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All Nova Scotia.com - Feedback – Convention Centre

As HRM's Urban Design Project Manager, nothing pleases me more than to see so many weighing in on the critical urban issue of the proposed convention centre. While we await further negotiations between the three levels of government, I feel it is important to highlight a few aspects of this project from a city-building perspective around which there has been some energetic discussion.

First, if the project gets the green light for funding, there are significant opportunities ahead for the public to help refine the design side of this project. For one, there is a requirement contained in the Province's Expression of Interest for the proposal to undergo a public consultation process. As part of its submission, the development company had to include a comprehensive plan that will allow citizens to be part of the design process. This process will commence once negotiations are complete, because until that happens there is no project.

As well, there is a requirement in the new downtown plan for public review and comment on the design before it is submitted to the Design Review Committee (DRC) as part of the Development Approval Process. The committee reviews qualitative elements such as design, quality of materials, and sidewalk experience, while municipal staff reviews the quantitative elements such as height, mass, setbacks, etc. Although development decisions on the quantitative elements of applications are not appealable, decisions on the qualitative aspects are appealable to Council. Regardless, no project can be approved that does not meet or exceed the rigorous design controls of the new downtown plan.

On the question of impacts by the proposed centre on views from Citadel Hill, the development company, the Province and HRM have already said the project would not impact any protected views from this beloved national site. These views are protected through the same policies and to the same extent as they have been for the past 35-plus years.

With regard to the location, HRM has recently refocused its attention on the economic, environmental and cultural sustainability benefits of densifying the downtown. This is vital for a successful renewal of the downtown core and to strengthen our regional economic base. Elizabeth Beale of the Premier's Economic Advisory Committee said, "...the prospects for Nova Scotia are now inextricably linked to the success of its largest urban area."

HRM's Regional Plan (2006), HRM by Design (2009), and HRM's "Capital Ideas" proposal (2010) each point to the need to concentrate investment and growth in areas that are already served by existing infrastructure, which includes sidewalks, streets and parks, as well as restaurants, shops and cultural attractions. The central site of the proposed convention centre meets these criteria, whereas other sites such as the Cogswell Interchange would require the expenditure of many millions of additional dollars to create new infrastructure.

The proposed convention centre is just one of many urban initiatives that would help bring the life back into the downtown core that it so urgently needs and, with that, greater prosperity for the entire region and the Province beyond.

Thanks to All Nova Scotia.com for the opportunity to add to what has and will continue to be a healthy debate on this proposed major development project.

Sincerely,

Andy Fillmore,

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