



Photo Credit: Google Earth

M DISTRICT FUTURE GROWTH NODE PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

August 29, 2023

HALIFAX

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PLANNING PROCESS

Halifax Regional Council initiated the M District Comprehensive Neighbourhood Planning program on December 13, 2022.

The lands are designated “Future Growth Node (FGN)” under the Regional Centre Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (Centre Plan) which requires a comprehensive neighbourhood planning process to be completed before development can take place. The planning process will address what is needed for a new complete community through the creation of a neighbourhood plan for the entire FGN.

The planning process includes public engagement, background studies (land suitability, transportation, archaeological resource impact, potable water and wastewater servicing) and detailed review by HRM staff and other review agencies. The purpose of the planning process is to create “complete communities” – neighbourhoods with housing, employment and recreation for current and future residents within walking distance.

The planning process is initiated by a development application but considers all properties within the FGN comprehensively. At the time of Phase 1 public engagement, one application was received from WM Fares Architects, on behalf of Rank Inc.

THIS DOCUMENT

This document provides a summary of engagement activities and feedback received during Phase 1 of the M District Future Growth Node (FGN) public engagement process.

The **SUMMARIZED FEEDBACK** section provides a summary of all feedback and ideas received from the primary forms of public engagement – the online survey, public meeting, and correspondence. Feedback is summarized into key themes which emerged through the engagement process. Throughout this section, the **blue text boxes** highlight resident quotes extracted from submissions to the online survey.

The **NEXT STEPS** section briefly highlights the next steps of the planning process and future public engagement opportunities.



The site today (Google Earth)

HOW WE ENGAGED

This report summarizes a seven month engagement process which employed the engagement methods indicated on this page. The statistics on this page are accurate to August 1st, 2023.



Project Website

4,900 visits
575 Document Downloads
104 FAQ Page Visits
345 Video Views



Public Meeting

May 17th, 2023
212 attendees across three public open house sessions



Signage Posted on Site

May 9th, 2023



Mailouts

1,711 Notices Mailed



Online Survey

153 Surveys submitted by residents



Correspondence

8 emails received (unique email addresses)
1 phone call



Social Media

Posts on municipal accounts
Advertising on Facebook

HOW WE HEARD YOU

1. The three **PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE** sessions held on May 17th, 2023 had 212 attendees who asked questions, shared their opinions, and expressed their concerns. This meeting had HRM Planning Staff in attendance to discuss the application and planning process, as well as representatives from the applicant's team to explain their proposal.

2. The **ONLINE SURVEY** received 153 responses from residents who answered eight questions regarding what aspects of the existing site they valued most, what they hoped to see in a future redevelopment of the site, and what concerns and questions they believed still needed to be addressed.

3. Staff received **CORRESPONDENCE** by email and phone throughout the first phase of public engagement. The majority of this correspondence was with residents who live close by to the M District site and were concerned about the potential impact of the development on their property. Information gathered from the public open house sessions, the online survey, and correspondence were summarized into the themes that make up this report.



Lake Banook with the M District in the background (Discover Halifax)

FEEDBACK CATEGORIES

Throughout the engagement process, feedback was sought on topics which planning policy can address. These categories are shown below.

LAND USE



DENSITY



TRANSPORTATION



PARKS AND LANDSCAPING



BUILDING DESIGN



HERITAGE AND CULTURE



COMMUNITY FACILITIES



PHASE 1 TIMELINE

Below is a timeline of Phase 1 engagement. This phase took place between January and July 2023.

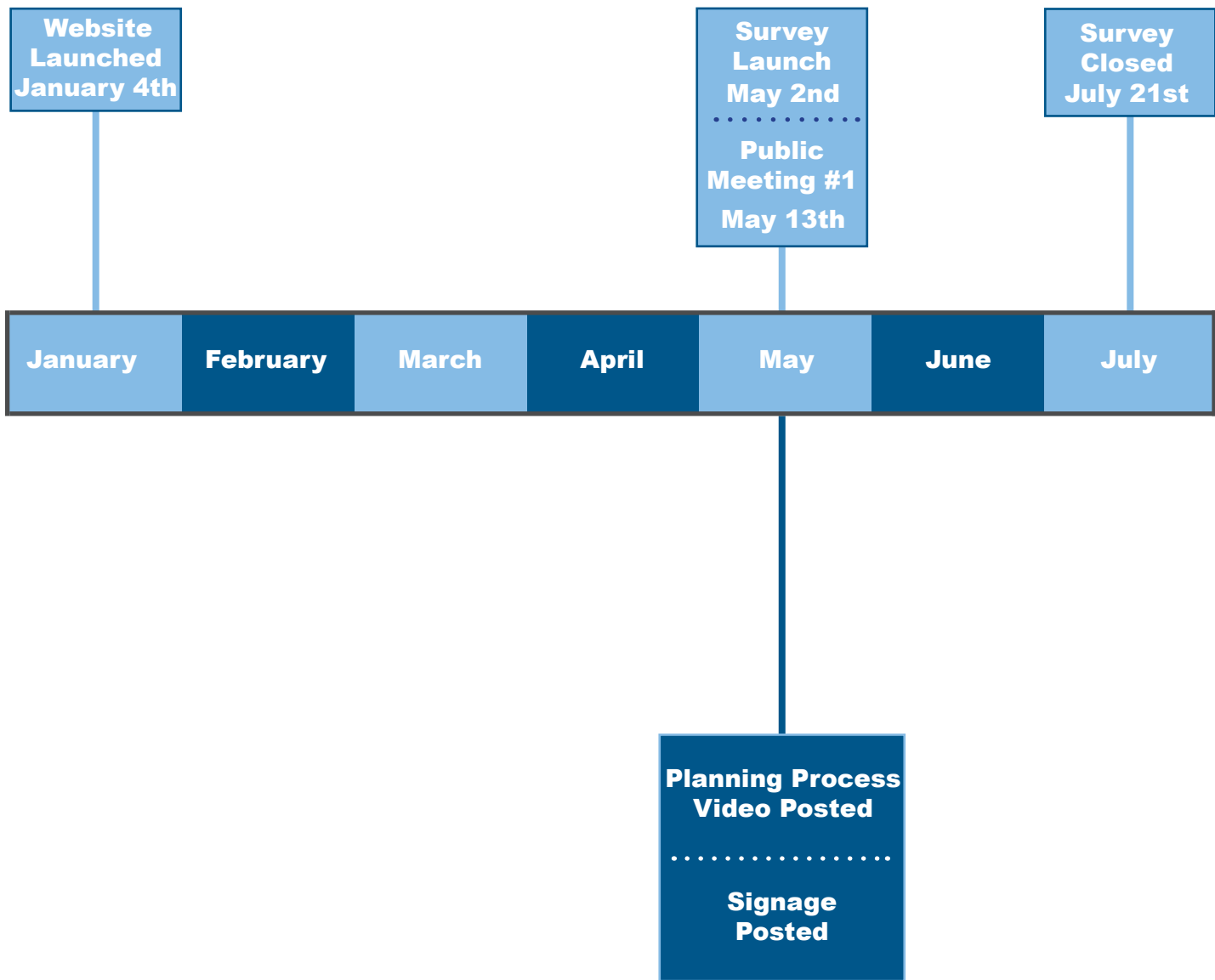




Photo Credit: HRM Planned Growth

SUMMARIZED FEEDBACK THEMES

HALIFAX

CURRENT STATE

When asked about what aspects of the existing site were important to them, many residents highlighted that the existing transit services, retail shopping, and highway access were important to them. However, residents frequently mentioned that they placed little value on what they perceived to be an overabundance of surface parking lots.

Many residents saw the current site as a great opportunity for redevelopment to provide services, housing, and additional retail opportunities. While there was some disagreement about the exact shape and form of this redevelopment and what elements ought to be included, a large majority of residents were in favour of some form of change. Different points and considerations brought forward by residents are described in the following pages.

Key Points

- » Residents generally placed little value on the existing conditions of the site.
- » Residents value the opportunity to improve the existing site through redevelopment.

"It's a mall, an ugly mall, nostalgia isn't a real thing, let's move forward shall we? What is with the giant swaths of parking lot? The parking requirements the city requires is far too high. The Mic Mac parking lot was last filled on the 70s..."

"Some existing services are important to me in the mall such as the drugstore. I live very close to the mall and often pop in to access these retail spaces for errands."

"I have no sentimental attachment to parking lots"



Existing Site Conditions (HRM Planned Growth)

HOUSING AND BUILT FORM

Among residents, apartments were the most preferred type of housing within M District. There was a particular emphasis on larger 2 and 3-bedroom units suitable for families. There was also strong support for townhouse style development. A small number of residents expressed support for lower density housing such as single unit dwellings, however others still were expressly against this idea.

A mixture of rental units and condominiums was favoured by residents to address the housing needs of a diverse population. There was also general support for the inclusion of seniors housing in the proposal. Some residents felt that the amenities to support seniors were not adequately provided in the proposal.

Residents held a range of views regarding the height of the proposed buildings within M District. Some expressed concerns that 30-36 storey buildings might create unsafe wind conditions, block sunlight, and obstruct lake views. There was also a general concern from residents that the nature of the proposed high-rise buildings did not respect the character of the surrounding neighborhood. Residents with this perspective suggested that it would be more appropriate to have low to mid-rise buildings or to set a maximum height of 20 storeys.

In contrast to this perspective, many residents were in favour of the proposed heights and advocated for maximizing the density of the site. Some argued that maximizing density on the site was a better alternative than a pattern of urban sprawl.

The issue of housing affordability was frequently mentioned by residents. Some residents felt that the construction of new high-end buildings would serve only to make housing more expensive in the area while others felt that a high density development could help to alleviate the acute housing shortage in HRM. There was a consistent and strong emphasis that the M District needed to include an affordable housing component to help combat rising housing costs. Definitions of affordable housing varied. To some residents, affordable meant below-market housing such as “rent geared to income” units

while to others it meant having generally low rents requested at \$800-\$1,000 / month.

“It makes sense to increase residential density at this site but NOT on the scale proposed. Massive towers are out of scale to the neighbourhood. And there are no jobs/industries nearby (. . .)”

“Medium to high density rental and condos, with affordable housing. It’s a beautiful area of Dartmouth (well, the lakes, not the parking lots!) and is far too low density for “inside the Circ.”

“The proposal should have more density and taller residential towers. The current proposal is not ambitious enough, and does not do enough to help with the housing shortage that Halifax is facing.”

Key Points

- » Residents had diverse perspectives on what housing types are most appropriate.
- » The majority of residents felt that the site should have high density housing with units large enough for families.
- » Residents had differing views on appropriate height maximums.
- » Residents generally agreed that affordable housing is an important consideration.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Residents showed significant interest in the environmental sustainability of the proposed M District development. Concerns were broadly related to the potential impact of the development on water quality, wind conditions, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Citing a 2019 Stantec report on the source of pollution in Lake Banook and Lake Micmac, some residents emphasized the need for environmental assessments and additional measures to mitigate any negative impacts on the local water bodies.

Some residents raised concern about a potential underground watercourse that daylights off-site and feeds directly into Lake Banook. Accounts from residents described witnessing the impact of nearby construction on Lake Banook due to sediment runoff. Other concerns include the potential impact of wind being generated between the proposed buildings creating wind tunnels. Some residents feared that the tall buildings might create unsafe conditions in an area that is considered to be already windy. Other concerns regarding wind included the potential for wind impacts on the Lake Banook paddling course. Some residents were generally dismayed at a

perceived lack of green space. Different tools to promote sustainability were suggested by residents including the planting of additional trees, natural park space, and green stormwater infrastructure. Multiple residents also expressed an interest in the use of green roofs, energy efficient building standards, and low carbon emission building practices.

“The Englobe report did not take note of the water course that daylights on the eastern side of the development area(. . .) The watercourse parallels a public walkway before draining into Lake Banook. All efforts should be made to protect that watercourse during construction activities.”

Key Points

- » Residents had concerns about the impact of the redevelopment on water quality, wind conditions, shadows, and climate change.



Potential Watercourse surfaces out of stormwater culvert across Mic Mac Boulevard (HRM Planned Growth)

A MIXED-USE COMMERCIAL CENTRE

Many residents noted the opportunity for the M District to become a complete community with a mix of commercial, residential, recreational and institutional uses. Some residents expressed a desire that the redevelopment of the site would transform the M District into a new urban centre for Dartmouth within which most of one's daily needs could be met without the need of a personal automobile. Some residents identified this as a 15-minute city concept, while others simply expressed a desire for being able to access a wide variety of services, shops, and destinations by walking or rolling.

Residents identified a variety of different land uses that should be included within M District in order for it to live up to this vision including public art, medical and health services, fitness facilities, restaurants, cafes, and shopping. The most frequently desired land use, however, was a grocery store. Many residents felt that the current access to groceries in the community was inadequate and that if M District were to be developed without one, that it would be necessary for future residents to own a personal motor vehicle.

There was a general shared interest between residents that the development should be more community-focused, with suggestions such as outdoor event spaces, playgrounds for kids, a community pool, a library, and green spaces. These facilities were suggested to support not just the future residents, but also the residents within the existing neighbourhoods adjacent to the M District.

Key Points

- » Residents were generally supportive of increasing the diversity of commercial, residential, recreational, and institutional land uses within the M District.
- » In particular, many residents identified the need for a grocery store within the M District.
- » Residents identified the potential for the M District to become a new urban centre in Dartmouth.

"Definitely a grocery store!!!! At the very least a convenience store with sufficient grocery products! This is way overdue for this area and the biggest complaint heard by my neighbourhood."

"This is a generational opportunity for improvement. Please use it to make the M district as well as the nearby neighbourhood of Crichton Park a fifteen-minute, active transit friendly community."

"This is an opportunity for HRM to build a sustainable community in the heart of Dartmouth for families, seniors, and singles in all stages of life... HRM has the choice to approve a "future urban concrete jungle" or make changes to ensure the development is sustainable and suitable for all citizens well into the future."

HERITAGE AND CULTURE

Some residents felt very strongly that addressing the anglicized spelling of Mi'kmaq, "Mic Mac", which the mall, street, and lake take their name from, was an integral part of the planning process for M District. Residents felt that the mall, street and lake needed to be renamed in consultation with Indigenous voices as a part of the planning process for the M District. While the choice to refer to the future growth node as the "M District" is a tacit recognition of the controversy surrounding the name, some felt that it was not an appropriate replacement.

Residents also noted the presence of the African Nova Scotian community known as "The Avenue" located at the end of Crichton Avenue. Residents felt that the community, which has been historically displaced by development and municipal activities, should be considered in this planning process.

Through survey responses and conversations with residents, it was clear that many residents felt that the M District is integral to the community identity of Dartmouth. Some residents went so far as to refer to the neighbourhoods in this area as "The Heart of Dartmouth". Mic Mac Mall, while considered by many to be less culturally influential than in the past, is still valued as a commercial institution that provides opportunities for employment, shopping, and services. Notably, to those which the mall held cultural value, this value did not extend to the parking lots which are proposed to be redeveloped.

Some residents felt that the M District should incorporate art and murals as well as venues for performing arts. This may be a good opportunity to highlight the cultural values and heritage of the site and surrounding area.

Key Points

- » Residents felt that consideration for the Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities was integral to any planning process for the M District.
- » Many residents feel that the existing mall and the surrounding neighbourhoods have a cultural importance to Dartmouth as a whole.

"This area **MUST** be renamed (especially if we're calling it something like "M District"). If this hasn't been done, this project should be put on a full stop until proper consultation can be done."

"I would like to see the architectural design to take into account the Mi'kmaq culture and natural and anthropocentric history of the area and the surrounding beauty of the area."

"I grew up in a neighbourhood near Mic Mac Mall and would go to the mall with my dad to go to the food court, and play games in the arcade when there was still an arcade there. It was a really fun place to go and be around other people, with plenty of entertainment. I would love if some of this character remained here."



*Mic Mac Mall Construction, 1972
(Halifax Municipal Archives)*

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

On the topic of active transportation, residents emphasized the importance of enhancing the pedestrian accessibility of M District. There was a common desire that the redevelopment provide infrastructure to enable one to comfortably meet all of their basic needs by walking or rolling. In contrast to this vision, the existing site was felt to have severely inadequate pedestrian infrastructure.

Despite the lack of adequate pedestrian infrastructure, many residents recognized the value of existing informal pathways on the site. They viewed these pathways as valuable assets that should be protected and integrated into any redevelopment plans. Specific pathways that were identified included a pathway to Horizon Court near the Irving Shipbuilding office, and a path from the Glen Manor and Micmac Boulevard intersection to the front entrance of the Mall.

Residents identified safety and accessibility concerns with the existing crosswalks along Mic Mac Boulevard, and with the existing underpass beneath Highway 111 to access Shubie Park. Multiple residents also expressed concern about the lack of pedestrian infrastructure along Brookdale Crescent. There was also some concern about the safety of children in the area due to traffic along Mic Mac Boulevard.

To improve the pedestrian accessibility of the Future Growth Node, residents called for a direct connection from the Lake Banook multi-use trail to the mall, sidewalks along Mic Mac Boulevard, Brookdale Crescent and Crichton Avenue, a pedestrian pathway to Horizon Court, and separated biking facilities within the Future Growth Node and along surrounding streets. Residents also identified the need for improved markings and lighting at existing crosswalk locations and for a new crosswalk to be located to connect to the existing bus terminal.

The inclusion of a pedestrian bridge across Highway 111 as shown in the originally submitted site plan had significant and widespread support. Residents felt that the bridge should be bike friendly and that it would significantly improve access to Shubie Park.

There was, however, some concern regarding the impact on privacy for households along Lakeshore Park Terrace.

“Accessing Shubie park requires traveling along busy roads and cutting across the highway. It is tricky at best on a bicycle.”

“Build it like a small city centre where you can walk to everything you need. Less car centric.”

“No easy access from Micmac to bluenose building (Irving shipbuilding). No sidewalks. I am blind and need to walk either on the road or through a parking lot.”

Key Points

- » Residents felt that the existing site and surrounding neighbourhood was severely inadequate, causing dangerous situations.
- » Opportunities for specific improvements to pedestrian infrastructure were identified.



*On-site crosswalk ends at inaccessible curb
(HRM Planned Growth)*

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Many residents believed that the existing transit terminal provides significant value to the mall, and the wider community. Despite its prominent role in connecting residents to services, employment, and destinations, the terminal was commonly referred to as “a terminal in name only” due to a lack of facilities for riders. Residents noted that the current terminal has a limited number of seating and shelters and that the shelters should offer better weather protection and heating. Residents called for better integration of the terminal with the mall to provide easy, direct and convenient access to the mall entrance.

Multiple residents identified the need for a substantially expanded terminal that would feature a new terminal building, restrooms and a place to buy tickets. Weather protection for transit riders was commonly requested including a covered access to the mall from the terminal to protect riders from rain. Accessibility and safety were both highlighted as important considerations for the design of any new transit terminal.

Suggestions for improved accessibility included a raised pedestrian crosswalk connecting the transit terminal to the mall entrance to eliminate the need for pedestrians to cross through parking lots. The current lack of pedestrian infrastructure to connect the terminal to various destinations within the site and across Micmac Boulevard was highlighted as a serious accessibility concern.

Residents felt that the increased population of the site warranted an improved level of transit service by increasing the frequency and number of routes. Suggested routes included connections to the Penhorn Terminal, ferry terminals, and the airport express route. Other suggestions to improve the service included the addition of bus rapid transit lanes, bus stops throughout the M District, and route maps at stops. Residents also suggested the need for on-site security and police presence for the new terminal so that riders feel safe.

“Oh - it would be amazing if there was some walking shelter made between the mall and the bus terminal so people walking wouldn't get wet when it rains!”

“The terminal should have direct connections (road crossings included) with the surrounding area and the mall property. It should have protected waiting areas (shelters and/or building), and screens to update the bus schedule.”

“Halifax Transit has been my major mode of travel within the city for nearly 4 decades for work. If it is too far to walk, I hop on a bus and taxis are too expensive. The Mic Mac Mall terminal is advertised as a “Major transit hub”. My question is where is the shelter with heat at this terminal???”

Key Points

- » Residents value the existing transit terminal while noting that there are many opportunities for improvements.
- » Residents believe that transit is an important component of the redevelopment of the site and that the level of service should be increased accordingly.

INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY AND DENSITY

There was a general concern among many residents that the scale of the proposed redevelopment would have impact on services in the area. Residents frequently believed that the M District development would cause an increase in traffic on Micmac Boulevard, particularly at the on and off ramps from Highway 111. Some residents felt that the existing on and off ramps were already dangerous due to the spacing of highway exits.

Residents were also concerned about the potential impact on traffic at the Woodland Avenue and Micmac Boulevard intersection. In particular, some residents felt that vehicle queuing would increase and that the ability for pedestrians to cross the intersection would be made worse. Regarding the proposed roundabout at this intersection, some welcomed the planned infrastructure improvement while others were concerned that it would be inadequate to handle the volume of traffic. Many identified the current intersection as being a barrier to pedestrians crossing Woodland to access the mall.

Traffic along Crichton Avenue was of particular concern for residents who feared that the additional density would increase the use of Crichton Avenue as a shortcut to Downtown Dartmouth and the Macdonald Bridge. To counter this, residents suggested employing traffic calming strategies such as the addition of bike lanes and sidewalks on both sides of the street along Crichton Avenue. Multiple residents wanted to see an analysis of how traffic along Crichton Avenue would change as a result of the development included in the traffic impact study.

Another concern that residents frequently expressed was that the local school system, including Crichton Park Elementary, does not have the capacity to support the proposed development. Some residents felt that the existing schools in the area are already over capacity and do not provide adequate before and after school programming. Suggested solutions were to construct a new school on the M District site, or to renovate and expand the existing schools to accommodate the increased population. Similar concerns about the capacity of the healthcare system were also raised.

“Traffic study....how are you going to move all these people. Present infrastructure won't cut it!”

“This will create too much neighborhood traffic thru Crichton park area.”

“How is the traffic going to be handled. People are already driving too fast on Creighton ave. Are there going to be more schools built to accommodate the people?”

Key Points

- » Many residents had concerns about the capacity of roads in the surrounding neighbourhoods and that traffic would increase as a result.
- » Residents were generally concerned about the ability of social services such as schools, hospitals, libraries and recreation facilities to accommodate the proposed population increase.



Icon by Freepik

PARKS, RECREATION, AND LANDSCAPING

There was strong interest in the subject of parks, recreation, and landscaping within the M District. While many residents acknowledged the value of having the Lake Banook trail and Shubie Park within close proximity to the M District, many feared that the additional population would result in these parks being overused. Many residents were concerned by a lack of park space within the M District proposal, stating that pedestrian boulevards are not a suitable substitute for natural park space, playgrounds, and programmed recreation space.

Some residents wished to see improvements to the existing parks in the neighbourhood including the construction of a pedestrian bridge across Highway 111 to provide a connection to Shubie Park, an improved connection between the M District and the Lake Banook trail, and pedestrian infrastructure improvements along MicMac Boulevard to connect to the Maybank Fields. Additionally, some suggested providing public bathrooms at the former YMCA site located at the end of Brookdale Court.

Several residents expressed concerns about environmental sustainability and the impact of the development on natural ecosystems, lakes, and wildlife. The use of landscaping was suggested by residents to mitigate the potential impact by incorporating green roofs, green park space, and retaining space for natural habitats. There was also a significant desire for extensive tree planting throughout the M District.

Residents expressed a high demand for the addition of community and recreation facilities within the proposal. Potential facilities that were suggested included a library, theatre, recreation centre, swimming pool, curling club, community garden and multi-functional community space. These facilities were suggested to be important for providing outlets for youth, and for the seniors living in the proposed retirement facility and in the surrounding neighbourhood.

“I agree that the area needs more housing, but if that housing is high-density high rises, there needs to be a commitment to green space for those individuals to use. Right now, the only “green space” this proposal has is a bunch of pedestrian walkways and a bridge to go OFF of the property.”

“I would like to see more green space. While Shubie is nearby, more green space could reduce the negative impacts associated with large concrete structures and parking garages.”

“Parks, a community garden, and a library. The closest library, Alderney Gate, is a 30 minute walk away, which is too far to be practical for many”

Key Points

- » Residents placed a high level of importance on the incorporation of green space within the M District.
- » Recreation facilities including a library, theatre, swimming pool, and recreation centre were identified by residents as being desirable within the M District.
- » Residents believed that the provision of green park space would benefit recreation opportunities as well as environmental sustainability.

DISRUPTION AND NUISANCE

Residents had concerns regarding the impact that the construction timeline would have on the neighbourhood. As a result of the M District redevelopment timeline, residents who live nearby would experience some form of disruption from construction for the next 10 – 20 years. The impact of trucks bringing construction materials and taking away fill, noise from blasting or digging, noise from construction, and dust and sediment runoff were all mentioned as potential negative impacts from construction to local residents. There was also some concern about the physical impact of blasting on properties in the neighbourhood and on service pipes in the area.

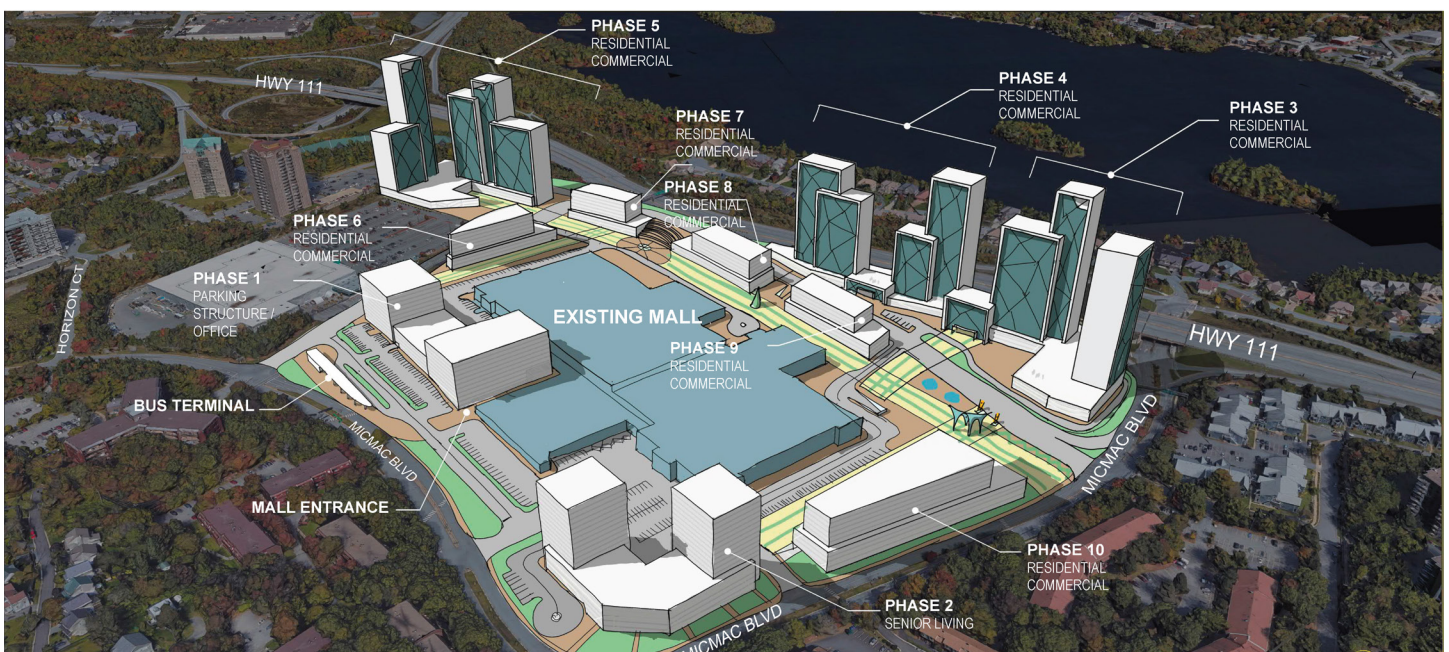
Some residents were concerned about the impact of the new development on noise and light pollution. In particular, it was noted that recently constructed buildings have included lighting on their rooftops which has contributed to light pollution in the area. Residents, particularly those who live along Lakeshore Park Terrace and Horizon Court were concerned that the buildings would limit the enjoyment of their housing due to the casting of shadows. Some residents requested that the applicant complete shadow studies to ensure that the proposed high-rises would not adversely impact their properties. Similarly, some residents had concerns

that the proposal to construct tall apartment buildings would reduce the privacy of their properties.

"I am apprehensive about how the construction is going to impact the surrounding neighbourhood where I live - noise, increased traffic etc. I recently bought a townhouse in the area because it was quiet, there were trees, lakes, walking paths, low rise buildings. Now there is going to be high rise buildings, increased traffic both on the roads and on footpaths, and noise. I am fearful that the construction noise and related traffic issues will persist for years."

Key Points

- » Residents who live within close proximity of the M District were concerned about the impact of construction on their quality of life.
- » Residents who live along Lakeshore Park Terrace and Horizon Court expressed concerns that the proposed high-rises would cause shadows and reduce privacy on their properties.



M District Proposal 3D Context View, WM Fares Architects



Photo Credit: Google Earth

NEXT STEPS

HALIFAX

PLANNING PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT

The next steps of the planning process include the following:

- » Additional information is required from the applicant including a preliminary landscaping plan, shadow study, wind impact assessment.
- » Adjustments to the proposal will be required to address comments made by various HRM departments, external review agencies, and public feedback.
- » HRM will draft policies for the future growth node to outline the requirements for the consideration of a development agreement.
- » Depending on the outcome of the review and policy drafting stages, and the developer's readiness, HRM may also draft development agreements or land use by-law regulations to enable development on the site or a portion of the site.
- » Phase 2 of public engagement will invite the public to review and comment on the draft policies and a revised development proposal for the site.
- » Finally, staff will draft a report for Regional Council and make a recommendation.

Phase 2 of public engagement will commence once draft planning documents are ready for public review. The public will be notified about engagement by mailouts to nearby residents, social media posts by the municipality, social media advertising and updates to the project website. The project website is updated regularly with documents, general updates, and public engagement information.