



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

Item No. 15.1.9

Regional Council
December 12, 2023

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: November 20, 2023

SUBJECT: Case 22257: Regional Plan Review: Phase 4 Draft Plan What We Heard

ORIGIN

On June 20, 2023, Regional Council passed the following motion: Item 18.2:

- THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:
 1. Accept the Draft Regional Municipal Planning Strategy included in Attachment A of the staff report dated June 16, 2023 to be used for public engagement purposes;
 2. Adopt the amendments to the Public Participation Program for the Regional Plan Review in Attachment F of the staff report dated June 16, 2023 and direct the Chief Administrative Officer to follow the revised Public Participation Program for the Regional Plan Review as generally set out in Attachment B and as outlined in the Community Engagement section of the staff report dated June 16, 2023; and
 3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to follow the revised work plan schedule as generally outlined in Attachment C of the staff report dated June 16, 2023 – Regional Plan Work Plan and Attachment D of the staff report dated June 16, 2023 – Site-Specific Requests.

On July 11, 2023, Regional Council passed the following motion: Item 15.1.10

- THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:
 - ...
 2. Use the Regional Plan Review engagement program, as presented to Regional Council on June 20, 2023, as the initial public participation program policy guiding the Suburban Plan
 - ...

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter (HRM Charter), Part VIII, Planning & Development and Part IX, Subdivision.

RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Accept the Draft Regional Plan What We Heard Report included as Attachment A; and
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to follow the recommended approach to site-specific requests for Regional Plan amendments as generally outlined in Attachment B.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Draft Regional Plan was presented to Regional Council in June 2023. From June 20, 2023 until October 27, 2023, staff engaged with stakeholders and the public on the Draft, and the results of the engagement are provided in this report.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an overview of the process and results of the community engagement conducted on the Draft Regional Plan, between June 20 and October 27, 2023;
- Highlight the adjustments anticipated to the Regional Plan policies based on the feedback received, along with internal staff review;
- Highlight feedback received to inform the Suburban Plan process; and
- Provide an update on site-specific requests.

The work undertaken to date has been consistent with the Public Participation Program and the Regional Plan Review Work Plan endorsed by Regional Council on June 20, 2023. Based on the feedback received through the public engagement and internal staff review, Regional Planning staff are drafting a comprehensive amendment package which will include a revised Regional Plan and any amendments to Community Plans and Land Use By-laws necessary to implement the Regional Plan. This package will be brought forward to Regional Council for review and approval, targeting Spring 2024.

BACKGROUND

Regional Council initiated the Regional Plan Review in February 2020. Previous deliverables included the [Themes & Directions Report](#) and the [Themes & Directions What We Heard Report](#). This was followed by Regional Council's approval of a set of amendments ([Phase 3 Quick Adjustments](#)) in October 2022. In June 2023, the [Draft Regional Plan](#) was released for public engagement purposes. It was anticipated that refinements to the Draft Plan would result from this feedback and that a revised Regional Plan would be prepared for consideration of Regional Council in 2024.

In July 2023, Regional Council approved the initiation of the [Suburban Plan](#), using the Regional Plan Review Phase 4 engagement program as the initial public participation program guiding the Suburban Plan. Draft Guiding Principles and Draft Design Guidelines for the Suburban Plan were provided as part of the Draft Regional Plan, along with draft policies relating to Complete Communities. Council also approved on this date that site-specific amendments to Municipal Planning Strategies in the Suburban Area be considered through the Suburban Plan process.

Draft Regional Plan Engagement

Public engagement took place from June 20 to October 27, 2023. The What We Heard Report (Attachment A) summarizes the input resulting from over 1000 submissions and interactions during this time. The Public Participation Program focused on sharing the Draft Regional Plan and providing opportunities to collect meaningful feedback through broad and inclusive engagement. While previous Regional Plan Review engagement focused on digital tools in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, this phase of engagement brought a renewed focus on in-person engagement options. Event times and locations were selected

regarding their accessibility for a range of people. There was a special focus on events in suburban and rural areas as the Draft Plan introduced the Suburban and Rural Community Planning programs.

The Draft Regional Plan covers a range of planning topics. Accordingly, engagement materials presented background information and overviews of proposed policies for all topics within the Plan. During engagement, notable topics of immediate concern emerged, including emergency egress from communities, and amendments related to HRM's Housing Accelerator Fund application. As these issues emerged, new materials were prepared to respond to public questions. All engagement material was made available on the [project website](#).

In-person engagement

A total of 23 in-person engagement activities were held, with a total attendance of over 600 people. This included:

- 14 at locations in suburban communities;
- 6 in rural communities; and
- 3 in the Regional Centre.

Engagement included the following formats:

- 13 'Pop-ups' where planners visited public locations such as libraries, farmers' markets, and shopping malls;
- 3 'Planner Office Hours' provided the opportunity to meet municipal planners on-site at rural libraries for two full days to discuss local considerations and review the Draft Plan;
- 5 Public Open Houses were held in suburban communities, with each open house including afternoon and evening sessions; and
- 2 community meetings in Middle Sackville and Musquodoboit Harbour were organized by community groups, with Planning staff invited to present on the Draft Plan and respond to questions from residents.

Hard copies of the Draft Plan were made available at all Halifax Public Library locations.

Online engagement

Online engagement used the [Shape Your City Halifax](#) webpage as a central hub. The webpage provided the opportunity to:

- Publicize events;
- Provide dedicated phone line and email contact information for questions and submissions;
- Download the Draft Regional Plan, maps, topic summary sheets, and background materials;
- Review site-specific requests, with a dedicated [Shape Your City Halifax webpage](#);
- Post on a comment board for general feedback; and
- Complete the Suburban Plan Questionnaire.

The Suburban Plan Questionnaire was available both online and at in-person events and had a total of 56 submissions.

Live online engagement was held as a Reddit 'Ask me Anything,' with staff responding to questions posed from members of the public online.

Correspondence and stakeholder feedback

Public feedback was accepted through email, telephone, and in writing. Meetings were held virtually and in-person with external stakeholders and community groups. Many stakeholder groups have been engaged throughout the Regional Plan Review process. In total, 122 pieces of written and emailed correspondence were received. Written submissions from individuals, stakeholder groups, and the development communities provided a detailed review of the draft policy reflecting the depth of stakeholder knowledge.

Getting the word out

In-person and online engagement opportunities were publicized through:

- A public service announcement;
- HRM social media platforms;
- The Regional Plan Review E-Mailing List and the Shape Your City Halifax E-blast;
- Website updates;
- Radio advertising;
- Print ads in local newspapers across the Region.

Community groups and stakeholder organizations amplified and publicized events and ways to be involved through their own contact lists and social media. Municipal staff engaged representatives of abutting municipalities with an opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Plan.

Open houses in Suburban communities were an opportunity to discuss draft policy and learn about local neighbourhoods. Staff from the Suburban Planning team introduced the Suburban Community Planning program and its draft guiding principles. Events in rural areas were an opportunity to learn about local community goals and issues and introduce the Rural Community Planning program and staff. The feedback received will inform the Community Planning programs moving forward.

DISCUSSION

The What We Heard Report (Attachment A) summarizes key themes of feedback. Generally, the feedback was supportive of policies and objectives contained within the Draft Regional Plan. There was wide support for the concept of healthy and complete communities as a guiding framework for planning, and for environmentally focused regulations to protect sensitive ecosystems. There was concern expressed for housing supply and affordability, along with the social and physical infrastructure needed to support current and future residents. Written submissions provided a highly detailed review of draft policies, with suggestions for strengthening policy language. Refinements to the Draft Regional Plan are anticipated as a result of both public feedback and internal review.

During the public engagement period, Regional Planning staff have continued to review the Draft Plan and collaborate with other Business Units. Based on the public feedback received, as well as internal staff review, adjustments to the Plan are being contemplated as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Anticipated Plan and Policy Adjustments

Chapter	Anticipated and identified adjustments
General comments/ 1. Introduction	• Review wording throughout the document to improve readability, strengthen policy language, and provide a consistent voice throughout the document. • Chapters 1 and 2 may be combined as both are introductory in nature. • Review land acknowledgment statements. • Strengthen provisions related to accessibility, in support of the Municipality's Accessibility Strategy.
2. Planning for Our Region	• Strategic Infrastructure Planning: Public and internal feedback has highlighted the need to move quickly on planning for infrastructure and services as the municipality continues to grow at a high rate. There was feedback on the funding, timing, prioritization, and sustainability of infrastructure investments to accommodate the existing population as well as the needs of growth. The Regional Plan will be revised to further emphasize the importance of a Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Priority Plan, which will guide the Municipality's work on investing in services and infrastructure including water, wastewater and stormwater

	services, transit and mobility network infrastructure, emergency services, community and parkland facilities, among others. Staff will explore options for collaboration and options to invest in infrastructure (including through other orders of government).
3. Building Healthy and Complete Communities	• Plan Area Boundaries: There was some confusion over terms for different plan area geographies (“Urban Area” vs. “Urban Service Area”, “Suburban Area”, “Rural Area”). Revisions will be made to the Plan to clarify these terms. • Suburban Planning: The feedback included requests to update the existing Suburban-Area planning documents. The feedback will inform changes to this chapter and the Suburban Community Planning program. • Rural Planning: The feedback included support for community-led planning in rural communities. Feedback will inform the next steps of the Rural Community Planning program. • Future Serviced Communities: Additional clarity is needed in policy regarding Future Serviced Communities, so that the steps in the planning process are clear and directive for staff, developers, residents, and Council. Although there were several comments requesting the Regional Plan remove some areas currently identified as Future Serviced Communities from the Plan (such as Sandy Lake), these areas are currently being studied and such a decision is not recommended until background studies have been completed.
4. Strengthening Community Infrastructure	• Park Planning: Revisions will clarify the scope and intent of future strategic park planning. The identified Regional Park Priority Plan would not focus solely on parks classified as “Regional” but rather be an HRM-wide Park Plan (i.e. Parks Priority Plan). Planning & Development is working with Parks & Recreation to further refine this section. • Emergency Services: There was feedback which called for an increased focus on community safety and emergency planning, particularly in light of the wildfires. Staff will revise the plan to further emphasize emergency planning, including emergency egress and FireSmart practices. Planning & Development will work with Community Safety and Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency on these revisions.
5. Fostering Diverse and Affordable Housing	• Housing Accelerator Fund: There was feedback received regarding the need for increased housing options, particularly in the gentle density and missing middle form. On September 26, 2023, Regional Council directed staff to expedite amendments to planning documents in support of the Housing Accelerator Fund program, to enable a range of housing options. As the Draft Regional Plan had proposed many of the initiatives, Council directed that the feedback received through Regional Plan public engagement program be used to support these amendments. This package is expected to come forward in advance of the broader Regional Plan amendment package. More detail will be available in a separate staff report.
6. Protecting the Environment and Acting on Climate	• Halifax Green Network Plan Program (HGNNP): Feedback included a desire to see the HGNNP fully implemented and environmental considerations incorporated into all aspects of the Municipality’s operations. Recognizing that there is a desire for strong policy language that demonstrates a commitment to the HGNNP, staff will review and

	revise the Regional Plan to ensure the intent of all policies and their implementation is clear. Staff note that many of the HGNP actions are directions for ongoing work which are being used regularly by Parks & Recreation, and Environment & Climate Change supports related work under the HalifACT program. The Regional Plan Review is implementing HGNP actions related to land use planning through amendments to planning policy and associated land use by-law regulations (for example, an increase to the watercourse buffer from 20 metres to 30 metres, region-wide). The Draft Regional Plan also establishes policy intent for future community planning work. • Ecological Corridors: The Halifax Green Network Plan identified a series of Essential and Important Corridors for the movement of wildlife throughout the municipality's green network. The Draft Regional Plan included a preliminary draft approach for implementation of this corridor program. Both public and internal feedback clearly identified that the draft policy needs revision. It is expected that multiple tools for regulating development will be required, as well as ongoing programs to explore opportunities for restoration. This is expected to require ongoing work as part of the Halifax Green Network Plan program. • Wetland Protection: Feedback included requests for better protection for wetlands. The Municipality's authority is limited, as the Provincial Department of Environment & Climate Change is responsible for issuing wetland alteration permits. Regional Plan policy will be adjusted to more clearly identify the need to gather additional wetland data and support future wetland protection measures. • Floodplains: Feedback included requests for further work to map and regulate development in floodplains. The Draft Regional Plan policy will be revised to more clearly describe the future work that is required to respond to flood risk.
7. Transforming How We Move in Our Region	• Investing in Mobility Infrastructure: Public feedback included requests for better transit and active transportation infrastructure. There is a need to clearly identify that the Municipality will invest in mobility infrastructure as the region grows. The Regional Plan will be revised to identify that mobility infrastructure will be a significant component of the Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Priority Plan. • Updated Mobility Plans: Other Business Units including Halifax Transit, Public Works (including Active Transportation, Road Safety and Parking Services) have identified intent to undertake new strategies. The intent and scope of this work will be identified in the Regional Plan.
8. Supporting Economic Prosperity	• Industrial Land Policies: There is a need to further clarify how the policies of the Regional Plan relate to industrial land planning at the community level. Minor adjustments to this chapter will provide clarity and direction for future work.
9. Celebrating Culture and Heritage	• Sharing Our Stories: When the Draft Regional Plan was published in June 2023, Sharing our Stories: HRM's Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan had not yet been presented to the Heritage Advisory Committee or Regional Council. Minor amendments are expected to the Regional Plan to recognize Sharing Our Stories as adopted.
10. Implementation	• Discretionary Application Policy: The Regional Plan will establish one consistent policy for discretionary applications, replacing all existing general implementation policies as contained within each secondary plan. Minor adjustments are expected to this section. • Indicators: Many key performance indicators are already monitored

	through Corporate Strategic Planning, Halifax Partnership's Halifax Index, the Integrated Mobility Dashboard, etc. The Regional Plan indicators will therefore identify the components of the Growth Monitoring Program, outlined in Section 2.6.1 of the Draft Regional Plan.
--	--

Site Specific Requests

Staff have continued to receive requests from property owners or their representatives for amendments to the Regional Plan and/or community plans for specific properties or areas of land. Since the release of the Draft Regional Plan in June 2023, an additional 9 requests were received, and 1 was withdrawn by the applicant. Attachment B provides an outline of all requests and provides details including the type of request, relevant existing policy, considerations for the Regional Plan Review, and staff's recommended approach. An [interactive map](#) showing the location of all requests is available on a dedicated Shape Your City page. Staff reviewed all requests against existing planning policy, including the Regional Plan, applicable secondary municipal plans, and priorities plans (including the Halifax Green Network Plan, Integrated Mobility Plan, and HalifACT). Recommended approaches to the requests were developed based on their consistency with Regional Plan and priority plan objectives, the opportunities and constraints on each site, and the level of additional study and analysis that may be required for staff to develop amendments within the anticipated timeline of the Review.

Of the 9 new requests received, staff are recommending that 8 requests should be considered during Phase 5. During Phase 5, staff will undertake a Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Priority Plan, which will guide whether future infrastructure and servicing should be expanded outside of the current Urban Service Area boundary. One request (C787, which requests industrial rezoning in Harrietsfield) is not recommended by staff at this time, as the lot does not have road frontage and is not capable of meeting the road frontage required by the land use by-law. Instead, zoning in this area will be considered as part the future the Rural Community Planning program.

Based on the range of requests received, during Phase 5, particular focus will be given to:

- Considering whether, how and where future serviced development should be considered beyond the boundaries of the current Urban Area;
- The Growth Control (Schedule J) areas in Beaver Bank and Hammonds Plains, and its relationship to community connections and emergency egress from existing neighbourhoods;
- The Middle Sackville area, which is seeing significant development pressure as well as water quality concerns in the Springfield Lake area;
- Ensuring collaboration with African Nova Scotian communities to review land use policy and service provision in these communities in line with their community development objectives.

Staff note that requests for the Suburban Planning area that do not require amendments to the Regional Plan or Regional Subdivision By-Law have been directed to the Suburban Plan process in line with [Regional Council's direction on July 12, 2023](#). These will be managed in a separate staff report.

Next Steps

Regional Planning staff are now working to revise the Regional Plan policy and write the full amendment package which will include supportive amendments to all community plans and land use by-laws. Staff are targeting Spring 2024 to present the final amendment package to Regional Council. A public hearing must be held before Council can considering approving the Plan.

Phase 5, considering future growth scenarios, will begin immediately following the adoption of the Regional Plan. It is anticipated that this phase will include developing a Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Priority Plan and may result in further amendments the Regional Plan.

Conclusion

This report provides an overview of the public engagement for Phase 4 of the Regional Plan Review work

program, which took place from June 20, 2023 to October 27, 2023. Attachment A provides the What We Heard Report. Attachment B provides an update on Site-specific requests. Feedback received on the Draft Regional Plan will be incorporated into a full amendment package for Regional Council's consideration in Spring 2024.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs associated with undertaking the Regional Plan review identified in the work plan for 2023-2024 can be accommodated within the approved 2023-2024 operating budget.

RISK CONSIDERATION

This report involves proposed amendments to the Regional Plan. No risks are identified at this time.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Regional Plan includes a range of policies that deal both directly and indirectly with the natural environment. Chapter 6 of the Draft Regional Plan includes comprehensive policies regarding the environment and climate issues, and the Plan supports the objectives of the Halifax Green Network Plan and HalifACT. Site-specific plan amendment requests have considered the environmental objectives of the Regional Plan and Priorities Plans.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council may choose to initiate the consideration of potential policy that would differ from those outlined in this report. This may require a supplementary report from staff.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Draft Regional Plan What We Heard Report
Attachment B: Site-Specific Amendment Requests

A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](https://www.halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Dave Paterson, Principal Planner, Regional Planning, 902.229.8860
Leah Perrin, Manager, Regional Planning, 902.476.3792
Telina Debly, Planner II, Regional Planning
Anne Totten, Planner III, Regional Planning
Kathleen Fralic, Principal Planner, Suburban Planning
