for de-registration application***

The Middle Musquodoboit Agricultural Society has applied to have the Harrison House de-registered as a municipal heritage property because the building has fallen into disrepair and is unsafe, and the Society has become unable to maintain or restore it.

### ***History***

The Harrison House is situated on the Halifax County Exhibition Grounds in Middle Musquodoboit along with a number of other buildings. It was built in the early 1850s for Dr. William Harrison, the Musquodoboit Valley's first resident physician, who settled in the area in 1830. Situated on a large property close to the village centre, the house was much admired for its elegant, English cottage style. Dr. Harrison died in 1864 and his wife survived him by 30 years. The property then changed hands a few times before the Middle Musquodoboit Agricultural Society acquired it in 1910 for the purpose of developing the exhibition grounds. Alongside other buildings developed for the annual agricultural fair, the Harrison House was the main building for displays such as art, crafts, local foods, and school exhibits, and was a venue for important community events.

### ***Heritage Registration***

As one of the oldest buildings in Middle Musquodoboit, and based on its historical associations, distinctive architecture, and visual prominence in the community, the Harrison House was registered as a municipal heritage property on September 17, 1985 by the former County of Halifax. Under the Heritage Property Act, the heritage registration applies to the building and the property on which it is situated, which in this case includes the entire exhibition grounds.

## **DISCUSSION**

The *Nova Scotia Heritage Property Act* requires that an application for de-registration be determined by Council after holding a public hearing. The Heritage Advisory Committee will also review the request and advise Council. Section 16 of the *Nova Scotia Heritage Property Act* outlines the criteria Council shall consider when a heritage property owner has requested de-registration:

*16 (1) On the application of an owner of a municipal heritage property or on its own motion, the council may deregister a municipal heritage property where:*

- (a) the property has been destroyed or damaged by any cause; or*
- (b) the continued registration of the property appears to the council to be inappropriate;*

*after holding a public hearing to consider the proposed deregistration.*

### ***Building Condition***

Although originally built well, the building has been altered over the years to accommodate the changing needs required of it. Interior walls have been removed to make way for display booths and the interior has been substantially gutted with the result that, in recent years, the structure has become unstable and unsafe for public use. With funding from the HRM Community Grants Program, conservation architect Allan Penney prepared a detailed conservation report in 2006 in which he outlined the main structural issues as follows:

- the wooden sills on which the building sits are rotten, with the result that the house has dropped in one corner and the whole building is now on a tilt;
- there is no basement, except for a small cellar in one corner, and the structural conditions under the interior part of the house are unknown;
- the building is missing three interior walls, two chimneys, and the ground floor staircase and this has contributed to overall structural instability;
- the second floor was originally carried on a wall, but it is now carried on posts that do not support a long beam and therefore may not be holding up the floor;
- the front porch is drooping due to the building settling, and the cellar access is unsafe.

These issues were confirmed in a 2007 report by Buchanan Design Group, Structural Engineers. Both reports were clear that there are options for stabilization and restoration but the costs would be substantial - in the order of \$150,000 - \$200,000 for stabilization work alone.

### ***Community Efforts to Save the Building***

Over the past three years the Middle Musquodoboit Agricultural Society and the Harrison House Preservation Society (which began as a sub-committee of the Agricultural Society) have taken steps to examine how they might restore the Harrison House. They have held six public meetings in the community asking for public input. They have met and communicated with HRM's heritage staff and, at the municipality's suggestion and with municipal financial support, have commissioned the professional studies mentioned above. However, in the final analysis, both organizations have indicated that they are unable to secure funds to put the building back into useable condition, and that there is not sufficient public interest to support the venture. There are very limited public funds available for a restoration of this magnitude. Even if funds were secured and the building made structurally sound, a sustainable, long term use for the building would need to be determined. Without a viable new use the Agricultural Society believes the present situation would be repeated.

At this point, both the Preservation Society and the Agricultural Society have agreed that the best course of action is to dismantle Harrison House and commemorate both the house and the life and work of Dr. Harrison in a permanent exhibit to be located in another building on the site.

***Summary***

It is regrettable that efforts to save the Harrison House have not been successful. The Agricultural Society has attempted to find a new use, had professional studies and cost estimates prepared, held public meetings, and even offered the building as a donation to someone to relocate it to another site. The building is in a serious state of disrepair and the Agricultural Society is financially unable to restore and rehabilitate it for continued public use.

Under these circumstances, staff believe that both conditions of section 16(1) of the Heritage Property Act are met, and recommend that Council de-register the property.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

The HRM costs associated with processing this application can be accommodated within the approved operating budget for C310.

**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.

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. The Heritage Advisory Committee may recommend that Regional Council set a public hearing date and de-register 170 Exhibition Grounds Road as a municipally registered heritage property.
2. The Heritage Advisory Committee may not support staff's recommendation to de-register 170 Exhibition Grounds Rd, Middle Musquodoboit.

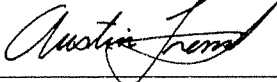
**ATTACHMENTS**

Map 1: Location Map - 170 Exhibition Grounds Rd, Middle Musquodoboit.  
Attachment A: Photographs of the Harrison House.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

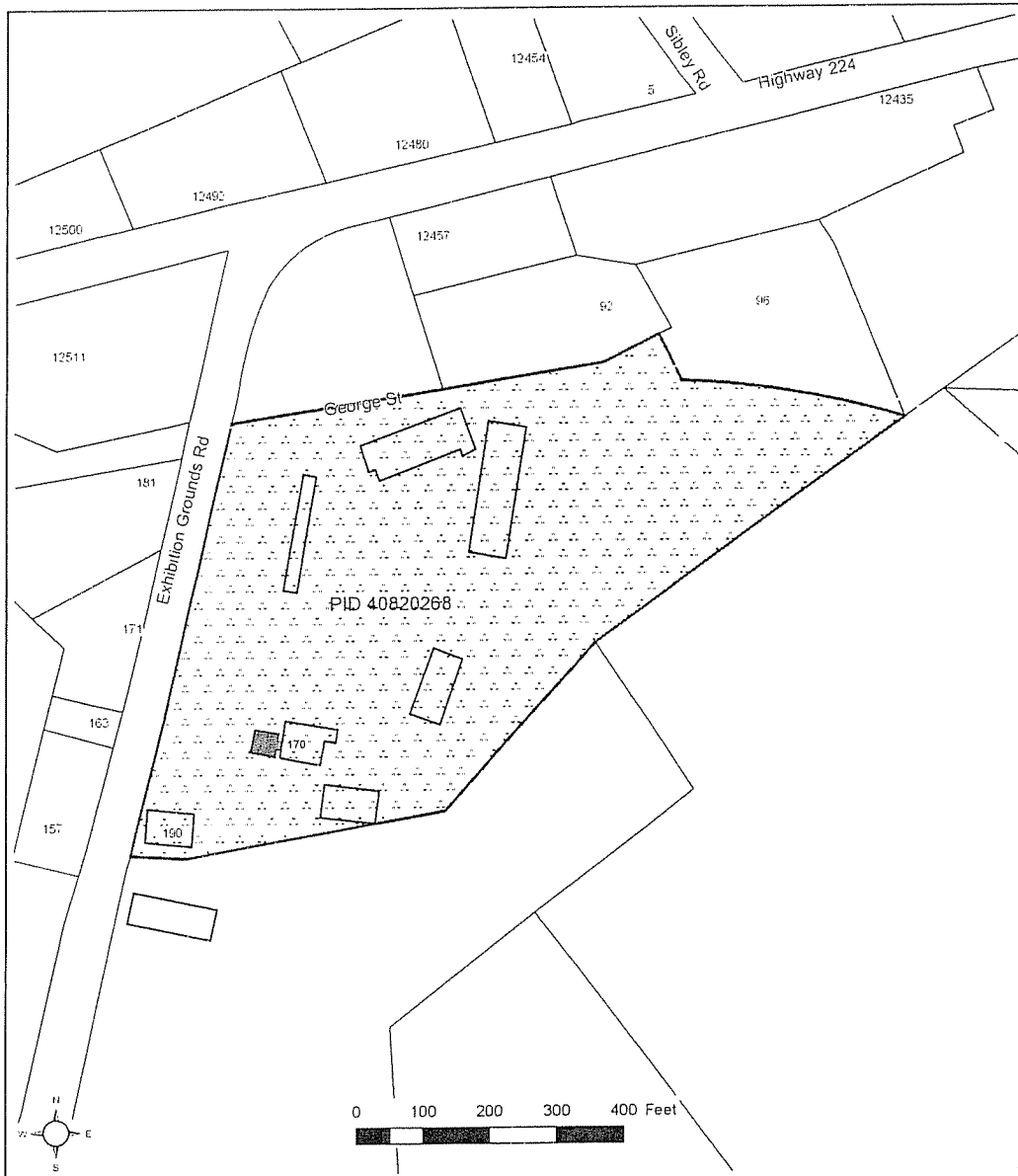
Report Prepared by : Maggie Holm, Heritage Planner 490-4419 & Bill Plaskett, Heritage Planner 490-4663

Report Approved by:





Austin French, Manager, Planning Services, 490-6717

MAP 1



Map 1 - Location Map

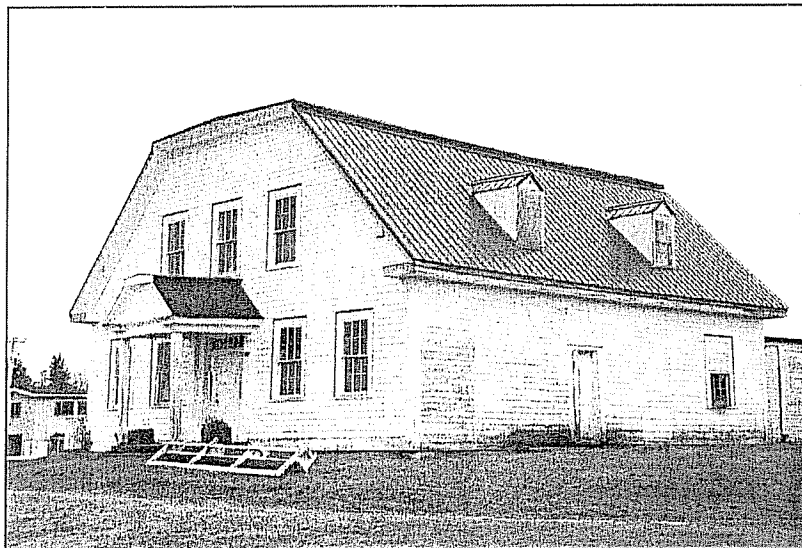
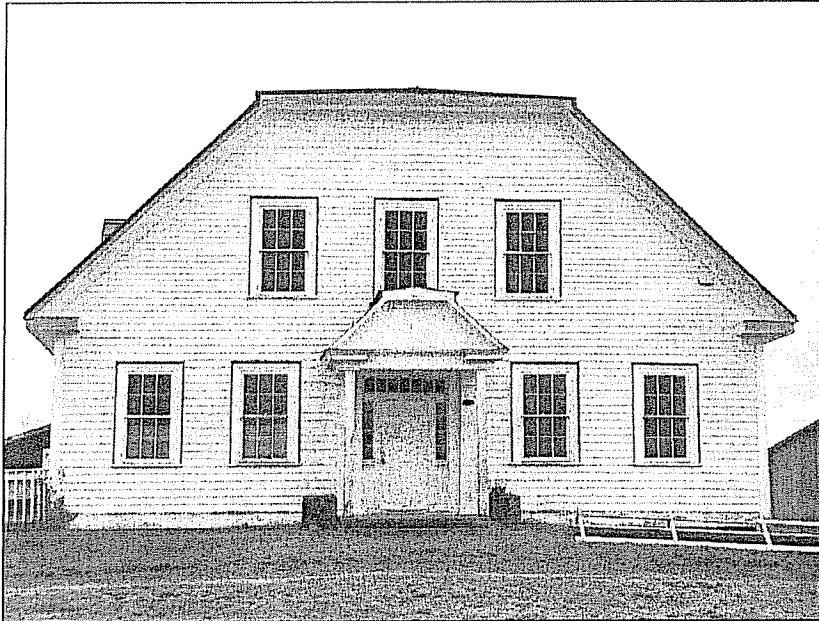
170 Exhibition Grounds Road  
Halifax  
Halifax Plan Area

-  Harrison House
-  Registered heritage property to be de-registered

**HALIFAX**  
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
HERITAGE AND DESIGN SERVICES

HRM does not guarantee the accuracy  
of any representation on this plan

Attachment A: Photographs



H00220  
De-register 170 Exhibition Grounds Rd

Heritage Advisory Committee  
January 21, 2009

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