

Issues and Opportunities Within the Regional Centre

**Urban Design Task Force
May 12, 2010**

SUSTAINABLE

Goal:

1. Design, plan and build with respect for economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability.
2. Create resilient communities that adapt to evolving opportunities and needs.

Issue/Opportunity

Port of Halifax activities and other harbour related uses are an important contributor to the economy of the entire Municipality.

Response

Future planning documents will need to continue accommodating harbour related uses in the Regional Centre.

Issue/Opportunity

Sea level rise is an ever increasing concern for both the general public and the Municipality.

Response

Future planning documents will need to take into account its potential impact on the Regional Centre.

Issue/Opportunity

Tall buildings in an urban context have the ability to create adverse wind conditions at street level. Presently, proposals for as-of-right tall buildings within the Regional Centre do not require the submission of a wind impact statement or study.

Response

Future planning documents should require the submission of wind impact statements/ studies for all tall building proposals in the Regional Centre.

Issue/Opportunity

While the Municipality does not have the jurisdiction to mandate sustainable building practices and technologies for private sector lead projects, beyond what is required under the Provincial Building Code, it can nonetheless mandate it for itself and its agencies.

Response

Future planning documents should require that all new municipal facilities be designed to show leadership in sustainable building design and at a minimum achieve a LEED silver standard in the LEED or an equivalent certification system.

Issue/Opportunity

District heating and cooling, geothermal and rooftop solar are ubiquitous technologies in some parts of the world, but have only recently come to the forefront locally as technologies that will help the Municipality transition towards a sustainable future.

Response

Future planning documents will need to recognize the importance of these sustainable technologies and eliminate any potential barriers to their use.

<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Urban agriculture in general and community gardening in particular have both received a tremendous amount of attention recently and are seen as effective tools in providing for a secure and sustainable food supply, all the while resulting in stronger and healthier communities.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> As part of the neighbourhood planning process, opportunities should be investigated to support urban agriculture in general and community gardening specifically.</p>
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HIGH QUALITY

- Goal:**
3. New development should be of high quality and compatible with other high quality developments.
 4. Promote high quality architecture and urban design that respects great heritage resources, including neighbourhoods.

<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Parking, services and utilities service areas are a necessary part of buildings, but often do not create a welcoming pedestrian environment.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> Care must be given to the design in order to minimize their presence and impact on the public experience by locating them to less visible parts of the building and by integrating them within the building mass. Design requirements for vehicular access, circulation, loading, utilities, parking structures and parking lots should be developed through the neighbourhood planning process.</p>
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<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Certain areas of the Regional Centre have no assigned height maximum, while others are assigned height maximums based solely on their applied zone. Furthermore, there are close to half a dozen ways to calculate heights throughout the Regional Centre.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The detailed neighbourhood planning process will need to assign maximum heights for the entire Regional Centre and develop a consistent height definition. The building height framework will serve to provide predictability with respect to important characteristics that development ought to consider depending on location, adjacencies, distinct areas or streets, and desired land uses.</p>
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<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Vacant properties are an everyday fact of life in the continued evolution of an urban centre. However, vacant properties, especially those located along corridors or in neighbourhood or urban centres do not necessarily have to be seen as a detriment to the local community.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The detail neighbourhood planning process should investigate requiring some form of landscaping treatment for vacant properties awaiting redevelopment.</p>
<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Ongoing issues have been identified with the quality, compatibility and appropriateness of certain contemporary design approaches. These include, but are not limited to the bland aesthetic quality of flat rooftops, the over prominence of garage doors along today’s residential streetscapes and the jarring visual impact of exposed parking podiums.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> Future planning documents should require a landscaping treatment for flat rooftops, as well as mandate that garages be set back from the street facing wall of their respective dwellings. Exposed parking podiums facing a street should no longer be allowed.</p>
<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Poles and overhead utilities are a common form of urban blight throughout the world, and HRM is not immune to this phenomenon. In order to improve the aesthetic quality of the built environment, the Municipality created in the past a pole free zone for a portion of the Regional Centre, within which overhead utilities are to be progressively relocated underground.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The detailed neighbourhood planning process should attempt to identify suitable candidate areas to be considered as part of potential future expansions to the Municipality’s pole free zone.</p>
<p>HERITAGE AND CULTURE</p>	
<p>Goal:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Heritage resources, including heritage districts, buildings, landscapes and cultural heritage, should be recognized, used, protected and enhanced. 6. Ensure lasting legacies (buildings, open spaces and streets) are maintained, and new ones are created. 	

<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Many buildings and streetscapes within the Regional Centre are valuable heritage resources and could therefore benefit from heritage protection through the <i>Heritage Property Act</i>. Likewise, entire areas could benefit as registered heritage conservation districts.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The detailed neighbourhood planning exercise should in part identify potential individual heritage resources with an aim of updating the inventory of potential heritage resources. This could then lead to a heritage registration campaign. The designation of heritage conservation districts could be pursued for larger areas identified as containing substantial intact heritage resources.</p>
<p>MOVEMENT</p>	
<p>Goal:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Integrate land use planning with transportation planning in such a way that alternatives to driving become an easy choice. Transportation options should be efficient, pleasant and readily available. 8. All streets should present an inviting barrier-free environment that considers the comfort, convenience, safety and visual interest of pedestrians. 9. The Regional Centre, in all ways, should be conducive to, and supportive of, active transportation movement. It should provide people with choices that are viable alternatives to driving. 	
<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> The existing planning regulatory regime for Halifax Peninsula contains a map that was developed during the 1970s and which identifies certain streets as suitable candidates for future street widening. Correspondingly, each of these streets has an established building line setback to prevent buildings from being constructed within the area reserved for future widening.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The building line map should be reviewed during the detailed neighbourhood planning process to assess its current relevance.</p>
<p>COMPLETE NEIGHBOURHOODS</p>	

Goal:

- 10. Support safe, mixed-use and diverse neighbourhoods, including:
 - o Affordable housing and a variety of tenures;
 - o Residential, commercial, employment uses; and
 - o Visually and physically accessible amenity space, including schools and parks within walking distance.
- 11. Ensure the necessary public services and amenities to support quality of life, cohesive communities and creative places.

Issue/Opportunity

Ongoing issues about the range of land uses which are appropriate in a primarily residential environment have been identified. These include, but are not limited to churches, child and adult daycare centres, home occupations, live/work opportunities, and neighbourhood commercial uses.

Response

Provided the residential character is maintained, a greater range of land uses should be considered through detail neighbourhood planning.

Issue/Opportunity

Current controls over multi-residential developments, such as maximum population/dwelling densities, angle controls and minimum landscaped open space have been in place for over four decades. These controls are outdated by today's standards, as they result in a "tower in the park" approach, often lead to awkward designs, and yield densities that are far below what can reasonably be accommodated.

Response

The detail neighbourhood planning process should investigate adopting a built form approach, as an alternative to the existing multi-residential controls.

<p>Issue/Opportunity Under the Nova Scotia Alcohol and Gaming Authority regulations, a licensed restaurant is not allowed to sell alcoholic beverages except when purchased with a meal. However, some restaurant owners have put forward the argument that trends and attitudes towards the serving of alcohol have changed tremendously in the past 20 years and that the licensed restaurant format is no longer the industry standard within urban areas of Canada. Instead, they suggest that the new industry standard for licenses has become the eating establishment/lounge license.</p>	<p>Response The detailed neighbourhood planning process should reassess current restrictions on lounges within the Regional Centre to determine if there is public acceptance in allowing lounges in association with, but subordinate to restaurants in primarily commercial areas (e.g. Quinpool Road commercial district). Controls could be put in place to limit the size and extent of operations. Except in limited circumstances, staff does not feel that there is much interest or merit in allowing full fledge stand alone lounges to be established outside already permitted areas.</p>
<p>Issue/Opportunity The Municipality does not have the power to force the private sector to provide affordable housing. It does however control substantial land holdings in the Regional Centre.</p>	<p>Response Future planning documents should contain policies to encourage the Municipality to provide a full spectrum of housing affordability in the redevelopment of vacant or under utilized municipal land holdings.</p>
<p>Issue/Opportunity To achieve the vibrant Regional Centre that the Urban Design Study sets out to provide, it is essential that a proper mix of multiple dwelling unit sizes be struck. This will ensure housing opportunities for a range of household sizes ranging from single individuals to households of two or more people.</p>	<p>Response Future planning documents should specify minimum ratios for a mix of desirable dwelling unit types within multiple unit residential developments.</p>
<p>Issue/Opportunity Affordable housing can be achieved, in part, by allowing the establishment of secondary dwelling units (e.g. basement apartments) and garden suites. These two housing options generally tend to be more affordable than other types of dwelling units and they also produce an income stream for the property owner, thus making it more affordable to own a home. Other strategies to increase the provision of affordable housing may include small lot developments and the elimination or reduction of minimum unit sizes and minimum parking requirements.</p>	<p>Response Provided the residential character remains relatively unchanged, a greater range of housing options should be considered through detail neighbourhood planning.</p>

<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Post-secondary institutions located in the Regional Centre are important contributors to the economy and culture of the HRM. However, the close proximity to primarily residential environments does at times lead to conflicts, especially where student housing interfaces with traditional family housing.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The detailed neighbourhood planning exercise should pay special attention to this ongoing concern, especially in neighbourhoods immediately abutting post-secondary institutions.</p>
<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Homeless shelters and group options homes can be controversial and sometimes lead to a nimbyism response from abutting neighbourhoods. However, these facilities do provide essential services to their residents and they often need to be located in an urban centre setting, in order for their residents to be able to access necessary services.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The detailed neighbourhood planning process should identify appropriate locations for homeless shelters and group options homes within the Regional Centre, as well as determine design and siting guidelines.</p>
<p>GROWTH AND CHANGE</p>	
<p>Goal:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Ensure that new developments respond to the natural, cultural, historical, and urban character of their context. 13. Direct change and intensification to areas that will benefit from growth. 14. Every new building should contribute to the betterment of the public realm. 15. Design should support accessibility, active transportation and transit (i.e. streets, land uses, neighbourhoods, open spaces, circulation systems). 	
<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Ongoing issues have been identified with a variety of land uses currently permitted as-of-right in certain areas of the Regional Centre, which may not be entirely appropriate in the Regional Centre context. These uses include car dealerships, auto body repair centres, and non-harbour related industrial and warehousing uses.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> Propose limiting the expansion of existing establishments and the restriction of new ones through the detailed neighbourhood planning process.</p>

<p>Issue/Opportunity Some uses such as drive-thru establishments, gasoline service stations, and self-storage facilities are still considered appropriate uses under certain circumstances within the Regional Centre. However, special care must be provided to ensure that they have as much of a positive interaction with their abutting uses as possible.</p>	<p>Response The detailed neighbourhood planning process should identify appropriate locations for these uses within the Regional Centre, as well as determine design and sitting guidelines.</p>
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<p>Issue/Opportunity Vacant and underutilized sites are ideal locations to accommodate future growth and intensification within the Regional Centre.</p>	<p>Response The detailed neighbourhood planning process should attempt to identify vacant and underutilized land parcels that are suitable candidates for redevelopment and which can accommodate a major portion of the growth that will be directed to the Regional Centre.</p>
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PROCESS

- Goal:**
- 16. Foster a culture of support for the building/ construction of quality urban design.
 - 17. Recognize and reward design excellence.
 - 18. Involve neighbourhood communities in local planning matters.
 - 19. Maintain opportunities for public participation in the implementation of HRM by Design.
 - 20. Foster predictable outcomes that have been tested to be achievable and fair.

CONNECTED

- Goal:**
- 21. Prominent views to prominent natural and built features should be recognized, protected and enhanced.
 - 22. Enhance safe and appealing connections within the Regional Centre including to and from the waterfront, open spaces and neighbourhoods.

<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> A lack of clarity has been identified with the existing Dartmouth viewplane legislation. In addition, community members have voiced concerns over the lack of protected public views along the Northwest Arm.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The Municipality should attempt to resolve the known problems with the Dartmouth viewplane regulations. Additionally, viewplanes along the Northwest Arm could be considered through detailed neighbourhood planning.</p>
<p><u>Issue/Opportunity</u> Visually prominent sites provide unique opportunities to define areas, strengthen visual connections, animate open spaces, and to orient and stimulate pedestrian movement These sites are appropriate for special functions and urban design features such public art, monuments, attractions, and civic or cultural facilities.</p>	<p><u>Response</u> The detailed neighbourhood planning process should attempt to identify these visually prominent sites.</p>