



**Virtual Public Information Meeting
Case 21875**

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

**Wednesday, October 21, 2020
6:30 p.m.
Virtual**

STAFF IN

ATTENDANCE: Stephanie, Planner, Planner III, HRM Planning
Thea Langille, Principal Planner
Carl Purvis, Program Manager
Tara Couvrette, Planning Controller, HRM Planning
Deanna Wilmshurst, Client Service Coordinator
Ayo Aladejebi, Diversity & Inclusion Advisor
Mapfumo Chidzonga, Diversity & Inclusion Advisor

ALSO IN

ATTENDANCE: Jason Jackson – Presenter for Applicant, Akoma Holdings Inc.
Spencer Colley – Presenter Applicant, Akoma Holdings Inc.
Veronica Marsman – Applicant, Akoma Holdings Inc.
Troy Scott – Architect, T.A. Scott Architecture + Design for Akoma Holdings Inc.
David Harrison – Project Manager for Akoma Holdings Inc.
Jeff Pinhey – Civil Engineer, ABLE Engineering for Akoma Holdings Inc.
David Hendsbee – Councillor, District 2 and Akoma Property Committee Chair
Lana Maclean – Mental and Emotional Support Councillor
Cynthia Jordan – Mental and Emotional Support Councillor
Lorelei Nicoll, Councillor, District 4
Wayn Hamilton – Provincial Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs

PUBLIC IN

ATTENDANCE: Approximately: 25

1. Call to order and Introductions – Ayo Aladejebi and Stephanie Salloum

Mr. Aladejebi welcomed attendees to the meeting, introduced themselves and the development proposal:

Case 21875: An application by Akoma Holdings Inc. to enable development of the former Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children property, located along Highway #7 in Westphal.

Mr. Aladejebi then acknowledged our location in the ancestral and traditional lands of the Mi'kmaq people, and affirmed that we are in the Decade for People of African Descent. They also gave special thanks to the Akoma Board, VOICES (Victims of Institutionalized Child Exploitation Society), AUBA (African United Baptist Association of Nova Scotia), and ANSDPAD (Nova Scotia Decade for People of African Descent) for their help in developing the public engagement program for the application.

Ms. Salloum introduced herself as the Planner and Facilitator guiding Akoma Holdings' application through the planning process. They also introduced other staff members, the two presenters from Akoma and the mental and emotional support councillors who were in attendance. The area Councillor for District 4, Lorelei Nicoll, was also in attendance online.

2. Presentations

2a) Presentation by HRM Staff – Stephanie Salloum

Ms. Salloum's presentation included information on the following:

- (a) the purpose of the meeting including to share information and collect public feedback about the proposal - no decisions were made at this meeting;
- (b) the role of HRM staff through the planning process;
- (c) a brief description of the application including what parts of Akoma's proposal are being considered through the current application and Regional Plan Review project;
- (d) the context of the subject property including an overview of the historical significance of the site in addition to the existing planning policies and zoning; and
- (e) the planning process and status of the application.

2b) Presentation by Jason Jackson & Spencer Colley – Applicant

Mr. Jackson & Mr. Colley presented details about Akoma Holding's proposal including the principles that guided their development plans, the goals for the site, proposed land uses, servicing details and housing objectives.

3. Questions and Comments

Ms. Salloum welcomed attendees to ask questions to staff and the presenters and provide their feedback, including what they liked and disliked about the proposal. There were two ways in which the public could provide comments: (1) some attendees signed up in advance of the meeting to speak and were connected to the meeting via phone; and (2) other attendees that were connected via the online webcast were asked to enter their questions and comments in the Q&A chat of the MS Teams meeting.

(1) Speakers Connected via Phone

Mr. Chidzonga invited the speakers from the public one at a time to unmute themselves and provide their comments:

- (i) Mr. McCullock identified themselves as a representative of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) who assisted with the housing needs assessment completed in support of Akoma's proposal. They expressed their support for Akoma's proposal as it relates to the objectives and initiatives of the National Housing Strategy. They also asked when approval could be achieved for the initial phases of the project to allow for funding opportunities for the development.

Ms. Salloum responded that the current application is focused on Phases 1-4 of the proposal and the hope is to bring a report to Council for a decision next year. Phases 1-4 may be brought to Council under two reports to allow for occupancy of the former Home by the centennial of its opening.

Mr. McCullock thanked staff for their response and mentioned they look forward to working with everyone on this project.

- (ii) Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard identified themselves as a Senator of Nova Scotia and a resident of East Preston. They expressed excitement for the development and recalled previous public engagement and analysis that was completed by Akoma leading up to the current proposal. Senator Bernard voiced their hopes for removal of barriers and recognition of the development opportunities of Akoma's project. Senator Bernard affirmed that Anti-Black Racism has affected residents through the lack of development opportunities in the community. They also mentioned development of the subject property would be a significant step in the right direction.

Senator Bernard asked about the lack of services and access to the Dartmouth city sewer and water services in the area. They stated that Cherry Brook now has access and wondering why this can't be made available to the Akoma property?

Ms. Salloum responded that Akoma has requested an extension of the Municipal water service to include their property. The proposed development would be serviced by on-site septic systems. Consideration of municipal sewer services for the Akoma property is something that can be considered through the larger second review of the Regional Plan project. Ms. Salloum hoped to provide more details and a response to the general question about access to city services for East Preston through a Question and Answer (Q&A) document that would be posted to the website at a later date.

Senator Bernard expressed their support and endorsement of Akoma's plans and viewed the lack of municipal services to the property as a systemic barrier that could create problems for the development. Senator acknowledged CMHC's support and asked if there has been any private support in Akoma's proposal?

Mr. Jackson responded that nothing is in place at the moment and that Akoma is trying. Mr. Scott added that Akoma's intent is to maintain ownership of the property while allowing the community to leverage the land to gain funding and support for the development. Senator Bernard clarified that they were wondering more about third party financial support rather than land ownership. They felt that perhaps partnerships with some private organisations like amateur sports groups could offer financial support and would align with the Africentric principles described in Akoma's presentation.

Mr. Harrison provided clarity on Akoma's intent to allow for partnerships with private entities through a comprehensive development approach to maximize value in financing and to leverage economic development. Mr. Harrison referenced some businesses that Akoma may be open to partnering with, including Northwood, Oceanview or Shannex for a senior's development as well as the Community College for innovative programming for apprenticeship training in construction trades.

Senator Bernard agreed that community economic development is much needed in the Preston townships and in other Black communities and believed that Akoma's development could lead this initiative. They reiterated the need for and importance of removing systemic barriers.

Senator Bernard expressed thanks for the time to participate.

(iii) Theresa Pryde – no comments were provided.

(iv) Bernadette Hamilton introduced themselves as an area resident and a member of the NSDPAD Coalition. They asked for clarification if a decision on Phases 1-4 would not occur until summer next year.

Ms. Salloum responded that Akoma is going through a process to change the planning policies. This process involves writing a report on the proposed changes in the zoning and planning policies before Council makes a decision on the proposal. There are various groups within HRM that need to review the report before it proceeds to Council. Akoma can only apply for permits for the proposed development after Council decides on the policy and zoning changes, which is the timeline that was outlined.

Ms. Hamilton asked why the timeline takes so long. Ms. Salloum acknowledged that it is a relatively long process, but it is legislated and so there are steps that cannot be avoided to quicken the timeline. Ms. Salloum clarified that HRM staff are doing as much as they can to expedite the process. One way in which that may be done is by splitting Akoma's request into

two reports and two decisions for Council so one report on the old Home and the senior's development (Phases 1 and 2) can be brought forward earlier.

Ms. Hamilton asked if there was something the community could do to expedite the timeline? Ms. Salloum reiterated that staff are doing as much as they can to expedite the process being mindful of the deadline Akoma is trying to achieve, but there are legislated steps in the planning process, like the public meeting to collect public feedback, that cannot be avoided. Bernadette asked for details on the timeline and process to be put on the website. Ms. Salloum responded that the planning process flow chart is available on the website, but additional details on the timeline and process can be provided on the website.

Ms. Hamilton asked if HRM Planning would support the Comprehensive Development District as it relates to an Africentric approach and lens for this development process. They wanted the proposal to be seen from the community's lens and not from a general lens. Ms. Salloum agreed with the need to view the proposal through a community lens. Ms. Salloum also clarified that staff are focused on getting feedback from the public on "what" is being proposed like the land uses, driveway accesses, streets, sidewalks etc. Planning staff will later work with Akoma to determine "how" the development can be enabled, what planning tool would be appropriate such as a new zone or development agreement.

Ms. Hamilton asked why is the feedback window so long? Why is staff collecting feedback until November 25? Ms. Salloum clarified that this date was selected based on feedback received from the four community groups that helped establish the engagement program. It was also selected in recognition of the current Covid-19 pandemic and the inability for the public to meet with staff in person due to social distancing mandates. As a result of the pandemic, HRM planning staff are collecting public feedback in various ways and the November 25 deadline was selected to give members of the public enough time to learn about the proposal and participate in the engagement program. Ms. Hamilton expressed concern that the longer we wait for feedback, sometimes feedback will not be received as members of the community may forget about the request. They felt that the five-week feedback period could further delay the process.

Ms. Hamilton thanked staff for the opportunity to participate and expressed overall support for the opportunities for Black businesses and economic development in Akoma's proposal.

After Ms. Hamilton completed their comments, Mr. Aladejebi brought forward questions from the Q&A chat of the meeting. The last caller was experiencing technical difficulties but got connected later in the meeting.

- (v) Tony Smith introduced themselves as a member of VOICES (Victims of Institutionalized and Child Exploitation Society). They referenced the 1915 Private Bills Act which required the establishment of land and buildings for the use of education and proper training for the Afro-American race. There was another bill that was amended in 1978, which reiterated the purpose of the Home for establishing and securing land and buildings for education and training for members of the Black Afro race. There was an amendment to that Bill that outlined in the event that the Home was dissolved, the remaining assets would be distributed to the African United Baptist Association or any other charitable organization with the objective of providing care and protection for the Black Afro race. Mr. Smith provided information about VOICES, the court settlement for the abuse they suffered at the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children, and the apology received. They recalled that the subject lands were given to the Black community to meet those needs. When the Home dissolved – the Coloured Home only exists in name – the assets were transferred to Akoma. Mr. Smith expressed that the Home no longer belongs to the Black community, but mentioned they heard that efforts were being made to rectify that, which was felt as very important. Mr. Smith expressed that when looking at development of the lands and the lands belonging to all Black communities throughout the Province, they felt unsure that the various ANS communities were consulted to determine if the development would meet their needs. Mr. Smith suggested that a way forward is to ensure complete transparency and to be

more inclusive. They recognized HRM staff's approach and advised for it to be done properly as many community members are passionate toward the institution, as it was one of the proudest moments in Black history, there was unfortunate suffering endured by the former residents, and it was hoped that the issues were addressed through the Restorative Inquiry, but the institution was not present in honouring the apology. As former residents of the Home, Mr. Smith expressed that they never sought ownership of the land because they believe it belongs to the Black communities. Moving forward, Mr. Smith suggested that other people in the various Black communities should be included in the process to avoid repeating the negativity that was done in the past that led to today. Mr. Smith hopes that the current process would allow for greater transparency and clarified the lack of transparency within the Black community was relative to the name change, transfer of ownership of the NSHCC assets. Out of respect for VOICES and the Restorative Inquiry, they went to the AUBA to inform them of the changes as they played in integral role in the establishment of the Home.

Mr. Smith acknowledged previous comments raised by other callers about the timeline. They believed that there were many good ideas presented for the site, but also felt it was important to ensure sufficient time is allowed for inclusivity with the various Black communities because historically, the Black communities owned the lands.

Mr. Scott replied that it is unusual for HRM staff to actively seek feedback from the public beyond the Municipality's borders, but in this case, the process with HRM has included organisations outside its borders. Akoma is aware and interested in hearing feedback from those groups. Akoma's desire is to move as quickly as possible, but they do understand that this is the process and they look forward to VOICES' feedback and others'.

(2) Questions from the Q&A Chat of the MS Teams Meeting

Mr. Purvis and Ms. Langille responded to some of the questions in the Q&A chat. Questions were also brought forward by Mr. Aladejebi to the presenters for a response. Below are all the questions from the meeting chat and the respective responses.

(i) Anonymous Attendee:

My understanding is that Leeman Langille, Castle Hill Capital Incorporated, a Halifax based real-estate development and investment company and fully integrated sales and services organization focusing primarily acquisitions and sales of residential, commercial and industrial properties. Mr. Langille states he gave AKOMA Holdings a \$250,000.00 deposit to the property manager to purchase land from the Colored Home. He states he is awaiting approval from HRM to rezone the land to build a sub-division. Is there any truth to that?

This question was brought forward to the presenters.

Ms. Marsman responded that Akoma received \$250,000 from an application to the Federal Government under Canada 150. Akoma was also in discussion with Castle Hill about property development. They might have informed Akoma about the Canada 150 application at the time, which was going back a few years, but the \$250k was received by the Federal Government.

(ii) Anonymous Attendee:

The maps show a connection to Giberson Dr. in Linwood Estates but there doesn't appear to be any reference to such in the text. Is this connection planned?

This question was brought forward to the presenters. Mr. Purvis also responded in the chat: Yes - the intent would be to extend Giberson and allow individuals to connect to Main Street via the Akoma lands.

Ms. Salloum confirmed that the connection to Giberson is planned. Mr. Scott outlined that Giberson was set up to allow the possibility of extending it and HRM has maintained ownership

of the lands between the end of Giberson Drive and Akoma Holdings' property. The intent is to extend Giberson which would give the community an ability to connect to Main Street through Akoma's property.

(iii) VOICES:

I believe that there should be no rush in deciding what should be done with the property because what we fail to see is that these lands were provided for all members of the black communities of Nova Scotia. Each community should have a say in what happens to the properties. The home serviced all black communities and was established with an explicit mandate and mission to provide care and support self-reliance and empowerment for the "Afro-American race" through care, education and training of those in the black community. How does this plan service that?

Mr. Purvis responded in the chat: Akoma notes their development is guided through Afro-centric principles. The community has stated there is a need for affordable housing and housing for individuals at need. Additionally, there were needs expressed for community space which it is felt this development would address.

Mr. Jackson recalled from their presentation that the proposal is guided by 7 Africentric principles and Akoma is working collectively with community. Also, in 2018, Akoma conducted a housing needs study and community members were engaged and are a part of that study. Through the housing study, the community raised the needs for seniors housing, homes for young adults, families, students, and those with different abilities. Additionally, there were needs expressed for community space which it is felt this development would address.

(iv) Councillor Lorelei Nicoll:

What might the timeline going forward be? Who decided on the phasing of this application? Will this phasing expedite the development or delay it? Council approved the following motion: Direct staff to 1. Initiate a process to consider amendments to the Cole Harbour/Westphal MPS to allow the appropriate adaptive re-use of the lands containing and surrounding the NS Home for Coloured Children.

Mr. Purvis responded in the chat: Phasing is something determined by Akoma. Planning staff have been working with Akoma to determine the most expeditious route forward to advance the project to Council quickly to meet their desired timelines. This is why the entire development will not be dealt with in a single report and decision by Council.

Ms. Salloum referenced a previous response which outlined the timeline and the two projects whereby Akoma's proposal is being considered. Phasing is something determined by Akoma, the applicant. Planning staff have been working with Akoma to determine the most expeditious route forward to advance the project to Council quickly to meet their desired timelines while satisfying the legislated requirements of the planning process. Therefore, the entire proposal may not be dealt with in a single report and decision by Council.

Mr. Harrison added that Akoma is urgently seeking approval to allow interior renovations of the old Home. There is also an opportunity and urgent need for seniors housing. Mr. Harrison explained that Akoma has a funding opportunity to move forward with the senior's development. Other phases are in response to questions and feedback from HRM staff including planning, engineering, and transit. Mr. Harrison explained that the phased reports for Council decisions is not something Akoma initiated - it is something that HRM is recommending. They added that Akoma's request for a Comprehensive Development District would allow for changes in the phasing of the development and Akoma believes the Comprehensive Development District planning tool is appropriate for the community.

(v) Anonymous Attendee:

You talk about studies can you confirm how many community residents took part in the studies

or surveys? My point to asking how many have been involved in the questions and surveys even within communities next door.

Ms. Langille responded in the chat: Several groups have been working with Akoma to develop the proposed plan, approximately 500 residents from communities of East Preston, Cherry Brook and surrounding areas.

Mr. Jackson clarified that several groups have been working with Akoma to develop the proposed plan including African Nova Scotian communities and others such as East Preston, North Preston Rate Payers Association, AUBA (African United Baptist Association), and Roads to Prosperity. Over 500 people were involved in the plan and study.

(vi) VOICES:

The Home property was incorporated in legislation by a private members bill in 1915. It was deemed advantageous to the interests for the purpose of securing and establishing lands and buildings for the care, education and proper training of members of the Afro-American Race. How does this proposal fit that legislation?

Ms. Salloum expressed that staff hope to provide a more detailed response to this question through a question and answer document that will be posted to the website in the coming weeks.

Mr. Purvis responded in the chat: For this planning process, HRM Council will make their decisions based on applicable planning policies and legislation related to development and land use. That said, we can ask Akoma about the applicability of this bill.

Mr. Harrison added that many of the buildings referenced relate to care including the children's centre, long term care facility and seniors home at a minimum. All of Akoma's efforts through the Comprehensive Development District process would allow for further opportunities for care, apprenticeship training, partnership with the community college (NSCC) involving constructing the buildings and trades. Akoma is focused on care, education and training as elements of economic development. There are plans for a halfway house. Akoma proposes a range of opportunities to allow for mixed income communities, ground floor retail along Main Street and private investments and services. Mr. Harrison felt that the Comprehensive Development District would answer the questions, and zoning properties for education and care would not allow for flexibility to meet the mandate for education, care and training.

4. Closing Comments

Ms. Salloum thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting.

5. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:02 p.m.