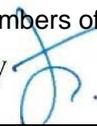


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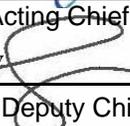
Item No. 14.1.6
Halifax Regional Council
August 2, 2016

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

SUBMITTED BY:

John Traves, Q.C. Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by 

Jane Fraser, Acting Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: July 22, 2016

SUBJECT: Beach and Park at Gordon R. Snow Community Centre

ORIGIN

August 8, 2015 Halifax Regional Council motion:

“MOVED by Councillor Dalrymple, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee, that Halifax Regional Council request a staff report on a needs and feasibility study of a beach and park on the water frontage of the Gordon Snow Centre in Fall River.” **MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Section 79(1): Council may expend money required by the Municipality for: k) recreational programs; (x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose; (y) furnishing and equipping any municipal facility; (ah) ... trails, including trails developed, operated or maintained pursuant to an agreement made under clause 73(c), bike paths ... and other recreational facilities; (ai) public grounds, ... parks, ... and community centres; and (as) wharves and public landings.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council authorize staff to develop a capital project that establishes a floating dock water access on Lake Thomas at Gordon R. Snow Community Centre in Fall River for future capital budget consideration.

BACKGROUND

Gordon R. Snow Community Centre, 1359 Fall River Road, is located on a 4.0 ha parcel of land with frontage on Lake Thomas in Fall River (Map 1). The land was acquired by the municipality in 2001 for its value as a natural passive park and water access to Lake Thomas. The site was later designated as the location of a Community Centre to replace aging facilities in the area. The Gordon R. Snow Community Centre was constructed on a joint site with HRM Fire Station 45 for the efficiency of shared services and infrastructure. The footprint of the building and adjacent improvements is approximately 1.25 ha or 31% of the total area of the site. The remaining 2.76 ha remains naturally wooded with a small network of walking trails dedicated to Selena Jefferson, a prominent member of the community. A cleared area on the northernmost corner of the site acts as an informal rocky beach access to Lake Thomas (Attachment A).

In July 2015, Fall River residents voted to allocate \$29,853.06 of funds remaining in an area rate account designated for sidewalks in Fall River to “enhance access to Lake Thomas at the Gordon R. Snow Community Centre property”. Regional Council subsequently requested a staff report on this matter on August 4, 2015. This report addresses the Council motion.

DISCUSSION

The community of Fall River has an identity rooted to the Shubenacadie lake system. Through years of rapid growth, land along Lake Thomas has been increasingly privatized. The Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (2012) for the River-Lakes Area highlights the community’s desire to maintain and protect public water access to Lake Thomas. The water frontage at Gordon R. Snow is specifically listed as an area for future enhancement. However, the strategy indicates that the area is to remain mostly naturalized with minimum disturbance to the lakeshore.

In early 2015, the Municipality acquired two parcels of land on Lake Thomas, across the lake near the intersection of Highway 2 and Fall River Road (Map 1). These are only well suited for maintaining views of the lake, not for promoting or allowing for safe access for public boating or swimming.

Beach and Park Considerations

The Municipality currently provides 23 supervised beaches and a number of informal water access points that allow swimming opportunities to residents. The supervised beaches are larger and easier to access, generally consisting of a sandy, gradual entry to saltwater (3 beaches) or freshwater (20 beaches) co-located with on-site parking, washrooms/change facilities, and some grassy supportive space.

HRM does not currently have an established service standard for provision of beach access. However, analysis was undertaken to consider the availability of water access in Fall River compared to other communities across HRM (Attachment B). It is found that the Fall River community is reasonably served by beaches (on average). Overall, Fall River residents have better access to provincial guarded beaches and unsupervised swimming areas than other HRM residents, but have less access to municipal guarded beaches and the total combined number of swimming opportunities.

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) recommend standards for siting public beaches, which include the following:

- Beach area should have 50 sq. ft. of land and 50 sq. ft. of water per intended user;
- Lake or ocean should have a sand bottom with slope maximum of 5% (flat is preferable); and,
- Boating areas should be completely segregated from swimming areas.

Other actions recommended by HRM Aquatics for consideration of swimming areas include:

- Water quality testing for a minimum of one season to ensure safe levels of bacteria; and
- An investigation of the lake bottom to ensure safe and stable footing (no large/loose rocks, or underwater obstructions such as stumps).

Based on the standards listed above, the proposed site at Gordon R. Snow Community Centre does not meet the criteria for a municipally programmed/supervised beach. The site is small and does not provide suitable square footage of land area to support beach activity. Further, the stretch of lakefront does not have a sandy bottom conducive for swimming.

It is not possible to alter the site to create a sandy beach based on regulations from the Nova Scotia Department of Environment (NSE). NSE does not allow sand to be added to watercourses, nor can rocks or vegetation be removed. Both the shoreline and bed of the watercourses must be disturbed minimally in development. Therefore it is not appropriate to clear vegetated land on the shoreline, bring in sand (or remove rocks), then grade a suitable beach entry.

Water Access Considerations

While a formal beach and park is not suitable for the site, it is recognized that there are benefits to providing access to Lake Thomas, particularly for small non-motorized watercraft. This can be realized with a seasonal dock on the northeast corner (Attachment A) for the launching of canoes, kayaks and other small watercraft. The ideal dock would be a combination floating and stationary dock with minimal impact on the shoreline. A small stationary platform with concrete footing could be installed on the lakeshore, connected to a floating dock by a ramp with guard rails (Attachment C). Additionally, there will be an assessment of whether a small picnic area could be established on the shoreline to support use of this dock (Attachment A).

A dock at this location would be beneficial according to the recreation principle of co-location. It is valuable to cluster facilities and services together to maximize access, efficiency, and convenience for citizens. The Gordon R. Snow Community Centre and site already hosts: a fitness centre, community rooms, washrooms, parking, a playground, a skate park, an outdoor gazebo/pavilion, walking trails, and heritage interpretive signage. There is also opportunity for the community centre to provide paddling rentals and/or free lessons.

There would be some challenges and concerns that HRM would need to address in the installation of a floating dock.

Safety: Unsupervised Swimming

Although the dock would be used as a launch for small non-motorized watercraft, it is recognized that there may be interest in using it for swimming access. There may be issues with this, including water quality and safety issues relative to subsurface, and the possibility for a person to become trapped beneath the dock. As such, it is not recommended that swimming be permitted off the proposed dock. Signs would need to be clearly posted to discourage swimming and/or diving at this site.

Safety: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Although the site at Gordon R. Snow is preferable from a recreation perspective, there are some issues with safety identified by CPTED analysis. Halifax Regional Police (HRP) performed a CPTED audit which is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: CPTED Analysis of Gordon R. Snow Site from HRP

CPTED Principle	Notes
Natural Surveillance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolated area. No nearby residents to monitor • No clear sight lines to dock area from Fall River Road or the Community Centre parking lot • Some views from Highway #2 but this is from a distance
Access Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No control over pedestrian access • Many entrances, some partially hidden from view • Parking lot is always open, encouraging users to hang out 24 hours • Shoreline improvements would require widening of an access road to the site. The entrance of this road would need to be gated and locked for staff use only

Territorial Reinforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current signs of vandalism, litter• Frequent maintenance would be necessary to demonstrate pride of ownership
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In addition, HRP noted ongoing issues with after-hours activity at this site, including vandalism and noise complaints. These issues should be resolved using CPTED improvements to the site before water access is installed.

Some immediate CPTED improvements which will be completed include:

- Installing a gate to block entry/exit of the parking lot after hours (e.g. 10pm – 6am);
- Posting “NO EXCEPTION” signage to deter mischief and enforce hours of use;
- Increasing frequency of patrols, rule enforcement, and ticketing for offenses;
- Trimming trees around CCTV cameras in the parking lot to allow clear view; and
- Minor thinning of trees between dock site and parking lot.

Dock Installation

According to NSE regulations, seasonal floating structures must have minimal impact on the shoreline and lakebed, and must be removed and stored in the winter months. Provided these conditions are met, a Notification of Watercourse Activity Form must be submitted prior to construction. If the conditions cannot be met, a longer application process, including completion of an Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan, is required.

There would also be increased operational and maintenance requirements that HRM would need to undertake for a stationary-floating dock, including:

- Ensuring that the floating dock is taken out for the winter, and reinstalled in the spring;
- Ensuring there is a safe storage place for the dock;
- Requiring annual maintenance of the pathway and vegetation;
- Increasing servicing of garbage receptacles;
- Posting and maintaining appropriate signage; and
- Clearing a pathway for maintenance and emergency vehicles.

The most suitable site for enhanced water access at Gordon R Snow Community Centre would be at the northeast corner of the property (Attachment A). As that area closely abuts the neighbouring property, care would need to be taken in establishing the dock area so as to reduce conflicts and the potential for trespass.

Next Steps

Should Regional Council authorize staff to develop a capital project and costing associated with establishment of a floating dock water access, the following steps would be undertaken:

- Determination of the grade/slope of the entry to Lake Thomas;
- Investigation of underwater hazard;
- Assessment of water quality over one full summer season to validate the absence of inappropriate levels of bacteria (assessment underway since June 2016, all tests successful to date)
- Assessment of suitability for a small picnic area on the shoreline;
- Completion of preliminary site design and costing, including CPTED items; and
- Estimation of operational costs associated with the proposed dock.

Upon completion of the cost estimates, the proposed project would be included in a future capital budget for Regional Council’s consideration.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

During a recent community meeting, \$29,853.06 was recommended to be allocated from community

funds for enhancements on the site. This recommendation will be considered by Regional Council as part of an upcoming report regarding the Fall River Sidewalk Area Rate.

Upon completion of capital cost estimates, any additional funding for the proposed floating dock water access would be considered during future capital budget deliberation. Estimated operating costs would also need to be included in future operating budgets.

The cost to develop a capital project as outlined under the “Next Steps” sub-heading in the Discussion section can be completed within the approved operating budget.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There would be risks associated with the installation of a floating dock. The proposed installation of a floating dock versus construction of a beach at the site would mitigate significant risks. Other risks would be able to be managed through implementation of CPTED changes, installation of no swimming signage, and completion of a liability assessment and risk management strategy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

On February 23, 2015 the Councillor for District 1 initiated a consultation process to determine priorities for allocating the funds remaining in an area rate account designated for sidewalks in Fall River. The results were presented at a public meeting on July 13, 2015 at the Gordon R. Snow Community Centre. Attendees unanimously approved to designate \$29,853.06 to “enhance access to Lake Thomas at the Gordon R. Snow Community Centre property”.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

In order to proceed with any installation of a floating dock water access, it must fulfill all the environmental requirements outlined by the Nova Scotia Department of the Environment to submit a ‘Notification of Watercourse Alteration’ or to obtain a ‘Watercourse Alteration Permit’. Whether notification or approval is required will be determined by results of technical staff review.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: Regional Council could choose to not authorize staff to develop a capital project and costing for the future establishment of a floating dock water access on Lake Thomas at Gordon R. Snow Community Centre in Fall River.

Alternative 2: Regional Council could choose to direct staff to explore alternative locations for swimming and/or water access in the Fall River community. This may involve the acquisition of new property.

ATTACHMENTS

Map 1: Context of Gordon R. Snow Community Centre and Surrounding HRM Parkland

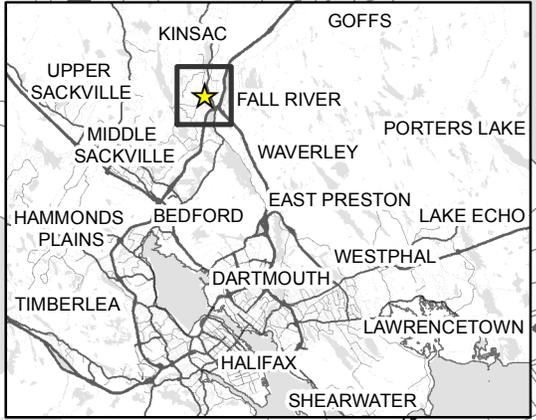
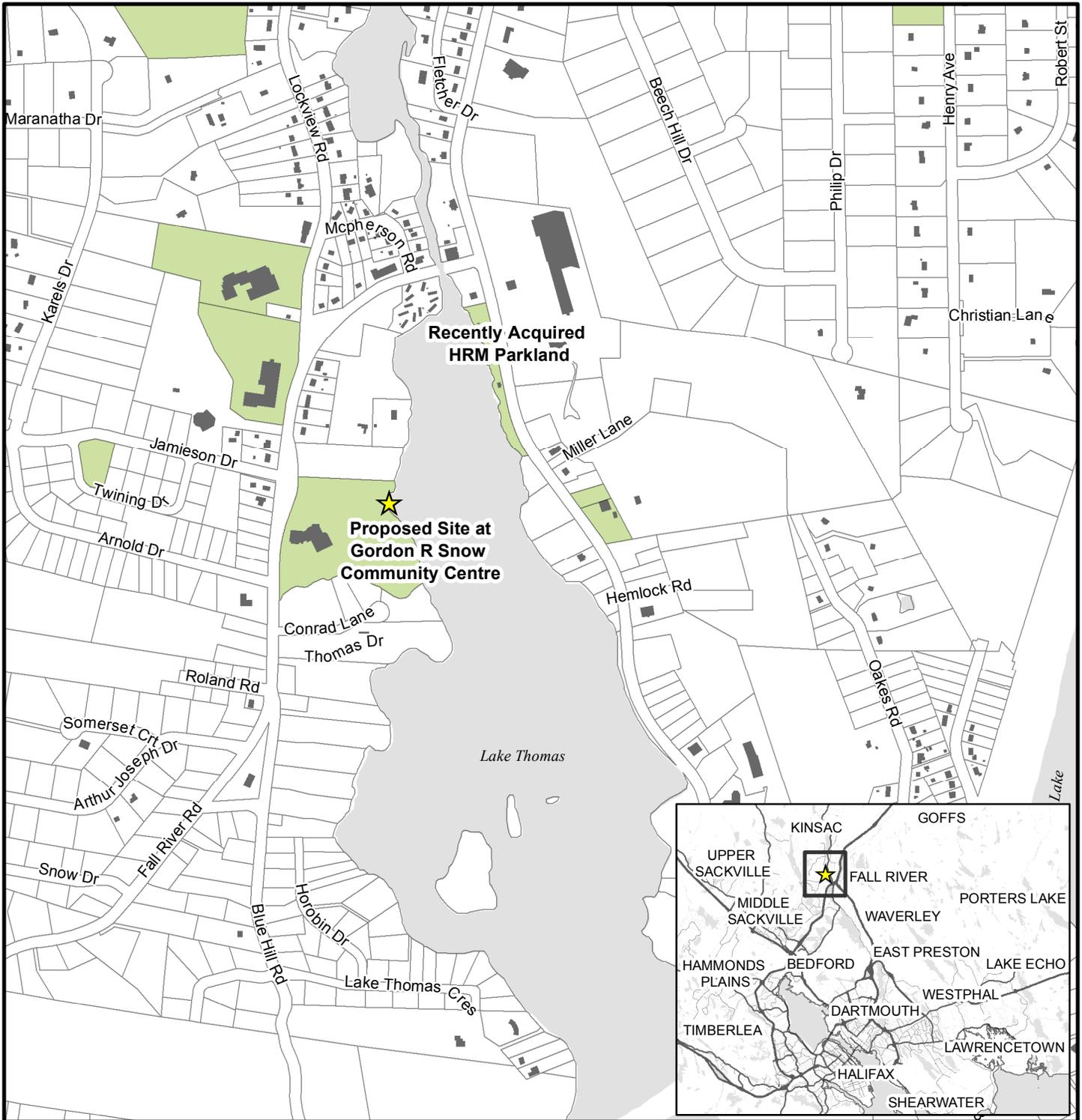
Attachment A: Proposed Site at Gordon R. Snow Community Centre

Attachment B: Existing Patterns in Municipal Beach Service Provision

Attachment C: Visual Representation of Combined Stationary and Floating Dock

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

Report Prepared by: Siobhan Witherbee, Parks Planning Intern, Parks and Recreation, 902.490.6822



Map 1 - Context

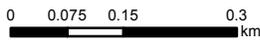
Council Report - Beach and Park at Gordon R. Snow Community Centre
 Fall River, NS

-  Proposed Site at Gordon R Snow Community Centre
-  Parcels
-  Buildings
-  HRM Parkland
-  Lakes and Ocean

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 Policy & Planning



The accuracy of any representation on
 this plan is not guaranteed.



Property Belonging to the Estate of Selena Jefferson

Site of Potential Picnic Area

Site of Potential Stationary-Floating Dock

Fire Station 45

Gordon R Snow Community Centre

Selena Jefferson Walking Trails

Lake Thomas

FALL RIVER

CONRAD

Property Boundaries

Walkways and Trails

0 20 40 80 m

Attachment A: Proposed Site at Gordon R. Snow Community Centre

Attachment B: Existing Patterns in Municipal Beach Service Provision

Current Beach Service Provision

Service levels for beach access have not been formally defined by the municipality. HRM currently provides 23 guarded beaches for swimming in the municipality. Based on these current levels of service provision, the majority (88%) of residents have access to municipal guarded beaches within 12km or a 20 minute drive. This service standard could be considered by Regional Council to be a regional level of access, as the majority of residents must leave their home community to access a guarded beach.

An additional 9 provincial guarded beaches and 17 unsupervised swimming areas are located within the municipal boundary using GIS. The combination of these three beach types changes the current beach service provision from 12km to 7km, and from a 20 minute drive time to a 12 minute drive (Table A3.1). However, residents may still be required to drive to neighbouring communities for access to designated guarded or unsupervised swimming opportunities.

Table A3.1: Current Beach Service Provision – Percentage of HRM Residents with Access to Beaches*

	Municipal Beaches	Municipal + Provincial Guarded Beaches	All Guarded Beaches Identified Swimming Areas
15km	93%	94%	94%
14km	92%	94%	94%
13km	91%	93%	93%
12km	89%	92%	92%
11km	86%	90%	91%
10km	84%	89%	90%
9km	83%	87%	88%
8km	80%	84%	86%
7km	77%	80%	84%
6km	73%	75%	81%
5km	68%	70%	78%

* Method: Reverse engineering process (start at 15km, incrementally reduce catchment) to see where access starts to significantly drop off. Flagged: access reduction of 3% or more associated with catchment reduction of 1km

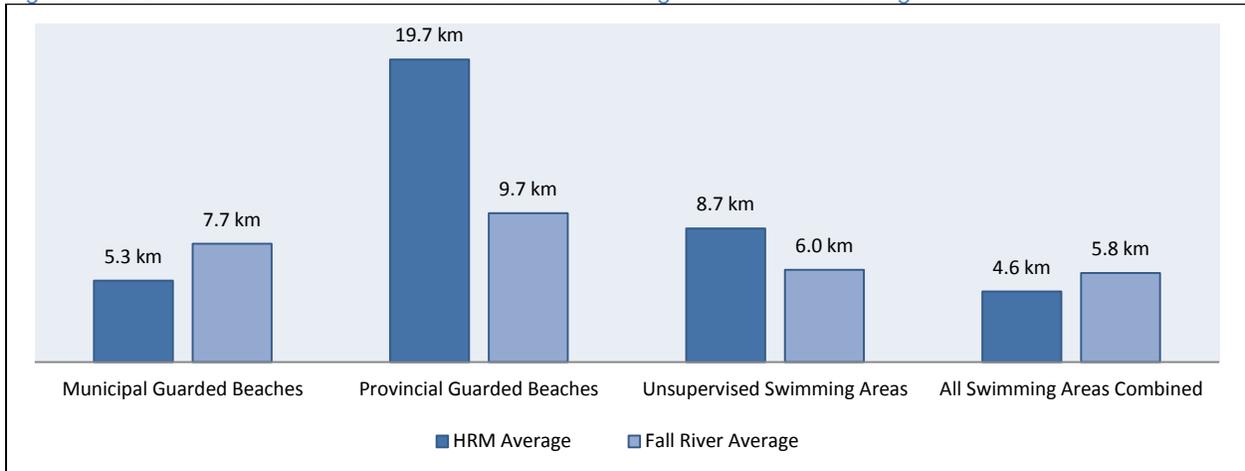
There are currently four public beaches within 12km of Gordon R Snow Community Centre:

- 5.6km: Three Mile Lake (unguarded)
- 8.1km: Lakeview Park Beach on Rocky Lake (unguarded)
- 9.2km: Laurie Beach (unguarded)
- 10.6km: Kinsmen Beach (guarded)

Three Mile Lake beach exists as large boulders on the side of the Cobequid Road that people tend to jump off into the lake. In recent years, signs have been posted to prevent drivers from pulling over to the side of the road to access the water at this location. Lakeview Park Beach is small, rocky, and unguarded. Laurie Beach is frequented by Fall River residents; however, it is also rocky and unsupervised. The nearest guarded beach to Gordon R. Snow Community Centre is Kinsmen Beach in Lower Sackville (15 minute drive). Kinsmen Beach was closed due to water quality for 39 days last season, or 63% of the summer. These closures have been an ongoing issue due to the abundance of ducks polluting the water. Beyond the 12km current service boundary, the provincially guarded Oakfield Beach is also frequented by the Fall River community. There is a sandy beach, but users must drive 14.0km or roughly 25 minutes to reach this location.

Figure A3.2 illustrates the average distance needed for residents to access beach and swimming opportunities. The average distance for HRM residents is compared to the average distance for Fall River residents.

Figure A3.2: Distance Travelled to Water Access: HRM Average vs. Fall River Average



Based on the above distribution, the Fall River community is reasonably-served by beaches compared to other HRM residents (on **average**). Overall, Fall River residents have better access to provincial guarded beaches and unsupervised swimming areas than other HRM residents. Where Fall River is slightly behind is in access to municipal guarded beaches and all swimming areas combined.

On a larger scale, Fall River has better access than the **majority** of residents with guarded service within 12km (Kinsmen Beach) and unsupervised opportunities within 7km (Three Mile Lake Beach).

Attachment C: Visual Representation of Combined Stationary and Floating Dock

Figure C.1: Example of Combination Stationary and Floating Dock



Figure C.2: Proposed Location of Combination Stationary and Floating Dock

