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Item No. 15.1.9
Halifax Regional Council
December 14, 2021

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed
Denise Schofield, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 7, 2021

SUBJECT: **Case 22257: Regional Plan Review: Themes and Directions What We Heard**

ORIGIN

- February 25, 2020 Regional Council initiation of the Regional Plan Review process
- December 15, 2020, Regional Council approval of the revised Public Participation Program for the Regional Plan Review process

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

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

Regional Municipal Planning Strategy, Chapter 9, Policies G-13 and G-14

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Suspend Schedule 3 (Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee Terms of Reference) of Administrative Order One, the Procedures of Council Administrative Order;
2. Adopt the amendments in Attachment F and direct the Chief Administrative Officer to follow the revised Public Participation Program for the Regional Plan Review as generally set out in Attachment A and as outlined in the Community Engagement section of this report; and
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to follow the revised work plan schedule as generally outlined in Attachment B – Regional Plan Work Plan and Attachment C – Site-Specific Requests.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an overview of the results of the community engagement conducted on the Themes and Directions Report and to highlight any adjustments to the planning policy work based on the feedback received;
- Identify requests for amendments to the Regional Plan and to receive direction on how to proceed based on staff's initial analysis;
- Provide an update and further information on the Preliminary Housing and Population Analysis; and
- Provide an overview of the recommended Regional Plan Review work plan and additional financial and resourcing needs required to support development of overall planning policy.

Staff are recommending that the remaining Regional Plan Review be carried out in three phases as follows:

- **Phase 3: Quick Adjustments** – return to Regional Council in **May 2022** with quick amendments and adjustments to the Regional Plan that align with Regional Council's goals, as a rapid response to current housing conditions;
- **Phase 4: Draft Regional Plan** – return to Regional Council in **December 2022** with the remaining policy framework; and
- **Phase 5: Future Growth Planning** – create a work plan and begin analysis of additional lands to be considered for expansion in anticipation of continued growth to be brought forward for Regional Council's consideration in **2023/2024**.

A revised Public Participation Program and work plan are provided in this report, as well as information on work planning for other related policy projects.

BACKGROUND

Regional Council initiated the second review of the Regional Plan on February 25, 2020.¹ As part of the initiation, Council adopted a Public Participation Program to guide the public engagement for the review. On December 15, 2020,² an updated program was adopted by Council to reflect the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on engagement efforts.

The Themes and Directions Report was released and presented to Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee on May 20, 2021³. It was the first major deliverable of the Regional Plan Review. The purpose of the document was to explain the scope of the Regional Plan Review to the public, stakeholders and Council, and to seek feedback. The document shared ideas about key planning issues and provided details of the work to be completed during the Review.

This report to Regional Council marks the end of Phase 2 of the overall work program.

Public Engagement

Public engagement on the Regional Plan Review's Themes & Directions Report opened on May 20, 2021 and ran until July 16, 2021. Themes & Directions engagement activities included a Shape Your City page with a variety of resources (www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/regional-plan), six Virtual Q&A Sessions, an online survey, an online comment forum, a dedicated phone number and project email (regionalplan@halifax.ca), Board and Committee meetings, and stakeholder meetings. Engagement was

¹ <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/200225rc1511.pdf>

² https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/201215rc1118_0.pdf

³

<https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/standing-committees/210520cpedinfo2red.pdf>

widely advertised through social media, online advertising, regional and local newspaper advertising, and newsletters distributed through the Office of Diversity & Inclusion and Community Developers.

Feedback received through the engagement covered a wide range of topics and some common themes emerged. Examples include:

- Concerns for increased housing availability and affordability;
- A desire to direct new development into existing urban and suburban communities and to design complete communities;
- Planning for clustered rural growth centres as village or town-like communities, and increased reflection of rural community characteristics;
- The need for municipal action to respond quickly to climate change;
- The importance of valuable regional wilderness areas and calls for limiting the impact of development on those areas;
- Support for implementing the Halifax Green Network Plan, HalifACT and Integrated Mobility Plan;
- Concern for protecting low density neighbourhoods from the impact of higher density development; and
- Requests to expand active transportation and transit service.

The What We Heard Report provides a complete summary of the engagement and feedback received and how it is being used in analysis. The report is included as Attachment E.

Site-Specific Requests for Policy Changes

In addition to the broad feedback provided as part of the engagement process, staff have received 53 requests from property owners or their representatives for amendments to the Regional Plan for specific properties or areas of land. Attachment C provides detail on each request, including the type of request, relevant existing policy, considerations for the Regional Plan Review, and staff's recommended approach. The types of requests received are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Site Specific Requests

Type of Request	Description
Future Serviced Communities	Requests to initiate comprehensive secondary planning for lands designated Urban Settlement, which the Regional Plan envisioned for future serviced development within the life of the Regional Plan (by 2031)
Urban Reserve	Requests to initiate comprehensive secondary planning or to amend the existing designation and zoning for lands designated Urban Reserve, which the Regional Plan envisioned for future serviced development after the life of the Regional Plan (after 2031)
Service Area Boundary Adjustments	Requests to amend the Urban Service Area boundary and/or the Water Service Area boundary to enable development of properties with municipally provided services
Schedule J – Beaver Bank/Hammonds Plains Growth Control Area	Requests to allow development on lands within the Beaver Bank/Hammonds Plains Growth Control Area (Schedule J), which restricts residential subdivision activity within portions of the Beaver Bank and Hammonds Plains communities until transportation infrastructure capacity is increased
Suburban Plan Amendment	Requests for supportive Regional Plan policy to enable an alternative form of development or increased density for lands currently within the Urban Settlement designation
Rural Plan Amendment	Requests for supportive Regional Plan policy to enable an alternative form of development or increased density for lands currently within the Rural Commuter designation
Industrial Lands	Requests for comprehensive planning for lands within the Regional Plan's Business/ Industrial Sub-designation

Staff reviewed all requests against existing planning policy, including the Regional Plan, applicable secondary municipal plans, and priorities plans (including the Halifax Green Network Plan, Integrated Mobility Plan, and HalifACT). Recommended approaches to each of the requests was developed based on whether the requests were consistent with Regional Plan and priority plan objectives, the opportunities and constraints on each site, and the level of additional study and analysis that may be required for staff to develop amendments within the anticipated timeline of the Review.

Policy Work Program

With public engagement on the Themes and Directions Report completed, staff will begin drafting amendments to the Regional Plan. Each of the actions contained in the Themes and Directions Report has been assessed to determine the remaining work. Some work has already been completed, other work will involve a simple text amendment, and some actions will require additional analysis before new policy can be created. The full assessment of the actions is contained in Attachment B. The list of the additional analysis required before the Draft Regional Plan can be completed is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Regional Plan Review Overview Remaining Work

Item	Description	Remaining Work
We can decide how we want Halifax to grow.		
Growth Management and Market-Based Housing	Assess potential future growth patterns and identify any adjustments to growth and mode-share targets	- Finalize population and housing analysis - Update Regional Transportation Model with new data (Population, Employment and Active Transportation) - Model preferred growth scenario(s) - Develop new growth targets focused on expansion and infill
	Provide direction to Regional Council on growth planning and target projects or changes which quickly advance housing	- Advance work on Future Serviced Communities - Advance work on site specific requests that align with policy direction - Identify any quick adjustments that can be undertaken to Suburban or Rural Plans which would result in greater clarity in decision-making and improved conditions for housing development
	Establish work program for future boundary expansion	- Identify any requests for amendments that should occur as part of the review of future policy to direct expansion or infill - Identify the areas and focus for long-range growth
	Advance industrial land projects and complete employment studies	- Advance Ragged Lake Industrial Park and Burnside Industrial Park Phase 14 - Review employment analysis and establish new methods for studying employment trends, including office, retail, and industrial land - Update modelling and identify any changes to industrial policy
Secondary Planning Program	Identify the areas best suited to support additional growth based on existing and potential future services (Complete Communities Analysis)	- Assess the preferred growth scenario against key infrastructure including Water, Wastewater, Transit, Active Transportation, Strategic Corridors, Parks/Wilderness Areas, Recreation Facilities, Library Facilities, Emergency Services - Review the population and growth plans against the capital/service plans - Identify any major service or infrastructure constraints or opportunities

Table 2: Regional Plan Review Overview Remaining Work

Item	Description	Remaining Work
		- Identify any areas that might require further analysis for Capital Cost Contributions aligned with Regional Growth - Update Modeling and Growth Scenarios as required
	Establish work program for the Suburban and Rural Secondary Planning Programs	Identify the work that needs to occur to support the creation of both interim guidelines and to develop the framework for the Suburban and Rural Areas
We can create change through new partnerships.		
Social Policy Program	Complete Interim Density Bonusing, Inclusionary Zoning, and Accessibility Review	- Develop Interim Density Bonusing Program - Develop Inclusionary Zoning Program - Develop work on Community Land Trusts - Review Accessibility Requirements
We can make it easier for people to move.		
Integrated Mobility Program	Finalize Strategic Corridors and Complete Urban Transit Service Boundary review	- Assess the Urban Transit Service Boundary against existing and potential housing and population growth - Identify any adjustment to the Urban Transit Service Boundary - Establish the strategic corridor map as well as potential adjustments to Subdivision By-law or Standards to improve street connectivity if required - Advance Mill Cove Infrastructure Study
We can protect what matters.		
Sharing Our Stories Program	Complete Heritage Policy Update and Sharing Our Stories Update	- Adjustments to Heritage Policy, including support for Heritage Conservation Districts, Heritage Development Agreement Policy, and Policy CH-16 (Development Abutting Heritage Properties) - List of Heritage Conservation Districts and Cultural Special Areas - Identification of heritage process for discretionary applications if needed
Green Network Plan and HaliFACT Program	Develop an approach for protection of important wilderness corridors and connectivity of the green network	- Identification of underlying zoning and constraints - Use existing community analysis to identify key areas for protection - Identification of immediate zoning changes or environmental process for discretionary applications
	Level of Service Standards for Parks	Review and develop Level of Service Standards for the Regional Subdivision By-law
	Review of wetland and watercourse protection	Review and revise existing regulations protecting wetland and riparian areas in HRM land use by-laws to ensure greater protection for these features and ensure standards regulations are adopted across the region.
	Develop an interim approach for Coastal Setbacks	Determine appropriate elevation setbacks for interim period as vulnerability mapping is completed.

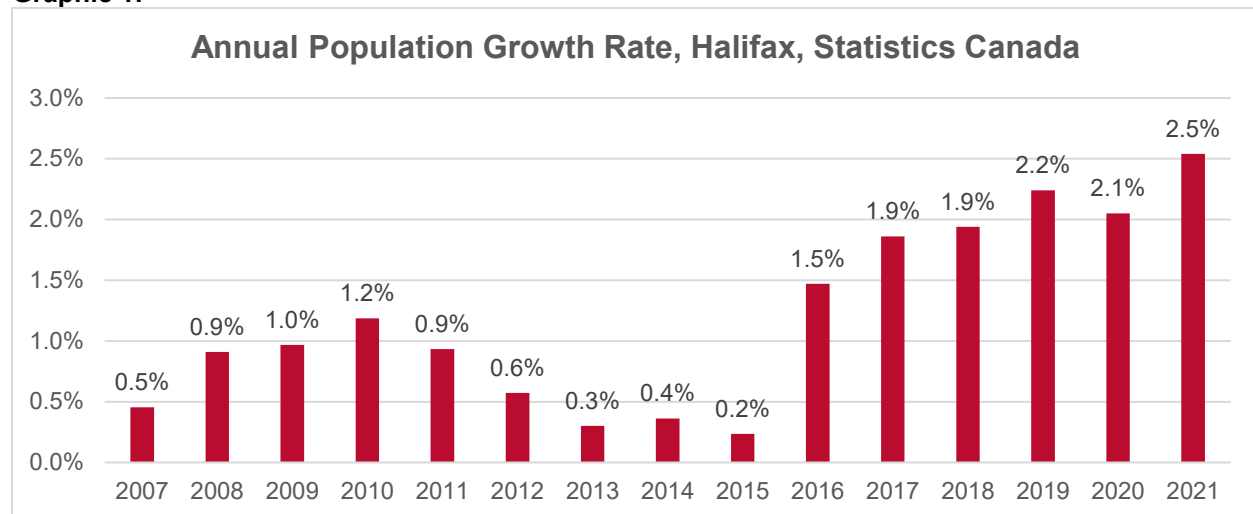
Housing and Growth Analysis

As part of the Regional Plan Review process, staff have been receiving feedback on the Preliminary Population and Housing Issue Paper. Staff have completed additional analysis in response to changing population and housing conditions, as well as the feedback received over the course of the Phase 2 engagement period. A report with supplementary information is included in Attachment D.

Population Growth Scenarios

In the last few years, Halifax has experienced unprecedented population growth, advancing from an approximate 1% growth rate in the early 2000s to a 2% annual growth rate in the last few years. This sudden change began in 2016 and has continued since. Recent estimates released in November 2021 by Statistics Canada indicate that HRM has experienced record growth this year, with our population increasing by 2.5% to 459,938.

Graphic 1:



As a result of this and other growth pressures, which are explored in Attachment D, staff are recommending an additional high growth scenario be added. Depending on the population scenario used, the Municipality may need to accommodate the following number of new households:

Table 3: Population Scenarios

Population Scenario	Approximate Projected Annual Population Increase*	Approximate Projected Annual Household Increase*	Approximate Total Population as of 2050
Low	5,300	2,500	537,774
Moderate	9,800	4,300	714,533
High	14,600	6,400	943,014
High High	21,100	8,700	1,102, 525
*These values represent the average annual growth projected in each population scenario for the years 2022-2026; they are not meant to be predictive but to help demonstrate order of magnitude of change.			

Staff will continue to monitor data as it is published and will be re-examining population scenarios with the release of the components of population change for this past year in early 2022, with any updated information from the Provincial or Federal governments, and as new population estimates are published every year.

Regulatory Capacity and Market Indicators

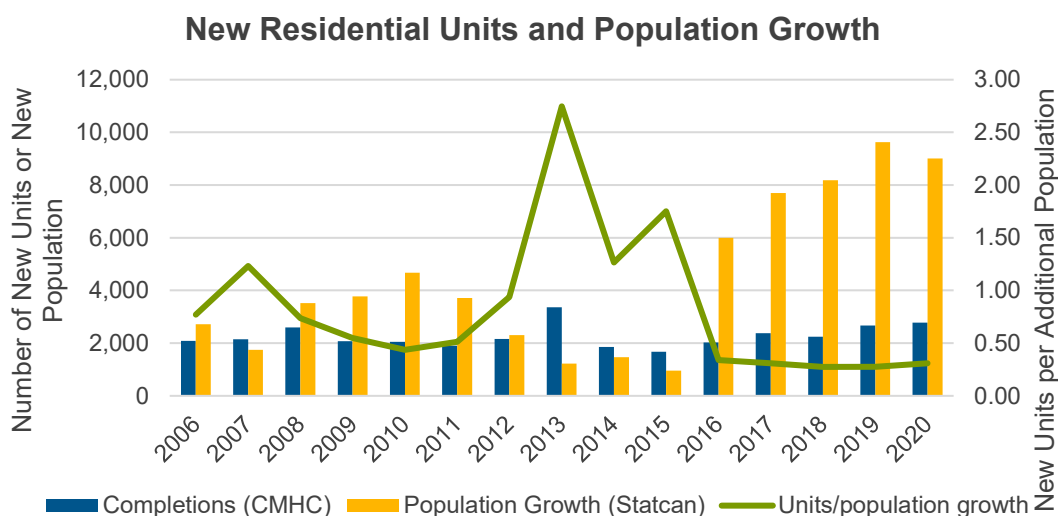
As we continue to plan for HRM's housing, it is important to highlight that the act of creating regulatory capacity in planning frameworks does not guarantee that all potential units can or will be built. Planning policy and zoning regulations permit housing to be built at certain densities, housing types and locations, but private market factors heavily influence whether land is viable for development. When calculating HRM's "regulatory capacity", we must recognize that many factors influence how quickly housing can be built.

For example, infill development represents urban intensification, where underutilized sites are redeveloped, or existing buildings are converted to accommodate additional units or commercial space. Planning policy may identify an underutilized site (for example, a property containing a small commercial building with a large parking lot in an urban area) as an appropriate place for significant residential intensification. Despite the potential regulatory capacity of this site, the current use may still be more economically viable in the short to medium term than a redevelopment project. It may take several years for the market conditions to make an infill project economically viable. Similarly, expansion of the service boundary requires analysis of infrastructure constraints, coordination often among various levels of government, and often among multiple landowners.

In assessing housing demand and supply needs, several market-based indicators aid in understanding the current housing conditions. More detail is provided in Attachment D, however, a high-level summary is as follows:

- Since 2016, residential unit construction has grown, but the scale of population growth has outpaced the growth in residential construction. Staff are suggesting a potential construction undersupply of approximately 12,644 units.
- Staff examined HRM's absorption rates using CMHC data, which show how quickly new housing is built and occupied. This can help us understand how quickly housing is being constructed in relation to demand and indicate how much new housing inventory is available. Analysis shows increasing pressure in the housing market as observed through increasing rates of absorption.
- CMHC's January 2021 Rental Market Report showed that a 2.9% increase in the rental universe in 2020, and more newly completed units were added than in 2019. CMHC's data shows that despite growth in new apartment unit completions in recent years, the vacancy rate remains very low.

Graphic 2:



Planning Policy Response

Although there are many aspects of the housing ecosystem and construction process that HRM does not have direct control over, it does contribute to the provision of market-based housing in two principal ways:

- Ensuring that there is **sufficient regulatory capacity** to accommodate changes in housing demand; and
- Ensuring the **efficient service delivery** of development and construction approvals.

The Regional Plan Review is focused on the first of these – ensuring regulatory capacity is available to accommodate changes in housing demand. The Regional Plan focuses on organizing the growth of the municipality in two main ways; through expansion and infill.

When development occurs on previously undeveloped land, this often represents **an expansion of the existing urban area**. In HRM, significant expansion and intensification has been enabled through the Regional Plan through Master Planning, which is a comprehensive infrastructure and planning process (examples include Bedford South, Bedford West, Russell Lake West). The Municipality is focused on expansion in the following ways:

- **Advancing Future Service Communities**, which are planned growth areas (examples include Sandy Lake, Highway 102, Dartmouth East, and Akoma/Westphal lands). To ensure planning in these growth areas proceeds with urgency and specialty in alignment with Regional Council's goals, a dedicated staff team is being assembled to advance this work.
- **Identifying areas for future growth** (Urban Reserves) to ensure continued land is available for growth in the coming years, to respond to potential population growth.

HRM has **enabled infill by identifying sites suitable for intensification** along transit lines and in areas that are ready for redevelopment, which align with delivery of key services. This work is being completed through the Secondary Plan and By-law Simplification project with infill development being focussed in the following ways:

- The Centre Plan policies and regulations facilitate overall quicker approvals, consistency and clarity in development rights and improved approval processes. New residential regulatory capacity has been created in Centres, Corridors and Higher Order Residential Areas.
- In addition, significant areas for intensification were approved in 2019 through the Centre Plan Package A, these are called Future Growth Nodes (examples include: Shannon Park, Mic Mac Mall, West End Mall, Penhorn and Dartmouth Cove).
- Following the Centre Plan, the Municipality will focus efforts on the Suburban Plan and Rural Plan, which will again strive to facilitate quicker approvals and intensification in areas primed for redevelopment and servicing.

DISCUSSION

Remaining Work Regional Plan Review

As noted, staff have completed Phases 1 and 2 of the overall Regional Plan Review work program. In response to managing the Municipality's response to growth and feedback received on our analysis of population and housing, staff are recommending that the remaining work be divided into three phases. The table below outlines this Phasing Plan, and also the potential residential housing capacity associated with the work.

Table 4 – Regional Plan Work Plan - Remaining Phasing

Phase	Name	Description	Potential Residential Capacity*	Target RC Date
Phase 3	Quick Adjustments	- Finalize population and housing analysis and update using Statistics Canada's 2021 Census Data Release (early 2022) - Advance work on site specific requests that align with policy direction and are relatively straightforward to initiate (See Attachment C, Table 1: Summary - Phase 3; examples include Bedford Commons, Morris Lake, Exhibition Park) - Simple text amendments that help support priorities plans (i.e., IMP, HGNP, HalifACT) - Identify any quick adjustments that can be undertaken to Suburban or Rural Plans that would provide greater clarity in decision-making and result in improved conditions for housing development - Undertake employment study and update Regional Transportation Model with new data (Population, Employment and Active Transportation) - Model preferred growth scenario(s)	8,411 units	May 2022
Phase 4	Regional Plan Draft	- Complete Analysis as identified in the Work Plan (See Attachment B) - Advance work on additional site-specific requests (see Attachment C, Table 1: Summary – Phase 4; examples include various lands in Middle Sackville, Bayers Lake and Purcell's Cove Urban Reserve)	6,384 units	Dec 2022
Phase 5	Future Growth	- Advance work on assessing remaining urban reserves - Host Regional workshops and engagement to identify growth nodes - Identify new areas for expansion and growth - Advance work on additional site-specific requests (see Attachment C, Table 1: Summary – Phase 5; examples include Kidston Lake Urban Reserve, Bedford Highway sites and Beaver Bank & Hammonds Plains lands)	8,459 units	Spring 2023
*These values are estimates based on cursory analysis only, are not meant to be exact, and are provided to help demonstrate order of magnitude.				

Work Occurring Outside Regional Plan Review

There are also a number of pieces of policy work that require the attention and focus of specialized teams. It is staff's intention to bring more information forward on staffing and resourcing requirements as part of the budget and business planning process, and in subsequent meetings of Regional Council. Below are key pieces of work that **will be conducted outside of the Regional Plan Review**. An overview of this work is provided, as well as an estimate of the potential housing units that are estimated to result from the policy work.

Table 5 – Policy Work Occurring Outside the Regional Plan Review

Policy Item	Description Next Steps	Potential Funding Needs *	Initial Assessment of Possible Residential Capacity of Intensification Areas *
Future Serviced Communities (Master Planning) - Sandy Lake - Dartmouth East - Highway 102 - Akoma - Burnside Sub-Area 14 - Ragged Lake	Team: - Planned Growth Next Steps: - Hire/Assign Team - Develop Work Plan - Identify Mechanisms to Speed up the Process - Return to Council with work program in early 2022 - Additional funds for strategic studies required to advance work will be brought forward at this time Note: Sandy Lake Environmental/Park Boundary Study is being advanced now as a result of the November 9, 2021 motion of Regional Council.	Approximately \$1.5 Million to conduct baseline infrastructure study and environmental assessments	18,506 units
Plan and By-law Simplification - Centre Plan Future Growth Nodes and Ongoing Upkeep - Suburban Plan - Rural Plan	Team: - Staff will continue to be focused on implementation and ongoing upkeep of the Centre Plan. - Some staff may be redeployed however, additional staff may be needed to advance Future Growth Nodes and Suburban and Rural Plans. - Staff will identify what additional staff and budget resources are needed to Regional Council as part of the budget process. Next Steps: - Engagement during the Regional Plan Review has highlighted that additional engagement and community analysis may be required before advancing intensification in Suburban Areas, including Interim Guidelines. - Engagement during the Regional Plan Review has highlighted that additional engagement in defining Rural and Edge Communities, as well as Infrastructure (Servicing and	Approximately \$1 million to support hiring consultants to run engagement and develop policy framework – other studies may be required over time	Centre Plan Future Growth Nodes – 24,000 units (Some of this work is already underway) Suburban Plan – 50,000 - 60,000 units Rural Plan – requires additional research and analysis to determine

Table 5 – Policy Work Occurring Outside the Regional Plan Review

Policy Item	Description Next Steps	Potential Funding Needs *	Initial Assessment of Possible Residential Capacity of Intensification Areas *
	Mobility) Analysis is required in advance of the Rural Plan review.		
Affordable Housing - Develop Interim Density Bonusing Program - Develop Inclusionary Zoning Program - Develop work on Community Land Trusts	Team: - Social Policy Team Next Steps: - Work is already underway on all three items - Initial Interim Density Bonusing Framework Expected spring 2022 - Inclusionary Zoning Initial Report and Policy Direction expected summer 2022 - CMHC funding has been awarded for Community Land Trusts - Any additional funds required to advance this work will be brought forward in the budget process	Accommodated under existing Operational Budgets	Not Applicable
Mill Cove Planning and Infrastructure Design	Will identify to Regional Council what additional staff and budget might be required to advance this work as part of the budget process	\$200,000	Not Applicable
*These values are estimates based on cursory analysis only, are not meant to be exact, and are provided to help demonstrate order of magnitude.			

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs associated with undertaking the Regional Plan review identified in the work plan for 2021-2022 can be accommodated within the approved 2021-2022 operating budget. Information concerning risks and other implications of adopting the proposed work plan is contained within the Discussion section of this report.

RISK CONSIDERATION

This report involves amendments to the Regional Plan and secondary municipal planning strategies. Such amendments are at the discretion of Regional Council and are not subject to appeal to the N.S. Utility and Review Board. Information concerning risks and other implications of adopting the proposed amendments are contained within the Discussion section of this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement process is consistent with the intent of the HRM Community Engagement Strategy, the *HRM Charter*, and the revised Regional Plan Review Engagement Plan approved by Regional Council on December 15, 2020⁴. Staff are proposing an update to that Engagement Plan, which can be found in Attachment A. The revisions will reflect the updates to the work plan, as outlined in this report.

The level of community engagement achieved during Phase 2 of the Regional Plan was consultation. A summary of the engagement is included in the Background section of this report, and detailed engagement results are provided in the What We Heard Report in Attachment E.

As staff move into Phase 3 of the Review, information on the site-specific amendments contained in this report will be posted on the Regional Plan Review website⁵ and comments will be accepted by phone and email. A public hearing must be held by Regional Council before they can consider approval of any proposed amendments to the Regional Plan, secondary plans or land use by-laws.

Amendments to the Regional Plan, secondary municipal planning strategies and land use by-laws may potentially impact residents, business owners, other HRM Business Units, and stakeholders including other levels of government, community groups, and the development industry.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications of this report identified at this time. The Regional Plan includes a range of policies that deal both directly and indirectly with the natural environment. The implications of any proposed policy changes will be considered throughout the review process and outlined in future reports to Council.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council may choose to initiate the consideration of an engagement or policy review process that would differ from that outlined in this report. This may require a supplementary report from staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: Revised Engagement Plan
- Attachment B: Regional Plan Review Remaining Work Plan
- Attachment C: Site-Specific Amendment Requests for Consideration through the Regional Plan Review Process
- Attachment D: Preliminary Housing & Population Analysis - Supplemental Report
- Attachment E: What We Heard Report
- Attachment F: Engagement Plan Amendments

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

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⁴ https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/201215rc1118_0.pdf

⁵ <https://www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/regional-plan>

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