



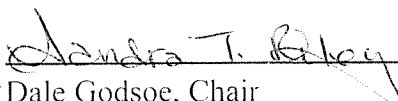
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**Item No. 3 (ii)**

**Halifax Regional Council  
February 26, 2008**

**TO:** Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**

  
Dale Godsoe, Chair  
Urban Design Task Force

**DATE:** February 21, 2008

**SUBJECT:** HRM By Design: Downtown Halifax Vision

**ORIGIN**

Urban Design Task Force meeting of February 06, 2008.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Urban Design Task Force recommends Regional Council approve, in principle, HRM by Design's "Downtown Halifax Vision" as described in the attached Memorandum dated February 06, 2008.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the February 06, 2008 meeting of the Urban Design Task Force, Staff from HRM By Design provided a presentation in regard to findings of Forum 4 and Forum 4B. Following discussions of this matter, a motion was passed to approve the "Downtown Vision" with the minor amendments per the Urban Design Task Force's February 06, 2008 recommendations, and to recommend the amended Downtown Vision be approved-in-principle by Regional Council.

The Urban Design Task Force's minor amendments were to delete "Big Move #10 - An enhanced downtown skyline," and replace it with a new Big Move #10 entitled "A transit-oriented downtown."

## **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

None associated with this report.

## **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**

None associated with this report.


## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 'A':

Memorandum, dated February 06, 2008, from HRM By Design staff to the Urban Design Task Force.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/agenda.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:

  
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Sandra T. Riley, Legislative Assistant

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## **HRM By Design – UDTF Memo**

To: Urban Design Task Force

From: HRM By Design Staff Team

Date: February 6, 2008

**Subject: Council’s “Approval in Principle” of the Downtown Vision on February 26, 2008**

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### **Origin**

The subject matter of HRM by Design’s public consultation Forum 4 in September and Forum 4b in November was the Downtown Vision. The findings of this phase of the project result from extensive public consultation and detailed refinement by the consultants, staff and the Urban Design Task Force. In accordance with the project’s strategy of phase-by-phase incremental Council adoption, these findings (the Downtown Vision) will be on Council’s February 26, 2008 agenda for approval in principle. Approval in principle on that date keeps the project on schedule for a June, 2008 public hearing on the new downtown policies. Not achieving this timeline seriously compromises the momentum of the Downtown Strategy due to Council’s summer recess schedule and the pending municipal elections in the fall. UDTF approval of the Downtown Vision on February 6 is therefore critical.

### **UDTF Recommendation to Council**

It is recommended that the Urban Design Task Force:

1. Approve *HRM by Design’s* “Downtown Vision” as described in this report.

### **Background**

#### *HRM by Design thus Far:*

From the time of HRM by Design’s commencement in June, 2006 through to June, 2007, the project was focussed on the entire Regional Centre including Dartmouth inside the circumferential highway and the Halifax peninsula. During that time period the project team held three week-long public consultation forums: one in downtown Halifax; one in downtown Dartmouth, and; one in North End Halifax. In addition, numerous citizens and stakeholders from throughout Dartmouth and Halifax were consulted, interviewed, and otherwise engaged. That year of work, and the public consultation it entailed, yielded the following Council-approved Regional Centre-wide findings:

- Regional Centre Urban Design Vision and principles
- Regional Centre Urban Design Framework

- Regional Centre Reurbanization Strategy

Taken together these three project components embody a shared vision for the Regional Centre for the next twenty-five years, and provide the basis for new development policies for Halifax and Dartmouth to be delivered in the Final HRM by Design report.

#### *A Focus on Downtown Halifax:*

In June, 2007 the project turned its attention toward the special challenges facing downtown Halifax. This focus on downtown Halifax was directed by Council both in the Regional Plan, and in the approval of HRM by Design's scope of work. Accordingly, the development a Downtown Vision has been the sole focus of our work since June, 2007.

The level of public engagement attained during the Downtown phase of the project was exceptional, having drawn rooms of between 500 and 600 people on at least two occasions. Residents and other stakeholders participated in our consultations in a variety of ways, be that to attend a workshop, a presentation, an interview, or writing a letter. The Urban Design Task Force is to be commended for proving entirely effective in achieving its mandate of guiding and facilitating effective consultation. The overwhelming message from the public regarding the downtown phase has been that the project is on the right track, the Downtown Vision accurately captures the aspirations of the community, and HRM should proceed with its implementation as quickly as possible

## **Discussion**

### *For Council's Approval: "The Downtown Vision"*

The findings of this phase of the project as determined by Forum 4 in September, 2007 and Forum 4b in November, 2007 pertain only to the downtown study area as shown on the attached map. This boundary was carefully drawn with regard to the areas of varying built form character that exist in the downtown, and to the existing MPS plan areas. The boundary contains those areas of downtown Halifax that are facing the greatest development pressures and that are governed by policy most in need of updating.

The Downtown Vision for which Council approval is being sought is described under the following four headings: "A. The 10 Big Moves for Downtown," "B. The District Based Approach," "C. Cogswell Interchange Area Redesign," and "D. Implementation":

### **A. The 10 Big Moves for Downtown**

Collectively these ten aspirations for our downtown constitute a shared and widely agreed upon vision of what we want our downtown to look like in the next twenty-five years. These are the 10 Big Moves as they were presented to the public at Forum 4b in November, 2007.

#### *1. Increase Residential and Office Space Downtown*

The future vibrancy and economic growth of our downtown depends upon there being many more people living and doing business here. The Regional Plan accommodates an increase of approximately 25,000 new residents in the Regional Centre over the next 25 years. Building upon that figure and supplementing it with extensive research and interviews with local real estate and development

professionals, HRM by Design has identified an upper limit need for 3 million sq. ft of office space and up to 5,000 new residents in the downtown over the next 15 years. Importantly, this capacity accommodates a variety of new residential and commercial development in the short and long term. While this amount of growth may not occur within the 25 year study window, it is nonetheless important to identify that there is capacity for it without negative impact on the open space, heritage protection and urban vibrancy goals of the project.

2. *Defined and Distinct Downtown Districts*  
Downtown Halifax features distinct districts with varying characters, functional identities and building forms. The objective of defining these districts is to help focus and direct land uses, define the appropriate form of development, protect heritage, and direct public investment. There are nine proposed districts which are detailed in the next section of this report.
3. *A Protected and Vibrant Historic Heart*  
Halifax's rich heritage assets are a main attraction for tourists and locals, which increase the economic prosperity of downtown. The protection and preservation of these heritage resources is a key pillar of HRMbyDesign. The Barrington Street Heritage Conservation District will implement stronger methods of heritage protection than currently exist, along with a preservation incentives program. Future study is also recommended in the South Barrington area and Historic Properties to implement a similar program.
4. *Integrate the Cogswell Interchange Area and Cornwallis Park Gateways*  
The transformation of the Cogswell Interchange and Cornwallis Park areas will serve as catalysts for revitalization and the attraction of new residents and businesses to downtown. Public support for the redevelopment of the Cogswell Interchange and rejuvenation of Cornwallis Park is tremendous due to the opportunity to provide more public open space and amenities, and new residential and commercial development.
5. *Provide a Variety of New and Improved Open Space Anchors and Connections*  
The amount and quality of public open space and amenities must increase in parallel with the increase in residents and workers downtown. A variety of high quality open space types are proposed to complement adjacent uses, to provide signature destinations downtown, ensure amenities for high-density residential living and to provoke the Downtown revitalization. Visual and physical connections along the east/west streets that terminate in outdoor public open spaces on the waterfront are important in reestablishing the link between the Citadel and the waterfront, and are a key component on the Downtown Vision.
6. *Great Streets that Support a Culture of Walking*  
Improved streetscapes are intended to enhance the Downtown experience, supplement the open space network, promote a culture of walking, support street level retail, and strengthen district identities. Beautiful, well-designed, pedestrian-friendly streets will inspire more people to explore downtown shops, restaurants and entertainment venues. Great streets connect local neighbourhoods and districts, increasing downtown vibrancy around the clock.

7. *Remediating the Interface and Quality of Existing Buildings & Structures*  
As part of the urban design objectives for downtown, this plan will encourage, assist and enable the improvement and/or transformation of existing buildings and infrastructure that fails to make a positive contribution to the pedestrian experience. Strategies include the retrofitting of undesirable street level conditions, updating and enhancing existing towers and parking structures through façade improvements, and improved lighting.
8. *Reinforce Visual Connections & Civic Pride*  
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 urban design features such as public art, monuments, attractions, landmark architecture, and civic or cultural facilities. Potential opportunity sites include: Granville Mall, the Halifax Ferry Terminal, waterfront open spaces at the foot of east/west streets, the Cogswell/Commons Gateway, and the North & South ends of Barrington and Hollis streets.
9. *New Developments Designed to be Well-Mannered & Pedestrian Friendly*  
The approach to guiding new development is focused on ensuring a vital, inviting pedestrian environment that will attract residents, enhance retail uses at street level, encourage active transportation choices, and resonate with visitors to the downtown. Proposed strategies to achieve these objectives include: enhancing existing heritage with complementary design, directing height where it is appropriate, ensuring sun penetration on sidewalks and minimizing wind impacts, ensuring a coherent relationship between neighbouring buildings, and ensuring the pedestrian experience is comfortable, safe and visually appealing.
10. *A Repaired & Enhanced Downtown Skyline*  
Identifiable and appealing downtown skylines can enhance the image of the downtown and the entire city to residents and visitors. Tall buildings have the greatest civic obligations to be appropriately located, and to feature high quality materials, roof treatments, and overall architectural excellence. New towers will aspire to become landmark buildings as part of the renewed downtown Halifax skyline.

## **B. The District-Based Approach**

Moving forward, the planning and design policies embodying the Downtown Vision will build upon the concept of “Defined and Distinct Downtown Districts” as described in Big Move #2 above. The attached map shows the proposed boundaries of the nine proposed districts. The Urban Design Task Force and the Project Steering Committee recently held a day-long workshop to finalize this approach. Their work included creating a character statement and a list of objectives for each of the nine districts. This approach reflects substantial consultation with members of the public and other key stakeholders, such as heritage interest groups, business organizations, the development industry and government partners.

Each District will be governed by policy that addresses the following: district character and identity, absolute building height, building massing and upper story

stepbacks, heritage protection considerations, detailed urban design guidelines, open space recommendations, recommended land uses, and other guidelines and requirements as deemed appropriate. This approach will promote the filling-in of vacant lots; it will promote new development at a variety of scales, styles and use, and; it will ensure that new development is appropriate to its location based on existing and desired district character.

Heritage buildings and areas will be protected in two ways. The first is through the immediate introduction of the Barrington Street Heritage Conservation District and the identification of two other districts (South Barrington Street and Historic Properties) for future consideration as Heritage Conservation Districts. The second method by which heritage will be protected relates to heritage buildings that are not located within Heritage Conservation Districts. For these stand-alone structures, detailed protective design guidelines and incentives for rehabilitation and reuse will apply.

The District-Based Approach embodies the clarity and predictability for policy in the downtown study area that has been clearly asked of the project, while still retaining the context-specific detail required to direct appropriate treatment of heritage resources, the appropriate form and height of new development, and insistence upon vibrancy and excellence of design to the pedestrian realm.

Council is being asked to approve in principle the District-Based Approach on February 26, 2008. Greater detail on the district-specific policy will be provided in a future Council report once it has been finalized by the project team and Urban Design Task Force.

### **C. The Cogswell Interchange Area Redesign**

Repeatedly throughout project consultations the community has been nearly unanimous in requesting that Cogswell Interchange be removed and a grid of city blocks and new development parcels be restored, which is consistent with many of the 10 Big Moves. It is therefore recommended that, as part of the Downtown Vision, Council initiate planning and design work related to the redevelopment of the Cogswell Interchange lands consistent with, and concurrent with, HRM by Design. This approach will capitalize on the momentum of the Downtown Vision, and will enable good decision-making on the future use of those lands.

### **D. Implementation of the Downtown Vision**

The key deliverables are a set of policies, bylaw provisions and urban design guidelines which will guide future planning and development. Importantly, the deliverables will provide Council with a clarified policy framework within which solid development decisions can be made. As a means of achieving this directive, changes to the Municipal Government Act are necessary. Specifically, staff envisions changes to the Site Plan Approval provisions (s. 231) to enable such a review to include “building features and design elements” and the implementation of a design review panel. If for any reason we are unsuccessful in achieving these MGA amendments through our work with the Province, we would instead continue to use the current

Development Agreement process, but modified to ensure that building height and mass are encoded in the land use bylaw, and that strict design guidelines would be met.

As part of the adoption in principle of the Downtown Vision, Council is being asked to approve the request for initiating legislative changes to the Municipal Government Act to implement the HRMbyDesign project. Greater detail on the specific legislative changes and implementation tools will be provided in a future Council report once finalized by the project team and Urban Design Task Force. For clarification, this approval will enable HRM staff to proceed with a formal request to Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations for legislative changes to the Municipal Government Act.

With regard to future public consultation on project implementation, the following opportunities are embedded in the current workplan:

- Late February: *HRM by Design* booth at the Dartmouth Waterfront Ideas Expo.
- Late February: Full-colour *HRM by Design* brochure designed and distributed by the Downtown Halifax Business Commission.
- Early March: *HRM by Design* booth at the Nova Scotia Homeshow.
- Late March: Possible *HRM by Design* insert in the “Naturally Green” mailer.
- Early April: Publication and distribution to public of Draft Downtown Strategy and supporting policy.
- Mid-April: Public Open House on Downtown Strategy and policy.
- May: “First Reading” of new Policy by Council.
- June: Public Hearing on new Policy by Council.
- Fall 2008: Public consultation on implementation of the Regional Centre-wide components of *HRM by Design*.

Staff have looked very closely at the possibility of providing an additional public consultation on the Downtown Strategy prior to Council’s ‘First Reading’ in May as discussed at the January 30 UDTF workshop. The tightness of the schedule combined with the numerous other opportunities for consultation and comment do not permit us to hold that additional consultation.

## **Next Steps**

During the next several months staff will be working closely with the consultant team and the Project Steering Committee to further refine the many details of a Downtown Strategy in accordance with the direction of the Urban Design Task Force and our public consultation. It is the project team’s intention to bring a draft downtown policy set back to Council for a First Reading in May, 2008 and a Public Hearing in June, 2008.

In order for the project team to complete the draft downtown policy set and present it to Council in May for a first reading, Council’s February 26, 2008 approval in principle of the Downtown Vision is sought.

- End -



