

4 A Common Vision

4.1 Vision

Capturing the vision of a diverse public is a challenge in every municipal visioning process. The variety of view points produces positive tension from which unique, context appropriate, and creative solutions can emerge.

4.1.1 Community Values

The vision for Dartmouth Common must be shaped by community values. How we design and use our community spaces communicate messages about what we value. The Dartmouth Common tells visitors and residents what the values of the community are. **Right now, there is a disconnect between what the community values and what is seen on the Common – the Master Plan aims to resolve this gap and make the Common truly reflective of community values.** Through the public input opportunities, community members have shared what they value about the Dartmouth Common. The following eleven key community values have emerged through the process and set the starting point for establishing the vision, goals and guiding principles for the Dartmouth Common.

1. Open Space

Dartmouth Common provides a highly valued and unique green oasis of open space in the middle of the city.

2. Community

It is a freely accessible gathering place for family and friends, which makes it an important place for community-building. Generations of Dartmouth residents have helped build their community by volunteering to make Leighton Dillman Park and other areas of the Common beautiful, useful and clean.

3. Quiet Reflection

The Dartmouth Common's pathways, gardens, cemeteries and quiet nooks are valued places for meditation and contemplation.

4. Recreation & Health

The Dartmouth Common provides valued space for many types of indoor and outdoor recreation and promotes community health by making space for physical activity.

5. **Beauty & Views**

Views of the Halifax Harbour, good vantage points for special events like the fireworks, and the beauty of Common itself are valued aspects of the site.

6. **Heritage**

The Dartmouth Common is a location with heritage significance for the Mi'kmaq and was at the heart of the early settlement that would later become known as Dartmouth.

7. **Arts & Culture**

The Common provided a space for social and cultural gatherings throughout its history, and continues through the Highland games, school and community events and productions.

8. **Connection**

The proximity of the Dartmouth Common to transit, the bridge across the harbour and to the remainder of the road network, mean that it is used every day for travel to work, school, and play. The Common is a well-travelled space that represents the connection between the important places in people's lives.

9. **Education**

Education has been an integral part of the Dartmouth Common throughout history and continues today. The Common is thus highly valued by community members and especially students as a place for learning and growing.

10. **Ecology**

The ecological aspects of the Dartmouth Common greenspaces and gardens are valued by the public, who also want to see the ecology of the area improved and sustained into the future.

11. **Sustenance**

The Dartmouth Common is also a valued space for sustaining the community through growing healthy food in the community garden plots.

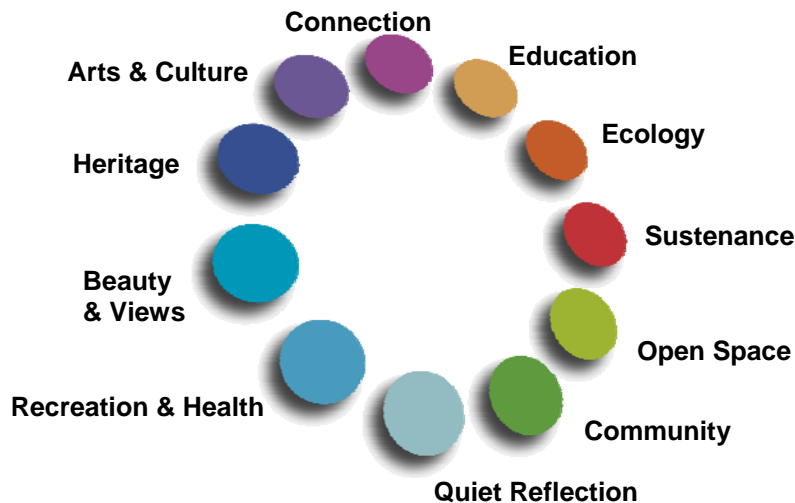


Figure 4.1: Community Values

4.1.2 Draft Vision

The Dartmouth Common is a **gateway** to a great community; both a welcoming, open oasis of greenspace and a lively civic core that sets the stage for both commonplace and extraordinary aspects of our lives.

The Commonplace

The Common is and will continue to be:

- ↗ part of our daily passage to school or commute to work as we walk, cycle and drive through it;
- ↗ where we meet our neighbours, play with our families and friends, grow our food, and where we exercise and stay healthy; and
- ↗ a place where we can hear conversations, laughter, cries, encouragements, and simply the quiet sounds of nature amidst the hustle and bustle of the city and harbour.

The Extraordinary

The Common is and will continue to be:

- ↗ where ceremonies are held: graduation, award events, weddings, commemorations, and memorials;
- ↗ where milestones are achieved: tests passed, races run, homeruns hit; and
- ↗ where we remember our past and anticipate our future.

Strong Sense of Place

The Common will build on its strengths and flourish into an identifiable gateway to Dartmouth that will be recognizable to residents and visitors as an open space landmark and civic destination. The Common will strengthen its sense of place and become:

- ↗ a landmark in the Halifax Regional Municipality;
- ↗ a place that provides a clear demonstration of the values of the community;
- ↗ more safe and accessible for all;
- ↗ more ecologically healthy and vibrant;
- ↗ better defined and connected; and
- ↗ more active and useable year-round.

4.2 Goals and Guiding Principles

The overarching vision for the Master Plan is that Dartmouth Common is a *greenspace and civic gateway* to Dartmouth where sense of place will be intentionally strengthened, and where now and in the future we will

experience both the commonplace and the extraordinary. To transform the vision to reality, goals have been set to improve the Dartmouth Common. In order to achieve the goals, guiding principles that reflect community values have been determined to shape the strategies and actions that will lead Dartmouth Common forward. These goals and principles are informed by public consultation, staff input, site analysis, case study research and design.

4.2.1 Goal 1: Strengthen Sense of Place

The Common will be easily identified and develop a strong and cohesive sense of place.

Guiding Principles for Creating a Strong Sense of Place

GP 1.1: Define Strong Edges

- ↗ People must know when they are inside or outside of the Common;
- ↗ People should have a sense of entering Dartmouth through the gateway of the Common; and
- ↗ Strong edges must also be permeable to allow for connectivity.

GP 1.2: Allow for Deep Connectivity

- ↗ Within, through, and beyond;
- ↗ Legibility of streets and pathways continue into and out of the Common;
- ↗ It is important to better connect the pieces: across Nantucket, across Alderney, across Thistle, across Wyse; and
- ↗ The Dartmouth Common needs to be linked back into the community both physically and in the collective consciousness. Connectivity can be strengthened through improved links to the Trans Canada Trail, Alderney Gate, the lakes, the bridge, etc.

GP 1.3: Connect the Edge Through Identifiable Nodes

- ↗ Entry and exit points – the “gateways” to the larger gateway – “open doors” to the Common.

GP 1.4: Transportation Should Respect and Complement the Common

- ↗ It should be made to feel as if the roads such as Nantucket and Thistle are crossing through a park not the other way around.

GP 1.5: Develop a Common Language

- ↗ A “common language” is like a tie that binds the visual aspects of the area together and allows it to be read as one continuous entity. A “common language” includes furniture (benches, picnic tables), signs, banners, etc.

4.2.2 Goal 2: Redefine the Dartmouth Common as a Landmark Destination

Dartmouth Common will become a place that attracts people. It is an important place that people pass through (i.e., commuting, going to school), but it also needs to have the element of destination. People will be crossing the bridge from Halifax and coming in from other outlying areas to enjoy the amenities and attractiveness of the site.

Guiding Principles for Creating a Destination

GP 2.1: Establish the Common as a Hub of Activity for Dartmouth

↗ As the gateway to the city it needs to be a hub of activity; it needs events and intentional programming.

GP 2.2: Promote the Common

↗ The Dartmouth Common should be promoted as an important hub of activity – for example, there should be photographs in HRM promotional documents and put on the map at the ferry terminal.

GP 2.3: Recognize Opportunity Sites, Yet Ensure Appropriate and Best Use

- ↗ Recommendations should be made for the best use of underused and vacant land and corridors;
- ↗ The Common already contains a number of important public uses. The open space of the Common should not be seen as unused space that can accommodate any new desire for use that comes along. While it is important that existing uses are maintained, a framework is needed that clearly defines where expansion of existing facilities can take place and where open space must be preserved or enhanced; and
- ↗ Zoning of the site that allows appropriate uses to be accommodated in appropriate locations is vital.

GP 2.4: Tell the Story of the Common

- ↗ There are many threads of the past on this site that make this place an important spot in the history of the region. These threads will be recognized and woven together to tell a story of the place; and
- ↗ Important sites include the First Nation's burial site in St. Pauls Cemetery, St. Pauls Cemetery itself, the old Park School site, the old Library and City Hall site, Leighton Dillman Park, the other cemeteries, the Sportsplex, the Urban Wilderness Park, and even the shopping plaza at Wyse Road and Nantucket Drive, and the mine.

4.2.3 Goal 3: Enhance the Experience of the Commonplace

The Dartmouth Common will provide a great place for the people who access it everyday in their daily commutes, exercise, and leisure activities.

Guiding Principles for Enhancing the Experience of the Commonplace

GP 3.1: Provide Spaces for Community Building

↗ People who live near the Common, in a sense, live next door and may use it everyday. There needs to be a variety of spaces that provide for group activity as well as solitary contemplation. Formal events and informal use of the Common provide opportunities for building relationships within the neighbourhood and strengthening community connections.

GP 3.2: Facilitate Daily Travel

- ↗ People move through the Common everyday. Special consideration needs to be given to ensuring that daily travel to work, school and play is safe, enjoyable, and easy;
- ↗ Public transportation is a priority as the bus and nearby ferry services provide links to the rest of the system; and
- ↗ Active transportation paths will form spines moving through the site to connecting opportunity sites and other important areas.

GP 3.3: Respect and Enhance the Existing Functions of the Area

↗ The Common already provides for many public functions that are important to the community including open space, schools, recreational facilities and sports fields, transit, active transportation linkages, etc.

GP 3.4: Safeguard Health and Safety

- ↗ Safety for everyone is a priority, with special consideration for the needs of children, youth, students, seniors, and those with special mobility needs who travel through the Common;
- ↗ Opportunities for healthy and active living on the Common need to be protected;
- ↗ Negative effects from cars and buses, including noise and air pollution, need to be mitigated and reduced, especially near the schools and outside recreation areas; and
- ↗ Design should promote safety and discourage crime.

4.2.4 Goal 4: Enhance the Experience of the Extraordinary

Opportunities for special events and activities will be improved so that there are more opportunities for the extraordinary every day.

Guiding Principles for Enhancing the Experience of the Everyday Extraordinary

GP 4.1: Provide Spaces for a Variety of Forma and Informal Events

↗ The Common should be a destination for local and regional events and activities. Facilities of the highest quality should not only be available to local residents but they should attract people from the larger region as well. Certain spaces within the Common need to be large and have infrastructure to support large events. There should be formal places for programmed activities that have significance at the regional level as well as informal spaces for gatherings and happenstance meetings.

GP 4.2: Preserve Views

↗ Locations with spectacular views will be demarcated on the ground and the views from these locations will be preserved. Promoting these views as part of the overall experience of the Dartmouth Common also has the potential to draw tourists to Dartmouth.

4.2.5 Goal 5: Improve Greenspace and Open Space

The greenspace and open spaces in the Common will not be treated as space leftover in between developments; these will be regarded as defining and central components of the overall Common, which communicate civic pride.

GP 5.1: Respect the Natural Context

↗ It is important to realize that micro climatic effects affect the usability of the park. Designs for the places should respond to the cold winds sweep up the harbour in the winter, should take advantage of the southern facing slopes, provides some pockets throughout the open space, should also provide shady areas of respite on hot summer days. Topography constitutes both a challenge and an opportunity.

GP 5.2 Balance Human Use and Wildlife Habitat

↗ The Common is shared between people, plants and wildlife. Areas of highest ecological importance will be maintained. The whole Common is habitat and even within built up areas, areas for plant and wildlife life can be restored in small but significant ways.

GP 5.3 Improve Connectivity between Existing Greenspace and Open Spaces

- Creating connected corridors for movement and mingling within and beyond the Common is important for plants and animals as well as desirable by human users.

GP 5.4 Better Define Greenspace and Open Spaces

- Whether a community vegetable garden, a flower bed, an open hilltop, a path through a cemetery, or a cobblestone walkway, these greenspaces and open areas need to be better defined so they are recognized, respected, and used according to their purpose.

GP 5.5 Plan for Open Space and Greenspace Maintenance

- The Common is a highly valued and unique feature in the city and it needs to be maintained and cared for in a way that reflects its high value. Existing and proposed greenspaces and open spaces need to be well-maintained. Plans for the maintenance of both natural greenspace and “hardscapes”, such as pathways, streets and, pedestrian promenades are necessary to ensure continued and improved functionality and beauty.