



DARTMOUTH COMMON MASTER PLAN PROJECT PROJECT SUMMARY

PROJECT GOALS:

The following goals will guide the Master Plan:

- establish a long-term vision and planning framework to guide the Municipality in protecting, improving and managing the Dartmouth Common for public use and enjoyment
- recognize and reinforce the Common as a significant regional public space and civic asset
- establish stakeholder and public support for the Plan and collaboration for its delivery
- establish a multi-year investment strategy to implement the Plan including priority projects and initiatives

BACKGROUND:

In 1788 an effort to secure a common pasturage and public land for the benefit of all citizens resulted in the Crown granting 150 acres of land to the people of Dartmouth. While its area, configuration and character have been largely altered over time, the Common remains a significant part of the regional open space network and Dartmouth's civic character. The Common is also a key gateway into Dartmouth and holds importance for the community identity of this area.

Of the original 150 acre land grant, 99 acres remains under municipal ownership and management as parkland, transportation infrastructure and public facilities. This presents a significant opportunity to strategically plan for the future enhancement of the Common with special emphasis on balancing and integrating public facilities and public open space.

Over the years the Dartmouth Common lands have been developed in an uncoordinated manner and without a municipal plan to guide decision-making. As a result, the cohesiveness and civic character of the Common has diminished. In the absence of a plan the Common has developed in part with uses that are not in keeping with the original spirit of the Common land grant. The intent of the Common as established under the Dartmouth Common Act prohibits the sale, lease or "alienation" of lands and prevents any person from building on the Common. While legislative amendments and land sales have enabled development to take place, it is important that future decisions be guided by a planning framework that reflects a public vision for the remaining Common and surrounding district and by clear objectives for its long-term use.

The most comprehensive planning effort to date for the Common has been through the work of the Dartmouth Common Committee established in the 1980's out of increasing public concern over the protection of remaining Common lands. The Committee's mandate included development of the Dartmouth Common Enhancement Plan; a strategy for directing investment and improving the management of the Common. This Plan was completed in 1989 and along with the Dartmouth Common Act adopted in 1986, was meant to guide future decisions affecting the development and enhancement of the Common. However, the Plan never took root and was not effectively integrated into municipal policy or the operations of the City of Dartmouth or the Halifax Regional Municipality.

PLANNING CONTEXT:

The HRM Regional Municipal Planning Strategy establishes a broad framework for sustainable growth management and development of vibrant, healthy communities across the region. Key to this is the development of a network of open spaces and natural areas. In HRM a healthy open space network serves many functions including recreation and aesthetic enjoyment, protection of natural and cultural heritage, and critical connections between communities and destinations. Publicly accessible and interconnected open space is a critical element of building healthy and complete communities. The Dartmouth Common is one of HRM's most significant urban open spaces and plays an integral role in Dartmouth's open space network and character.

There is a need for the Municipality to strategically plan for the future use and enhancement of the remaining Common lands and to establish a stronger recognition of the larger Common district. This includes coordination of proposed initiatives on the Common which must be considered under a broader functional and design context. The design and integration of public infrastructure and facilities will be key to the successful enhancement and protection of the Common as an important public asset.

Expansion of the Nantucket Road Transit Terminal, expansion plans for Dartmouth Sportsplex, and future enhancements to the Dartmouth High School will all be considered through the Master Plan. Special emphasis will be placed on developing conceptual design enhancements for these and other opportunity sites across the Common. Developing pedestrian and other active transportation connections and enhancing the comfort and enjoyment of people using the Common is also a key objective of the Master Plan. The Nantucket Transit Terminal expansion project presents an immediate opportunity to align the Municipality's objectives for public transit, active transportation and open space development and protection.

Future growth in Dartmouth's downtown area is also of importance as it will increase the need for open space and active transportation pathways and connections. Development opportunities for adaptive property reuse and in-fill will bring new residents and commercial activity into the area. Consideration must be given to how these future developments will connect to and enhance the Common.

Other privately and publicly owned lands around the Common also hold strategic importance to its future character and use. Strong partnerships and collective support from land owners for the vision and objectives of the Master Plan will be key. Longer-range development opportunity sites should be looked at conceptually from an urban design perspective including opportunities for key pedestrian linkages. The Plan will highlight these opportunities appropriately.

In addition to addressing the need to protect broader open space assets and values the master plan will also place emphasis on active transportation options and their alignment with open space infrastructure and networks. Active Transportation circulation and connections in and around the Common is a key objective of the master plan and understood to be a critical element of planning urban parks and open space systems. Improved AT connections to public facilities and infrastructure on the Common including the Nantucket transit terminal and other public facilities and destinations will be addressed. The objectives under HRM's active transportation plan and draft Harbor Plan will be important considerations. Opportunities to better integrate the Common through trail connections, streetscape improvements, and landscape design will be explored.

The Dartmouth Common Master Plan will formalize a public vision and objectives with a primary goal of protecting the integrity and special character of the Common for public use. Special emphasis will be placed on achieving a strategic balance between public open space needs and public facility and infrastructure needs. Design concepts that stress character and image, continuity and harmony between uses will be developed to achieve this balance. The Plan will also include recommendations and guidelines for how open space on the Common should be protected.

The Master Plan will provide a multi-year planning and decision-making framework for Municipal staff and Council and will articulate planning and design expectations for stakeholders and partners. It will be used to guide municipal Council and staff in making decisions regarding strategic programming, capital investment, and asset management and real estate development. The Plan will help inform future land-use planning and policy development by identifying areas of interest and focus for long-range planning and strategic asset management. It will enable a more collaborative and predictable management and administrative model for open space and public facilities planning and development and help to forge key partnerships with stakeholders.

Planning input and participation from the public will be critical in defining the vision and objectives as will the input of key partners and landowners who have a role in developing and managing Common lands for public use. The Plan will recognize the need to apply different tools and levels of policy for the range of jurisdictions and land-use scenarios operating on the Common. In this respect the Plan will guide the Municipality in undertaking its role as manager and public trustee of Common land.

OBJECTIVES:

The following objectives will shape the planning process and outcomes:

- a. understand the regulatory and jurisdictional framework that governs the description, use and development of the Dartmouth Common
- b. develop a planning framework that effectively aligns HRM's land-use, open space, cultural, transportation and growth management policies in support of the future public use and development of the Common as a significant regional civic space
- c. develop and enhance the Common open space network for recreational and public use with emphasis on pedestrian connectivity and linkages to the downtown core, Halifax Harbor and other key public and community nodes
- d. develop a design framework and conceptual design guidelines for Common lands with special emphasis on the broader urban design context, active transportation, and community, cultural, ecological, and historical quality and values
- e. create a policy framework and recommendations for the future acquisition, repatriation and redevelopment of Common lands for public use
- f. establish mechanisms for the integrated management of the Common within HRM and among various partners and stakeholders including private and public land-owners
- g. establish an implementation framework to direct capital improvements, strategic operations, asset management and investment
- h. identify initiatives for enhanced community programming including (but not limited to) special events, recreation, heritage and cultural interpretation and public art