

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

URBAN DESIGN TASK FORCE MINUTES

August 1, 2007

PRESENT:

Ms. Dale Godsoe, Chair
Mr. Paul MacKinnon, Vice- Chair
Ms. Cathy Carmody
Councillor Sloane
Mr. Bill Hyde
Mr. Steven Terauds
Mr. Paul Shakotko
Ms. Adriane Abbott
Ms. Linda Garber
Mr. Bernie Smith
Councillor Wile
Ms. Margot Young

REGRETS:

Mr. David Garrett
Mr. Kevin Riles
Mr. Kendall Taylor
Councillor Smith
Mr. Frank Palermo

STAFF:

Mr. Andy Fillmore, Project Manager
Ms. Jacqueline Hamilton, Manager, Capital District
Mr. Steve Higgins, Implementation Coordinator
Ms. Chrystiane Mallaley, Communication Officer
Ms. Chrissy White, Legislative Assistant

CONSULTANTS:

Ms. Jennifer Keesmatt, Office for Urbanism

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	CALL TO ORDER	3
2.	APPROVAL OF MINUTES - July 18 th , 2007	3
3.	APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS	3
4.	BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES	3
5.	REPORTS	
5.1	Barrington Street Heritage District Tax Incentive Program- Bruce Fisher/Andre MacNeil	3
5.2	Council Debrief re: Forum 2 & 3 Outcomes	6
5.3	Update- Meetings with Development Community	8
5.4	Communications Update- Chrystiane Mallaley (materials to be circulated via-e-mail)	8
5.5	Critical Path Update- Steve Higgins	8
5.6	Discussion- Public Art Policy	6
6.	CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS	9
7.	CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS AND DELEGATION	9
8.	ADDED ITEMS	9
9.	NEXT REGULAR MEETING DATE -September 5, 2007 12-2 p.m, Halifax Hall, City Hall	9
10.	ADJOURNMENT	9

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 12:10 p.m. in Halifax Hall, 2nd floor, City Hall.

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

MOVED by Councillor Sloane, seconded by Mr. Smith, that the minutes from July 18, 2007 be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

MOVED by Councillor Sloane, seconded by Mr. Mackinnon, that the order of business be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES- None

5. REPORTS

5.1 Barrington Street Heritage District Tax Incentive Program

Mr. Bill Plasket, Heritage Planner provided an overview regarding the heritage aspects of the Tax Incentive Program, noting:

- The shape of the district was outlined with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation,
- The purpose of the program is restoration and rehabilitation with commercial revitalization as Barrington Street as the cor of the downtown,
- This plan will bring attraction of the heritage district as a symbolic action,
- Discussions for two decades have supported Barrington Street as a heritage district,
- The plan links with the Urban Design Study by encouraging heritage preservation,
- The plan aims to attract a higher quality of retail to enhance the public realm,
- It is the hope to improve the image, restore the confidence in the buildings, encourage owners to reinvest in their properties and use public investment to trigger greater private investment,
- the process that dictates the current plan dates back to the 1970's when the first inventory of the downtown heritage buildings was taken,
- In the 1980's there commerce slump on Barrington Street,
- In 1992 the Downtown Halifax Marketing Analysis was conducted where discount retail moved toward specialty retail,
- in the early 1990's Barrington Street began to gain more momentum,
- In 1998 the Downtown Barrington Rejuvenation Strategy was conducted to determine the need for a special district designation,
- In 2003, a study concluded that Barrington Street should be included under the

- Property Act as a Heritage District,
- In January 2006 the plan was presented to Council. It was accepted in principal and referred back to staff for a detailed review,
- The plan outlines financial and regulatory incentives to encourage private investment in restoration,
- The public realm improvements will include sidewalk replacement, street trees and furnishings, lighting plan, grand parade plan, graffiti clean up, and a parking and loading rationalization,
- A technical committee has been formed and a proposition has been modelled for impact on traffic circulation. Once complete, there will be further consultation with business owners and stakeholders to determine proper function,
- Regulatory incentives could include an alternate building code, a height bonus (up 2 additional Stories by-right), transfer of development rights (to be studied),and preferential leasing,
- The development policies contained in the plan attempt to clarify the existing rules as this will not be an establishment of anything new,
- The 2 existing policies are Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and conservation standards for registered heritage buildings,
- The guidelines advise limiting height will reinforce character,
- Contemporary design with historic frame will be allowed.
- The view planes that are under standard will allow modest height increases
- The Strength and Demolition Policy establishes a 1 year demolition. Registered buildings will require a two year negotiation and development agreement amendments for replacement. If denied, the Council decision will stand,
- Major retailers are reluctant to establish themselves without the accomplishment of this plan.

Mr. Andre MacNeil , Financial Consultant continued the presentation by advising of the Barrington Street Heritage District Tax Incentive program, noting:

- Major work regarding financial incentives began in January 2006,
- The recommendations included a tax freeze on Barrington Street,
- staff proposed an incentive that encouraged development for capital improvements to heritage properties,
- Staff studied national models,
- St. John's/Charlottetown were assessment based model was deemed ineffective for Barrington Street as it was unpredictable and linked to income,
- Vancouver has a Net present Value/ "Shortfall" system. This system creates partnerships with business owners, the incentive is designed to compensate heritage projects for estimated "shortfalls." The incentive is agreed upon project by project, between city and property owner. This plan may cause challenges regarding administrative burden to determine current value as teams of experts would be needed on both sides to ensure this process is conducted properly. This would be ideal for larger projects, but was deemed ineffective for Barrington Street,

- Winnipeg and Regina have Investment Based system. The incentive is a percent of the private investment where the areas of the investment must meet the program criteria. There is certainty and fallibility around design criteria. This was the chosen program structure for Barrington Street.
- Staff recognize that with the type of renovations required, not all renovations would lead to increased rent as there is not a distinct link to the assessment. Some renovations may cause decrease in square feet to meet current requirements,
- staff objectives are to make specific projects feasible, as the government can not meet the needs of every building. The idea is to get buildings that have potential and meet the criteria moving,
- After research, it was concluded that a 20% incentive rate would be attractive,
- Grants could be an option, but a tax rebate is unique and would provide attraction.
- The program will outline how to encourage people to invest more. An incentive could be created around “the more you invest, the bigger return.” The other approach would be to target the type of work being done. Incentives could be provided for facade or historic restoration. Structural and code requirements would be second and modernization and efficiency improvements would be last.
- Internal renovations may not receive compensation,
- . The plan allows targeting of big projects,
- Staff must work within planning standards to ensure the building is historically significant,
- the tax credit would be limited to the maximum tax paid and would allow “carry forwards” by the property owner,
- the next steps include working and coordinating with HRM by Design,
- Staff will be consulting the Barrington street business regarding the level of desirable investments,
- Funding for this program will be requested in the 2008/09 budget,
- Option one and two could be combined.
- Task Force Members provided comments Mr. Mac Neil’s presentation, noting:

Councilor Sloane advised that she supports providing options to generate interest as this will give developers a sense of control. She also noted that staff should consult with the building code to gauge intent.

Ms. Keesmaat advised that improving facades is different then bringing buildings to code and questioned how will this be broken down. She suggested tailoring the incentive package on a site by site basis. She noted that there is an overlap of incentives with the final stages of the urban design process and an interface should be created to vet the work by the finance department. She continued by advising that the heritage incentive should meld with the urban design project. In response to Ms. Keesmaat, Mr. Plaskett advised that staff are in the process of determining a model that embraces the huge complexities of Barrington Street. He advised that the plan has been designed for specific existing problems, and rate of return will be explored.

Ms. Hamilton advised that tax incentives can be used as a toll for revitalization in heritage conservation districts.

Mr. Mackinnon advised that the Barrington Street Heritage District Committee has some concern about coordination of the projects noting the necessity for linkages to the Municipal Planning Strategy and possible policy changes.

A brief discussion regarding time lines, it was clarified that the tax incentives will be completed in the fall to ensure budget time lines are accommodated. The tax incentive recommendations could go to Council at the same time as the Urban Design Study.

Ms. Margot Young entered the meeting at 1:16 p.m.

Mr. Smith advised that staff must determine the desired function of Barrington Street in order to determine customer base. Until this is accomplished, success can not be predicted as critical mass may be an obstacle.

Mr. Fillmore advised that the projects reurbanization strategy will answer the populations base questions.

Ms. Godsoe thanked staff for their presentation and invited them to keep the Urban Design Task Force involved Throughout the process.

5.2 Council de-brief Forum 2 & 3 Outcomes

Ms. Godsoe advised that members of The Urban Design Task Force met with Council at a Committee of the Whole session on July 31, 2007. She advised that the staff recommendation was approved with unanimous support from Regional Council.

Councillor Wile advised that Council was very impressed with Ms. Keesmaats presentation.

Due to time constraints, the Committee decided to deal with item 5.6 at this time.

5.6 Discussion- Public Art Policy

- A document titled "HRM Public Art Policy and Procedures" was circulated.
- A draft document titled "HRM Draft Cultural Plan" was circulated.

Ms. Holly Richardson Regional Coordinator, Culture and Heritage presented the report, noting:

- The Cultural Advisory Committee was mandated to create a Public Art Policy as a top priority out of the Cultural Advisory Plan,

- There has been linkages and interconnections with staff and Committee Members with a cultural mandate,
- The Cultural Advisory Committee has worked for the past 8 months on the policy and the recommendation will go before Council before the end of the year,
- A current policy surrounding public art investment does not exist in HRM,
- There has been an influx of requests from community groups to develop monuments and memorials. Monuments and memorials are recognized as important, but other forms will also be embraced including contemporary art,
- The goals of the Public Art Policy mesh well with HRM by Design's mandate to promote excellence in design,
- The Public Art Policy will create an expression through public art to enhance the community and visitor access to art and to encourage artistic diversity with a range of styles and forms,
- The plan hopes to enhance visual and civic landscape,
- A critical goal is to promote and support local artists by providing private and public economic collaborations,
- Art should be infused into the development of our community and our city,
- The Public Art Policy will provide guidance to Regional Council in terms of investing, setting annual investment priorities and setting specific funding tools to enable public art,
- The policy will set out the decision making procedures for how a concept becomes a piece of art. Peer jury's will be struck each time a public art concept comes forward,
- The three streams include a guiding policy for municipal art, guidelines for private and public art development mandating the municipality to encourage developers to use public art in their developments,
- Some Canadian cities mandate developers to provide public art incentives to the community as part of their projects,
- The development agreement process will be followed to require public art in some cases,
- Vancouver was referenced regarding their private and public art sector funding pool,
- The key piece of the policy regards a funding strategy which outlines how this plan can be economically implementable. Capital and Operating funds must be allocated for public art commissions and partnerships and a maintenance reserve for the ongoing care of the HRM public art gallery,

Ms. Richardson concluded her presentation by advising that she would like the opportunity to engage the task force regarding opportunities to move these projects forward simultaneously.

Task Force Members provided comments on Ms. Richardson's presentation, noting:

Councillor Slaone advised that she has met with a developer who supports the incorporation of public art into developments. She noted that the possibility for partnerships with developers exists and should be enforced.

Ms. Keesmaat advised that the UDTF should support the Public Art recommendations as the mandates are aligned. She advised that she would like to see a further draft of the policy before it goes to Regional Council.

Ms. Godsoe thanked Ms. Richardson for her presentation and invited her to attend a future meeting to provide an update.

5.3 Update- Meetings With Development Community

Ms. Keesmaat advised that Mr. Ron Soskolne held a series of meetings with the development community. She advised of his findings.

- These meetings provided the development community with an opportunity to vent regrading issues with the development approval process,
- It was identified that the approval process is too long, success is uncertain and clarity is lacking regarding the evaluation process,
- It was reinforced that heritage is a significant issue as the heritage lobby is disproportionate to the values that exist. There is a willingness to be respectful of heritage but uncertainly of what heritage criteria is,
- Anxiety should be minimized.

Mr. Soskolne proposed that a pilot project should be initiated as part of HRM by Design with an objective to design a process for the development of a specific site. This could be accomplished with the release of a RFP demonstrating how the project could work. This project would be a competition among the development community that would not compromise existing policy framework as it would be a pilot project.

The Committee agreed taht this would be a good idea.

5.4 Communications Update

- A document titled “Communications Update- Forum 4 Downtown Districts” was before the Task Force.
- A draft document titled “Key Messages-Forum 4 Downtown Districts” was before the Task Force.

Ms. Chrystiane Mallaley, Communications Officer advised that the Daily News is preparing a set of articles to be published regarding Forum 4.

5.5 Critical Path Update

- A document titled “ UDTF Critical Path Schedule” was before the Task Force.

Mr. Steven Higgins, Implementation Coordinator advised that Forum 4 outcomes will dictate the fall and winter schedule. He also reminded the Task Force that there will be

a joint planning workshop with the Steering Committee on August 23, 2007.

6. **CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS**- None

7. **CORRESPONDENCE PETITIONS AND DELEGATION**- None

8. **ADDED ITEMS**- None

9. **NEXT REGULAR MEETING**

The next regular meeting of the Urban Design task Force will be September 5, 2007 from 12-2 p.m. in Halifax Hall, City Hall.

10. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m.

Chrissy White
Legislative Assistant