



Bloomfield Master Plan

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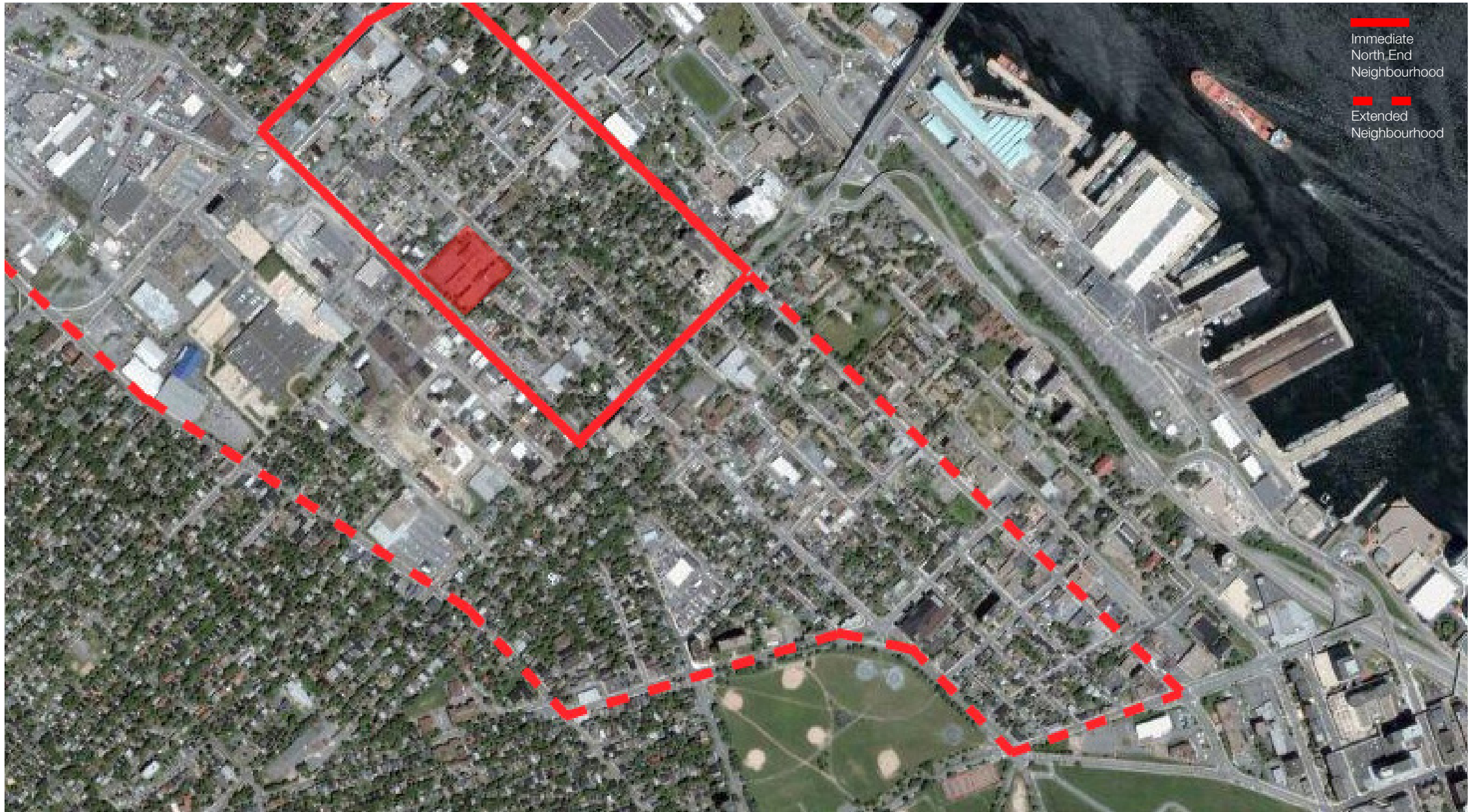
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Immediate
North End
Neighbourhood

Extended
Neighbourhood

Prime location

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Bloomfield Master Plan

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Rich North End fabric

At the heart of the Bloomfield Master Plan lies a successful mix of publicly-owned and market-driven development which will result in a vibrant, mixed-use development and support community programs and quality public space.

Purpose

Since 2002, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has been engaged in a property-review and planning exercise to determine the long-term use of the Bloomfield site in the North End of Halifax. The resulting Bloomfield Master Plan puts forward an innovative physical redevelopment and programming framework for the site. A successful mix and density of public, private and community uses will provide HRM citizens with a vibrant, mixed-use district—and spinoff benefits for the local economy and community. As a new destination on the Halifax Peninsula for the arts and for incubating creative community programs and initiatives, Bloomfield will also create positive spinoffs for the region as a whole.

Background

Over the years, the three former school buildings on the site have largely been used for community recreation, social

programming, non-profit tenancy and artist studios. Only one building on the site, the Bloomfield Community Centre, is currently in operation. The two other buildings, the Fielding Building and the Commons Building, are vacant and need significant capital repair and improvement. Current operation and associated maintenance of the Bloomfield facilities is accumulating a rising annual deficit beyond the Municipality's long-term capacity to sustain. To justify HRM's ongoing investment in the site, its operation must be strategically aligned with the Municipality's programming mandate and policy priorities. A building-asset and operational review determined that the facilities are not effectively serving HRM's community-programming interests. Hence, the review concluded, strategic changes must be made. The review identified Bloomfield as a potential catalyst not only for achieving HRM's community-development priorities, but also

for achieving a range of growth-management, urban-design and economic-development objectives. It became clear that we need a long-term vision and a development plan for this important public asset.

Objective

In 2008, HRM began a Master Planning process to arrive at the most feasible use, community programming, and design concept for the Bloomfield property. The result is a conceptual framework and opportunities plan that will guide future decisions for site development. The Master Plan (the Plan) articulates objectives for types of uses that should be accommodated on the site and the development form they should take. In this way, the Plan lays out important expectations not only for the Municipality, but also for private-sector and non-profit partners who will be involved in implementing the Plan

and developing the site.

The Bloomfield Plan communicates an economically feasible and community-supported development vision for the property. While the development intent and objectives are clear, the Plan is meant to be flexible enough to respond to shifts in the market, community needs and economic conditions while maintaining its core vision. In this respect, the Plan does not prescribe floor plates or assign specific uses to predetermined spaces; instead, it proposes a careful mix of uses within a built form that will best achieve the desired balance and vitality.

Plan Highlights

The following planning and design fundamentals are set out to ensure that a core set of principles is maintained throughout the implementation stages, and that the

work adheres to the original intent of the development plan.

Urban Design

- *An efficient use of urban lands, with a critical mass of residential density, commercial, community and cultural uses*
- *Ground-floor commercial facilities located along the edges of the site to foster pedestrian flow, social exchange and an integrated mixed-use neighbourhood*
- *High-quality public amenity, and community and cultural facilities and spaces*
- *Renovation and adaptive re-use of heritage buildings for community and mixed-purpose use*
- *A physically integrated cluster of community facilities centred around public open space*
- *Porosity of pedestrian movement into, within and around the site, and connection to*

transit infrastructure and nodes

Community Development

- *Affordable and accessible community programs and services delivered by HRM and its non-profit partners*
- *Community-driven partnerships for operation of municipally owned facilities*
- *Innovative community management and facility-ownership opportunity*
- *A percentage of housing units maintained as “affordable” to invite a range of ages and economic position, and social and cultural diversity*

Arts and Culture

- *Facility space for creative incubation, and arts production and exhibition*
- *A development model enabling both multi-purpose and purpose-built space for artists*

and arts organizations

- *Cross-fertilization and exchange among professional, amateur and emerging artists within a multi-use community environment*
- *Opportunities to merge non-profit and for-profit arts and creative industry*

Economic Feasibility

- *A balanced development model that is affordable for the Municipality and its partners*
- *Multi-sector partnerships and development and operating models that allow for innovative funding mechanisms and economic sustainability*
- *An economically attractive development concept that the private and community sectors can deliver and that can be absorbed by the market*
- *Efficient and environmentally sustainable use of services and infrastructure*

Implementation

- *The Plan's outline of site development will require more detailed planning, design and market feasibility to advance the project from concept to reality. However, the Master Plan itself represents a critical phase in the overall process and allows the Municipality to advance toward the preliminary phases of implementation.*
- *Momentum and awareness created through the Master Planning process must be maintained by moving swiftly toward more detailed phases of planning and design. The complexities of the proposed mixed-use development are such that the following elements of work must be completed in order to effectively market and develop the site.*

Economic and Market Analysis

- *Financial and market analysis, and*

identification of funding sources

- *Operating and performance estimates for development components*
- *Condition assessment and capital estimates for heritage buildings*
- *Assessment of affordable housing needs and development models*

Program and Partnership Development

- *Programming needs assessment and partnership model(s)*
- *Community facilities tenancy plan and user-group profile*
- *Program delivery and business plan for the Bloomfield Community Cultural Centre*
- *Partnership opportunities audit (EOI, stakeholder engagement, survey, etc.)*
- *Framework for soliciting, evaluating and selecting partners*

Planning Approvals and Development Process

- *Amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategy to enable physical aspects of the development and proposed land uses*
- *A development-agreement process addressing site and building design, public open space, circulation, access and other detailed aspects of the development*
- *Study of the development's environmental effects, such as wind and traffic*
- *A partnership engagement strategy to effectively market and develop the site*
- *Expression of Interest and Request for Proposal package*

Architects' Statement

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Introduction

Halifax's North End is one of the most culturally diverse communities in the HRM. It serves the city as an incubator for social, commercial, and cultural enterprise. The distinctive urban fabric of this neighbourhood is currently being both enriched by sensitive investment and eroded by incompatible development. The four acre Bloomfield school site occupies a significant place in the history of this community. The public debate regarding the future of this community resource has been long and sometimes contentious. The initiation of the Bloomfield Masterplan process represents the recognition by the HRM of its role in insuring a community-building future for the site.

For purposes of comparability of alternative schemes, this study maintains an economic assumption of a zero-sum game, where public, community uses are balanced economically with private market uses for the

site. Council may choose to subsequently alter this economic assumption.

This is a form-based urban design study which builds on urban planning principles. Therefore, it is neither a detailed architectural study, nor an exhaustive study of management models for the site. These will be the focus of further study, and will be based on a clear urban design foundation articulated by this study. We are honoured, as consultants, to be involved in this collaborative process with the community and HRM staff on what promises to be a model urban development; at a moment when all things are possible moving forward.

Process

Public engagement, through interviews with community stakeholder groups, and through participatory design workshops on the topics of 'good uses' for the site and 'good form' for development, has been a central component in the Bloomfield Masterplanning process. A community advisory committee representative of community interests and a broad steering committee composed of HRM staff have also directed our efforts.

Planning principles that have guided the design process include: diversity, community-building, publicness, accessibility, authenticity, engagement, environmental responsibility, creativity, adaptability, and beauty. Precedents have been studied for adaptive reuse of heritage properties and for streetscape and public space making strategies.

The public engagement process has led to considerable consensus on several important

issues. For example, it is widely agreed that the development of the Bloomfield site must contribute to the public good as a community center in both the social and cultural sense. It is well understood that private, market development on the site can be compatible, enriching, and enabling to this end. Both the existing Commons and Fielding buildings are recognized as valuable architectural heritage assets (at-risk), which should be sensitively reused. Strategies for environmental sustainability were widely recommended, such as geothermal heating, encouragement of public transportation alternatives to automobiles, green roofs, and LEED certification for all buildings. The need for density was recognized as essential for a rich urban experience, economic viability, and sustainability. As a model development, the maximum mix of uses, and social and economic diversity are required.

Design

As a result of the public engagement process three distinctive urban design options were explored, driven by alternative approaches to key variables: density, creation of public open space, and retention of existing buildings. Evaluation of these options guided by stated community and urban planning goals led to the design of a preferred option. This scheme optimized the quality and quantity of both exterior and interior public space, architectural heritage retention, and economic viability.

The recommended scheme begins with the extension of two new pedestrian streets through the site (Bloomfield Street and Fern Lane), thereby enhancing the public accessibility of the site. A large central public green square is created called “Bloomfield”, contributing to the city’s network of public spaces. This results in the creation of the dense mixed-use perimeter development of the site comprising of a rich mix of

commercial and residential types; creating vibrant streetscapes and positive interfaces with the surrounding neighbourhoods in terms of both scale and use. The public character of the development is further enhanced by the creation of community and arts oriented buildings along the new Bloomfield Street, and surrounding a new public square. Both the commons and fielding buildings are recommended for retention, creating a heritage precinct. The existing 1970’s school building is recommended for removal due to its minimal structural value, and it’s position on the site which precludes the creation of quality public open space or quality interfaces with residential uses, and eliminates the possibility for necessary density and any underground parking; thereby radically reducing the social, economic, and sustainable value of the site.

Implementation

Continued public ownership of a considerable portion of the Bloomfield site (current scheme +/- 80%) is necessary to ensure long term community benefit (public accessibility, community uses, and programming). This approach reserves a clear envelope for a rich mix of private market uses along the perimeter streets (Robie Street, Agricola Street, Almon Street), at a density which enables financial viability.

No zoning framework exists currently under which this innovative type of development can be considered. As a result a development agreement process will be required, together with a plan amendment. A development amendment process will ensure continued community engagement in considering the merits of proposed projects for the site. It is also a tool which effectively favours and rewards good architectural design.

An RFP process will be initiated by HRM to select development and community partners and to explore the attendant management models. It is currently envisioned that all buildings will be constructed by private developers. Community use facilities will be managed by community groups. Market use buildings will be managed by developers according to the community values articulated in the Masterplan. The HRM will continue to offer public programming and manage the public urban spaces for the benefit of the community.

The proposed urban design and property ownership pattern enables the alignment of both public and private initiatives on the site. A successful mix of publicly owned and market driven development will result in a vibrant, mixed-use development and support community programs and quality public space.



Existing Bloomfield Site