

THEME 11

ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global public health crisis that has significant implications for the social and economic well-being of our region. HRM is facing great uncertainty, and the Regional Plan can help to guide the Municipality's recovery and response.

HOW WILL THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW CONSIDER COVID-19?

The pandemic has had an unequal impact on traditionally underrepresented groups and those with underlying health conditions, and further demonstrates the need for planning policies that support residents of all backgrounds. The policies of the Regional Plan and the underlying Priorities Plans can be used to support complete, safe and healthy communities where residents can access services and amenities within their own communities, a robust open space and active transportation network, and innovative community economic development concepts that support local business and enliven public spaces in the midst of physical distancing and gathering restrictions (e.g., introducing open streets and reducing barriers to outdoor dining, shopping and recreation). COVID-19 has seen a major shift to how and where people work, which could significantly impact employment areas and change commuting patterns. There has been an increased demand in the housing market for larger homes with private backyards, where people have extra space to work from home. The Regional Plan Review will continue to monitor trends in working from home, housing-form preferences, where people choose to live and commercial and office vacancy rates, and will aim to develop flexible land use policy and regulations that can

adapt to changing conditions.

The Regional Plan Review is considering that certain aspects of society may shift for an extended period or indefinitely. Indicators of societal change may include:

- how and where people work and attend school;
- comfort levels regarding social gatherings;
- housing-form preferences (single- or multi-unit housing, high density or low density, access to a private backyard);
- community-form preferences (urban, suburban, rural, mixed-use, small complete communities);
- changes to how people move throughout the Region; and
- the importance of outdoor and public spaces and active transportation networks.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

- 11.1 Continue to monitor the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on social, economic, environmental and population growth indicators, and adopt a framework for tracking these trends to guide future regional planning.**
- 11.2 Identify communities with inequitable access to the social determinants of health necessary to weather a pandemic, such as housing, food security, access to green/amenity space, and transportation options, and focus on prioritizing the servicing of these communities.**
- 11.3 Explore the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on community design preferences by engaging residents about their ability to work from home, changing travel patterns, the demand for “complete communities,” housing-form preferences and needs, their use of outdoor spaces, and changes in how residents socialize and gather.**