

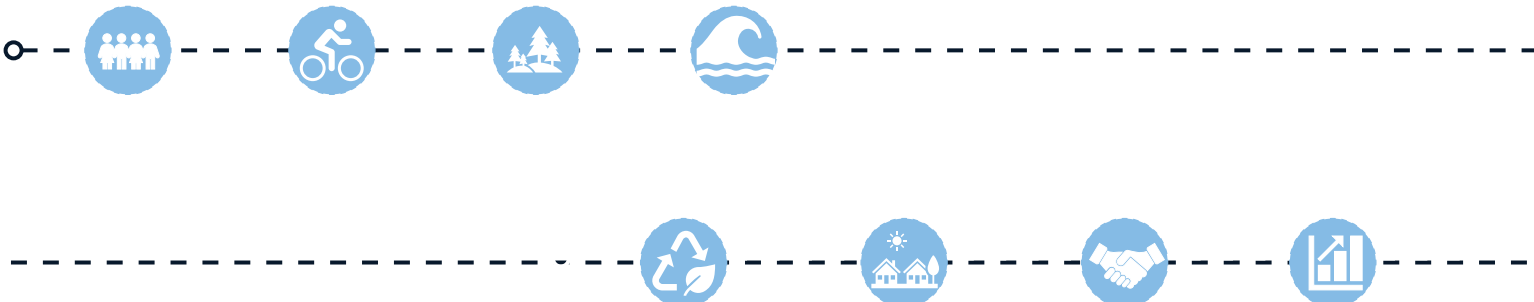


DRAFT REGIONAL PLAN

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

December 2023

HALIFAX



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OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The Halifax Regional Municipality initiated its review of the Regional Plan in 2020. The Regional Plan (also known as the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy) sets out a common vision, principles, and long-range, region-wide planning policies outlining where, when, and how future growth and development should take place. The Regional Plan Review responds to the region's population growth and housing pressures with a focus on developing complete communities, protecting natural and cultural resources, and acting on climate.

The Draft Regional Plan was presented to Regional Council on June 20, 2023. This report summarizes feedback collected from June 20 through October 27, 2023.

The Regional Plan provides policy for the whole municipality. Engagement activities reflect the municipality's expansive geography and diverse communities with a range of options for being involved. Extensive engagement with stakeholders took place during this phase of engagement. Public participation with a range of groups meant that staff could receive the meaningful feedback needed to bring forward refinements to the Plan for Regional Council's consideration.

There was a special focus on events in suburban and rural areas as the Draft Plan introduced the Suburban and Rural Community Planning programs. In July 2023, Regional Council approved the initiation of the Suburban Community Planning program, using the Draft Regional Plan engagement as its initial public participation program.

While previous phases of engagement on the Regional Plan Review focused on digital tools in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and public health restrictions, engagement on the Draft Plan incorporated a renewed focus on in-person engagement options, along with options to engage virtually.

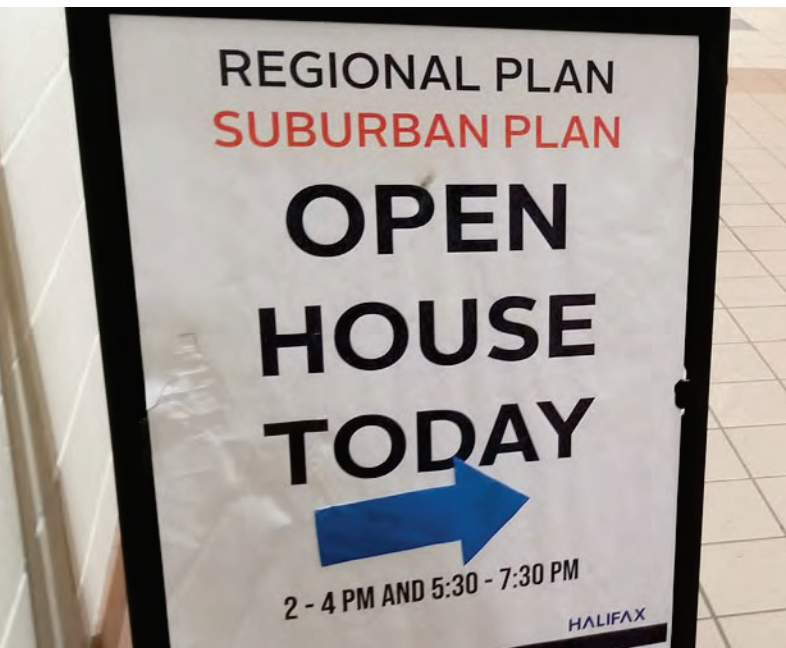
SUBURBAN COMMUNITY PLANNING ENGAGEMENT

The Suburban Community Planning Program is a framework the Municipality will use to guide planning and development in suburban communities. The Regional Plan refers to suburban communities as those that are within the Urban Service Area (with transit, piped water, and piped wastewater existing or planned) and are outside the Regional Centre. Engagement allowed Suburban Community Planning staff to have conversations about the principles and objectives of the planning program, and to learn more about specific community concerns.

APPENDICES

This What We Heard Report is accompanied by a series of appendices:

- Appendix A: Compiled Comments on the Draft Regional Plan and Preliminary Staff Response
- Appendix B: Suburban Plan Questionnaire Responses
- Appendix C: Reddit "Ask Me Anything" Discussion
- Appendix D: Online Comment Board and Correspondence Log
- Appendix E: Written Submissions



WHAT WE DID

Public engagement for the Draft Regional Plan Review followed the Regional Plan Public Participation Program approved by Regional Council on June 20, 2023. The Public Participation program also provided communities with an early introduction to the Suburban and Rural Community Planning Programs.

To introduce the Suburban Community Planning Program, Open House events were held in suburban locations, providing information on the complete communities framework that is contained in the Draft Regional Plan. A Suburban Plan Questionnaire was available on the Regional Plan Review's Shape Your City page and at open house events.

To introduce the Rural Community Planning Program, Staff held Planner Office Hours and Pop-ups in Rural Areas. Staff also participated in community meetings organized by local community groups.

HOW WE GOT THE WORD OUT

To raise awareness about both in-person and virtual options to engage a variety of advertising methods were used. Notification tools included:

- Public Service Announcement and traditional media coverage;
- Councillor newsletters;
- Updates to the dedicated [Regional Plan Review webpage](#) on Shape Your City Halifax;
- Emails to email contact lists and Shape Your City E-blast;
- Social Media Posts and Advertising, including:
 - » Facebook
 - » X
 - » Instagram
 - » Reddit
- Digital screens;
- Radio advertising on Seaside FM;

- Print ads in local newspapers:
 - » Masthead News
 - » Eastern Shore Co-operator
 - » The Beacon
 - » Chebucto News
 - » Shop the Shore
 - » Cole Harbour Merchant
 - » Burnside Merchant
 - » Parkview News
- Posters in all Halifax Public Libraries; and
- Hard copies of the draft Plan available at all Libraries.

Community groups and stakeholder organizations amplified and publicized events and ways to be involved through their own contact lists and social media.

ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

As summarized in Table 1, **staff had over 1000 interactions through this phase of engagement.**



Community and pop-up events (Musquodoboit Harbour, Middle Musquodoboit)

ENGAGEMENT	EVENTS, INTERACTIONS, AND SUBMISSIONS
Planner Office Hours	6 days in 3 locations (approximately 50 participants)
Pop-Ups	13 events (approximately 364 participants)
Open Houses	5 open houses (each with afternoon and evening sessions), with a total of 179 attendees
Attendance at community meetings	2 events (approximately 100 participants)
Stakeholder Meetings	20 meetings (approximately 94 participants)
Reddit "Ask Me Anything"	Approximately 50 unique participant comments (unknown number of site viewers)
Online Comment Board	55 submissions
Suburban Plan Questionnaire	56 questionnaires completed
Phone Calls	11 phone calls
Emailed and Written Correspondence	121 emails and 1 written submission
Approximate total interactions	1081
Shape Your City site visits and document downloads - Regional Planning and Site-Specific Requests Pages	Total of approximately 19,200 site visits with 12,900 document downloads.

Table 1: Engagement events and participation

IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

Staff organized a range of in-person engagement events as described in

Table 2. At **pop-ups**, staff visited public places or events with a small table or booth. These events provided an opportunity for residents to meet planners and talk about ideas for their communities. **Planner Office Hours** provided the opportunity to meet municipal planners on-site at rural libraries for two days to discuss and review the Draft Plan. **Open Houses** offered the opportunity to meet with staff from the Regional Planning and Suburban Planning teams. At Open Houses, information was provided on all topics contained in the Regional Plan and events allowed for in-depth conversations on proposed policies. Each open house date included both an afternoon and evening session.

In addition, community meetings in Middle Sackville and Musquodoboit Harbour were organized by resident groups, with Planning staff invited to present on the Draft Plan and respond to questions.

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Throughout engagement, staff met with community and development industry groups using virtual and in-person meetings.

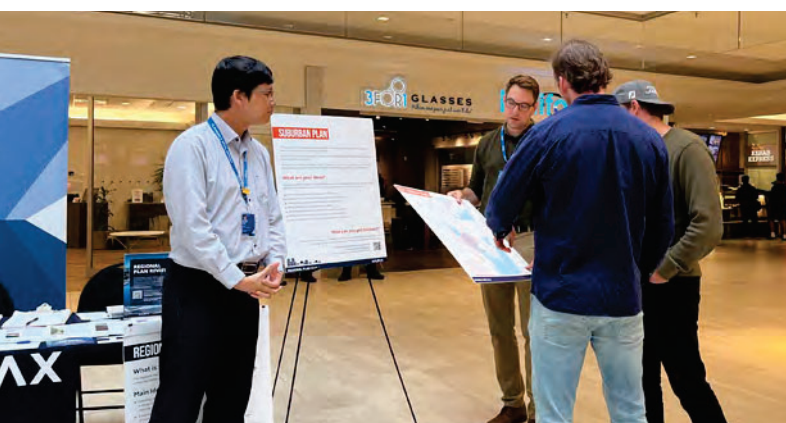
ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

The Regional Plan Review's Shape Your City Halifax webpage (www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/regional-plan) has been active since the initiation of the Regional Plan Review in February 2020. For engagement on the Draft Regional Plan, the page was updated to include event listings and engagement tools. Engagement materials and feedback tools included:

- Introductory video;
- The Draft Regional Plan documents and maps;
- Topic Summary Sheets;
- Comment Board;
- Suburban Plan Questionnaire; and
- Contact information for staff (phone and email).

POP-UPS	PLANNER OFFICE HOURS
• North American Indigenous Games, July 19 • Horizon Community Centre, Eastern Passage, August 3 • Great East Dartmouth BBQ, August 12 • Halifax County Exhibition, August 16 • Scotia Square, August 30 • Coronation Park, Fairview, September 6 • Sackville Farmers Market, September 9 • Sunnyside Mall, September 13 • Cole Harbour Place, September 21 • Spryfield Farmers Market, September 24 • Woodlawn Library, October 5 • Hubbards Farmers Market, October 14 • Alderney Landing Farmers Market, October 21	• Musquodoboit Harbour Library, August 8 and 9 • Sheet Harbour Library, August 17 and 24 • Tantallon Library, August 22 and 23
	OPEN HOUSES
	• Acadia Hall, Lower Sackville, September 19 • Canada Games Centre, Halifax, September 25 • Chocolate Lake Centre, Halifax, October 11 • Bedford Legion, Bedford, October 18 • Cole Harbour Place, Cole Harbour, October 26

Table 2: Engagement event formats, locations, and dates



Pop-ups and open houses (Lower Sackville Farmers Market, Sunnyside Mall, North American Indigenous Games, Scotia Square, Acadia Hall, Chocolate Lake Rec Centre, Cole Harbour Place)

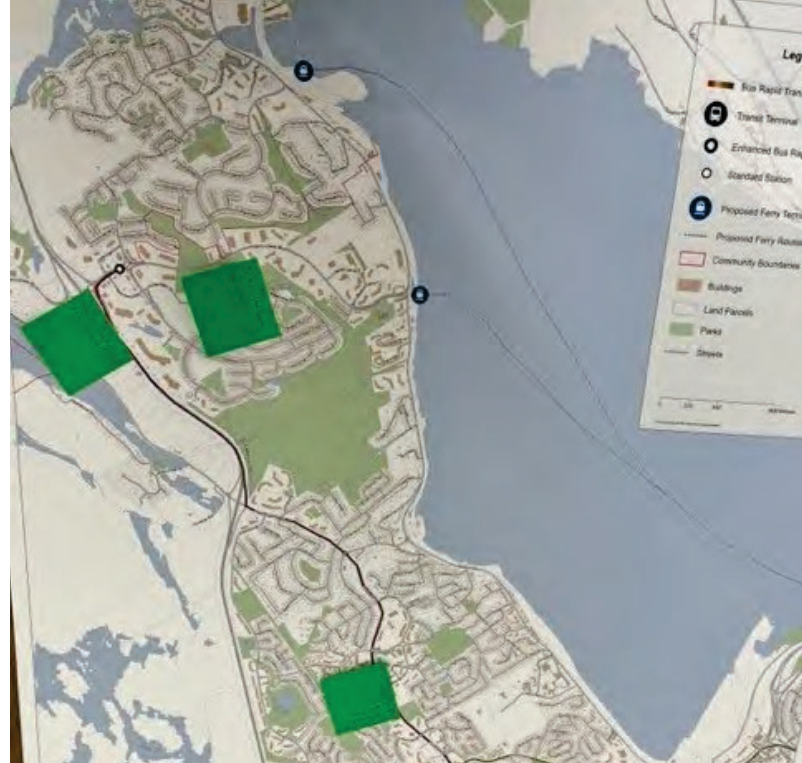
The Shape Your City webpage also includes reports and background documents for residents to review and learn about the project and its previous stages. Information on site-specific requests was available on a dedicated Shape Your City Halifax webpage (<https://www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/site-specific>).

LIVE ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Staff held a Reddit ‘Ask me Anything’ on the r/halifax subreddit, with staff posting and responding to questions on September 14 from 1 to 8 pm. Questions and responses are contained in the Appendices and remain available online.

CORRESPONDENCE

Since the release of the Draft Regional Plan on June 20, 2023, 122 pieces of correspondence were received. All comments are included in the Appendices.



WHAT WE HEARD

Feedback was generally supportive of policies and objectives contained within the Draft Regional Plan. There was wide support for the concept of healthy and complete communities as a guiding framework for planning, and for regulations to protect ecologically sensitive areas. There was concern expressed for housing supply and affordability, along with concerns for the social and physical infrastructure needed to support current and future residents. Written submissions provided a highly detailed review of draft policies. Refinements to the Draft Regional Plan are anticipated based on public feedback and internal review.

DRAFT REGIONAL PLAN KEY THEMES

We heard comments on all topics in the Regional Plan. Table 3 below provides a summary of the key discussion topics and themes. Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of comments received and preliminary staff responses.

TOPIC/CHAPTER	KEY FEEDBACK THEMES
<i>Introduction / Planning for the Region</i>	- Housing, climate change, and environmental protection need to be foundational pillars of the Plan. - Enable increased infill and intensification of built-up areas and reduce sprawl – but ensure infrastructure and services are available to support it.
<i>Complete Communities</i>	- More clarity is needed on what counts as suburban (the border between suburban and rural). - Build complete communities that provide housing, shops and services, walkable mixed-use areas, and transit. These communities will provide hubs/nodes across the region instead of focusing just on downtown. - There should be a higher density of housing, jobs, services, and destinations located along transit corridors and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines. - Environmental features should be preserved, and there needs to be green space and trails in new developments. - Increase non-vehicular transportation options in suburban areas. - Some of the Future Serviced Communities identified in the Regional Plan are valuable ecological areas and should remain so. - Preserve rural community character, ensuring that growth and new uses fit with existing streetscapes and do not compromise infrastructure or water supplies.
<i>Community Infrastructure</i>	- Access to parks and open spaces is one of HRM's best features. More parkland acquisition is needed as HRM grows to ensure all residents have equitable access to nature and recreation. Support for Level of Service standards and park acquisition to occur alongside population growth. - Strong support to protect nature and environmentally sensitive areas (especially Purcell's Cove Backlands, Sandy Lake, Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, and Kidston Lake), with significant interest in regulations to protect or acquire land in the adjacent areas and watershed. - More recreation facilities and expanded programming are needed, along with considerations for diversity, equity, and affordability of the programs. - Support for working with the Halifax Regional Centre for Education and Province on school capacity in growing communities. - There is significant concern about sufficient emergency response infrastructure, and second neighbourhood egress routes. - Significant interest and support for food security policies in the Plan.

Table 3: Draft Plan Engagement Key Themes (continues next page)

TOPIC/CHAPTER	KEY FEEDBACK THEMES
<i>Housing</i>	• There is an urgent need for housing and it should be the cornerstone of the Regional Plan. • Most support looking at all options to increase housing, including apartments, townhouses and allowing more units per lot. • There is interest in a variety of housing and tenure formats, including land lease communities, clustered developments, tiny homes, cooperative housing, and community land trusts. • Support for building affordable and non-market housing, and to include affordable housing in municipal initiatives such as the Cogswell redevelopment. • For some communities, there is strong feedback on preserving neighbourhood character in terms of the existing building form and number of units. • There is support for increasing height limits, but with consideration for transition, minimizing shadow impacts, and availability of green space. • Interest in implementing inclusionary zoning and density bonusing, but also concerns about their impact on development activity and whether these tools make market-rate units more expensive. • There is support for “no net loss” policies, however it is unclear how it would work and if it creates additional barriers to construction.
<i>Environment and Climate</i>	• The Halifax Green Network Plan (HGPN) should be implemented through the Regional Plan and inform HRM corporate initiatives and business planning. • HRM needs stronger watershed protection and should develop watershed management plans. • There needs to be better mapping and data collection for watersheds, wetlands, and floodplains. • There is support for implementing a 30-metre watercourse buffer. • Some support a wider buffer, and applying it to all wetlands, not just Wetlands of Special Significance and those adjacent to watercourses. • Representatives of the development industry expressed openness to the 30-metre buffer, so long as options to regain density elsewhere in the development is retained. • Watercourse buffers should be publicly owned, and there should be stronger enforcement against vegetation removal in buffers. • Limit or prohibit development in floodplains and look for nature-based solutions to mitigate flooding. • Coastal protection legislation is needed, with policies to limit development and protect coasts and coastal roads.

Table 3: Draft Plan Engagement Key Themes (continued from last page, continues next page)

TOPIC/CHAPTER	KEY FEEDBACK THEMES
<i>Mobility</i>	• Improve public transit frequency, reliability, and geographic coverage. Improved connections for Burnside, Main Street Dartmouth, Bayers Lake, and Spryfield were particularly highlighted. • Consider commuter rail and light rail transit (LRT). • Implement Bus Rapid transit (BRT) and fast ferries. BRT connections to Spryfield, the new Bedford ferry, and Larry Uteck area were specifically mentioned. • BRT station design needs to incorporate bike infrastructure and the BRT needs to be connected to active transportation (AT) routes. • Expand the AT network with more protected bike lanes and better infrastructure. • Cyclist and pedestrian safety are major concerns. • There need to be more options for rural transit. • Traffic congestion is getting worse. New growth and development need to have infrastructure or designs to mitigate it. Concerns were raised about Spryfield, Sackville, Beaver Bank, and Hammonds Plains Road. • Mode share targets are very aggressive and may not be feasible without significant investment in transit service and active transportation. • There should be more transit and active transportation connections between suburban communities, and less focus on transportation into the downtown Halifax core.
<i>Economy</i>	• Support for enabling more commercial uses in residential areas to create mixed use communities. • Promote more nature-based tourism. • Limit/stop infilling of water lots. • African Nova Scotian community action planning is important to address historic inequities.
<i>Arts, Culture and Heritage</i>	• The Regional Plan needs to address Reconciliation. Mi'kmaq communities should have more influence over development and land use. • The policies on salvage & deconstruction increases heritage preservation and supports the Plan's environmental goals. • Need an art policy if HRM is going to have a population of one million people.
<i>Additional Comments</i>	• Overall, policies need to be stronger, especially environmental policies. They should use "shall" instead of "consider" or "may consider" to strengthen actions. • The Plan needs meaningful performance indicators, ongoing monitoring and reporting to measure its success.

Table 3: Draft Plan Engagement Key Themes (continued from last page)

SUBURBAN COMMUNITY PLANNING KEY THEMES

In general, there was strong support for the Community Planning Program and the development of updated and simplified planning policy for suburban communities. The Draft Regional Plan contained draft Guiding Principles and Design Guidelines for the Suburban Community Planning Program. Table 4 below provides a summary of feedback on the topics of the Guiding Principles.



DRAFT GUIDING PRINCIPLES	KEY FEEDBACK THEMES
<i>Open Space and Culture</i> - Identify, preserve, enhance, and showcase important natural and cultural heritage features, that contribute to sustainability and sense of place. - Integrate natural processes and energy conservation in site design including preserving, rehabilitating, and restoring natural system functions. - Provide for generous active and passive parks and open spaces.	The protection of the environment and support for more sustainable forms of development was a strong theme of engagement, both in the Suburban Area and broadly across the municipality. Participants identified public parks, forested areas, and waterbodies as being important areas to protect. Many respondents to the Questionnaire identified specific areas for protection and enhancement. Feedback included that density should be focused on HRM's existing serviced area, rather than developing greenfield sites and expanding services to them.

Table 4: Key Feedback on the Suburban Plan (continues next page)

DRAFT GUIDING PRINCIPLES	KEY FEEDBACK THEMES
<i>Complete Communities</i> • Support people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to live, work, shop, learn, and play within a short journey. • Promote mixed use neighbourhoods with safe and convenient access to goods and services needed in daily life to create positive health outcomes. • Use an equity lens when developing land use policies.	In general, participants identified a need for additional housing in our suburban communities, including a range of forms and levels of affordability, to accommodate HRM's growing population and give existing residents more options for places to live in their communities. In the Questionnaire, the most popular forms of housing identified to support increased density in the suburbs were low and mid-rise multi-unit buildings. Some participants expressed concern about the impact of increasing density in low density neighbourhoods. Many participants identified concerns about the limited availability of services, infrastructure, and amenities in suburban communities to support new and existing residents. Participants identified a need for enhanced transit service, improvements to roads, sidewalks, and paths for vehicles and active transportation, and increased water and wastewater capacity. They also supported the introduction of additional uses like schools, recreation facilities, health care services, emergency services, and commercial uses like local shops, grocery stores, and restaurants. Several participants suggested establishing local employment hubs or 'downtowns' outside of the Regional Centre to reduce the need for trips the Regional Centre.
<i>Transit Supportive Growth</i> • Direct growth to transit corridors, nodes, and under-utilized commercial nodes to support inclusive and connected communities; • Locate the highest density and mix of uses within a short walk of frequent transit terminals, and mid-rise and missing middle housing within a short walk of transit station or corridor; • Create short blocks, grid or modified grid mobility networks, and complete streets within transit walksheds.	Traffic and congestion were identified as a concern by participants. There was support for creating mixed-use, walkable communities, and increasing access to transit. Feedback included requests for establishing the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines and ferry routes established and participants generally understood that additional density would be required to support them. Feedback also included concern about the timing of the introduction of density and the establishment of rapid transit service. Concerns included having many new residents buying cars and establishing travel habits before rapid transit service is available, the cost of acquiring lands to establish BRT service increasing because of zoning changes and the possibility that the service will never be established at all.

Table 4: Key Feedback on the Suburban Plan (continued from last page, continues next page)

DRAFT GUIDING PRINCIPLES	KEY FEEDBACK THEMES
<i>Pedestrians First and Human Based Design</i> • Prioritize the needs and comfort of people in all seasons to make walking more convenient and viable, reduce emissions and improve public health. • Encourage land use, transportation and design policies that prioritize walking, cycling and transit over private vehicles. • Foster high-quality architecture and urban design that is interesting and comfortable for people at street level.	Feedback included general support for creating more pedestrian friendly communities across the municipality. Some participants expressed a need to protect suburban character in building and community design. Participants often noted the need for additional sidewalks and other forms of active transportation infra-structure in suburban communities, though some did not feel that this was necessary and may negatively impact the convenience of vehicle travel. Feedback included support for reducing or eliminating parking requirements in planning documents, with the understanding that development would still provide needed parking for users, without these being specified by Municipal regulations.
<i>Other Feedback</i>	In addition to comments on the Guiding Principles, common feedback included: • Improving the readability of planning documents. • Ensuring that the development of the Suburban Plan includes additional community engagement with residents and stakeholders. • Clarifying the boundary between the Suburban Area and the Rural Area. • Increasing the number of photos in the Suburban Design Guidelines from suburban communities. • Increasing density inside HRM's existing serviced area, rather than expanding out into greenfield sites. • Considering emergency egress in the design of communities.

Table 4: Key Feedback on the Suburban Plan (continued from last page)

FEEDBACK FOR THE RURAL COMMUNITY PLANNING PROGRAM

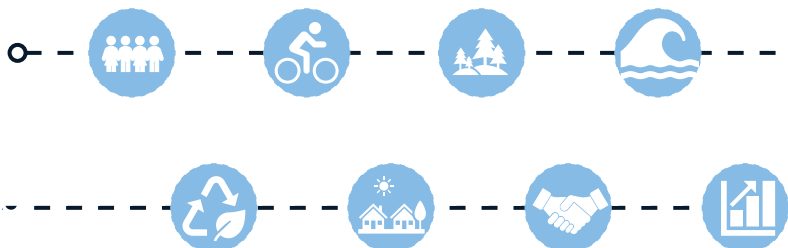
There was feedback that rural communities will require a different approach to planning than HRM’s urban and suburban areas. The Rural Community Planning Program, with its participatory, community-led approach, received support as a way to incorporate local knowledge into the rural planning framework. Some community members feel rural areas have been marginalized or underserved by municipal services. Preserving rural character and sense of community was a key theme of feedback and there is concern that growth could negatively impact rural communities, but also interest in how growth might be able to support economic development and improved infrastructure, such as sidewalks, transit, and active transportation options. Drinking water quality and quantity is also a concern in many rural areas.

Coastal and agricultural land protection received a significant amount of attention. Ensuring the remaining lands that can support agriculture are protected against resource extraction and residential development was important. Many of HRM’s rural communities are experiencing sea level rise and storm surges and want stronger protection for the coastline and coastal roads. HRM’s rural areas offer easy access to nature, which was seen as a strength in attracting tourism and increasing local economic development opportunities.

NEXT STEPS

Staff continue to review feedback in preparing refinements to the Regional Plan, with an intent to provide the Plan and amendment package for consideration by Regional Council in 2024.

This engagement is informing the refinement of objectives and engagement approaches for the Rural and Suburban Community Planning programs. These programs will continue to engage communities throughout the municipality.



Acknowledgments

The Halifax Regional Municipality wishes to thank all residents and stakeholders who took the time to participate in engagement activities, provide feedback on the Regional Plan Review, and get the word out on engagement opportunities. The Staff Team conducting engagement included:

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