

THEME 2

BUILDING HEALTHIER AND MORE COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

The Regional Plan provides guidance for the development of communities across the municipality. It sets policy direction at a regional scale by showing where and how to build communities in a way that makes the best use of municipal services and amenities, and strengthens our citizens' quality of life. It also guides community-level planning through documents called secondary plans, which outline in more detail how communities should be organized and developed. The Municipality is currently undertaking the Secondary Plan & By-law Simplification Program, which will reorganize secondary planning documents into three major geographies (Regional Centre, Suburban Communities and Rural Communities) and update their policies to reflect the direction of the Regional Plan.



WHAT IS A COMPLETE COMMUNITY?

HRM's priority plans have highlighted the importance of building healthy and "complete communities". Complete communities are where people of all ages, abilities, incomes and backgrounds can live, work, learn, shop and play near one another, with access to transportation, food and a variety of housing options. Complete communities provide residents with the services and resources they need, foster strong social connections and support community mental health. Healthy community design has a positive impact on residents' health and overall well-being.

The "building blocks" of a complete, healthy community include:

- Places to live, in a range of housing types for all ages, incomes and abilities, including shared housing options;
- Places to learn, work and shop, including schools and institutions, business districts and industrial areas;
- Places to play and access nature, including parks, community centres, recreation facilities and libraries;
- Places to celebrate culture and heritage, including gathering spaces, cultural landscapes, museums and heritage buildings;
- Protection of important environmental

areas, including wilderness areas, coastal areas, wetlands, flood plains and wildlife habitats;

- Access to healthy, affordable food, including space for food production, and support for local food systems;
- Well connected places, with affordable and accessible transportation, including transit, active transportation routes and trails, and roads; and
- Basic services and infrastructure that create safe and healthy places, including emergency services, waste collection, and water and wastewater infrastructure.

The Municipality can be strategic by directing new development to areas that already have services and amenities that reflect the idea of a complete community and have the greatest potential to accommodate new growth. To build upon those community assets, the Regional Plan Review will study existing and planned transit, parks, facilities and other public amenities, and their relationship to potential locations for growth. This will identify the areas that can best support growth as well as any gaps that should be addressed to better support communities. Following this, the Secondary Plan and By-law Simplification Program will use this strategic direction to prepare more detailed and area-specific policies and built form regulations.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

2.1 Review and revise the Regional Plan's Settlement policies to better support the Municipality's goal of building complete communities and implementing the direction of the Priorities Plans.

2.2 Review and revise the Regional Plan's growth centre policies using a 'complete communities' analysis by:

- Defining different types of centres and adopting land use policies reflecting appropriate levels of growth for each;
- Refining the expected population growth projections based on recent observed trends;
- Identifying environmental and other physical constraints;
- In Suburban communities, targeting new development around frequent transit networks; and,
- In Rural communities, maintaining the Regional Plan's overall approach to limit sprawl and cluster development that encourages strong rural centres.



WHAT IS THE SECONDARY PLAN & BY-LAW SIMPLIFICATION PROGRAM?

To implement the planning and land use direction contained in the Regional Plan, Regional Council relies on a group of documents called Secondary Municipal Planning Strategies. Each of these are subordinate to the Regional Plan, apply to a specific community area (sub-geography) within the municipality and contain locally-oriented policies that govern land use on each individual property within that sub-geography.

The Municipality is currently undergoing a major project to simplify this secondary planning framework and bring these documents fully in line with the strategic vision set out in the Regional Plan. This is called the Secondary Plan and By-law Simplification Program. This will reorganize the Secondary Municipal Planning Strategies around three major geographies – the Regional Centre, Suburban Communities (everything outside of the Regional Centre, but inside the transit service boundary), and Rural Communities (all lands outside the transit service boundary).

Many of HRM's 22 Secondary Municipal Planning Strategies were developed before amalgamation in 1996. Each is accompanied by a Land Use By-law, which is the regulatory implementation tool. The plans are in a variety

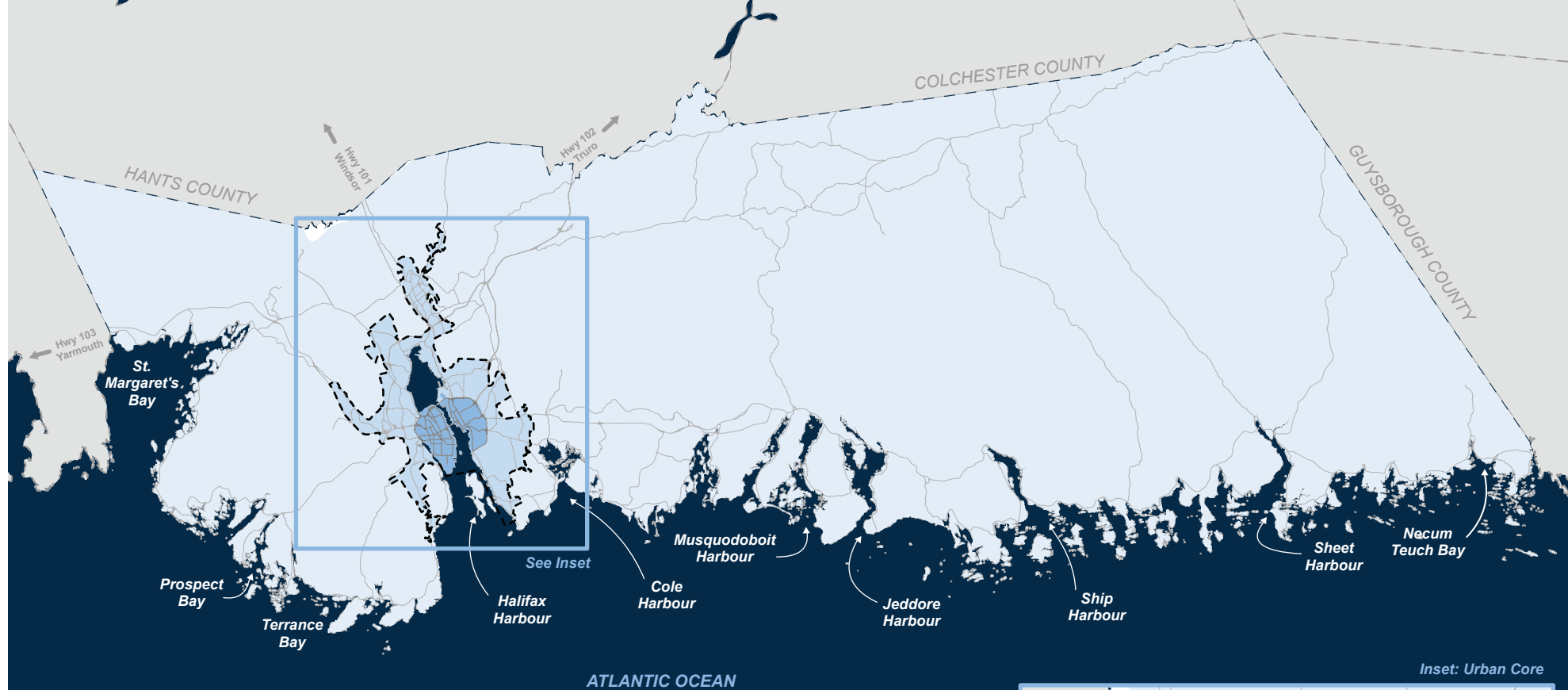
of formats, and use different definitions, policies, and processes to regulate land use and development. In addition to implementing the Regional Plan, the Secondary Plan & By-law Simplification Program is expected to modernize planning policy and improve administration.

The creation of the Regional Centre Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy ("Centre Plan") is the first phase of this work. When fully adopted, the Centre Plan will turn the four original plans and by-laws into one simplified plan and by-law. The 2014 version of the Regional Plan established vision and objectives for the Regional Centre Plan, and similarly, this Regional Plan Review will guide the development of the suburban and rural plans. The work will draw on the overall objectives of the Regional Plan and priority plans, together with best practice research, information regarding demographic and economic trends, and community engagement.

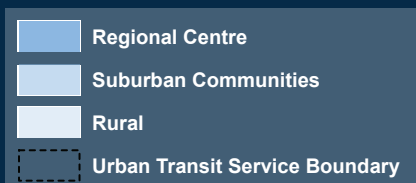
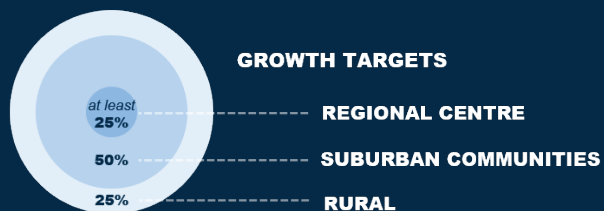
THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

2.3 Establish the Secondary Plan and By-law Simplification Program in policy with the following broad objectives:

- **Implement the Regional Plan and priorities plans through land use and community design policies and regulations;**
- **Organize the planning framework around Regional Centre, Suburban and Rural geographic areas;**
- **Direct intensification to areas that support the building of healthier and more complete communities;**
- **Affirm that each new plan and land use by-law will respond to local conditions and needs of our diverse communities. Community input and participation in this process will be critical, providing a primary source of guiding knowledge for the plans.**



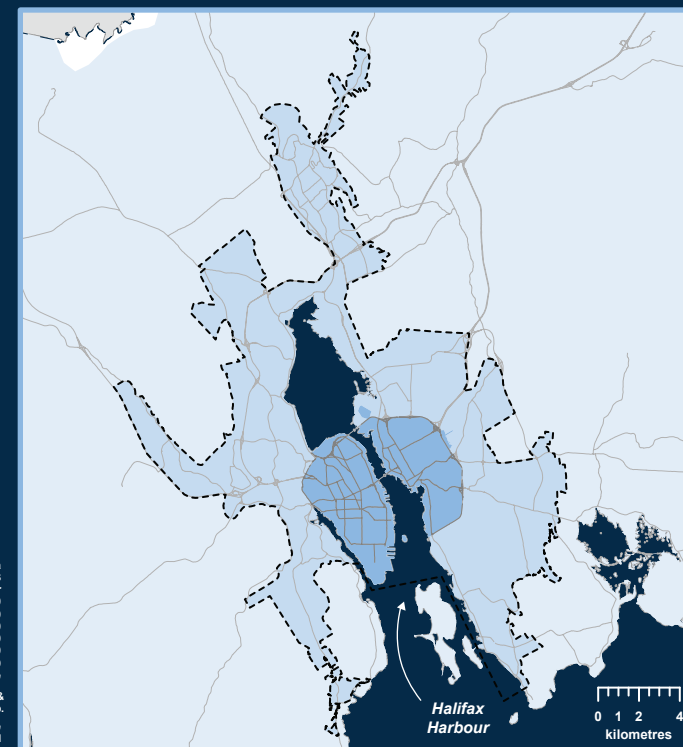
MAP 2 Regional Plan Geographies



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REGIONAL CENTRE PLAN

The Regional Centre Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (SMPS) and Land Use By-law (LUB) are detailed planning documents that replace the various outdated SMPs and LUBs covering the urban core (Halifax Peninsula and Dartmouth within the Circumferential Highway). It is expected that 40% new housing growth will occur in this area by 2031. In creating the Centre Plan and its underlying LUB, the Municipality conducted a planning process that included extensive analysis of the Regional Centre's physical, social and economic structure, public engagement, and alignment with the Regional Plan and various priority plans.

On June 13, 2017, Regional Council authorized the Centre Plan's draft direction and approved a two-phased adoption path for the Regional Centre SMPS and LUB. The first phase, known as "Package A", was adopted by Council in 2019. "Package A" included areas where most new growth will be directed, including Downtown Dartmouth, Centres, Corridors, Higher Order Residential, and Future Growth Nodes. The second phase, "Package B", will include Downtown Halifax, Established Residential areas, Institutional and Industrial lands, and Parks and Community Facilities lands. Although the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has delayed public engagement activities, "Package B" is expected to be brought forward before the Regional Plan Review is complete.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

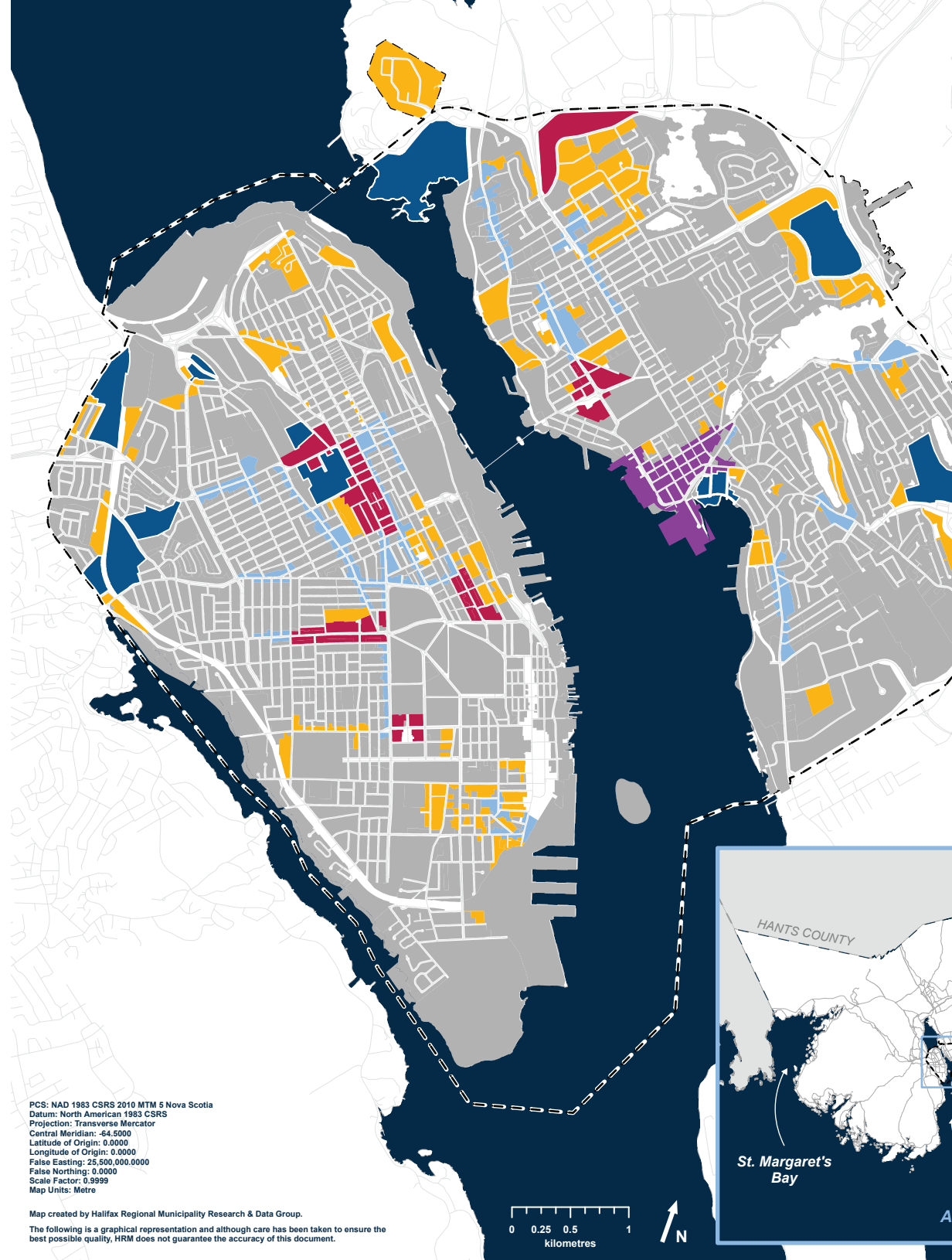
2.4 Update Chapter 6A of the Regional Plan, "The Regional Centre" upon approval of the Regional Secondary Centre Plan to reflect the current status of this document.



MAP 5 Regional Centre

Centre Plan Designation

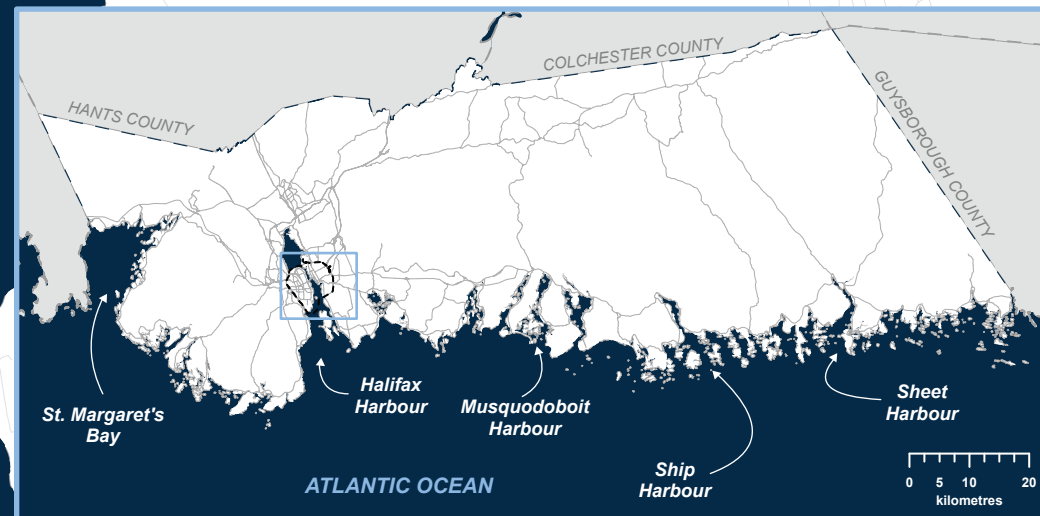
- Centre
- Corridor
- Higher-Order Residential
- Downtown
- Future Growth Node
- Package B
- Regional Centre Boundary



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SUBURBAN PLAN

The Suburban Planning area includes the urban area outside of the Regional Centre that is serviced with municipal water, wastewater and transit. It is expected that up to half of the Municipality's new housing will be built in this area by 2031. The Regional Plan Review will establish a vision and objectives for the Suburban Planning framework, which will help direct housing intensification in this area.

To identify locations for intensification, the Regional Plan will study the location of infrastructure, transit, facilities, and other public amenities. In suburban communities, most growth should occur where it's easier to take transit, walk, wheel, or cycle from home to work, school, shopping and community facilities. The [Integrated Mobility Plan](#) calls for directing high-density residential and employment density only where there is an existing or proposed high level of transit service. The [Rapid Transit Strategy](#), approved by Council in May 2020, proposed a high-frequency Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Network extending into suburban communities, and a new ferry service connecting to Downtown Halifax. The [Halifax Green Network Plan](#) highlights that new development can be shaped so that important natural areas are protected. Redeveloping existing built-up areas also provides an opportunity to enhance open

space connections if Green Network values are incorporated into the community design. These concepts will be built into the vision and objectives guiding the Suburban Plan review.

Once appropriate areas for intensification are identified, the Suburban Plan will create policies and regulations to achieve the desired form and scale of development (create the rules at the property level). As it is likely to take several years to bring forward the Suburban Plan, Council may continue to be asked to consider proposals not currently envisioned by the policy within the existing SMPs and LUBs. The Regional Plan Review will set out policy to guide decision-making for these applications while the Suburban Plan is being completed. This will allow proposals that meet identified community needs and objectives to be prioritized over proposals that are inconsistent. Additional information on this topic is available in the issue paper titled "[Suburban Community Design](#)".

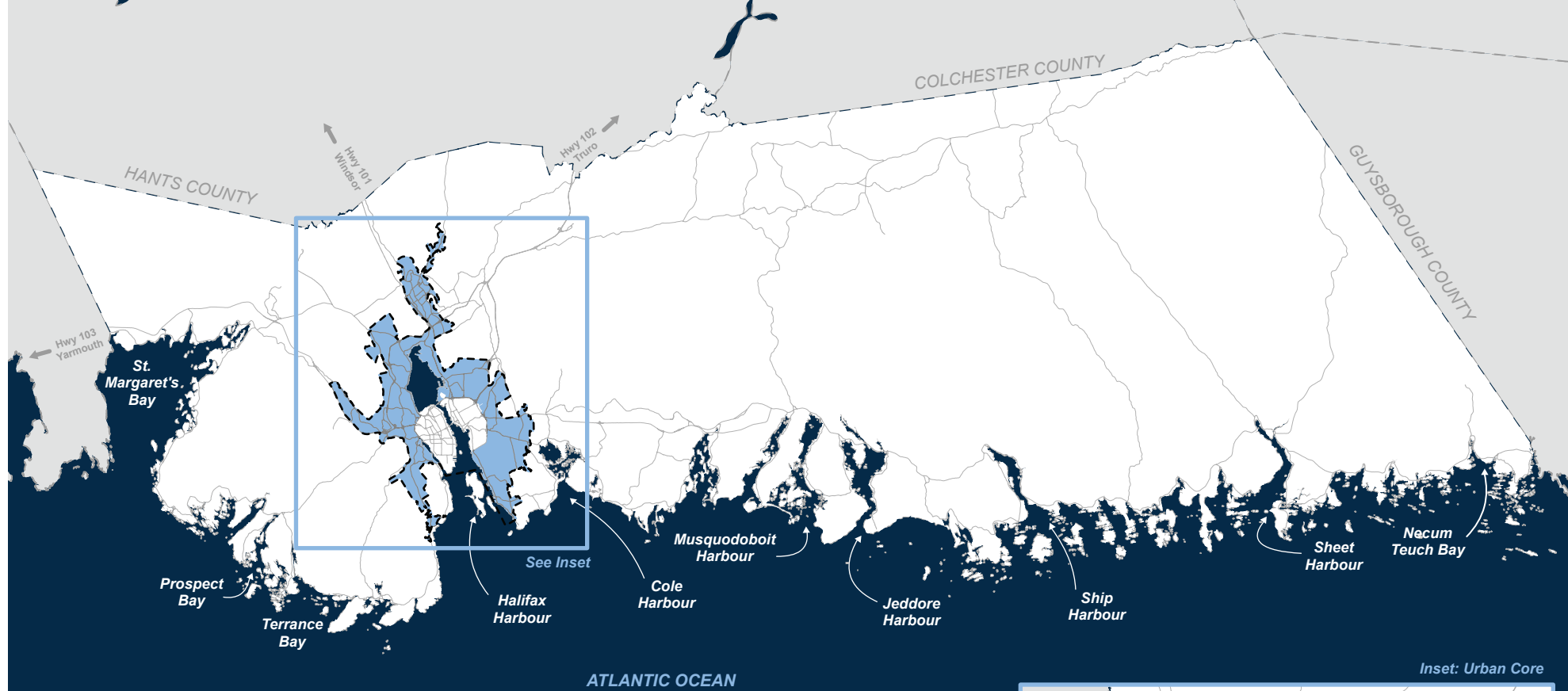
THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

2.5 Establish a vision, objectives and key principles to guide the Suburban Plan, which include:

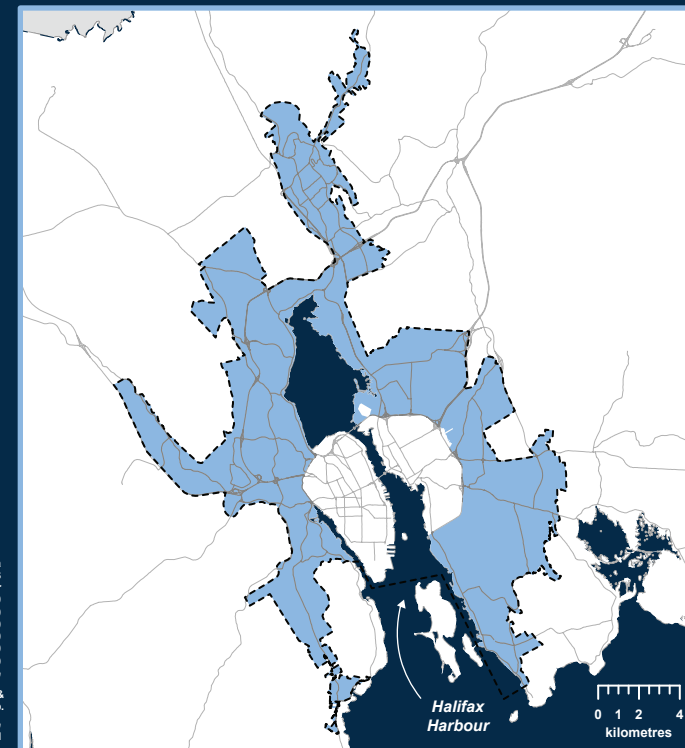
- **Directing most growth to mixed-use, transit-oriented communities that can be served by transit, walking, wheeling and cycling;**
- **Directing growth in a way that protects and preserves valuable wilderness areas and open spaces;**
- **Ensuring planning regulations focus on affordability and accessibility, and support people-oriented urban design; and**
- **Protecting and prioritizing industrial lands and harbour access for marine-dependent uses, with other employment directed to mixed-use centres.**

2.6 Adopt interim policy guidance for applications for secondary municipal planning strategy amendments to guide site planning and built form characteristics.

2.7 Consider if the interim policy guidance may also be used to improve the processing of discretionary applications such as development agreements to further the goals and objectives of the Regional Plan.

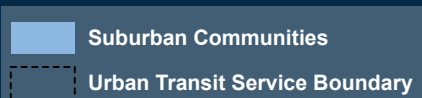


Inset: Urban Core



MAP 6

Suburban Communities



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For more information on this topic, please read the issue paper titled [Rural Community Planning](#)

RURAL PLAN

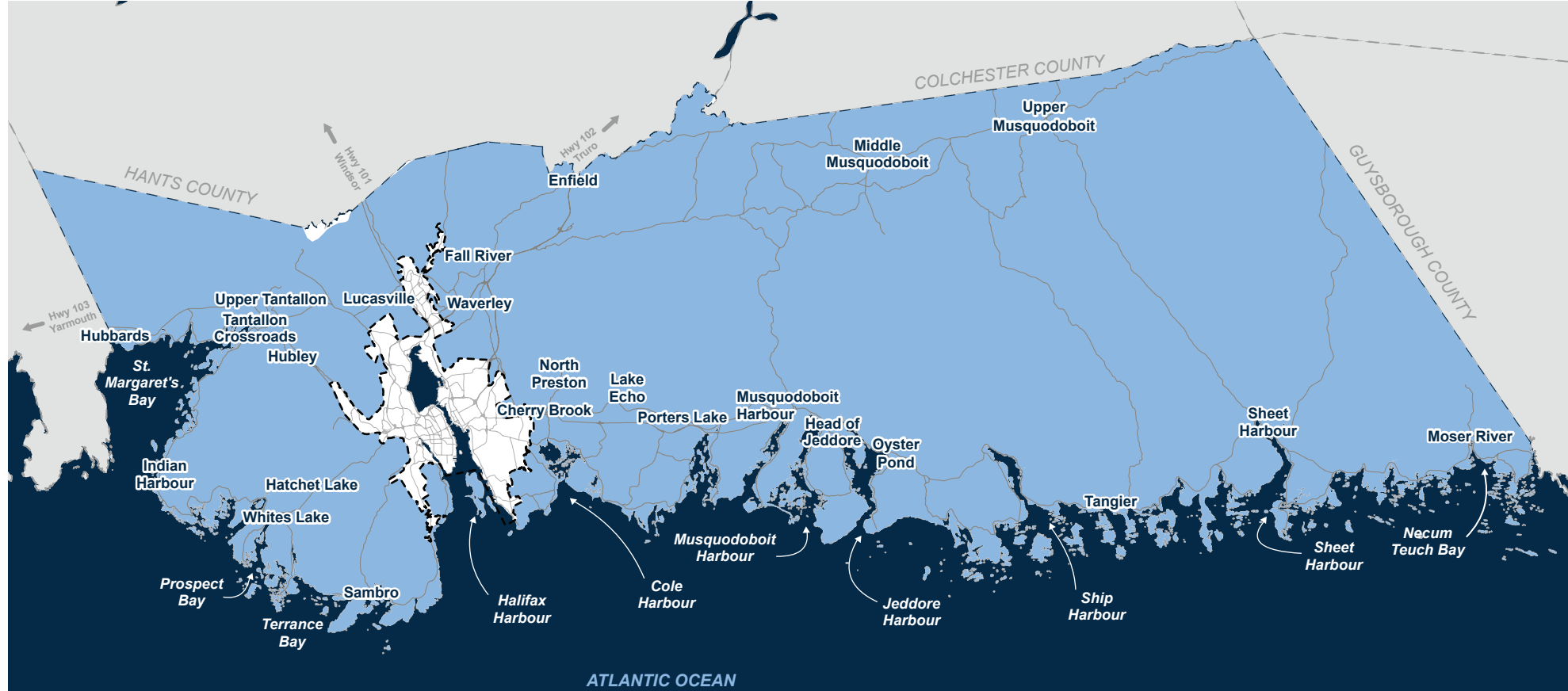
The Rural Planning area includes areas outside of the Transit Service Boundary, where most development is serviced with on-site septic systems and wells. The Regional Plan Review will establish a vision and objectives for the Rural Planning framework, which will help direct the location of future development in this area to 2031 and beyond.

Maintaining the integrity of rural land and communities is important to rural residents and a fundamental aspect of the Regional Plan. HRM's rural communities are diverse in terms of their geography, population density, and proximity to the urban core of the Municipality, and have significant ecological, economic, social and cultural value. As HRM grows, pressures on rural communities at the edge of the urban area threaten to change the traditional rural character of these areas. Residents in the rural commutershed close to the urban core experience very different lifestyles and economic opportunities and may require different services than those more distant from urban HRM, where natural resources are critically important to the economy. The Regional Plan Review provides an opportunity to think about how our urban and rural areas interact, how rural areas are supported to grow and change, and how rural residents' visions for the future of their communities can be realized.

An important part of rural planning is to recognize and support community character and rural lifestyles. Each rural community has distinctive architectural styles, building forms, natural and cultural assets, and development patterns which give the area a sense of place, identity and character. The Regional Plan can direct supportive land use regulations to help communities to maintain these special qualities, while allowing for new development in key locations. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings can provide economic options within rural communities as well as help ensure a range of affordable and accessible housing types, which are needed to allow residents to stay in their communities.

In addition to protecting community character, growth and intensification will continue to be focused in strategic locations to foster strong rural hubs. These can serve as vital service centres for larger parts of the region. Clustering intensification also helps direct development away from important cultural landscapes, significant open spaces and resource lands, such as forestry or agricultural lands.

The Regional Plan permits new large-scale rural housing developments only through the Conservation Design Development process. While the existing policies can effectively conserve open space within proposed developments, there is little policy direction to



MAP 7 Rural Areas



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consider broader regional landscape patterns and connectivity and, because there have been very few applications for these developments in rural growth centres, growth in this form has been limited. The Regional Plan Review will consider opportunities to revise the existing policies to better achieve their intent and to support growth in rural centres.

The Municipality can encourage healthy and sustainable rural development by establishing a clear policy for infrastructure in rural service centres. With lower population densities, providing central water, wastewater and frequent transit services would be expensive and challenging. The existing Regional Plan outlines some alternatives to traditional central wastewater and water services, such as Wastewater Management Districts and private wastewater utilities for conservation design developments. To date, these systems have not been widely adopted in the Municipality. These and other innovative solutions should be explored to understand how they might be used to encourage healthy, affordable rural community intensification and development.

Connecting rural communities is important for supporting rural economic viability and social equity. Rural mobility can be improved by clustering rural development in established centres, investing in strategic active transportation infrastructure, and expanding

the Rural Transit Funding Program to improve rural mobility options. A range of rural mobility options are needed to serve the different types of rural communities. Consistent with the Integrated Mobility Plan, the Regional Plan Review will begin to study opportunities to improve rural mobility through alternatives to conventional transit, as called for in the Integrated Mobility Plan.

THE REGIONAL PLAN REVIEW WILL:

2.8 Establish a vision, objectives and key principles to guide the Rural Plan which include:

- **Directing intensification to existing rural communities that act as important service centres and have the potential to be complete communities;**
- **Protecting rural landscapes as critical to the region's natural and open space network;**
- **Supportive adaptive reuse of existing buildings and land uses;**
- **Supporting working landscapes for resource industries, agriculture and food security, and tourism opportunities;**
- **Ensuring planning regulations focus on affordability and**

accessibility, and support building communities that reflect local character and history; and

- **Support a range of housing forms within each rural service centre.**

2.9 Review past studies and initiate further analysis to understand the barriers and opportunities for developing innovative services in rural areas, with a focus on water, wastewater and rural public mobility.

2.10 Revise conservation design development policies to streamline the development process within rural service centres.