

African Canadian Engagement Summary Report:

Diamond Head Consulting: HRM Urban Forest Management Master Plan

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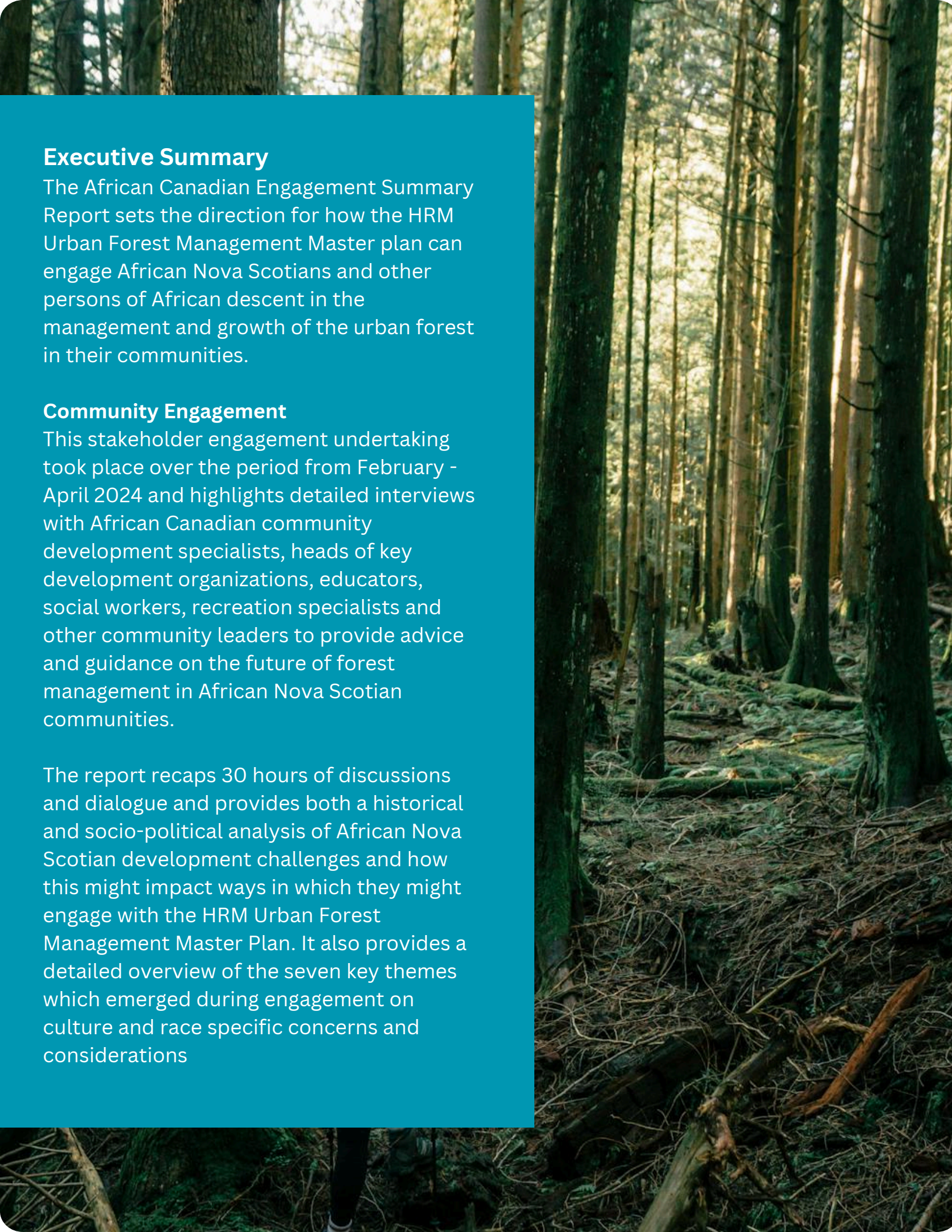
Purpose of Engagement: To inform and consult with African Canadian stakeholders on key directions to be taken to update the Halifax Regional Municipality Urban Forest Management Master Plan

Engagement Timeline: February - April 2024



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A photograph of a forest with tall, thin trees and sunlight filtering through the canopy. The image is split vertically. The left half is a solid teal color with white text. The right half is a photograph of a forest with tall, thin trees and sunlight filtering through the canopy. The forest floor is covered in fallen branches and leaves.

Executive Summary

The African Canadian Engagement Summary Report sets the direction for how the HRM Urban Forest Management Master plan can engage African Nova Scotians and other persons of African descent in the management and growth of the urban forest in their communities.

Community Engagement

This stakeholder engagement undertaking took place over the period from February - April 2024 and highlights detailed interviews with African Canadian community development specialists, heads of key development organizations, educators, social workers, recreation specialists and other community leaders to provide advice and guidance on the future of forest management in African Nova Scotian communities.

The report recaps 30 hours of discussions and dialogue and provides both a historical and socio-political analysis of African Nova Scotian development challenges and how this might impact ways in which they might engage with the HRM Urban Forest Management Master Plan. It also provides a detailed overview of the seven key themes which emerged during engagement on culture and race specific concerns and considerations

Scope of the Engagement

In spring 2024, as part of the process to update the Halifax Regional Municipality's Urban Forest Management Plan, a stakeholder engagement initiative was undertaken with members of the African Canadian community. Engagement spanned approximately four weeks and included a variety of options for participation. This included opportunities for in-person and online focus groups, as well as in-person and online one-to-one interviews. However, due to the availability of participants, engagement took place primarily as one-to-one online interviews. 2 of the 18 interview sessions were conducted in pairs. Each of the 18 interview sessions were approximately 60 – 90 minutes in length.

Who We Heard From

A total of 20 individuals were interviewed. The participant selection guidelines were designed to emphasize the importance of voices from diverse communities of people of African descent. This included representation from individuals who identify as African Nova Scotians, African-Caribbean, and Continental African. Three of the 20 individuals interviewed and identify as newcomer Canadians and two individuals identify as first generation Canadian. The remaining 15 individuals identify as African Nova Scotian.

Gender and Age Distribution

Below is a pie chart visualization for gender and age distribution data. The left chart represents gender distribution, showing that 65% of the respondents are female and 35% are male. The right chart depicts age distribution, with most respondents (30%) falling in the 61-70 years age range.

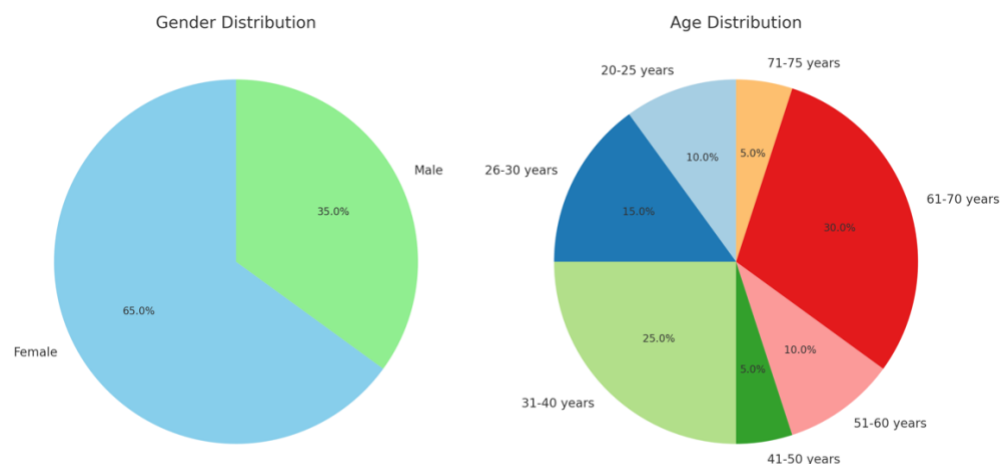


Figure 1. Demography

Gender Identify

13 individuals identify as female

7 individuals identify as male

Age Distribution

2 individuals indicate being between age 20 - 25 years

3 individuals indicate being between age 26 - 30 years

5 individuals indicate being between age 31 - 40 years

1 individual indicates being between age 41 - 50 years

2 individuals indicate being between age 51 - 60 years

6 individuals indicate being between age 61 - 70 years

1 individual indicates being between age 71 - 75 years

Community Representation

The 20 individuals interviewed were drawn from a broad spectrum of African Canadian communities. Including:

- Historic African Nova Scotian communities
- Newcomer African-Caribbean Community
- Newcomer Continental African Community
- Rural, Sub-Urban and Urban communities

Historic African Nova Scotian and Other HRM Communities Represented

- Beechville
- Hammonds Plains
- East Preston
- North Preston
- Cherry Brook
- Lake Loon
- Africville
- North End Halifax
- Old Dartmouth,
- Suburban Halifax (Clayton Park)
- West End Halifax.

Organizational Representation

A variety of community-based organizations, and individuals from a broad occupational spectrum were consulted and engaged in interview. Including:

- Public School teachers
- Public Library Youth Worker
- Community Economic Development Specialist/Executive Director
- Social Workers
- Physician
- Public School Student Support Worker
- Musicians/Artists/Writers
- Photographer/Film Maker
- Property Manager/Developer
- Master of Architecture Student & Community Planning Graduate
- Graduate Student (Biology)
- Media and Film Studies Graduate
- HRM Recreation Executive Director
- Housing Development Coordinator/Administrator
- Jamaica Canadian/Caribbean Association
- Africville Genealogy Society/Africville Heritage Trust
- Lake Loon and Cherry Brook Community Development Association
- East Preston Day Care
- East Preston Recreation Association
- North Preston Recreation Association
- Hammonds Plains Land Trust
- Akoma Holdings Incorporated

What We Heard

Summary of feedback for the urban forest long-term vision

When considering a vision for the future urban forest all participants emphasized the Importance of community input in shaping the urban forest management plan. They highlighted the need for their voices to be heard due to unique perspectives and concerns. Aspirations for an ideal urban forest management plan vision tailored to needs of the African Nova Scotian community emphasized themes that include the need for of [policy, programming, and protection](#).

The need for robust *policies* characterized by their capacity to impact real transformation and change was consistently raised by engagement participants. Such policies will guarantee access, inclusion, diversity, and equity in the allocation of resources for forestry related programs. Additionally, adapting a suite of relevant policies can ensure enforcement of measures aimed at climate action and protecting the urban forest from excessive commercial development.

Some engagement participants discussed the need to undertake research and review of land clearing policies in HRM to understand what can and cannot be done on one's own land, particularly in African Nova Scotian communities. It was concluded that a policy review can assist with compliance and conservation of natural resources such as trees.

"There is a need for clear, understandable policies and information in urban forest management."

Engagement participants also see formal *programming* as a vital part of the vision for the future urban forest - noting that opportunities to participate in formal learning programs about environmental issues as well as economic, social, health, cultural and other issues and benefits of the urban forest, would be fully welcomed if provided.

"Implement a program for learning about tree care and tree health and incorporating forest knowledge into programs for children. This would be useful along with exploring the possibility of incorporating urban forested lands learning activities with the children in the [recreation] program. Consider leveraging the peaceful and educational aspects of nature for enhanced learning experiences....."

"I'd like to see some sessions where, you know, the old folks come in and tell us about the trees and how they use nature."

A third theme identified as an important ingredient of the vision for the future urban forest is *protection*. The most referenced issue related to the need for protection of urban forest was commercial development. Engagement participants defined commercial development as large-scale residential housing complexes - both single family and multi-unit, as well as business and

industrial parks. Participants talked about many of the detrimental effects on the livelihood of African Nova Scotian people and communities nearby, as well as on the overall environmental quality of land and air in the surrounding areas. Chief among concerns identified was disappearing green spaces. They highlighting challenges faced by historical African Nova Scotian communities in preserving green spaces amidst urbanization, stressing the preservation of historic areas and community engagement in green spaces. They noted commercial development negatively affects the ability to connect with nature. Disappearing trees, wildlife and cultural ways of life connected to the land such as fishing and farming all sound an alarm to protect urban forest and the need for tailored preservation policies for African Canadian and many other at-risk communities.

“I mean, yeah, but development of urban forest could lead to gentrification of the [African Nova Scotian] community.”

“They're literally ruining the aesthetic of the neighborhood because they're developing on these green areas that have lots of trees. And I don't think people understand. Trees are very important in terms of our air quality.... So when they come in and do a development, it just ruins everything because first you get rid of the trees and the greenery. So now we got poor air quality, and then you get rid of all the natural things...the deer leave, the bears leave, the foxes leave etc.”

Summary of feedback for protecting the urban forest

Fourteen of the 20 participants indicate they are homeowners and as such all 14 indicated they regularly maintain the trees on their property. Approximately half of the 14 homeowners indicated they or someone in their household is knowledgeable about tree care and health. There was a pervasive theme that “charity begins at home” in other words, by first learning to care for trees on your own property it cultivates care and concern for protecting the urban forest on a larger scale. Among the activities participants reported undertaking to protect their trees include regular trimming and pruning, protecting and treating soil at the base of the trees, spreading peat moss at the base of trees prior to winter, watering flowering trees and shrubs during hot and dry spells, and consulting a tree specialist if a tree looks infected.

Conversations with engagement participant about tree protection invariably turned into stories of tree loss due to encroachment and mass purchases of community lands by commercial developers. Many participants feel caring for trees on their own property is a manageable task. However, caring for trees in the wider community requires infrastructure and resources African Nova Scotian communities do not have access to.

“So right now we're involved in the black climate project where, you know, we got to better prepare and protect our communities. Having all these trees around us.”

“That forestry there, the acres of forest protected the church. It protected the community in general. We never got the full hit of a storm..... we lost so much forestry in the community, which we took for granted. Those were the hunting grounds for the, you know, older men like my dad and those guys all hunted in those woods.”

Summary of feedback for managing the urban forest

Regarding feedback on managing urban forests, a noteworthy point of view expressed by several participants underlined the need to examine the use of the term Management as it pertains to maintenance of forested lands. Several participants feel the term is a misnomer. The use of a term widely associated with efficient business operations and corporate affairs does not accurately communicate or capture the goals and intentions of urban forest conservation and climate action programming.

One participant commented *“I don’t know why it sounds like cutting down a forest”*. A second participant notes *“It sounds like you're going to be cutting down trees, not saving them”*. A third participant commented *“I was like, what the heck is an urban forestry management plan?”* It appears language may be a barrier to communicating goals and intentions which may have implications for community engagement in some instances.

In discussing forest management participants also mentioned the need to have discussion on the intersection between urban forest proposals and residential developments. As well, they emphasized the importance of planners considering green spaces and urban forest integration in community design.

Further considering the issue of management pertaining to city operations to maintain existing trees, including planting, watering, pruning, risk management, pests, and disease management, participants discussed the importance of involving the community in decision-making processes for urban forest management. Although only 2 out of 20 participants indicated they have participated in a formal tree planting event, 100% of participants said they are willing to volunteer at planting and other events in their community, to support urban forest management initiatives, if the opportunity is presented. Participants were quick to note the low participation of African Nova Scotians in mainstream urban forest management activities is not a factor of disinterest, but rather a lack of access to information about such events.

A lack of information about pest and disease control is another example that was brought to light. A representative of a community land trust in Dartmouth pointed out their 320-acre land holding was impacted by an invasive bug species two decades ago. At that time, many trees were cut down to slow down and arrest the problem. However, to their recollection HRM did not provide any education, conservation, or tree health programs to engage the African Nova Scotian community in managing and protecting their forest areas which were at risk and under attack.

The desire for more knowledge and information to empower individuals to take care of the forestry infrastructure around their own property and their own communities was very high among participants. Some participants believe the lack of information transfer and opportunities to be self-determining may be creating the erroneous impression that the African Nova Scotian community does not feel urban forest management is a priority issue. Two of the participants summed up the intersection between historic racial marginalization and current-day prioritization of urban forest management in their comments below.

"In my opinion, I think that we value it, but I just don't know if we know that we can make it better."

"Well, I think the only reason it's not being prioritized is that we are still wrapped up in claiming our land rights. Once you get your land back, then you can start to begin to plan. Like, you can't.... we can't do anything until we get our land back."

Summary of feedback for growing the urban forest

All 20 engagement participants indicate they support programs, and activities aimed at growing the urban forest. However, only 2 participants have ever participated in an organized tree planting event on city owned property. Rural and suburban participants noted they reside in heavily treed areas and have not had the need to plant trees on their own properties.

Several participants discussed the disappearance of fruit trees. They mentioned apple, cherry, plum, and hazelnut trees were once plentiful and are now scarce or barely existent. This seemed to be a distressing issue for some. Participants from different communities have offered similar explanations for the disappearance of fruit trees, which they attribute to poor soil irrigation. In one example the participant speculated that HRM dynamite blasting of bedrock, to install city water pipes, drastically disrupted the water table causing ponds and swamps in the area to dry up within days. It is believed the emptying of the waterbed caused fruit trees to die. In a second example, a participant speculates that industrial development and rerouting of water systems, impacted soil irrigation, which may explain the loss of fruit trees.

A possible solution to the disappearance of fruit trees is currently being examined by an African Canadian working group which is part of the HRM Just Food Plan. A core recommendation of this group is to plant fruit trees in African Nova Scotian communities. Numerous engagement participants support this idea. They feel this proposed program of action is in alignment with community needs and it contributes toward the goal of growing the urban forest.

Summary of feedback for engaging and partnering for inclusive urban forest management

All 20 individuals interviewed strongly support the need for strategies that ensure engagement of African Nova Scotians in forest management of trees in historic African Nova Scotian communities. Forming partnerships with HRM and collaborating with HRM community planning officials was advanced as a potentially positive action. Several participants discussed the need to undertake a mapping project to create an inventory and baseline of forest resources in the historic African Nova Scotian communities located in HRM. It was noted such a project would enhance community stewardship and self-determination. However, it was noted that a large-scale project of this nature requires access to technical and research resources as well as support to undertake data analysis of property records that HRM maintains. Therefore, forming partnerships and collaborating with HRM is essential.

Participants also discussed knowledge transfer and education in the areas of tree planting, watering, invasive species management and other similar technical information, also presents opportunities for collaborations between African Nova Scotian organizations (such as community development associations) and HRM. Some participants were quick to point out that collaboration is not a one-way knowledge transfer of information flowing from HRM to African Nova Scotian communities, but rather, it is a two-way transfer because of the specific inter-general cultural knowledge about the forest held by African Nova Scotians.

More importantly, participants both emphasized and highlighted the need to prioritize inclusive engagement strategies for African Nova Scotian communities in managing urban forests because of their unique and culture-specific needs. Conversations explored the importance of collaborations on sustainable approaches for forest management given the evolving landscapes of those communities and the lack of resources for those communities to self-manage.

One participant provided a salient example of how collaboration between African Nova Scotian community organizations and HRM is transforming the very fabric of community engagement and decision-making to produce inclusive models of resource management for all HRM residents.

“So, community benefits agreements are throughout the country. However, we’re the only province that doesn’t have them. All that means is presently when a developer goes in and buys a property, the only accountability is to HRM... right? So, community benefits agreements mean there’s a group in the community that they’re [developers] also accountable to. When we [Beechville residents] put that forward, council said, that’s a great idea, but why don’t we do it for everybody?”

Summary of Key Takeaways

The following is a summary of key takeaways from [What We Heard](#)

1. Community input is essential for the urban forest management plan.
2. There is a need for policies that promote access, inclusion, diversity, and equity.
3. Participants desire clear information and formal programming about urban forest management.
4. Protecting urban forests from commercial development is crucial.
5. Preserving green spaces is important for cultural practices and environmental quality.
6. Participants are concerned about the impact of disappearing trees on air quality and wildlife.
7. There is a need to reconsider the terminology used in urban forest management.
8. Community involvement in decision-making processes is important.
9. Participants are willing to volunteer in urban forest management initiatives if informed about opportunities.
10. Participants support programs aimed at growing the urban forest.
11. Planting fruit trees and addressing soil irrigation issues are important.
12. Initiatives like the HRM Just Food Plan align with community needs.
13. Strategies are needed to engage African Nova Scotians in forest management.
14. Forming partnerships and collaborating with HRM is crucial.
15. Knowledge transfer and education on tree care and invasive species management are important.

Culture Specific Considerations and Concerns

Introduction

This engagement summary report highlights comments and questions heard from participants who identify as persons of African descent. This includes those who identify as: African Canadian, African Nova Scotian, African Caribbean, and Continental African. The importance of incorporating the unique perspectives of residents who identify as persons of African descent, into the Urban Forest Management Plan, is critical because of their unique perspectives and concerns, as well as their more than 250-year history of systemic economic neglect, social exclusion, and racial marginalization.

The 20 engagement participants discussed a variety of topics related to culture-specific considerations in updating the UFMP. Throughout the engagement process common themes began to arise. These themes have been grouped into seven foundational elements and are discussed below.

UFM X Awareness/Education/Knowledge Transfer

Prior to participating in the UFM engagement interviews, none of the 20 engagement participants had any prior knowledge of the HRM Forest Management Plan, and they believe race plays a significant part in that lack of awareness. Participants discussed issues such as: the historic exclusion of African Nova Scotians from civic affairs; Low involvement in many aspects of civic issues due to individual and collective exhaustion caused by racial battle fatigue; The need to prioritize basic human rights such as education, housing, employment, health, legal justice, etc. which has eclipsed other less urgent issues such as UFM. Participants also discussed the lack of culture and race-specific communications methods to disseminate information to African Nova Scotians on matters such as UFM.

Despite these barriers to awareness, education and knowledge, participants expressed high interest and eagerness to learn more about the urban forest. They identified formal opportunities for knowledge transfer through culture-specific public information campaigns as a possible strategy. The absence of people of African descent formally educated, trained, and employed in fields such as: environmental science, sustainability, horticulture, agricultural science, community, and urban planning etc., was also mentioned as a factor contributing to the UFM knowledge desert in the African Nova Scotian community. These issues were addressed as recommendations and areas for improvement.

Related Participant Comments

“Organize education sessions for the community to discuss the urban forest management plan.”

“Share information on what healthy the trees should look like and where they should be placed.”

“Teach people how individuals derive knowledge and learning from forested area.”

“More emphasis and education on understanding how urban forests are currently used.”

“Incorporating Forest knowledge into programs for children.”

“Develop plans for future initiatives related to community development and education opportunities.”

“We need scholarships, bursaries and internships for African Nova Scotian students to get degrees and diplomas in these fields.”

“We need information so individual understanding how they can, you know, take care of the forestry infrastructure around their own property and then I think locally in their own communities.”

UFM X Culture/History/Nature/Spirituality

Participants repeatedly emphasized the need for urban forest management to reflect community desires and values. They note that nature and wildlife perceptions are influenced by historical, cultural, spiritual and community contexts. Many talked about African culture and its inherent respect for all other living species including plant species – especially trees. Participants highlighted the importance of UFM reflecting lived experiences of African Nova Scotians in respect to their engagement with forests.

The history of early Black Refugees and Black Loyalists as former enslaved people who were neglected by the British - left to fend for themselves, unsheltered in the forest - has impacted perceptions of the forest. Some feel those early encounters in the Nova Scotian forests, forged a deeply spiritual reverence for nature and trees. Additionally, early former enslaved Africans depended heavily on the land, forest, and trees for survival. Trees were essential as fuel, as wood to build shelters, as income from the sale of wood, as subsistence income for women who made baskets and wreathes to sell in city markets, and as food, by tapping maple trees for syrup and sweet water.

Much of contemporary economic, cultural, social, and spiritual life of African Nova Scotians - including the building of their 52 historic communities - was shaped by relationships to the land and trees. Consequently, participants believe UFM policies, programs and protection strategies will serve African Nova Scotian communities well only if they honour the culture, history, spiritual beliefs and lived experiences of African Nova Scotian people.

Participant comments below capture relevant sentiments about community, culture, values, history, and spirituality.

"When you think about the significance of the tree, it's very powerful. It's very symbolic. Trees connect us. Many cultures believe trees have spirits."

"So, trees are very much part of the, you know, the history of communities and of property."

"Markers of time. Particularly when they're on your property. They're almost like family members because they've been there."

"And those trees earmark family history, because we can go to a tree and say, remember when you fell from that tree when you were young."

"I enjoy walking throughout the community and looking at the vegetation, the woods [trees]."

"I feel very connected to nature even though I don't spend a lot of time in nature, but just those concepts, like I feel like when I'm on certain lands just that concept of the fact that it's true that these trees have seen it all. Like, they've seen generations of my family pass through this community. I do think it's very powerful, and it's, I think it has an impact when those things are gone or lost".

"I think they need to talk more about how Black people interact with the environment, because the truth is that black people out here especially, we have a history with this place. We hunt, we hunted out here. We did everything out here. So, I think they must talk about how people interact with their environment".

"And part of who we are culturally is the red maple, really, which is, ironic, when you think about it, that's the Canadian symbol. And, like, it's what the baskets were made of. It's what Clara Gough, and Edith Clayton would have used. That's what they used. They used the red maple to make those baskets. And they used the red maple for fuel, too, like, to fuel the fire. And they use the red maple to build their homes. And that's the same tree would feed you as well because you can drink sweet water and maple syrup".

"We knock the wood because we're acknowledging that, we don't want to be too vain and just, assume things. So, we're like, oh, we better knock wood. Like, give thanks. Give thanks to the spirit. The tree spirit".

"Trees mean something different for us now, after the fires and especially in our communities".

"If you're spiritual, you know, there's a natural connection there."

"Like, oh, yeah because it's like, almost in our blood, or to be in the woods and to smell the smell of timber and all of that, there's that type of, like, nostalgic, ancestral thing, connection".

UFM X Recreation/Leisure/Learning/Health

Participants pointed out that connecting with urban forests for leisure, recreation, health, and exercise offers numerous benefits to African Nova Scotians in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Many individuals pointed out that the urban forests provide a natural sanctuary within the urban environment, offering opportunities for physical activity such as walking, mental relaxation, and social interaction. For African Nova Scotians, engaging with these green spaces can help counteract the stresses associated with daily racial battle fatigue and provide a sense of community and belonging. Regular interaction with nature has been shown to improve physical health by encouraging exercise and reducing the risk of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and

obesity, which are disease profiles in which African Nova Scotians are overrepresented. Additionally, participants discussed the benefits of trees and the urban forest in enhancing mental well-being by lowering stress levels and promoting overall happiness.

However, participants did not hesitate to point out that to maximize these health benefits, it is crucial for HRM to allocate more resources towards supporting and encouraging the engagement of African Nova Scotians with urban forests. Historically, marginalized communities, including African Nova Scotians, have faced barriers to accessing green spaces due to socioeconomic disparities, lack of awareness, cultural disconnects and exclusion rooted in racial discrimination. By investing in targeted outreach programs, inclusive recreational resources such as walking trails and parks in African Nova Scotian communities, as well as community-led initiatives, HRM can foster a more equitable environment where African Nova Scotian residents can enjoy and benefit from urban forests. Participants feel, that ensuring green spaces are accessible and welcoming to African Nova Scotians not only promotes health and well-being, but also strengthens community ties, and enhances the overall quality of life in the region.

Many participants expressed dissatisfaction around four key areas. These are: lack of access to parks; Lack of access to green spaces; Lack of access to walking trails; And the absence of sidewalks to facilitate walking in rural and suburban African Nova Scotian communities. They discussed challenges faced by communities accessing green spaces, especially during winter. They suggested including more parks in Black communities for better engagement with nature, and the need for better access to water sources and lakes located in forested areas in African Nova Scotian communities.

Participants did not hold back on drawing distinctions between the practices of African Nova Scotians, relative to some other cultural communities, and the fact these differences can negatively impact African Nova Scotian engagement with the urban forests for recreation leisure and health. An example that came up repeatedly was the differing orientation towards off leash pets in public parks and green spaces. One participant summed it up by saying – *“We’re not dog people in general, but many people are. Dogs unleashed - we’re literally not comfortable with that. I noticed that at Point Pleasant Park. We used to love to go there, but it was always this apprehension about, oh God, it’s going to be everyone and their dog.”* Participant offered several other comments to promote awareness of the need for culture-specific accommodations and redress.

“If we had access - If our communities had more access to trails - most trails aren’t maintained in the wintertime. But that’s okay - people can deal with that. It’s just the fact that they’re all in white communities”.

“We don’t have any sidewalks. Yes - in the rural areas there is a lack of sidewalks, but there are still people, even with the lack of sidewalks, still walking.”

“We want sidewalks in our community”.

"The natural beauty of trees is something that's very therapeutic. And it's just like, it connects you to the earth".

"If it's hot in the summertime, we go to the park, try to get under a shady tree".

"Actually, with the Freedom School, we took the kids to this event called reclaiming our roots. It's an indigenous land-based teaching tool. We took the students so they could learn all the medicines in the forest".

"People are going back and looking at what were the herbs. What were the types of plants that my grandmother would have used when she was young?"

"Going to Africville, especially this past year, which was the longer celebration. It made me want to have that [camping park] in upper Hammocks Plains. And, like, part of what we're advocating for is for a space like that. Land so that we can have campers or, you know, trails or whatever and set up, where people can camp because we don't have that kind of space in our own community".

"Recreation in the woods keeps people connected to tree health".

"They knew what kind of bark to take off each tree to make herbal medicines because we didn't deal with doctors because we were put out here to die. So, thank God we had this [trees] it is another thing about our appreciation for nature."

"So, you know, it's kind of my release from work since I'm working from home in a quiet area to go outside".

"I like to bike. I bike a lot around my community and through it. There's almost nothing prettier than coming through Lake Loon in the fall. Like, when those trees turn - It's one of the most beautiful things because there's not many houses so I definitely do appreciate it.

Preston has most of the land and I think that's one of the communities you can do that with - creating these opportunities for parks."

"Like I said, we spent a lot of time outside playing in the trees you know we all did - vitamin D - longevity of life is not the same."

"The beauty and you know, what I mean, it's good for, you know. Even if you look at it this way, a good walk through the community and being with nature relaxes you."

UFM X Community Economic Development

Interview participants explored conversations about how the HRM Urban Forest Management Plan holds significant potential for supporting community economic development in historic African Nova Scotian communities. By supporting communities in managing and utilizing wood lots, these communities can generate income through sustainable timber harvesting, and creating economic opportunities that leverage local natural resources. The desire for HRM support to develop public parks and walking trails has the potential to stimulate job creation in areas such as landscaping, maintenance, and tourism services, fostering a local economy rooted in environmental stewardship. Several participants discussed how such initiatives can also inspire and empower current residents and students to pursue education and careers in forest management and climate action, thereby building a skilled workforce dedicated to sustainable

practices. All participants under age thirty highlighted the need to integrate economic development goals with environmental sustainability. Further, these younger participants feel the HRM Urban Forest Plan can serve as a catalyst for economic development, community empowerment and ecological resilience.

Interview participants raised many questions yet to be answered. For the most part, they feel this conversation is a doorway to a much bigger conversation about long term economic development strategies and how it should intersect with HRM's Urban Forest Management Plan. Some of these comments are captured below to provide background and insights.

Our community was very industrious, and that industry was lumber and timbering. Like I can smell the sawdust from my family sawmill

"If there's going to be any discussion around development, there should be a conversation around forestry management happening at the same time because those types of things, from my understanding, can save you money. So again, if you are landscaping properly so that you have added shade, that'll make the actual building you're developing last longer because it's shaded and the sun isn't impacting it, ... this is now my housing brain turning on."

"If we go four wheeling, like, that's another thing. Like, we go, like, the people go four wheeling. That's one of the ways we get in deeper into the woods. That's how we can, you know, socialize, but also how we monitor all the developments and stuff."

"Home ownership keeps you connected to trees – starting with your own yard".

"And like how can we be using the urban forest, to create, you know, financial capacity, like a circular economy within our own community such that people are playing a part in this forestry plan, like we used to do, what our ancestors did in these communities. You know what I mean? Having a rich understanding of the resource".

"The other thing is that there are ways to profit off forestry. So, when we live in densely wooded communities, it feels like everyone else is profiting off our woods but us. So, I think that should be a conversation".

"I actually think that obviously there's a lot of development happening across the HRM and I'm very curious about what happens to that wood because we know one thing about black communities is that a lot of our homes were built that are still lasting, let's say from the sixties to eighties, most of them maybe into the nineties, and a lot of them are heated using wood and other older forms of heating. So there seems like a very clear opportunity to create some sort of relationship where that wood is, distributed in the community if it's going to be cut anyway. It seems like there's ways for our communities to benefit".

"When a forest management plan is developed for, let's say, Preston area, those communities should be involved, and should benefit from that plan."

"So, I think that a priority would be determining what is the most [viable] economic opportunity? I would say that we do need to consider economics, but not prioritize it as the top reason why we're doing Urban Forest Management".

“Preston has most of the land [of Black communities in the HRM], and that's prime real estate right now. And how do you protect that under the foster management plan?”

UFM X Access/Resources/Infrastructure

More than half of participants raised the issue that a robust Urban Forest Management plan for African Nova Scotian communities requires a multifaceted approach that integrates social, cultural, economic, and other vital infrastructural resources. Several participants recommended that this African Nova Scotian Community Engagement Report include a preliminary outline of the resources required to put an infrastructure in place and the need to connect Urban Forest Management to other merging critical issues such as discussion on the correlation between food security and urban forests. Key components of an infrastructure might include:

Community Engagement and Education

Outreach Programs: Culturally relevant outreach initiatives to raise awareness about the benefits of urban forests and encourage community participation.

Educational Workshops

Training sessions on forest management, environmental stewardship, and climate action tailored to community members.

Economic Opportunities

Job Creation: Employment opportunities in tree planting, maintenance, and urban forestry projects.

Local Businesses

Support for small businesses and entrepreneurs engaged in forestry-related activities such as sustainable timber harvesting and ecotourism.

Infrastructure Development

Parks and Recreational Spaces: Development of accessible parks, green spaces, and walking trails that cater to the community's recreational needs.

Facilities

Community centers and hubs that serve as gathering places for educational programs and cultural events related to urban forestry.

Social and Cultural Resources

Culturally Sensitive and Afrocentric tenets and practices: Integration of the community's cultural heritage and values into the design and management of urban forests.

Afrocentric Community Leadership: Empowerment of community-based leaders and African-centered organizations to take active roles in planning and decision-making processes.

Supportive Policies and Funding

Inclusive Policies: Policies that ensure equitable access to urban forest benefits and address systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities.

Funding and Grants

Financial support for community-led forestry projects and initiatives through government grants and partnerships with non-profits.

Health and Wellness Programs

Health Initiatives: Programs that promote the physical and mental health benefits of urban forests, such as guided nature walks and fitness activities in green spaces.

Research and Data Collection

Community-Specific Research: Studies that focus on the unique needs and preferences of the African Nova Scotian community in relation to urban forestry.

Monitoring and Evaluation Regular assessment of the impact of urban forest initiatives to ensure they meet community goals and adapt as needed.

By incorporating these elements, the HRM Urban Forest Management Plan can effectively address the needs and aspirations of the African Nova Scotian community, fostering a healthier, more sustainable, and economically vibrant engagement in forest management. Additional comments offered by participants are presented below.

“So, I think if African Nova Scotian communities are responsible for [UFMP] it’d be different. I think there would probably be a more significant focus on reconnecting with the land.”

“So, like understanding the use of the land, but also around risk mitigation because we do live in densely wooded neighborhoods, and I think that we all are aware that a lot of people in our communities don’t have insurance. So, if there were to be an incident in our communities, it would be a lot. It would be very devastating for some people.”

“We need to have the designated green space because that’s not there. We don’t have any.”

UFM X Community Engagement & Racial Tax

In discussing how to ensure long-term engagement of African Nova Scotians with the issue of Urban Forest Management, participants called attention to the many community development issues already demanding time and effort from community leaders. Participants also discussed how day-to-day preoccupation with racial issues such as battle fatigue, systemic racism, and the equity tax poses significant barriers for African Nova Scotians, diverting their attention and energy away from critical environmental concerns like urban forest management. Racial battle fatigue describes the cumulative psychological and emotional strain experienced by individuals

constantly exposed to discrimination and microaggressions. Systemic racism further compounds these challenges by embedding inequities in various aspects of daily life in Nova Scotia, from employment to education, requiring African Nova Scotians to expend additional effort to achieve the same outcomes as their counterparts, a burden known as the equity tax.

These pervasive racial issues demand considerable mental and emotional resources, leaving little room for engagement in long-term community projects such as urban forest management. The focus on immediate survival and overcoming daily injustices can overshadow the importance of community stewardship of urban forest management and the benefits it brings. As a result, the African Nova Scotian community may find it difficult to prioritize and participate in urban forestry initiatives, which require sustained attention and collective action. Addressing these racial barriers is crucial to ensure that African Nova Scotians can fully engage in and benefit from efforts to enhance urban green spaces, ecological sustainability and protecting communities from encroachment, expropriation, and gentrification. A sample of participant comments on this matter is provided below.

“There is the challenge of focusing on forest potential when basic needs are not met.”

“There’s so many other fleeting matters that unfortunately forest management hasn’t been prioritized.”

“Never mind trails. Trails are a luxury. We want basic things like sidewalks in our communities”.

“I think the only reason it’s not being prioritized is that we are still wrapped up in claiming our land. We’ve got to settle that and then we can begin to look at everything else.”

“I don’t really see us as a Black community focusing on it. but it is important”.

“The first thing that comes to mind is our disconnect and not being able to make this a priority. I should make it a priority but because there’s so many other matters this can’t be a priority. Unfortunately, it hasn’t been for that reason among others”.

Well, do I think urban forest management should be prioritized? I would say no because there are more imminent threats to the community.

“I say it’s a top priority and that at a meeting people would want to discuss this, but probably not, because they’re living under constant threat”.

UFM X Loss/Trust/Reparatory Justice

The historic relationship between African Nova Scotians and the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has been marred by social and economic neglect, as well as egregious acts of land dispossession. African Nova Scotian communities have endured systemic racism manifesting in various forms, such as forced relocations, denial of property rights, and economic

marginalization. Notably, the destruction of Africville, a vibrant Black community razed in the 1960s, exemplifies the deep-seated injustices faced by African Nova Scotians. The trauma of such dispossession, coupled with ongoing experiences of neglect and marginalization, has fostered a profound and enduring sense of loss and distrust toward HRM and other levels of government.

This historical context has left African Nova Scotians with a strong conviction that HRM and other levels of government owe them reparations and a commitment to non-repetition of past discriminatory practices. The community demands redress for historical injustices, such as land expropriation, gentrification, willful encroachment, and environmental racism. These issues are not merely historical; they have contemporary relevance as they continue to shape the socio-economic realities of African Nova Scotians. The community's call for reparations seeks to , ensure fair treatment and genuine inclusion in future urban planning and development efforts including long term urban forest management.

HRM has a unique opportunity to use the exercise of urban forest management as a platform to follow-up with participants and community leaders to open a wider dialogue aimed at rebuilding trust and forging a new relationship with the African Nova Scotian community. Engaging African Nova Scotians in the planning and management of urban forests can serve as a catalyst for open, honest, and frank dialogue about past wrongs and future aspirations. By prioritizing community engagement, transparency, and equitable practices, HRM can demonstrate its commitment to rectifying past injustices and fostering an inclusive environment. This process can help to heal historical wounds, promote environmental justice, and create a shared vision for sustainable urban development that honors the rights and contributions of African Nova Scotians. The discussions and recommendations of the 20 engagement participants served to foreground the overview of historic relations between HRM and the African Nova Scotian community while the following participant quotes below highlight the deeply political sentiments they expressed.

"For us, the dispossession, like, we're talking about land and forestry, another piece of it all. The dispossession of our land."

"There is a lot of harassment by white developers towards Black individuals for their land."

"Our absence and erasure from historical narrative of settlements keeps us from connecting to the land and the trees on it."

"And you know they think they know best. You know, it's never going to work for us the way it needs to be."

"But with them [trees] gone, it created a sense of community erosion almost like a mental attack on community."

"It's been so much oppression that we have lost our ability to dream."

"And you know think they know best. You know, it's never going to work for us the way it needs to"

"You can't have a development plan where developers are buying up all the land and cutting down trees you can't expect to have an urban forestry strategy. Those two do not make sense. I agree. And you can't hold on to land and then sell it to developers at the same time - like come on".

"We need to conduct archaeological studies before construction activities on lands formerly owned by African Nova Scotians."

"We should be talking with the younger generations for insights into community sustainability, advocating for land rights, and proper stewardship of ancestral lands".

"Until government, including HRM, admits they owe African Nova Scotians reparations for past inequities - just take Africville for example - it's hard to think about long-term collaborations with HRM aimed at being joint stewards of urban forests. First, we need restitution, repair, and compensation for those historic inequities."

Ideas for Improvement and key Takeaways

The following are key takeaways and ideas for improvement.

1. Inclusion of African Nova Scotians in the HRM Forest Management Plan is crucial due to historical experiences of marginalization.
2. Urban forest management should reflect community values, history, and spirituality.
3. Trees hold significant cultural and historical value for African Nova Scotians.
4. Preserving heritage of communities -especially African Nova Scotian communities is important in urban forest management.
5. There is a lack of awareness about the HRM Forest Management Plan in African Nova Scotian communities.
6. Participants are interested in learning about urban forests.
7. Public information campaigns and scholarships could improve awareness and involvement.
8. It is recommended that HRM open discussions and dialogue with African Nova Scotian community development leaders and educators on the topic of supporting opportunities for education, training, and employment in the environmental, community planning and urban forestry sectors.
9. There is an urgent need to undertake a mapping project to produce an accurate record of lands, and its title holders, located in historic African Nova Scotian communities.

10. It is recommended that HRM open discussions and dialogue with African Nova Scotian community development leaders on a strategy to develop a comprehensive infrastructure which will allow more effective development and delivery of programs and services related to urban forest management, community economic development and recreation and leisure.
11. It is recommended that HRM open discussions and dialogue with African Nova Scotian community development leaders on a strategy to develop Parks, Trails, Outdoor Interpretive Panels and other Placemaking installations.
12. It is recommended that HRM open discussions and dialogue with African Nova Scotian community development leaders on the topic of funds and resources to support communities to develop Land Trust Agreements
13. It is recommended that HRM open discussions and dialogue with African Nova Scotian community development leaders on the topic of undertaking a policy review - using an equity and race-sensitive lens - review, to revise, retire and create policies aimed at protecting the rights and interests of African Nova Scotians as it pertains to the preservation, development and management of their lands and urban forest areas.
14. It is recommended that the final report of the HRM Urban Forest Management Masterplan contain a designated section that acknowledges the history of lands in African Nova Scotian communities and highlights of significant land and urban forest issues unique to the African Nova Scotian community.
15. It is recommended that the final report of the HRM Urban Forest Management Masterplan contain an African Nova Scotian Recognition

Appendix

Definition of Terms

African Nova Scotian

African Nova Scotians are a distinct people who descend from free and enslaved Black Planters, Black Loyalists, Black Refugees, Maroons, and other Black people who inhabited the original 52 land-based Black communities in that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia,

African Canadian

African Canadians, or Black Canadians, are people of African ancestry who live in Canada. These individuals may have been born anywhere in the African Diaspora (including Canada), and are permanent residents or citizens of Canada.

African Caribbean

African Caribbeans, or Black Caribbeans, are people of African ancestry who descend from the Caribbean/West Indian islands who live in Canada. These individuals may identify as both African/Black Canadian and African/Black Caribbean.

African (Continental)

Africans or Continental Africans are people of African descent who were born on the continent of Africa.

UFMP Survey: culture Specific Questions

1. What is your first thought when you hear the term “Urban Forest Management “- especially as it relates to the African Nova Scotian/Canadian community?
2. In your opinion is this a topic the ANS Community should prioritize? If not, why not?
3. In your view how does the UFMP overlap with developments in the African Nova Scotian/Canadian community?
4. Are there any culture-specific and race-based matters this UFMP needs to consider?
5. If the African Nova Scotian/Canadian community was responsible for the entire Urban Forest Management Plan - What should they prioritize? Or what is one or two things that must be included?
6. If you were to open the UFMP in 3-6 months, look at it, and know that the African Nova Scotian/Canadian community was involved, what would you expect to see in the plan that reflects this involvement?
7. Is there someone in the African Nova Scotian/Canadian community you are aware of, who knows a lot about this topic, that I should talk to?
8. Is there someone you think might be disappointed or upset if they are not engaged in this consultation?

UFMP survey questions

How do you support the urban forest?				
	I currently do this	I don't do this, but I would like to	I am unable to do this	I'm not interested
 Learning about tree care & health				
 Regularly maintaining trees on my property				
 Planting trees on my property				
 Planting pollinator-friendly & native plants				
 Volunteering at planting events				
 Volunteering with a community group				
 Other				




How do you use the urban forest?

Place a sticker below		OTHERS Write it on a post-it and stick it here			
 For recreation and leisure					
 For exercising and relieving stress					
 For knowledge and learning					
 For shade and cooling in the summer					
 For harvesting food and natural medicines					
 For observing wildlife and experiencing nature					