

THEME 5

SOCIAL PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Since the last Regional Plan review Regional Council has played an increasing role in socially minded policies and directives including the endorsement in the Housing Needs Assessment, Halifax Food Action Plan, Anti-Poverty Solutions Strategy, the creation of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, expansions and an increasing presence of the African Nova Scotia Integrated Affairs Office, and countless other initiatives. HRM has also continued our role as members of the Mobile Food Market, Halifax Food Policy Alliance, Housing and Homelessness Partnership and strengthened collaborations with not-for-profits and the Province. This Council priority area should be reflected in the updated Regional Plan.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PARTNERSHIP

Nine partners from three levels of government, private, and non-profit sectors collaborate with community partners to end homelessness and housing poverty in Halifax.

HALIFAX FOOD POLICY ALLIANCE

A partnership of individuals and organizations representing different sectors related to the food system, working toward a vision where no one is hungry and everyone has nutritious food that they enjoy, for generations to come, sustained by local producers.

SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

In April 2020, HRM adopted a Social Policy Administrative Order with goals to “strengthen community health and wellbeing, enhance equity and inclusion, and build on social assets and community capacity”. It identifies three areas of focus; Connected Community and Mobility, Food Security, and Housing & Homelessness.

In recent years, the Municipality has begun to clarify its role in directly and indirectly supporting initiatives related to affordable housing and community health and well-being. Social planning takes place across municipal departments through recreation programming, community grants, community development, community visioning, diversity and inclusion training, youth services, parks planning, and public transit and active transportation planning. The Municipality has also worked to support housing and community health by removing barriers (such as zoning and fees) or by partnering with other levels of government and community organizations. Social planning should be included as part of all planning processes.

The Municipality does not and should not work on social planning alone. HRM works with other levels of government, arms-length organizations, non-profit organizations,

and community groups on initiatives that advance diversity and inclusion, equitable and meaningful representation, and meeting the basic needs of those who call HRM home. Well-established partnerships working toward social initiatives are the Housing and Homelessness Partnership and the Halifax Food Policy Alliance and in recent months HRM has been an active member of the Provincial Housing Commission. The Regional Plan Review will look to better define our existing partnerships and identify opportunities to address existing gaps.

Currently, the Regional Plan identifies and prioritizes areas where significant growth is anticipated. Neighbourhoods that have been historically underserved and previously left out of planning exercises may not be targeted as growth areas. As a result, they have faced greater inequities and have a heightened sensitivity to the impacts of development. This includes lack of access to safe, adequate and affordable housing, good food, and services and amenities as well as the ability to respond to climate change and disasters. The Regional Plan Review will develop an inventory of corporate resources that are being used to support planning with a social lens. This will include support and tools for community engagement and community-led planning which will allow the Municipality to better identify gaps where communities need more support.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

- 5.1 Align with the work of the Social Policy Committee to define the Municipality's role in social planning and inventory the Municipality's existing initiatives to better use existing resources and identify gaps.
- 5.2 Study the possible use of tools that could support capacity building, such as community benefit action planning, community trusts or community-led planning or projects.
- 5.3 Identify neighbourhoods facing inequities or communities that have been historically underserved and underrepresented and coordinate across departments to address vulnerabilities and build upon neighbourhood capacity.
- 5.4 Provide continued support for the development of partnerships to provide a range of community infrastructure and services for residents towards complete communities.



HOUSING

As Halifax continues to grow and develop, housing affordability has become an increasing issue across the municipality. While the provincial government provides services to support those in need of housing, the Municipality plays a significant role in determining where and how housing can be developed. The 2014 Regional Plan and the 2018 [Affordable Housing Work Plan](#) support the development of a variety of housing types and initiatives that address the full spectrum of the housing continuum, which is an important step to providing adequate housing for everybody.

The Municipality's role in supporting and encouraging affordable housing has increased steadily over the past several years. Through involvement with the Housing and Homelessness

Partnership and Anti-Poverty Solutions Strategy, HRM has developed relationships with non-profit housing organizations, for-profit developers and federal/provincial levels of government. Since the 2014 Regional Plan HRM has worked on several large initiatives including the 2015 Housing Needs Assessment, pending rental registration by-law, supporting municipal Housing First projects and directing the Federal Rapid Housing Initiative funding. HRM has further developed its support for the non-profit housing sector through waiving fees and developing grant and surplus land programs specific to affordable housing. In the fall of 2020, HRM permitted secondary and backyard suites throughout the municipality and continue to work on projects focused on removing policy and regulatory barriers to alternative forms of housing.

In addition to supporting the construction of new affordable housing options, HRM equally appreciates the importance of maintaining the region's existing affordable housing stock. While the redevelopment and revitalization of neighbourhoods can have several benefits, it can also have serious, often unforeseen impacts on the people who live in them. Many residents, or even entire communities, can be displaced or priced out as a result of increased rents or cost of services. Housing programs must include incentives to retain existing affordable housing stock and the planning process must consider the impact of redevelopment by proactively assessing for unintended consequences, preventing harms and maximizing equity.



THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

- 5.5 Explore additional approaches to encourage a diversity of housing forms though reviewing existing policies.
- 5.6 Support the development of the Housing Governance report to identify a municipal role in housing, furthering partnerships with non-profit housing organizations, private developers and the Province, to encourage the development and retention of affordable housing, including:
- Identifying planning tools to ensure no net loss of housing during redevelopment;
 - Updating the Housing Needs Assessment on an annual basis;
 - Removing barriers and reviewing and expanding opportunities to support the development and retention of affordable housing; and
 - Study possible tools and programs to further leverage surplus or available land including community land trusts.
- 5.7 Develop an interim regulatory tool for a region-wide density bonus program.



HRM'S COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

The toolkit provides practical, easy-to use tools to help people and groups:

- 1. Engage their communities to learn and gather information about the food environment and the food system*
- 2. Assess opportunities and barriers to achieving community food security*
- 3. Plan possible actions toward change*

FOOD SECURITY

It is estimated that between 1 in 5 and 1 in 7 households in HRM experience food insecurity. HRM has consistently ranked in the top 3 Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas with the highest rates of household food insecurity. With the rising cost of food continuing to outpace income and the challenges posed by COVID-19, these rates could worsen. The Municipality has recognized that it has an important role to play in promoting community food security. In 2020, HRM partnered with the Halifax Food Policy Alliance to develop [JustFOOD: an action plan for the Halifax Region](#). JustFOOD is centred on food justice and working together towards a region where no one is hungry, where food and people are celebrated, and our local food system is prosperous and sustainable.

It is anticipated that JustFOOD will take two years to develop. Work in 2021 will focus on engaging with communities and sectors to define food justice, test the Framework and move towards action. JustFOOD will commit the Municipality to actions and identify the resources needed to achieve them.

The Regional Plan Review will advance the commitment to design communities that promote food security by requiring consideration of access to food and impact on the food system in new and updated planning

policies. It will also implement supports for food security recommended in the [Halifax Green Network Plan](#), [HalifACT](#), and other municipal planning initiatives. The Municipality's Community Food Assessment Toolkit, created in 2019, offers a step-wise process to guide communities to learn more about their local food environment and plan actions to address challenges and build on strengths.

In addition to increasing access to food, the Regional Plan will also consider the conservation and enhancement of agricultural lands to strengthen and increase the resilience of our local food system. As the majority of the Municipality's prime agriculture land was developed for residential purposes in the growth of the 1960s-70s, what remains is precious. Additional effort is also needed to create more opportunities and maximize land for urban agriculture, making food production a part of the everyday landscape.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

5.8 Support the creation of JustFOOD and ensure alignment with its goals and recommendations by:

- Directing the use of JustFOOD tools and resources to better understand community vulnerability to food insecurity and the local food landscape when updating or creating planning policies.
- Removing barriers and creating incentives for food uses such as urban agriculture, agricultural operations, food outlets, etc. and reducing the impact of non-agricultural uses on viable agricultural land.



INCLUSIVITY & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Creating equitable complete communities requires an understanding of the lived experiences of the diverse residents that call HRM home. The Municipality must continue to develop an understanding of the effects of existing policies that disproportionately affect historically underserved and underrepresented groups. HRM has created the Diversity and Inclusion Office with expert advisors covering the African Nova Scotia, Indigenous, Acadian and Francophone, Immigrant and Accessibility communities. The Office provides leadership, strategic direction, policy advice, professional development and expertise to all aspects of the Halifax Regional Municipality (administration and Regional Council) with respect to diversity and inclusion. The Office also engages external stakeholders in supporting corporate diversity and inclusion initiatives and services. HRM

now has a Public Safety Strategy that directs policy-makers to consider systemic reasons for increased crime in under-represented communities (such as racism, a lack of affordable housing, unemployment, and poor access to healthy food and health services).

Public participation during planning projects provides an important opportunity for the Municipality to hear from residents. However, traditional engagement tools often only reach those who are already engaged or have the loudest voices and have left many others out of the conversation. Alone, these tools produce narrow representation in terms of demographics, perspectives and experiences. In recent years there has been more appreciation for a variety of tools that facilitate the involvement of all residents and overcome the barriers to effective and full public participation. These tools help to engage with all community members and bring a full

range of diverse perspectives, knowledge and identities to the table. The Municipality is currently creating a Public Engagement Guidebook that will help staff to develop more transparent, demographically representative and equitable public engagement programs that reflect the unique needs of each project and the community it impacts.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

5.9 Continue to engage the Diversity and Inclusion Office as a resource during planning projects.

5.10 Review existing engagement policies and adopt the upcoming Public Engagement Guidebook.



Removing barriers and creating opportunities for the full participation of all Halifax residents and municipal employees.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

HRM has several initiatives and commitments to better partner with, serve, and represent underrepresented groups. On October 30th, 2018, Regional Council approved the creation of the [Task Force on the Commemoration of Edward Cornwallis and the Recognition and Commemoration of Indigenous History](#). The Task Force is an equal partnership between Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and the Mi'kmaw community, as represented by the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs (ANSMC). It was tasked with advising Regional Council on proposed changes to the commemoration of Edward Cornwallis on municipal assets, including Cornwallis Park and Cornwallis Street, and more generally, recognizing and commemorating the indigenous history in the lands now known as Halifax Regional Municipality. The Task Force made a list of recommendations on how to improve commemorations, consultation, and relations with the Mi'kmaw community and each recommendation was assigned to relevant HRM business units. The CAO will return to Council annually to report on progress.

In 2016, Regional Council approved the [2016-2021 Economic Growth Plan](#). The plan included a call for the development and implementation of an African Nova Scotian (ANS) Action Plan to advance ANS economic development

and community priorities. The Road to Economic Prosperity Advisory Committee was established in November of 2019 and included the Halifax Partnership, HRM, Black Business Initiative, the Nova Scotia Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs and community members. The Committee assisted in the development and implementation of the plan by providing guidance and community oversight. On September 22, 2020, [the African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity](#) was approved by Regional Council. It includes actions regarding Community Benefits Agreements, reviews of policies and regulations for disproportionate negative impacts in the ANS communities, support for the Akoma master plan, review of community boundaries and commemorations, remediation of contaminated sites in ANS communities, and infrastructure funding in ANS communities.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

5.11 Ensure the Regional Plan is aligned with the 94 Calls to Action, recommendations from the Task Force on the Commemoration of Edward Cornwallis and the Recognition and Commemoration of Indigenous History, and the African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity. This will be achieved through Sharing Our Stories and reviews of relevant policies and by-laws.

CALLS TO ACTION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action identifies actions for all levels of government to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.

ACCESSIBILITY

The World Health Organization says that 15 percent of the world's population lives with an impairment or disability. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Canada agreed to take appropriate measures to achieve accessibility and to develop and monitor minimum accessibility standards. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Act also direct the equal opportunities for every individual to enjoy a full and productive life free of discrimination on the basis of a disability.

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act explains the barriers residents face, including the following: persons with disabilities disproportionately live in conditions of poverty; there is diversity among persons with disabilities; persons with disabilities continue to face attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent them from achieving their full and equal participation in society; and persons with disabilities who are subject to multiple forms of discrimination face additional barriers. Achieving accessibility will improve the independence and well-being of persons with disabilities.

In HRM, the Diversity and Inclusion Office and the Accessibility Advisory Committee have been working to direct changes in planning policies that impact individuals with disabilities.

Of relevance to planning and development are the regulations that promote physical accessibility of buildings, streets, parks, and facilities directed by the NS Building Code, the Red Book (Municipal Design Guidelines), HRM Streets By-law, Municipal Planning Strategies, and Land Use By-laws. These regulations and policies address everything from sidewalks, trees, lighting, tactile crosswalks, and traffic signals, to the built form of individual buildings, including their entrances, unit layout, types of smoke detectors, and emergency exits. Land use by-laws have the ability to affect built form, such as barrier free parking spaces, pedestrian routes through parking lots, signage and wayfinding, encouraging more ground-level commercial uses and barrier-free access to residential units, permitting supportive housing more widely, setback requirements that allow wider sidewalks and permit ramps. Integrated mobility planning requires considering ways to provide accessible mobility options, such as accessible active transportation routes, accessible taxis and Access-A-Bus. Further, planning policies direct meaningful opportunities for inclusive and accessible engagement on policy changes, so how staff run engagements and share information with the public are equally as important as built form.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

- 5.12 Review and update planning documents (the Regional Plan, secondary plans and land use by-laws) that bring HRM closer to the goal of being a city for people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds. Ensure these documents align with the forthcoming HRM Accessibility & Inclusion Strategy.**
- 5.13 Include the Accessibility Advisory Committee and Diversity & Inclusion Office in the review of the forthcoming engagement tool to ensure it uses best practices for inclusion of residents with a wide array of disabilities.**