

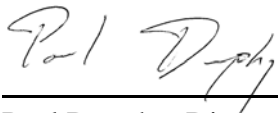


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Item No. 6

Halifax Regional Council
February 19, 2008

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Paul Dunphy, Director of Community Development

DATE: February 12, 2008

SUBJECT: Halifax Regional School Board - Imagine Our Schools

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

February 5, 2008: Motion by Councillor Uteck requesting an information report comparing the findings of the Halifax Regional School Board's Imagine Our Schools process with that of HRM's Regional Plan and HRM By Design with respect to future capacity as presented for Peninsular Halifax.

BACKGROUND

The HRM 25-year Regional Plan was adopted in 2006 and was based on population projections and allocations bearing in mind market trends for a wide range of housing types and locations. HRM By Design is an on-going visioning project for the Regional Centre (urban core), and among its many components includes a model for estimating development build-out capacity in and around downtown Halifax. Imagine Our Schools is a school facility planning process being undertaken by Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB), with the first phase addressing the Halifax Peninsula, Dartmouth, Cole Harbour, the Prestons and Eastern Passage. The enrolment projections used in this project are based on detailed population age group projections for specific locations with HRM. Regional Council and the public have raised questions about the variations between the future population levels used in each of these three strategic initiatives. The Council motion requests clarification from HRM staff.

DISCUSSION

Capacity relates both to available school capacity and residential development capacity which would generate demand for school capacity. While school capacity is beyond the scope of the HRM Regional Plan and Halifax by Design, both projects involve estimates of development demand and capacity, and therefore both have provided input to the Halifax Regional School Board's Imagine Our Schools study.

HRM Regional Plan

As a broadly scoped, region-wide vision, the HRM Regional Plan embodies assumptions about the overall distribution of residential development over the long term. Those assumptions are based on a housing market forecast by Clayton Research Associates, which anticipates that approximately 25 percent of the demand for new residential units will be within the Regional Centre, amounting to approximately 15,000 new dwelling units between 2001 and 2026. Based on anticipated household size, this would amount to a net population growth of about 25,000 for the Regional Centre over the 25-year plan horizon. The market analysis was based on projected household formation, the types of dwellings which various household sizes would favour, and typical locations for these dwelling types.

The Regional Centre is often referred to as the urban core, and comprises not only the Halifax Peninsula but also the portion of Dartmouth inside the Circumferential Highway. The Clayton Research Associates forecast did not separate these two locations, nor did it project a breakdown of age group populations for sub-areas within HRM such as the Regional Centre.

HRM By Design

HRM By Design is a municipal community visioning project ultimately aimed at the Regional Centre (Halifax Peninsula and Dartmouth inside the Circumferential Highway), with an initial focus on downtown Halifax and Spring Garden Road. In close consultation with the public and other stakeholders, this community-specific vision goes beyond the population allocation of the Regional Plan by designing a development pattern which would enable much stronger population growth in downtown Halifax - Spring Garden Road, based on a build-out scenario assuming proposed urban design principles applied to identified development parcels. This would call for an increase in the Regional Centre's share of overall growth beyond the 25 percent assumed by the Regional Plan.

Halifax Regional School Board Imagine Our Schools Project

Imagine Our Schools is a ten-year facilities planning project of the Halifax Regional School Board which is being coordinated with HRM Regional and Community Planning staff. HRSB staff and consultants have met numerous times with HRM staff to obtain information on the various projects and plans underway or completed within the Municipality. These meetings have included municipal staff from Regional and Community Planning, the Facilities Master Plan project, Regional Transportation (including the Active Transportation Plan), Metro Transit, and HRM By Design (including members of the Urban Design Task Force).

The Imagine Our Schools program uses detailed, area-specific population and enrollment projections. The population projections are inherently conservative because they are based on an age cohort survival model which also considers recent migration trends in and out of the Halifax Peninsula. The enrollment projections allow for the new development anticipated for the area. This method is appropriate because it focuses on population age groups, which are important when forecasting the demand for school capacity.

Comparing the Projects

Unlike Imagine Our Schools, the Regional Plan, and especially HRM by Design, focus on the demand for various housing types and available land capacity to accommodate this housing. As conceptual projects, these HRM documents assume that internal migration within the Region onto the Halifax Peninsula will accelerate as the population continues to age and seeks more options in compact housing. Moreover, HRM By Design further envisages provision of more family-oriented housing in the Regional Centre, leading to still greater population growth.

Implications for Halifax Peninsula School Capacity

While the three projects use different population growth assumptions, the implications for school needs on the Halifax Peninsula are mitigated by three factors:

- The need for school capacity is generated not by total population, but by the number of school-aged children. Because household sizes continue to decline dramatically, differences in total population numbers generate relatively small differences in the number of school-aged children.
- The Regional Plan reflects a typical market demand for housing on the Halifax Peninsula oriented to singles and couples, which implies a very low proportion of children to adults. School Board projections suggest that the more optimistic assumptions of the Regional Plan would stabilize the current decline in school enrollment on the Halifax Peninsula, but would not lead to any significant growth in these age groups.
- HRM By Design goes beyond the Regional Plan by envisaging full build-out under proposed design principles, and assuming more family-oriented housing in the vicinity of downtown Halifax. The analysis underlying Imagine Our Schools indicates that, even if this capacity build-out assumption were achieved, the number of school-aged children on the Peninsula would only rise slightly. Moreover, the resulting recommendations are being “future-proofed” to ensure retention of sufficient and appropriately located sites to accommodate potential demand for downtown schools.

In addition to considering anticipated school-aged population levels, Imagine Our Schools examines the distribution of schools within the Halifax Peninsula, and have taken into consideration the effects on walking distances school sizes. This is a matter of significant importance to the overall principles

of the HRM Regional Plan and the specific aspirations of HRM by Design.

HRM staff are satisfied that the Imagine Our Schools study has, to date, addressed the population growth assumptions and objectives of the Regional Plan, and is including contingency plan recommendations (“future proofing”) in the event that the more ambitious targets envisioned by HRM by Design begin to be realized.

Next Steps

The Halifax Regional School Board has been invited to make a presentation to Regional Council on the Imagine Our Schools project. It is understood that the remaining steps in the process are:

- Complete the public consultation on the draft document
- Submit the Master Plan to the School Board for information
- Receive written and verbal submissions from the public
- Submit final document to the School Board for approval

If it so chooses, Halifax Regional Council will have the opportunity to prepare a submission on the draft recommendations of the School Board consultants.

Once this initial phase of Imagine Our Schools has been completed, future phases will address North Central HRM (Bedford - Sackville - Fall River), Western HRM (St. Margarets Bay - Halifax Mainland), and Eastern HRM (Lake Echo to Ecum Secum and Musquodoboit Valley).

HRM staff will continue to foster a strong working relationship with their counterparts at the School Board and with their consultants through all phases of this project. Further to this, Council might consider requesting a more formal arrangement with the HRSB and the Nova Scotia Department of Education for on-going communication, coordination and facilities planning.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications.

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.

ATTACHMENTS

None

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

Report Prepared by : Marcus Garnet, Senior Planner, Community Development, 490-4481

Report Approved by: _____
Austin French, Manager, Planning Services, 490-6717

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Austin French". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.