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Item No. 10.1.2

Halifax Regional Council
November 18, 2008

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dan English".

Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Wayne Anstey".

Wayne Anstey, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer - Operations

DATE: October 23, 2008

SUBJECT: Halifax Urban Green Way-Active Transportation Trail

ORIGIN

At the April 15, 2008 Council meeting, Halifax Regional Council reaffirmed its support for a petition that was presented by the Municipal Clerk. The petition "was sent to Mayor Kelly from residents urging Halifax Regional Council to modify the current HRM's staff proposal with respect to the Beaufort/Francklyn segment of the active transportation trail to provide for a recreational trail and not a 24/7 paved road. The petition also requests a crusher dust recreation trail be installed." Council requested a staff report addressing the petition.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council support the construction of the Beaufort Street, Phase 1, Active Transportation Trail as designed by HRM staff and described within. The trail will implement the HRM Active Transportation Master Plan Facility and Planning Guidelines and staff recommendations regarding width and surface finish.

BACKGROUND

Over a decade ago the Halifax Urban Green Way Association, HUGA, and HRM began planning trails around the peninsula that link the Armdale Round-a-Bout to the Northwest Arm, Point Pleasant Park, the Halifax Seaport, and the Halifax and Dartmouth waterfronts to landmarks and trails beyond. The HUGA trail, in addition to incorporating a separate nature trail for recreation and tourists, will be an active transportation route to provide a safe option for cyclists commuting to and from the universities schools, hospitals and other destinations on the peninsula and all others needing alternative transit routes through the urban core. Over the last seven years, staff have worked with the HUGA community group and a total of 13 public meetings have been held. The trail, as proposed by staff, has been designed along with the HUGA group. Final engineering design and contract specifications have been completed. AT trail standards from the HRM AT Master Plan have been applied. The current plan calls for tendering of the Beaufort Street Phase I as described and funded in the Canada-Nova Scotia Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund.

DISCUSSION

On April 4, 2008, Mayor Kelly met with Harry Thompson, Mary-Lou Rossiter and Dr. John LeBlanc. At the meeting, a petition was presented. (Attachment 1). Each of the four points in the petition are discussed below:

1) Green Space-Asset to be Preserved:

One of the principle goals of the Halifax Urban Greenway is to conserve the apron of the Rail Cut along the CN Rail line. It is a precious asset to HRM that needs to be managed. There is no management of the resource at this time. The placement of the AT trail along the road and the narrow bark chip nature trail in the wooded area will serve to preserve the green corridor. The HUGA project, similar to many across North America, will achieve this fundamental conservation objective as part of a broader concept of enhancing green mobility for area residents. Green mobility opportunities are critical to the long term sustainability of HRM.

To ensure the future protection of the corridor, HRM is actively negotiating with Canadian National Railways. Agreement in principle has been achieved for the acquisition of the corridor apron which will see the treed corridor preserved for residents of the peninsula.

The AT trail will be primarily on the HRM Beaufort Street ROW. In order to preserve as many trees as possible and in general this small piece of the countryside on the peninsula: Beaufort Street will be narrowed between South Street and Dalhousie Street; the trail has been routed on to CN owned land between Regina Terrace and Oakland Street; and the width has been reduced to 3.5 metres along the entire length between Inglis Street and Roxton Road. In places within the later section, the trail width will be further reduced for short lengths to avoid valuable trees. For the most part, all trees beyond the HRM land and on CN land are of the invasive Norway Maple and as such should be removed to promote the healthy infilling of native tree species.

2) Main purpose of the HRM AT Plan:

The HUGA Project is a key component of the main spine network around Peninsula Halifax and a critical segment of the overall Active Transportation Plan.

From a regional network perspective the circular peninsula corridor forms the central hub of the regional spine system. Key AT pedestrian and bicycle connections to this circular corridor at the MacDonald Bridge and Armdale Rotary will in the future provide flowthrough linkages to and from the entire Peninsula. At this time, another trail section is being constructed for HRM by Heritage Gas Limited along Barrington Street. In addition, a second tier of community neighbourhood trails are envisaged that connect to this main spine system. Some will be on-street and some off-street. This Phase I of the overall HUGA vision will provide off-road AT and nature trail infrastructure for residents, students and all others wanting to travel in this area of the peninsula.

The HUGA segment will function and support all the categories of active transportation by definition, but will emphasis "Active Destination Oriented Trips" which includes trips to and from St. Mary's and Dalhousie Universities. Connecting adjacent neighbourhoods to Point Pleasant Park and the Halifax Waterfront will be a key function. A subsequent Phase will be continuation of the trail to a pedestrian bridge over the rail cut. This will be done in association with St. Mary's University who show the trail in their development plans. Providing the public with well constructed and maintained Active Transportation Infrastructure serves the main purpose of the HRM AT Master Plan.

3) Construction of Phase I:

The feasibility of the concept plan for the Halifax Urban Green Way, stretching from the Armdale Round-a-Bout to Point Pleasant Park was confirmed in a 2002 report prepared by the Halifax Urban Greenway Association, titled the Halifax Urban Greenway Proposal.

Feasibility of the linear concept was and still is dependent on acquiring permission or ownership of the land from CN and designing specific ways around key pinch points. Consistent with all major urban corridors there are critical challenges (pinch points) which need to be overcome to attain one hundred percent continuity. Beginning the trail along Beaufort Street as Phase I will serve as an example of the quality and potential of the AT trail between Point Pleasant Park and Armdale. Constructing the Phase 1 section along Beaufort Street as per the specifications in the HRM AT Master Plan is recommended.

4) Cost/Benefit:

In the January 2006 Project Business Case for the Halifax Urban Greenway, the total cost was estimated by O'Halloran and Campbell Consultants Limited to be \$1,055,241. This is for all three phases of the Greenway from South Street to Point Pleasant Park. Phase I of the project is the Beaufort Street section from South Street to Roxton Road. The cost estimate for this phase was \$406,065. At a press conference held on April 2, 2007, it was announced by the Honourable Peter MacKay that Canada via ACOA was supporting the project for \$300,000 and it was announced by Jamie Muir, that Nova Scotia was supporting the project with another \$300,000. The availability of this funding ends on March 31, 2010.

Multi-use trail infrastructure deliver one of the widest ranges of benefit packages of any municipal program. Benefits include health, environmental, recreational, economic and social benefits.

The off-road safe environment provided by the corridor will also help build capacity in active living lifestyles. It is a matter of record that constituency or the number of active transportation trips is increased using off-road trails. New users to the system will use the off-road safe experience first.

The active transportation[non motorized]trail network is particularly a relevant benefit with respect to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing the dependence on the automobile.

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

Two consultation opportunities were organized in response to the petition.

On Saturday, April 12, 2008, Councilor Uteck organized an on site 'walk-n-talk' for the community. The event was attended by HRM staff and the community volunteer group, HUGA. The impacts on trees and the green space in general were explained and discussed over the 3 hour walk with staff from Urban Forestry, Traffic, Planning and Trails.

On Monday, May 5, 2008, a public meeting was organized by Councilor Uteck and lead by Peter Bigelow, Manager, Real Property Planning. The attendance at HRM City Hall was recorded to be 76 members of the community. Staff responded to public questions and a majority of those in attendance spoke in favour of the trail as designed by HRM staff and were complimentary on the work done.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

This report is not an award of tender and is simply provided to address concerns raised within the petition presented to Council on April 15, 2008. A subsequent report will be brought to Council on the awarding of the construction contract.

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

Council could choose to agree with the desires of the petition to have only a crusher dust recreational trail. This is not the recommended course of action as the trail needs to be constructed to AT standards of at least 3.5 metres in width and finished with asphalt. The width and the finish maximize usage while minimizing on going maintenance costs. Not proceeding with the trail at all would be a lost opportunity to invest the \$600,000 approved for the project within the Canada-Nova Scotia MRIF Agreement. Not proceeding with the recommended AT standards or at all would also be a lost opportunity to develop needed public active transportation/recreational infrastructure. If Council chooses not to proceed, the Canada-Nova Scotia MRIF funds may be lost and the associated

capital funds previously allocated to the HUGA group by HRM Council would be reallocated to another community trail group.


ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 Petition on behalf of Residents for a South End Recreational Trail

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: Don Ambler, Trail Specialist, Real Property Planning, IAM 490-7359

Report Approved by:


Peter Bigelow, Manager, Real Property Planning, IAM 490-6047



Report Approved by: Cathie O'Toole, Director, Infrastructure & Asset Management 490-4825

-1-

**TO THE MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS
OF HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**

**FROM RESIDENTS FOR A
SOUTH END RECREATIONAL TRAIL**

**Re: Active Transportation Plan -
South Street to Point Pleasant Park Segment**

Submission and Request for Modification of Plan

BACKGROUND

The undersigned are home owners living along or adjacent to Beaufort Avenue and Francklyn Street. At the end of November, 2007 some of us were invited to City Hall to view the plan for the portion of the Active Transportation network to be constructed in our neighbourhood. We were extremely disappointed to see that the plan contemplated a 13 foot wide strip of asphalt adjacent to the street and proposed lights, signing for speed limits, lane markings and other indicia of a street. We had understood that a recreational trail was to be installed in our area and that trail had very strong support in the community. The idea of a paved roadway was a nasty shock to most of us.

Subsequently, on February 25, 2008 an information session was held at City Hall when Mr. Peter Bigelow and his staff made a presentation to residents of Beaufort Avenue and some others and answered questions. Staff was very committed to its design and with a few minor changes, unwilling to modify the asphalt road proposal.

Submission

We submitted to staff in February and now submit to Council that the portion of the Active Transportation network extending from the intersection of South Street and Beaufort Avenue to Point Pleasant Park should be designed and constructed as a recreational trail and not a transportation link.

Our reasons for requesting a recreational trail and not a transportation link are as follows:

1. **The green space in this area including the beautifully treed area along Beaufort Avenue is a precious asset to HRM and should be preserved as such.**

-2-

This area is heavily used now by joggers and walkers who use it because it is a small piece of the countryside on the peninsula, teeming with birds, squirrels and other wildlife. The installation of a paved road operating on a 24/7 basis will destroy the basic nature of this trail and despite representations of staff to the contrary will, we believe, necessarily involve destruction of a large number of trees and a major portion of the natural habit. The words of Joni Mitchell's song "Pave paradise, put up a parking lot" seem particularly appropriate. This option is totally unacceptable to us. The HRM Active Transportation Plan clearly contemplates that surface materials and design can vary depending upon the use and the users and states that trails should take advantage of natural geographical features to create a pleasant environment (See HRM Active Transportation Plan – "Design Fundamentals (a)". A crusher dust trail minimizing tree destruction and taking advantage of the habitat is the right solution for this stretch of the Active Transportation Network.

2. **The construction of this 24/7 link will not serve the main purpose of the HRM Active Transportation Plan of encouraging commuters to use non-motorized transport.**

As stated in the Executive Summary of the HRM Active Transportation plan found on the HRM website, the main purpose of the Active Transportation network is to encourage people on and off the Halifax Peninsula to reduce transportation by car and use a combination of public transit and on and off road facilities to travel to work, shopping and entertainment sites.

The area within the arc from the intersection of South and Beaufort Avenue to Point Pleasant Park is primarily residential and institutional in nature with small green spaces adjacent to the CN railway cut. Most of the major employers including the hospitals and Dalhousie University are located north of South Street. The major employer inside the arc is Saint Mary's University which can be accessed by public transit or bicycle more directly from South and Robie Streets and not by a circuitous route along Beaufort and Francklyn. Bicycle lanes on streets near Saint Mary's University would be much more useful. This proposed paved roadway along this stretch is totally unnecessary.

3. **The construction of a 24/7 transportation link along this stretch is at the very least, premature.**

Even if, at some future date, a case could be made for a paved roadway in this area, at this time it will be isolated and of little use as a transportation link for the foreseeable future. We have been told that there are significant challenges establishing the portion of the link extending from the rotary to South Street and many hurdles must be overcome. In addition if commuters are to access peninsular

-3-

Halifax from outlying areas links such as the CN Chester/Lakeside spur line must be acquired. The costs of such acquisition are very high and the acquisition of this link is far from certain. Even if the technical and land ownership issues can be resolved, HRM does not have a good handle on the cost of this link which will be extremely high and may not be feasible. To build the Beaufort, Francklyn stretch as a road at this time is akin to constructing the centre span of a bridge and hoping to acquire the approaches some time in the future. It is frankly reminiscent of the Cogswell Street interchange, that monument to bad planning which is now a link from nowhere to nowhere and must be torn down at great expense. **Can we not learn from past mistakes?** It should be kept in mind that whereas a recreational trail can be converted to active transportation link should the need ever arise in the future, the destruction of this green space to accommodate the proposed thirteen foot asphalt road cannot be undone.

4. **The cost of constructing a road on this stretch is not commensurate with the benefit to be derived.**

We understand the cost of installing even the Beaufort Avenue stretch of this link is in the order of \$800,000 to a million dollars. HRM's share is at least \$300,000 plus the cost of the Francklyn Street portion, bridges, etc., and ongoing maintenance costs. Given the lack of any connection to other links and the circuitous route to even Saint Mary's University, let alone any other place of employment or downtown entertainment, indicates to us that this trail will not get heavy usage for those purposes but will continue to be used primarily as a recreational trail for the foreseeable future. To spend large sums on this project at this stage of its development is a complete waste of taxpayers' money which can be put to many better uses. HRM staff seems to be driven by a need to do something quickly regardless of its merit. The availability of some federal funding seems to be a major catalyst for the inordinate haste to construct this isolated section of the trail. Mr. Bigelow referred to the Beaufort stretch of the trail as "low hanging fruit" implying that since construction challenges are not as great on this stretch as in other areas HRM will just start here and hope for the best. **This is poor planning and we reject it.**

FOR ALL THESE REASONS WE STRONGLY URGE CITY COUNCIL TO MODIFY THE CURRENT HRM'S STAFF PROPOSAL WITH RESPECT TO THE BEAUFORT, FRANCKLYN SEGMENT OF THE ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION TRAIL TO PROVIDE FOR A RECREATIONAL TRAIL AND NOT A 24/7 PAVED ROAD. WE REQUEST THAT A CRUSHER DUST RECREATIONAL TRAIL BE INSTALLED TO ENHANCE THE EXISTING INFORMAL TRAIL AND ENCOURAGE MORE RECREATIONAL USAGE.