

Responses to Public Questions and Concerns

Information on Akoma Holdings Incorporated's request to develop the former Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children site along Highway #7 in Westphal was distributed to area residents as well as members of various communities across the Province by means of the following:

1. Notices were mailed to residents of the immediate area;
2. Notices were shared with African Nova Scotian communities across the Province using networks of the Provincial department of African Nova Scotian Affairs (ANSA), the African United Baptist Association (AUBA), Victims of Institutionalized Child Exploitation Society (VOICES), Nova Scotia Decade for People of African Descent Coalition (NSDPAD), and the Akoma Board;
3. A virtual public information meeting was held on October 21, 2020;
4. Details about the proposal were posted to the case website: <https://www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/akoma-formernshcc>; and,
5. Area Councillors shared information about the development proposal with several community groups' Facebook pages.

HRM planning staff have compiled all the public comments and questions provided to date. In collaboration with the applicant (Akoma Holdings Inc.), we have prepared the following responses to the concerns and questions raised by the public.

**Please note that responding to the public feedback required input from other HRM departments and external agencies including Development Engineering, Traffic Services, Halifax Water, ANSA, ANSAIO and the applicant. Responses from the applicant have been clearly identified. All responses provided by staff are based on the applicable policies, regulations, guidelines and information/studies submitted by the applicant for their proposal.*

The Planning Process including Public Involvement

1. How have African Nova Scotian communities across the Province been consulted through the planning process? How has the Municipality been reaching out and seeking feedback from the various Black communities?

HRM planning staff have been working with the HRM African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO) and the Provincial Department of African Nova Scotian Affairs (ANS) as well as community groups to share information about the proposal with and collect feedback from the various African Nova Scotian communities across the Province. Four community groups have been very helpful in sharing information about the proposal to their networks: the Akoma Board, the African United Baptist Association (AUBA), Victims of Institutionalized Child Exploitation Society (VOICES), and the Nova Scotia Decade for People of African Descent Coalition (NSDPAD)*. In addition, current and former area councillors have shared the proposal with their constituents.

Before a decision is made on the proposal, the public will be invited to a public hearing where they can provide their feedback directly to Council. Staff will work with the above groups to ensure notices for a future public hearing and decision of Council are shared with the communities.

**Please note that the role of the four community groups in the planning process is to help staff share information with the public. The assistance received by the four community groups does not equate their support for the development proposal itself. These groups have not all been part of developing the plans for the subject property. The plans have been submitted by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated.*

2. What is the role or responsibilities of the Province in this project?

The use of land for residential, commercial, industrial or institutional purposes, for example, is in the exclusive domain of the Municipality. However, the Province does have authority in matters related to accessing Provincial streets and environmental issues. The Provincial department of African Nova Scotian Affairs (ANSA)'s role in this project is to provide guidance to HRM planning staff in engaging with the public. The HRM African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO) has also assisted staff with public engagement. For example, ANSA and ANSAIO have helped staff:

- connect with various community groups;
- present information about the proposal in a clear, inclusive and respectful manner;
- share HRM public meeting notices for the proposal with their networks;
- ensure that feedback can be collected by HRM staff in various ways; and
- coordinate the mental and emotional support services for the public at the virtual public information meeting.

3. How long will the planning process take? Can the planning process be expedited?

Staff are hoping to take a report to Council for a decision on Phases 1-4 of Akoma's proposal in Spring 2021. The remaining Phases will be considered through the [Regional Plan Review](#) project. The type of planning process we are in for Phases 1-4 can take approximately 18 months from receiving a complete application to getting a report to Council for a decision on the proposal. The process can take longer if an application is incomplete, additional technical study or public consultation is required, the scope of the project is relatively complex, or there are unforeseen circumstances. For example, Covid-19 has delayed most, if not all planning applications this year. Staff are hoping to expedite a report to Council for a decision by (or in) the Spring of 2021. This is the earliest staff can take a report to Council while meeting the legislated requirements of the planning process.

4. When will the report come to Council for a decision?

Although we have experienced delays, staff are working diligently to take a report to Council for a portion of the proposal toward Highway #7 in Spring 2021 in time for the 100th anniversary of the opening of the former Home (June 2021).

The Property

5. Who does the property belong to? How did the current owner acquire the property?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

In 1921, members of the African NS community came together to develop The Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children (NSHCC). The opening of the NSHCC was considered to be the greatest day in the history of African Nova Scotians. It is estimated that close to 3000 people came to the opening of this facility which would care for African Nova Scotia children who were destitute or whose parents were unable to provide for them. In 2011, the NSHCC Board of Directors who have decision making authority agreed upon and voted unanimously to launch the Akoma Family Centre (AFC) which took over the operation of providing residential care for children who are in the care of the Minister of Community Services. The AFC changed its mandate from caring for at-risk teens to siblings. In 2015, all assets of the NSHCC were gifted to Akoma Holdings Incorporated (AHI) or the Akoma Family Centre (AFC) as two separate charitable entities who are responsible for the properties. The NSHCC which is a legislated organization continues to exist, however has lost its charitable status as it is no longer conducts any operations. In 2016, the AFC again changed its mandate to provide for children with special needs.

6. Can the site be deemed a historic site or a registered historic property?

The site has significant heritage value and may qualify for municipal or provincial heritage designation, but no formal application for registering the site with the HRM Heritage Property Program has been received or processed. Federal heritage designation is mainly for the purposes of commemoration and does not provide formal protection or access to financial assistance. Information on applying for national historic site status can be requested from the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

The Developer

7. Who is Akoma Holdings Incorporated?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:
Akoma Holdings Incorporated is a registered company with NS Joint Stocks and operated by a community Board of Directors. Akoma has charitable status with the Canada Revenue Agency. The mission of AHI is to 'commit to providing stewardship of its assets to create economic and social opportunities for the African Nova Scotian community and the general society. The establishment of AHI and AFC provides a separation of the childcare services (operated from Akoma Family Centre) from the real property/assets.

8. How is a non-profit able to profit from these investment opportunities on land that was originally deeded to the Black communities for the education and wellbeing of children in the Black communities?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:
Charitable organizations must provide evidence to CRA that they are adhering to the charitable guidelines. In order to provide affordable programs and services, a portion will need to be subsidized; therefore, any profit gained by the organization will be utilized to offset any required subsidy. An example of this is currently occurring through our Bauld Centre office space and special events rentals

which are very affordable and approximately ½ of the market rate for rentals. In essence, they are subsidized by AHI as a way of giving back to the Black communities.

The Proposed Development

9. Who was involved in developing the proposal? Were ANS communities involved?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

The property development vision was developed by the AHI Property Committee and Board. Since inception in 2017, the plans have been shared with over 400 people which included members of the ANS communities, ANS organizations, community members, businesses, developers, members of the various levels of government and government departments. Consultations on what was proposed by Akoma and what's missing was discussed.

10. Will the proposed development be exclusively for people of African descent?

No. All members of communities of all backgrounds will be welcomed to utilize the services offered by the development. However, for example, Akoma wishes to allow businesses like a salon, which can offer specialized services for people of African descent.

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

Akoma adheres to Africentric principles much like the NSHCC which accepted all children who require a place to live. Although our focus is for people of African descent, we are an inclusive organization.

11. Who benefits from the proposed development and changes to the planning documents?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

Anyone who utilizes the services/programs of the Akoma development will benefit directly i.e., accommodations, those who live in the surrounding communities, will benefit from the various programs offered on the premises and the impact the development will have for their communities as development enhances property values in any area. As well, the development will benefit ANS people who will be able to apply for employment opportunities at the various facilities. Ultimately, HRM and the Province will benefit when incomes increase due to employment.

12. How does the proposed rezoning and development accomplish the mandate of the 1915 Act that applied to the NSHCC which was “to provide for the care, education and training of members of the Afro-American race”? How does the proposal fit in with the 1915 legislation?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

The Akoma Family Centre continues to provide care for children in the care of the Minister of Community Services. Since the early 60's the NSHCC accepted children of all races. Adhering to the Act which also states that the NSHCC “may sell, convey, lease, mortgage ...as may be deemed advantageous to the interest of the said corporation, for the purpose of securing and establishing lands and building for the care, education and training of the members of the Afro-African race”. Over

the years, discussions have been held with the Africentric Learning Institute to host a school on the premises. More recently the East Preston Empowerment Academy (EPEA) is renting space in one of the buildings and will be a major contributor to the development of building on the property. Programs offered by AHI and EPEA will provide for the education and training of members of the ANS community. The plans outlined by Akoma definitely fits the mandate as outlined in the initial NSHCC Act.

13. How does the proposal honour the history of the Home and the people/former residents who were harmed?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

As presented to the Council of Parties of the Restorative Inquiry, plans are underway to recognize the full history of the NSHCC through a number of initiatives. Some examples include: a historical timeline on the entrance of the old home building, markers on the land at various places that provide the history of the Home; an annual community family day where former residents, staff and those connected to the NSHCC can come and socialize; an annual church service in partnership with the African United Baptist Association; and, a scholarship for former residents of the NSHCC. We are cognizant that as African Nova Scotians we are a resilient people who have been traumatized for centuries through systemic racism, yet we survive!

14. What is “Africentric design”?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

Africentric designs takes into consideration the cultural aspects of people of African descent. Research is being conducted on what design would be appropriate for the various buildings on the property. Africentric design provides a cultural imprint on the property through the development of African designs, some traditional and some modern, but with cultural adaptations such as coloring, the addition of columns, pyramid styling etc. Africentric Design is a process responding to the Africentric principles. As opposed to simply replicating designs of African buildings, the process will focus on aspects of design that illuminate ancestry and heritage while engaging the community in the process. With the exception of basic parameters like building height, Africentric design cannot be prescribed in advance through zoning, nor, left to the whims of external design review processes.

15. Are there any plans to reserve a small section of land near Highway 7 to educate the public on the history of the home and honour former residents? For example, are there plans for a commemorative monument or plaque?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

It is our plan to work with the Black Cultural Centre and other ANS educational organizations to find the best method to ensure the history of the Home is memorialized. Working with these organizations, they can also provide advice on what type of monument and/or plaque would be best.

16. What services and opportunities would the proposal provide for the community?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

The proposal provides some options based on feedback provided to date from the Housing Needs Assessment and input from community members. The following services have been identified as required for the area: halfway facility for ex-offenders, facilities for homeless people, facilities for single parents, long term care facility, housing for seniors, affordable housing, housing for students and youth, educational programs, library resources, domed sports facilities, cemetery etc. Along with these services, our development will provide job creation opportunities.

17. How much will the proposed development cost and who will pay for it? Will it be funded by the government or private companies?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

The development is being phased in as funders are obtained. Currently, the exterior renovations to the Old Home have been funded by various level of government through grant funding and from Akoma. Plans are underway to work with fundraisers to assist in generating the required funds for each phase of the development.

18. Who will get to bid on the construction work?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

In accordance with Akoma policies, tenders will be sought for each development. Akoma tenders require that a percentage of work must be completed by persons of African descent.

The Old Home

19. Why is the Old Home being retained and repurposed?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

The Old Home is a legacy building in the ANS community. As noted in question 5, the opening of the NSHCC was considered to be the greatest day in the history of African Nova Scotians. It is estimated that close to 3000 people came to the opening of this facility which would care for African Nova Scotia children who were destitute or whose parents were unable to provide for them in the Atlantic provinces. It is the oldest Black owned building in the province and was structurally sound. The board considers the restoration of the Old Home as the 'Phoenix Rising out of the Ashes' to make it the focal point of the development on the property, and honours the legacy of this history.

20. How much money was spent on renovating the Home and who paid for the work?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

To date, \$1.5m was spent on phase 1 of the Old Home. As noted, in questions 17, grant funding of approximately \$450k was received. The remainder was raised by Akoma from a line of credit and some of their investments.

Water and Sewer Services

21. Will water and sewer service be extended to the subject property?

The proposal includes an extension of the Water Service Area Boundary to include Phases 1-4 of the development. An extension of the sewer service and a further extension of the water service for the remainder of the property will be considered through the Regional Plan Review project. Ultimately, the Regional Council of Halifax Regional Municipality will make this decision at the conclusion of the Regional Plan Review project.

22. Why can't sewer be considered through this process?

Additional studies are required for consideration of a sewer boundary extension. These studies are required to determine what technical upgrades are needed to the existing sewage treatment plants to create capacity for the proposed development, what it would cost, and how the cost can be recovered. This study would add time on to the planning process and Akoma wishes to proceed with a report to Council with a water service extension only, to allow for occupancy of the old Home by its centennial.

23. Why can't services be extended to the East Preston community as well?

A service extension to include the East Preston community is not being considered at this time. Ultimately, the Regional Council of Halifax Regional Municipality decides whether to extend services to an area or not. Service extensions are significant undertakings that require extensive analysis and changes to the Regional planning documents prior to commencing any construction.

In general, when considering if water and sewer services can be extended to any area in the Municipality, there are three major components that require analysis:

- Does the extension align with the Regional Plan's direction for strategic growth in the Municipality?
- Are upgrades to existing infrastructure required to technically accommodate the extension? What are the upgrades needed?
- How can the cost of upgrading existing infrastructure and installing new infrastructure be recovered? Are residents willing to pay for the service?

The Regional Plan identifies the East Preston community as a Rural Local Centre. Rural Local Centres are characterized by having a mix of low to medium density residential, convenience commercial, institutional and recreation uses serviced by individual on-site sewage disposal systems. The Regional Plan does not currently identify East Preston as a community targeted for high levels of growth. Higher levels of growth are mainly focused where services are already available.

Halifax Water completes updates to their Infrastructure Master Plan on a five-year cycle. It considers desired growth locations within HRM's Regional Plan and identifies infrastructure requirements to support growth. Additional study would be required to determine the technical upgrades required to

the local infrastructure, the capital cost to the Municipality, how the cost can be recovered by area residents, and if residents would be willing to pay for the service.

Road Network and Traffic

24. When will the Ross Road realignment to the traffic light on Main Street be completed?

Opportunities for improvements to Highway #7 between Forest Hills Parkway and Ross Road are being examined as a whole as portions of Highway #7 are due for infrastructure renewal in the next few years. HRM staff are currently reviewing opportunities for the enhancement of active transportation facilities (e.g. sidewalks) and potentially left turn lanes in this area.

25. Will any upgrades to existing streets (along Highway #7, for example) be required to support the proposed development?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:
The development has been designed to take advantage of existing hwy#7 infrastructure and extension of existing road corridors that have been set aside with the foresight that this property would connect to the road network in the future. With internal connections and the existing lighted intersection, Akoma sees little impact on the infrastructure unless services are extended.

26. Can the connection to Giberson Drive be for pedestrian access only?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:
The community intends to be inclusive and integrate with the surrounding neighbourhood. Akoma sees the connection to Giberson as a road connection that will integrate the segregated property into the greater community.

27. Can street names be a symbolic reminder of the history of the property?

Yes. Prior to the actual construction of streets and private shared driveways, a developer can reserve street names with the HRM Civic Addressing department. Staff can work with Akoma to determine a list of street names for the development that commemorate the history of the property. If a member of the public has ideas for street names, please feel free to email them to the HRM planner, Stephanie Salloum, at sallous@halifax.ca.

28. How will the proposed development impact traffic on the existing streets and surrounding neighbourhoods?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:
There has been a traffic statement which was prepared by a senior traffic engineer who works with WSP which was completed as part of the application process. The statement concluded that connections to the adjacent neighbouring streets would be advantageous for both developments giving access to Highway #7, Giberson Drive and Broom Road.

29. Has any consideration been given to sidewalks including a safe means of crossing Highway #7?

The following response was provided by the applicant, Akoma Holdings Incorporated:

Sidewalks along the south side of Highway #7 should be built in parallel with development as it proceeds. Concerning safe means of crossing the highway, the lighted intersection at the Akoma Family Centre satisfies this need on the west side.