

Why is the Our HRM Alliance necessary? For Thursday, July 7

Cost of Physical Inactivity

- From Heart and Stroke foundation report on the costs of physical activity in HRM:
The evidence is clear that increased physical activity would save the province millions of dollars a year in avoided health care costs. **It is estimated that physical inactivity in HRM costs the provincial health care system \$16 million a year** in hospital, physician and drug costs alone. When all direct health care costs are added, including private expenditures, the sedentary lifestyle of nearly half of HRM residents costs the province, and therefore the taxpayer, \$23.6 million a year in direct medical care expenditures. It should be noted that these cost estimates are quite conservative since they are based on the less stringent guidelines for physical inactivity now used by the Canadian Community Health Survey (resulting in a 50% rate of inactivity for HRM as compared with the 62% rate of earlier studies) and also the costs of mental health due to disorders related to physical inactivity are not included.¹

The Reality of Sprawl

- The most common density measure for HRM is 0.679 persons per hectare. HRM officials will tell you that does not account for the large rural areas - so a calculation that tries to account for those areas gives you a number closer to 5.5 persons per hectare. This is comparable to Moncton, at 5.66 persons per hectare, and London, ON, at 3.97 persons per hectare. Even Charlottetown, at 7.25 persons per hectare, has a higher density than HRM. Sprawling cities like Calgary and Winnipeg are closer to 13 persons per hectare. Dense cities like Paris are closer to 200 persons per hectare.

How Taxes Encourage Growth on the Fringes

- Municipal taxes are calculated as assessment times mill rate. It has no consideration of the actual cost to the municipality to service the residences. Service costs for high density urban areas are \$1,446. Service costs for low density suburban areas are \$3,897. Despite the fact that low density development is twice as expensive to service, the tax rate does not take this into account.

Commute Times

- A report on the study of commute times in HRM carried out by the STAR project, found that commute times in HRM range from 41 minutes in the inner city accounting for both trips to and from paid work to 70 minutes in the outer commuter areas. Since most new growth is occurring in the commuter zone – 133 per cent versus 18 per cent in the urban core – HRM's average commute time is only going to increase. HRM's commute time is longer than the average Canadian time of 54 minutes per day.² In fact, a report that compares Toronto to other cities across Canada in transportation issues states Halifax commute time at 65 minutes. Halifax

¹ Walker, S and Millward, H. The Cost of Physical Inactivity In Halifax Regional Municipality. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia. GPI ATLANTIC (2004)

² General Social Survey on Time Use: Overview of the Time Use of Canadians. Statistics Canada (2005) 7

ranked 15 out of 22 cities for people taking modes other than personal vehicles to work. Only 24.1 per cent used transit, biked, or walked to work. This low number may be a result of a poor transit system – public investment in Halifax is \$184.40 per capita **(20 out of 21)**.³

Loss of Green space

- Last year, nearly 1000 new homes were built. If these were all built on green field sites at a size of one acre with an additional 0.54 acres allocated for roads and services, they would use the same amount of land as half of the former City of Halifax.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the purpose of a municipal planning strategy?

According to the Municipal Government Act⁴:

The purpose of a municipal planning strategy is to provide states of policy to guide the development and management of the municipality and, to further this purpose, to establish

- a) policies which address problems and opportunities concerning the development of land and the effects of the development;
- b) policies to provide a framework for the environmental, social and economic development within a municipality;
- c) policies that are reasonably consistent with the intent of statements of provincial interest; and
- d) specify programs and actions necessary for implementing the municipal planning strategy [sic].

2. By forming an alliance, are you saying you are unsatisfied with HRM's Regional Municipal Planning Strategy, adopted in 2006?

³ Toronto Board of Trade. (2011). Toronto as a Global City: Scorecard on Prosperity – 2011. Taken from http://www.bot.com/Content/NavigationMenu/Policy/Scorecard/Scorecard_2011_Final.pdf on May 24, 2011.

⁴ Government of Nova Scotia. (2006.) Municipal Government Act. Part VIII Planning and Development. Section 213. Taken from <http://www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/muns/manuals/pdf/mga/mga08.pdf> May 22, 2011.

The Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS) was a tremendous effort taken by the Municipality. However, some of the priorities identified in the public consultation do not seem to be given the weight that they deserve. The public identified “sustainability” as their top priority when consultations were undertaken. The seven priorities identified in the goals and objectives document written in 2004 do not appear in the same form in the actual RMPS.⁵

3. What are the biggest shortcomings of the Regional Plan?

The RMPS does not include timelines for implementation, nor does it include baseline measures against which progress can be measured.

4. What makes you think that HRM has a problem with sprawl?

A calculation completed by Our HRM identifies an average density for Halifax, Dartmouth, and areas identified as either suburban or rural commuter as **5.5 persons per hectare**. The calculation was completed not with the total area of the municipality, but with the approximate area of developed land. A quick calculation of density merely divides population by total area. HRM says that this is a skewed figure because HRM is so big, with so much rural area. The calculation of 5.5 persons per hectare took this into account, and insured that only average lot size and corresponding commercial areas were included. The densities of other urban areas are as follows:

City of Vancouver, BC 5,040.90 persons per km²—50.4 persons per ha
Calgary, AB 1,360.21 persons per km²—13.6 persons per ha
Winnipeg, MT 1,365.16 persons per km²—13.65 persons per ha
Toronto, ON 3,973.46 persons per km²—39.73 persons per ha
Montreal, QC 4,438.68 persons per km²—44.30 persons per ha
Moncton, NB 566.69 persons per km²—5.66 persons per ha
Charlottetown, PEI 725.78 persons per km²—7.25 persons per ha
Victoria, BC 3966.3 persons per km²—39.66 persons per ha
London, ON 837.9 persons per km²—3.97 persons per ha
Paris, France 20,807 persons per km²—208.07 persons per ha
Whitehorse, Yukon 49.13 persons per km²— .49 persons per ha

Cities like Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver and Toronto are all working to encourage increased density. Winnipeg is encouraging people to live downtown, and has begun 80-year cost calculations before improving suburban developments. Calgary’s Mayor, Naheed Nenshi, has implemented a plan to stop sprawl, entitled “Planet Calgary”. In Vancouver, a program called Eco-Density is working to make the city more earth-friendly. In Ontario, the Greenbelt involves 1.8 million acres. HRM has stated that investing in the Capital Area is important. Our HRM thinks

⁵ Halifax Regional Municipality. Regional Planning Goals and Objectives. January 27, 2004.

that investing in all town centres is critical for the success of the communities within the municipality.

5. By having development spread across the municipality, services are actually provided at locations closer to where people are living. How is this wrong?

Having services close to where people live is desirable. In Smart Communities, services are within walking distance. The problem with many of today's services is that they are placed in locations that are auto-dependent. The RMPS identifies nodes for development. Nodes can be transit-oriented, and can maintain a healthy and vibrant downtown. The reality is that the development that occurs often happens outside of the identified nodes and is auto-dependent.

6. HRM is more than the peninsula; don't you feel that you are telling non-peninsula dwellers that their lifestyle choice is wrong?

Our HRM is an alliance of rural, suburban and urban groups. Each type of development is healthy and sustainable if it is developed "properly", with the true account of costs to the municipality taken into account. People ought to be able to live where they want, but they must pay the true cost of that lifestyle. Provisions for affordable housing will need to be made. Our HRM is not suggesting that existing development be removed, it is suggesting that all factors be considered before new housing or lots are approved.

7. Won't you be taking away private citizens' rights by telling them what they can and cannot do on their own land?

Zoning already limits what private citizens can and cannot do with their land. Current practices do not allow strip clubs to be built next to elementary schools. Industrial parks cannot be located next to hospitals. The changes to zoning that will later be presented by Our HRM will impact how and when the municipality develops - however this is not a new power, it is merely insuring that zoning bylaws and development restrictions are used to benefit the environment, the economic health of the municipality, and the well-being of citizens.

8. What might we borrow from the Ontario Greenbelt plan, and what wouldn't work here?

The Ontario Greenbelt included both the physical and designations and the Places to Grow Act, which outlines minimum densities measured as persons and jobs per hectare. It reminds a person approaching the Greenbelt that it is not simply an area of ecological significance that is to be preserved, but it is also an economic strategy.

9. Neither HRM nor the province is rich. How can they afford your plan?

HRM just contributed 1/3 of the cost of the construction of the Washmill Underpass, which will have a total cost of at least \$15 million. The cost of efficient planning is much less. HRM must choose where to prioritize its spending. The Our HRM Alliance would like to see spending on infrastructure for a healthier population, a cleaner environment, and a more sustainable future.

10. Are you against economic development?

No, economic development is an integral part of community success. Having a strategy that promotes environmental and citizen health will help to attract companies and employees. Richard Florida's work on "the creative class" emphasizes how both businesses and individuals are looking for complete communities.

11. At present, housing on the peninsula is financially unfeasible for many residents. New homebuyers are often forced to look for housing in the suburban or commuter areas. If Our HRM is calling for increased density and less development on cheaper "green fields", will new homeowners be priced out of the market?

Developers favour green field development because it is often easier and cheaper. Therefore, most new homes are located in suburban tracks. However, houses on the fringes, despite shouldering their own sewer and water costs, are more expensive for the municipality to service than are homes in already-built areas (see Page 22 in Settlement Patterns and Pricing for details). Given that the water and sewer and street infrastructure already exist in built-areas, it is logical that they are cheaper for the municipality to service. Because homes on the peninsula are often assessed at a higher rate, this means that their taxes are also higher.

What is not factored in most calculations are transportation costs. To have a private vehicle (which is required for many suburban or rural commuter residents), an average of \$700 per month is incurred. Over the course of a year, this is \$8,400. Over the life of a 25-year mortgage, this would amount to \$210,000 (without interest or inflation).

12. Don't developers now have to pay Capital Cost Contributions? Isn't this enough?

The RMPS does require that developers pay Capital Cost Contributions. This is a good first step, but until the Capital Cost Contributions factor in things like libraries, policing, fire stations, new schools and other community expenses over the life of those services, it is not enough. Winnipeg has recently adopted an 80-year cost analysis before it approves any suburban developments. This is what HRM should be considering.