



M DISTRICT FUTURE GROWTH NODE PHASE 2 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

July 11, 2024

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 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 planning process will address what is needed for a new complete community through the creation of a neighbourhood plan for the entire FGN, comprehensively considering all properties within the area.

The planning process of the M District includes two phases of public engagement. During phase 1, residents were invited to share their vision for the area. This phase took place between January and July 2023. The ‘What We Heard Report’ summarizing all the feedback is available on the Shape Your City website. Phase 2 of public engagement aimed to provide an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the draft policies and revised development proposals for the site.

During Phase 1 of public engagement, HRM received one proposal from WM Fares Architects, acting on behalf of Rank Inc. Following the closure of Phase 1, HRM received a submission from ZZAP Architecture and Planning, representing Dartmouth Properties Limited, the second property owner within the M District FGN.

THIS DOCUMENT

This document offers a summary of engagement activities and feedback received during Phase 2 of the M District FGN public engagement process.

The “**SUMMARIZED FEEDBACK**” section provides an overview of all feedback and ideas collected from the online survey found on the “Shape Your City” website. This feedback was received on the draft planning policy and updated proposal documents. The feedback is organized into key themes that emerged from the responses received. Within this section, blue text boxes highlight resident quotes extracted from submissions to the online survey.

The “**NEXT STEPS**” section briefly outlines the upcoming stages of the planning process.

HOW WE ENGAGED

This section presents a summary of the one-month engagement process utilizing various methods outlined below. The statistics provided on this page are accurate as of May 29th, 2024.



Project Website

17,400 total visits
4,080 document downloads
240 FAQ page visits
220 engaged visitors
3,227 informed visitors
13,765 aware visitors
1,240 video views



Mailouts

1,646 notices mailed



Online Survey

76 survey responses
submitted by residents



Correspondence

1 email received



Social Media

Facebook and Instagram ads posted
on April 29th – May 19th 2024.
6,652 clicks
37,383 reach
139 comments
51 shares
101 reactions

HOW WE HEARD YOU

1. The **ONLINE SURVEY** received 76 responses. In this survey, respondents provided their feedback on the draft planning policies and the updated landowners' submissions.

2. HRM staff received **CORRESPONDENCE** via one email.



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.

DENSITY



LAND USE



TRANSPORTATION



PARKS AND LANDSCAPING



BUILDING DESIGN



HERITAGE AND CULTURE



COMMUNITY FACILITIES



PHASE 2 TIMELINE

Below is the timeline of Phase 2 engagement, which took place between April 19, 2024 to May 20, 2024.

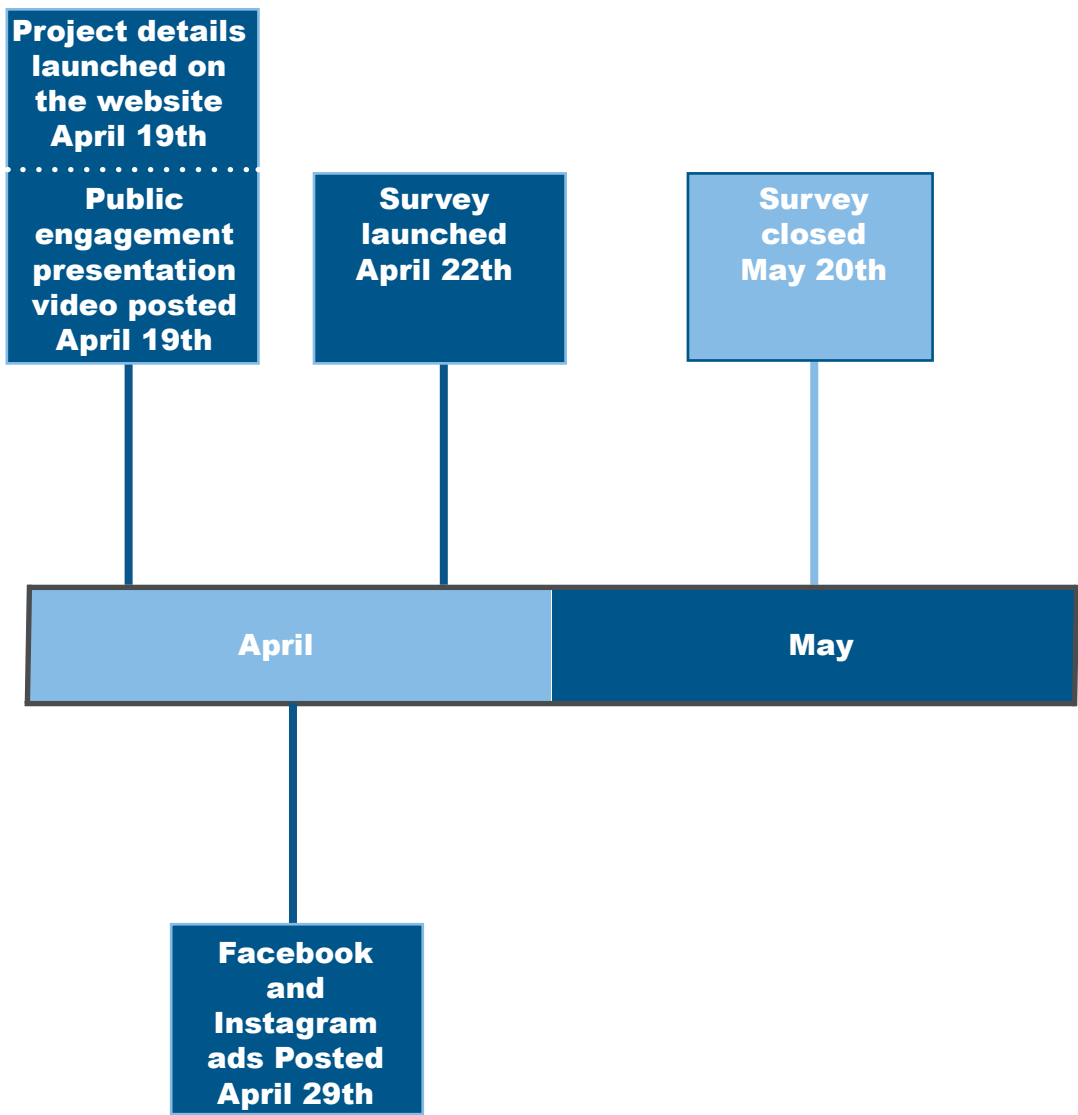




Photo Credit: HRM Planned Growth

SUMMARIZED FEEDBACK THEMES

HALIFAX

GENERAL FEEDBACK ON POLICIES AND SUBMISSIONS

Overall, residents provided positive comments about the proposed policies and the submissions by landowners. Some residents appreciated the proposed development, saying it would create a good, complete community. Additionally, pedestrian-oriented features and proposed housing developments were viewed positively. Comments indicated that the proposed development would revitalize the existing mall and the surrounding area.

The feedback also provided suggestions and areas for HRM staff to reconsider. Some residents thought that the proposed development brings too much density in terms of population and construction. The majority of responses said some buildings are too tall and disregard the character, scale, and proportion of the M District community. Another common point raised by the residents was that this development should consider providing all necessary infrastructure and services for the existing and proposed community of M District. Concern about schools, which are currently at capacity were a common example under this topic.

In addition to these points, many residents were worried about construction noise, dust, and traffic affecting local residents. They emphasized that there should be a proper plan to address these concerns, especially if the construction activities are carried out over multiple years.

"I think the submissions are well thought out and will create a great mixed-use community."

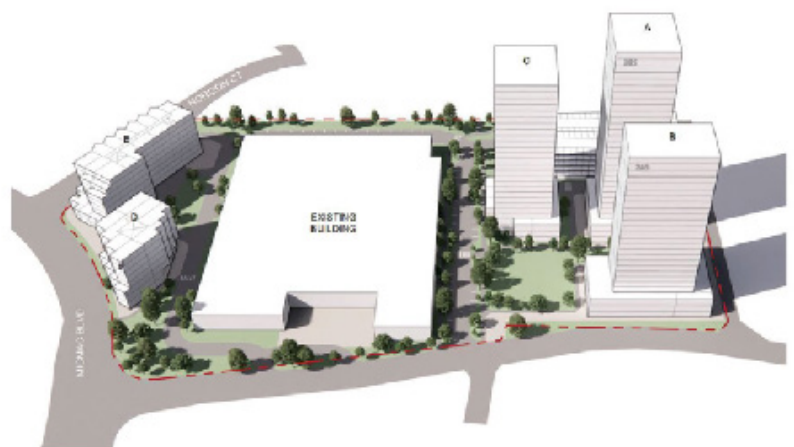
"I love how pedestrian oriented this plan is. More plans need to be like this."

"The policy does not address the amount of time this project will take and the effect of construction noise and construction traffic on local residents, for years to come."

"The population density and building height is much too large for the chosen site."

Key Points

- » Residents appreciated many features of the proposed development.
- » Numerous comments were received on areas that need improvement or reconsideration. These include the proposed high-density, high-rise structures, infrastructure provision, and construction-related inconveniences.



Irving site concept plan (ZZAP Architecture and Planning)

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

All the comments from the residents clearly showed acceptance of the housing-related developments within the site. However, many comments expressed significant concerns regarding the affordability of the proposed housing development and were unclear about how affordability would be maintained.

Many emphasized the need for a substantial portion of the development to be affordable, particularly for individuals and families with incomes under \$50,000 a year. The lack of affordable housing was a recurring theme, with several residents highlighting the disparity between median incomes and the high cost of rent in Nova Scotia. Questions were raised about the absence of a concrete plan for affordable housing within the development, with some suggesting that at least 15% of the units in the towers should be affordable.

There was also a strong call for the development to accommodate a diverse range of demographics, including families, seniors, and bachelors. Extending retirement buildings was seen as a wise decision given the large demographic of baby boomers in the province, but it was stressed that these units should be affordable.

Residents highlighted the need for a mix of housing types within the development. High-density housing, such as apartment towers, was deemed essential, particularly for transforming underutilized spaces like parking lots. Additionally, there was an interest for smaller townhouses.

Key Points

- » Residents stressed the importance of ensuring a significant portion of the new housing is affordable.
- » There is a strong desire for the development to include a variety of housing types to accommodate different groups, such as families, seniors, and single individuals.

“I do support the project and we do need the housing desperately.”

“The extension of retirement buildings are very wise as we have an incredible large demographic in this province of boomers but I hope they will be affordable.”

“As for housing, I don’t see anything specifically addressed at the real issue which is affordability of housing.”



BUILDING HEIGHTS AND BUILT FORM

A considerable number of comments were received regarding the proposed height and built form, specifically about the proposed 40-story buildings. The majority of residents expressed significant concerns that the buildings are too high. Only two comments were in favor of the proposed 40-story building height.

Many suggested reducing the height of the proposed buildings to a maximum of 15-20 stories to improve the aesthetic harmony of the area. There were also concerns about further limiting the building height to a maximum of 7-8 stories.

The main concern raised by residents was the shadows created by the proposed buildings. Some comments noted that tall buildings may cast too much shade on homes along Lakeshore Park Terrace during the winter months. Others suggested placing tall buildings only along the highway and reducing the height towards residential neighbourhoods. Residents were also worried that the building heights would be unusual compared to the rest of the landscape.

Residents also raised concerns about tall buildings creating wind tunnels and affecting views. Some mentioned that these buildings would block the nice view from their houses. Other concerns included complaints about LED lighting on buildings disturbing nearby residents.

“There are times when my backyard will be completely in the dark, on some very pleasant fall evenings possibly up until Christmas.”

“Doesn’t it strike it odd that the highest buildings in HRM are not going to be 1) in Halifax, or 2) Downtown. Where are the 40 floor skyscrapers there?”

“The buildings are too tall and there are too many units. Already when walking between apartment buildings on Horizon Court there is often a significant wind tunnel effect.”

Key Points

- » Many residents were concerned that the proposed 40-story buildings are too tall.
- » Main concerns included shadows cast by tall buildings, potential wind tunnels, and blocked views for nearby homes.
- » Residents also suggested placing taller buildings along the highway and lowering the height towards residential areas.



Perspective view - Mic Mac Boulevard - North (ZZAP Architecture and Planning)

DENSITY

Opinions about the increasing density of the M District were mixed. Some residents viewed it positively, believing it could help combat urban sprawl and create a more cohesive community. Additionally, a few responses saw the area as suitable for more density and growth.

Residents also expressed concerns about the proposed density. They felt that increasing density in neighbourhoods like Crichton Park might be excessive and mentioned that high-rise development and high density in other parts of the city have led to higher crime rates. Some suggested having fewer residential units to address these concerns. They also raised worries about congestion in the neighbourhood and the negative impact on natural surroundings like Lake Banook, Lake Micmac and Shubie Park. Additionally, they were concerned that the area's infrastructure might not support the increase in population density.

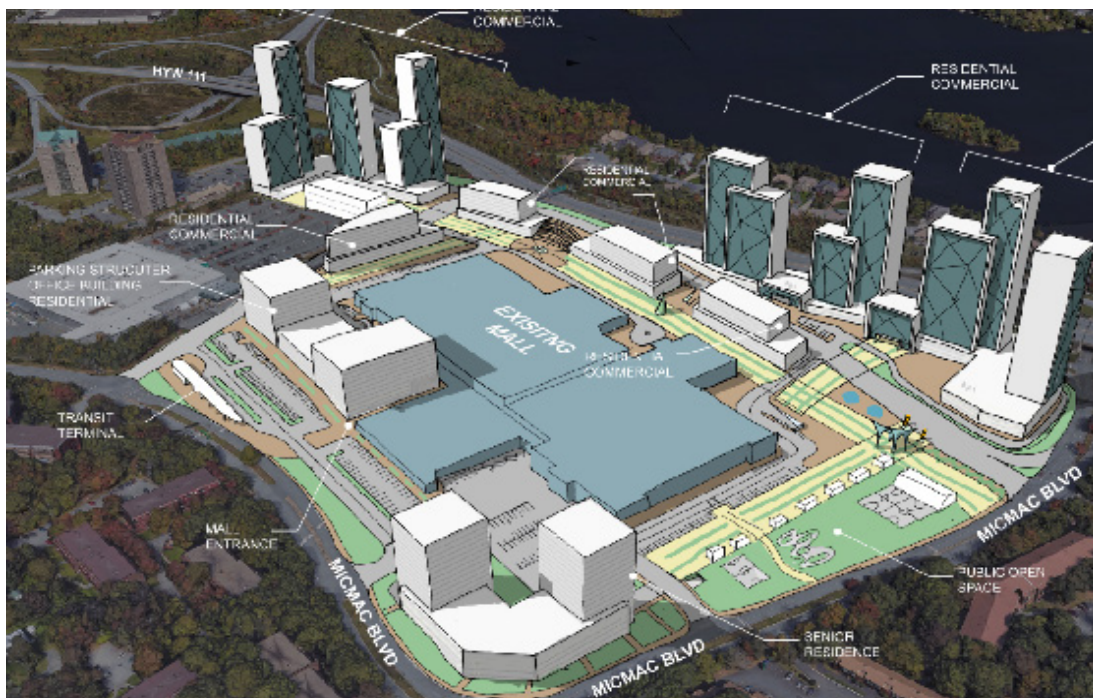
"Improved density is key to rescuing the city from the hands of the car-driven agenda of sprawl because that's the way we've always done it."

"Too many high rise buildings!!! Infrastructure in area will not support this degree of increase in population density!!!"

"Adding all these new constructs will definitely compromise an already congested neighbourhood."

Key Points

- » Some residents were concerned that increasing the density in the M District could lead to higher crime rates and strain the neighbourhood's infrastructure, suggesting a need for fewer residential units to address these issues.



3D context view - M District (WM Fares Architects)

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

Residents were worried about increasing traffic congestion, pointing out that the current road infrastructure might not handle the expected rise in traffic. Concerns were also raised about the lack of sidewalks and safe pedestrian crossings, particularly in areas like Horizon Court. Some residents stressed the need for upgrades to transportation infrastructure, including intersections like Glen Manor Drive and Crichton Avenue.

Residents also commented on the traffic study, highlighting that it did not include existing active transportation connections from the site to Lake Banook or the Shubie Canal Greenway. They also noted that the study missed analyzing the intersection of Glen Manor Drive and Crichton Avenue.

Residents proposed several measures such as implementing one-way streets, permit parking, and separated bike lanes to manage traffic flow and provide safe pathways for pedestrians and cyclists. They suggested the separated bike lanes to connect existing cycling routes and key destinations like Lake Banook and downtown Dartmouth. Some residents proposed bike-friendly bridges across Highway 111 and elevated connections over Mic Mac Boulevard.

Many residents appreciated the pedestrian-oriented design of the project but raised concerns about slip lanes that could risk pedestrian safety. Residents also recommended incorporating pedestrian-friendly features like weather-protected walkways and shared multi-use paths to reduce reliance on vehicles and promote active transportation.

Key Points

- » Residents are concerned about increased traffic congestion and inadequate road infrastructure.
- » Suggested transportation network improvements include adding one-way streets, permit parking, separated bike lanes, bike-friendly bridges, weather-protected walkways, and shared multi-use paths.

"I love how pedestrian oriented this plan is. More plans need to be like this."

"There does not seem to be a comprehensive plan for dealing with the volume of traffic that will result."

"I'm going to advocate for an elevated connection over Mic Mac Blvd to the Lake Banook trail, which is a major AT corridor."

"First, the 'potential bike friendly bridge across HWY 111. That needs to happen, the HWY is the great wall of car dependency, we need safe and efficient passages over it."

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Residents expressed several environmental concerns about the proposed project.

Several comments stressed the importance of protecting the water quality of Lake Micmac and Lake Banook, which have faced issues such as blue-green algae in recent years. There were also worries about increased wastewater runoff and its effects on nearby creeks and drainage systems, which are already under strain.

Additionally, residents highlighted the potential stress on Shubie Park due to the anticipated population increase, including the arrival of pets that could further impact the park's ecosystem. They suggested initiatives such as mailing information to new residents about proper wildlife treatment. Additionally, they recommended partnering with nonprofits for conservation education to promote responsible interaction with nature.

Some residents suggested having roof gardens for new constructions over six stories, similar to Toronto's requirements. They highlighted that roof gardens are important for water absorption, heat retention in winter, cooling in summer, and air purification and many other environmental benefits.

While some residents appreciated the inclusion of green spaces in the updated plans, they felt it was insufficient. Additionally, there were strong objections to cutting down mature trees around Micmac Mall, highlighting the importance of protecting these trees.

"I am pleased with the fact of the greenspace (park) that is in Phase 2 and it seems that a lot of the considerations that were in phase 1 have been addressed."

"I am not ok with you cutting down the mature trees surrounding Micmac mall. They need to be protected!!"

"Please be mindful in your submissions, more green space."

Key Points

- » The main concerns of residents were protecting the water quality of Lake Micmac and Lake Banook, and the impact of increased wastewater runoff.
- » Residents appreciated the green spaces, but felt that more were needed and strongly opposed cutting down mature trees.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Residents highlighted several key concerns and suggestions related to parks and recreational areas within the M District development. Many emphasized the need for more green spaces, walkways, communal gathering places, playgrounds and sports fields. Some residents specifically mentioned the importance of having green areas with large tree canopies.

Several comments pointed out the absence of a connection to Shubie Park in the current plans, stressing the importance of including such links for better access to outdoor spaces. Additionally, residents called for the inclusion of playgrounds suitable for all ages. They emphasized the need to maintain the current ratio of sports fields to residents to ensure adequate recreational facilities for the increased population.

Key Points

- » Overall, there was a strong desire for thoughtful planning to enhance green spaces and outdoor amenities, ensuring they meet the needs of the growing community.

“Would love to see the inclusion of more green spaces, walkways and a proper accessible playground for all ages.”

“Where are the sports fields? With all that space and that many people, surely the developers should be compelled to maintain the current ratio of residents to sports fields.”

“Better access to outdoor recreation for residents and visitors.”

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

In general, the majority of the feedback received indicated that the proposed plan exceeded the infrastructure capacity of the area. Residents highlighted the need for more infrastructure and services.

Responses pointed out the need for increased garbage collection services to accommodate the growing population in the area. Many concerns were raised about the capacity of local hospitals, medical clinics, and schools. Residents highlighted that current school capacities are already full and the need for proper planning for new schools.

Several comments mentioned that the existing street, sewer, and water systems are inadequate to handle the increased load. There were also specific concerns about low water pressure in the community.

Many residents called for the addition of grocery stores and childcare centers within the development to meet the basic needs of the new residents.

Key Points

- » Residents emphasized the need for enhanced infrastructure and services.
- » Concerns were raised about the capacity of the current street, sewer, and water systems.

“Where are these new families going to send their children to school?”

“With this many new people moving to the area and so many current apartments/condos/homes in Crichton Park it is a great time to add a grocery store into the plan.”

“Love to see more units getting put in and a great mix of residential and commercial. I hope we see all our basic needs being met within M District - affordable gym, local grocery, pharmacy, day care.”



Photo Credit: Google Earth

NEXT STEPS

HALIFAX

PLANNING PROCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

The next steps of the planning process include the following:

- » HRM staff will work to incorporate public feedback into the draft planning policy and development agreements.
- » A Council report with proposed policy amendments will be prepared for the first reading of the Regional Council. The same report will contain recommendations to the Harbour East Marine Drive Community Council regarding the approval of development agreements for the subject lands.
- » A joint public hearing will be scheduled if the Regional Council gives the first reading to the policy amendments and if the Harbour East Marine Drive Community Council gives notice of motion on the proposed development agreements.
- » Residents within the notification area will be informed about the public hearing by mail. During the public hearing, members of the public can share their opinions with both Councils about the draft planning policy and development agreements.
- » If the proposed policy amendments are adopted by the Regional Council, the Harbour Marine Drive Community Council will be able to provisionally approve the development agreements.
- » The planning policy's approval depends on provincial review and approval. Approval or refusal of a development agreements can be appealed to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board.