



PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 3 (iii)

**Halifax Regional Council
February 26, 2008**

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Fred Morley", written over a horizontal line.

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Fred Morley, Chair, Regional Plan Advisory Committee

DATE: February 21, 2008

SUBJECT: HRM By Design: Downtown Halifax Vision

ORIGIN

Regional Plan Advisory Committee meeting of February 20, 2008.

RECOMMENDATION

Regional Plan Advisory Committee recommends Regional Council approve HRM by Design's "Downtown Halifax Vision" as described in a memorandum and document dated February 13, 2008, with the understanding that the Regional Plan Advisory Committee's concerns related to (1) The Site Plan Review Process; (2) Economic viability of the proposed policy direction; and, (3) Cogswell Interchange Land Use options, will be satisfactorily addressed prior to the final report being presented by Council.

BACKGROUND

Staff of the HRM By Design project provided a presentation to the Regional Plan Advisory Committee on February 20, 2008 concerning HRM By Design's "Downtown Halifax Vision". Following discussion on the matter, the Regional Plan Advisory Committee passed a motion as noted in the 'recommendation' of this report.

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 13, 2008 RE: Approval of HRM By Design's "Downtown Vision".

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:



Sandra T. Riley, Legislative Assistant



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Fred Morley, Chair, Regional Plan Advisory Committee
Members of Regional Plan Advisory Committee

Cc: Roger Wells
Jennifer Weagle

From: Andy Fillmore, HRM by Design Project Manager

Date: February 13, 2008

Subject: **Approval of HRM by Design's "Downtown Vision"**

Dear Chair and Members of the RPAC,

I am pleased to inform you that on February 6, 2008 the Urban Design Task Force passed a motion approving HRM by Design's "Downtown Vision," and have forwarded a positive recommendation to Council to approve the same on February 26, 2008.

In accordance with established HRM by Design approval protocols, the project team is now seeking the Regional Plan Advisory Committee's approval of the Downtown Vision, along with a positive recommendation to Council for approval on February 26, 2008. In this way the UDTF and the RPAC are sending a strong, unified message to Council that the Downtown Vision has the support of both committees.

Attached to this memo please find the following, as approved by the UDTF on February 6, 2008:

1. A summary of the Downtown Vision
2. A map of the Downtown Study Area conceptually illustrating the 10 Big Moves
3. A map showing the proposed downtown district boundaries

You will recall that in the coming months the RPAC will be invited to participate in a joint meetings with the Urban Design Task Force to review and comment upon the downtown policies that are going to Council for a public hearing in June. As soon as the joint meeting dates are finalized invitations will be issued. In deference to the RPAC's schedule, we will plan these joint meeting s for regular RPAC meeting times to the greatest extent possible.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments.

My best regards,

Andy Fillmore, Urban Design Project Manager

A Vision for Downtown Halifax

The Downtown Vision for which the UDTF approved on February 6, and for which Council approval is sought on February 26, is described under the following five headings:

- A. Guiding Principles for Downtown Halifax,
- B. The Ten Big Moves for Downtown
- C. The District Based Approach
- D. Cogswell Interchange Planning and Design
- E. Legislative Changes to the Municipal Government Act

A. Guiding Principles for Downtown Halifax:

There are six overarching principles which embody the vision for Downtown Halifax looking forward over the next 25 years:

- *A Sustainable Downtown:* Develop a sustainable Downtown by leveraging existing cultural, commercial, institutional and infrastructure assets. Combine this with intensification and development of a splendid public realm to ensure social, economic and environmental public benefits for the entire HRM.
- *A Living Downtown:* Create a “living” Downtown through maintenance of existing neighbourhoods while supporting the creation of new residential opportunities including desirable high-density neighbourhoods with a variety of housing choices and that are supported by high quality community, streetscape and open space amenities.
- *A Distinct Downtown:* Maintain a distinctive Downtown by preserving and reinforcing the elements that impart a sense of distinct history, culture and a unique natural setting.
- *A Beautiful Downtown:* Restoring the pursuit of longevity, civic pride, visual appeal, and inspiring qualities to the design, improvement and construction of streets, open spaces and buildings.
- *A Connected Downtown:* Strengthen the visual and physical connections between historical assets, natural assets, and civic and open space destinations in the Downtown. In addition, create similar connections to surrounding districts and neighbourhoods outside the Downtown.
- *A Vibrant Downtown:* Create a vibrant Downtown by developing policies and procedures that encourage an urban environment with a broad mix of land uses, the required infrastructure and the necessary critical mass to support a creative and exciting economic, cultural and social community.

B. 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.

1. Defined and distinct downtown precincts

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 appropriate development, protect heritage , and direct public investment. There are nine proposed districts which are detailed in the body of this report.

2. *Increase live and work opportunities in the 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, HRMbyDesign 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.

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 similar programs. Design guidelines and incentives will protect heritage resources outside of heritage districts.

4. *Integrate the Cogswell 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. A key principle in support of great streets is promoting the infill of vacant and underutilised lands and at-grade parking lots with high-quality development.

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. 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. This includes the idea that 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.

10. *A Transit Oriented Downtown*

Building on the goals of the Regional Plan, HRMbyDesign promotes access to Downtown and the Capital District primarily through investment in public transportation, providing alternatives to dependence on the automobile. Development in turn should be provided at appropriate densities to support continued transit use. Much greater emphasis shall be placed on walkability and cycle use in the Downtown. Public transportation must be progressed into a whole new level of public acceptability and use by making its use vastly more convenient and treating the users as customers with much improved levels of service. Make transit use a universally acceptable and accessible means of transportation.

C. The District-Based Approach:

Moving forward, the planning and design policies for the downtown study area will build upon the concept of “defined and distinct downtown districts” as described in Big Move #1 above. Attachment #2 shows the 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. For each of the nine proposed districts their work included establishing boundaries and creating a character statement and a list of objectives. 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 storey setbacks,
- heritage protection considerations,
- detailed urban design guidelines,
- open space recommendations,
- recommended land uses, and
- others guidelines and requirements as deemed appropriate.

The district 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 and the appropriate form and height of new development while bringing vibrancy and excellence of design to the pedestrian realm.

Height Framework:

Throughout the downtown public forums various approaches to height were presented and discussed and ultimately a preferred vision for heights was recommended. This height framework is being refined by the Urban Design Task Force in the context of the district based approach and will be presented to Council when the proposed policy set is brought forth this Spring. The following key principles have been discussed in relation to height and are embodied in the 10 Big Moves:

- Promote infilling of vacant and underutilised lands (filling in the gaps),
- Promote development of a variety of scales, which allows for taller buildings in locations where they can best be supported in terms of existing block pattern and relationship to other buildings of height,
- Establish heights for the base of buildings (the “street wall”) to maintain a human-scaled, pedestrian oriented downtown,
- Taller buildings have greater civic obligations for contributing key public benefits and excellence of design at their base and at the skyline, and
- Height limits relate to the existing and desired character of a district and respect relationships to the Citadel and the waterfront.

Heritage Protection and Enhancement:

Strengthening the protection of heritage resources is fundamental to the Downtown Vision. Heritage buildings and areas will be protected through:

- Immediate implementation of the Barrington Street Heritage Conservation District,

- Identification of two additional districts within the downtown study area for future consideration as Heritage Conservation Districts: South Barrington Street and Historic Properties,
- Detailed design guidelines and incentives for rehabilitation and reuse to apply to heritage buildings that are not located within Heritage Conservation Districts.

Approval of the Downtown Vision and the District-Based Approach is sought to allow the project team and the Urban Design Task Force to move to the next level of detail in the development of district-specific policies and regulation.

D. Cogswell Interchange Planning and Design:

Repeatedly throughout project consultations the community has been nearly unanimous in requesting that the Cogswell Interchange be removed and a grid of city blocks and new development parcels be restored, an approach which is consistent with 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, HRMbyDesign. This approach will capitalize on the momentum of the Downtown Vision, and will enable good decision-making on the future use of those lands.

E. Legislative Changes to the Municipal Government Act (MGA):

The key deliverable for Downtown Halifax is a set of policies, bylaw provisions and urban design guidelines which will guide future planning and development. Extensive public consultation has occurred around the vision for downtown development from which the new policies will flow. The preferred development approvals model will see future building heights and massing (the *quantitative* elements of building) predetermined in the Land Use Bylaw and be subject to as-of-right approval. The design characteristics (the *qualitative* elements of building) will be governed by detailed design guidelines and will be subject to discretionary approval. With a clearly established vision, Council is in a position to streamline the development approval process in order to foster a positive development and investment climate in the downtown core. Key public benefits related to heritage protection, sustainability and quality architectural and public space design will be attained through this model.

As a means of achieving this directive, it is proposed that the current development agreement process in Downtown Halifax be replaced with Site Plan Approval, Variances and Incentive Zoning. The Site Plan Approval process is a way of dealing with site related design issues within the context of a more timely administrative review, which can be achieved within a sixty day period as opposed to six months or more with development agreements. The existing legislation for Site Plan Approval does not enable the scope of qualitative design review that is favoured by the HRMbyDesign Program (i.e., review of the external features, character, and appearance of a building or structure).

Therefore, to implement this new approach, amendments to existing provincial legislation are required to give HRM more authority over the architectural design of development while streamlining the approvals process. It is envisioned that four key changes to the Municipal Government Act are required to implement this approach:

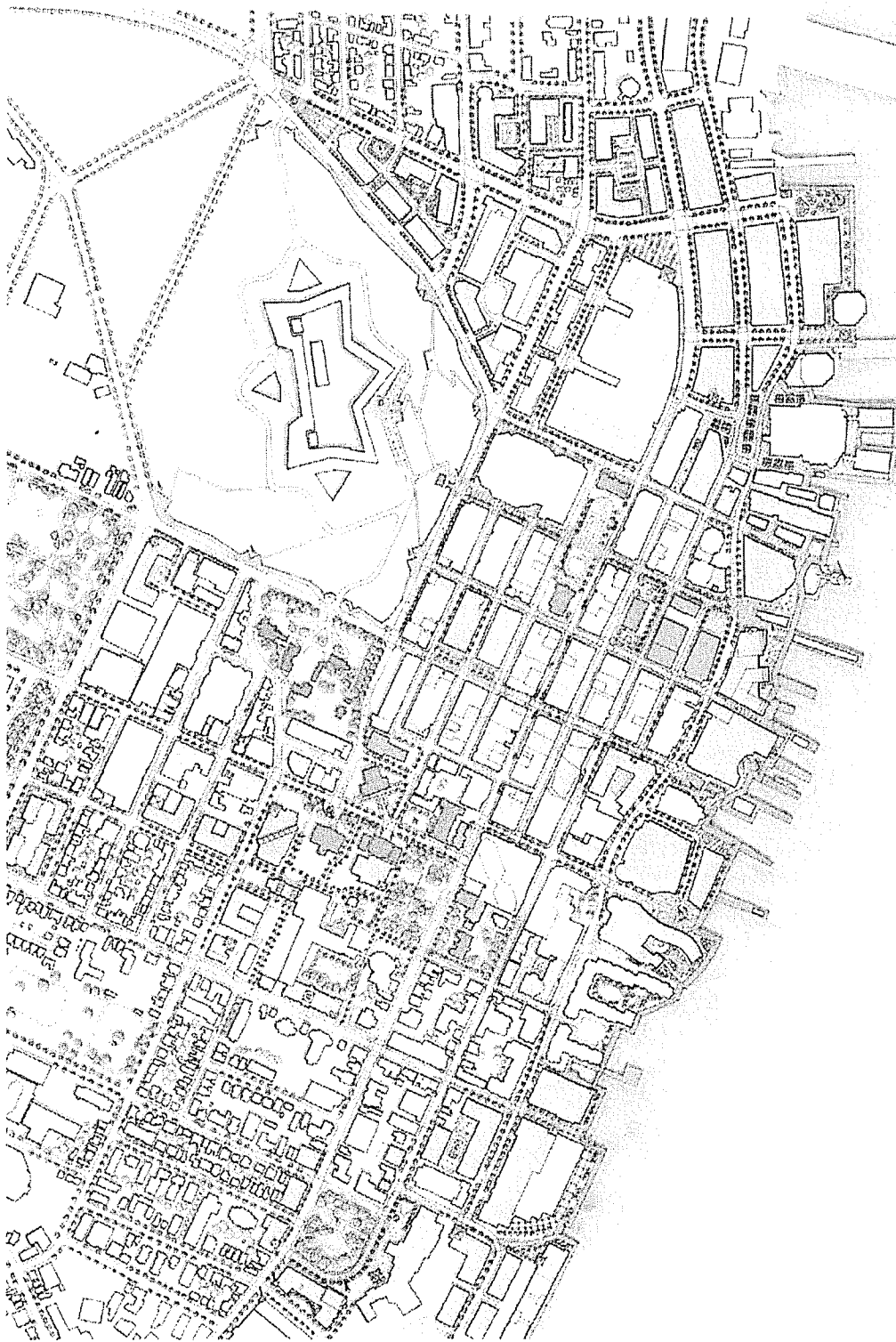
- I. Expand provisions of the Municipal Government Act related to Site Plan Approval to include authority to regulate “matters related to exterior design including the external appearance of structures, the character of structures, the design features of structures, and the facade of structures.”
- II. As part of the site plan review, enable the municipal Development Officer to refer applications to an external design review committee. The design review committee is being modeled after other advisory committees (Heritage, Planning) whereby applications can be referred to committee for expert advice and input.
- III. Enable the relaxation of “matters related to exterior design” by variance (sec. 235) under the as-of-right abilities. This will enable a wider range of as-of-right development options with a threshold to be established for Site Plan Approval.
- IV. Reduce the scope of the appeal process for Site Plan Approval in terms of limiting who has the right of appeal and changing the area in which the appeal provisions apply.

As part of the adoption in principle of the Downtown Vision, Council is being asked to approve a request to the Province for legislative changes to the Municipal Government Act to give HRM the enabling authority to implement a new development approvals process for downtown in conjunction with the HRMbyDesign project. The changes would give Council the ability to consider implementation of this new approach in conjunction with the downtown policy framework currently being developed for approval by Council this Spring. Council 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.

Next Steps

During the next several months staff will be working closely with the Urban Design Task Force and the Project Steering Committee to further refine and craft a new Downtown Planning framework to implement the recommendations of HRMbyDesign. At this time 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 advance of Council's summer recess. To support this timeline, further public consultations are planned during the months of March and April on the proposed Barrington Street Heritage Conservation District and the overall Downtown Strategy. Council approval of the vision, legislative changes and the future planning for Cogswell Interchange will help maintain the public momentum of this project and enable its timely implementation.

Downtown Halifax Demonstration Concept Plan



HALIFAX NS

HRM DESIGN

647cityurbanism

Andy Fillmore, Urban Design Project Manager,
Tel: (902) 490-6495 Fax: (902) 490-5730
E-mail: fillmoa@halifax.ca Website: www.halifax.ns.ca

Attachment Three:



Halifax Downtown DRAFT - For UDTF Review 06-Feb-08

Andy Fillmore, Urban Design Project Manager,
Tel: (902) 490-6495 Fax: (902) 490-5730
E-mail: fillmorea@halifax.ca Website: www.halifax.ns.ca