

Draft Dartmouth Common Master Plan – Comments

Shalom M. Mandaville

Thank you for sending us the generic updated info by email on the Dartmouth Common Master Plan. I as well as a handful of others in my primarily acclaimed international scientific team <<http://lakes.chebucto.org/>> that I showed to really love the plan as presented. Unfortunately, we have nothing to add since we cannot see any negative aspects at the present time, all we see are 'TOTAL POSITIVES'! We congratulate the staff of HRM as well as the consultants on a good compromise that you all worked on. On a personal level, I love the concept of the urban edge at the intersection of Wyse and Nantucket, as well as the Amphitheater at the intersection of Alderney and Wyse. I hope they will all be completed during year-2010, perhaps by early 2011. I ardently hope that the HRM Regional Council will fund the purchase of the McDonald's Restaurant and the Scotia Bank properties. I never even thought of it before but it has superb merit(s). Incidentally, being a totally single person in my late 60's, I frequent the McDonald's Restaurant prior to working out at the Sportsplex of which I have been a member since the early 1990's because I eat out almost every day though not necessarily every day since I frequent other eateries in Downtown Halifax. Hence, I would be sorry to see McDonald's close but I do realize that the interests of the community-at-large must supersede those of an individual. In addition, as a practicing and pragmatic environmentalist, I got rid of my car way back in Fall-1998, and ever since then, I have been taking transit on a daily basis. I take the Metro Transit at a minimum of four (4) times per day and as such, had to make 'sacrifices' on other interests since taking the transit does greatly increase the time spent on travel and wait times. I pass through the Bridge Terminal several times a day, every day inclusive of weekends/holidays. IMPORTANT:-- Hence, I can inform you all emphatically that the present Bridge Terminal is not a safe place during the nights, especially for those of us who are older and disabled.

Elizabeth Ann Macdonald

This Report is seriously flawed, based on several false premises. The area of the D C the consultants were told to study by HRM fails to include the lands below Wyse Road to Halifax Harbour from Boland Road until the Macdonald bridgehead. Why this deliberate omission? Yet, in the Report they are shown as D C lands on some of the Report's figures/maps. A large parcel of these lands is now vacant and presents an alternative site for an expanded Metro Transit (M T) bridge terminal , although its purchase from private owners, unlike using the "land bank" of the D C would be at a significant financial cost. Several statements are made and repeated about D C key stakeholders - three public (isn't Dartmouth Sportsplex a club, charging its members a fee to belong ?) facilities presently situated on the Central Common - without any supporting proof provided. Just saying it over and over does not make it so - With the ongoing decreasing enrolment in Halifax area schools, will the two schools on the D C be needed in five/ ten/ twenty years

? The Report states that each of these facilities has imminent plans for expansion, including a parking garage for Sportsplex. HRM's request to our Legislature to take additional land from the D C was only partially successful. The not more than 6 acres ceded from the D C is specifically for the planned at that time M T Bridge Terminal expansion adjacent to Nantucket Avenue. The Report seems to assume these lands, for the moment under HRM's control, can willy nilly be used for other purposes as long as these three stakeholders talk, work together and compromise.

The consultants also have no problem recommending building at several sites, despite the direct prohibition of building on the remaining D C lands. This ignoring of the law is worrying. While the D C's " open space " is often referred to in the Report, including under Value, page 29, little weight is actually given to this green oasis; to those of us who live/ work in downtown Dartmouth; or, to its ecological worth. This consultation process has been poorly handled. Public response to a report dated November 10 - November 11 was a public holiday - is to be received in less than 3 weeks. What I heard when I attended both public sessions does not mesh with many of the Report's recommendations. Those attending were very interested in the D C and its vibrant future. Some of us would have been pleased to serve on a focus group. I'm told that the steering committee for this effort consisted of reps of the oft stated three key stakeholders [all connected to HRM] and our Dartmouth downtown Councillor. Ironic isn't it that the steering committee for our Common Master Plan didn't include at least one ordinary citizen? Reference is made in the Report to the previous 1989 Plan. Having been a member of the Dartmouth Common Committee in the early 1990's, I know there were many good ideas suggested in it, but lack of funding was always an obstacle to make those suggestions happen. There is a reference in Appendix E, Bibliography, to the August, 1988 D C Report to Council, but nothing after that; Were any of the Committee members from that time, or later, contacted for their input ? While it is useful to have background documents noted at HRM's website at Real Property Planning, there isn't a list in the Report of any interviews.

Twenty years on, here is another Plan; what can we hope for from it? In this economy, and at least for the near future, obtaining funding for the D C's improvements will be a continuing problem. Has any thought been given to doing nothing major? Whatever recommendations are approved will always have to compete at budget times with many other HRM priorities before Council. Noting opportunities for land acquisition such as McDonald's on Nantucket Avenue or the CN lands by the Harbour is nice to read but hardly likely to happen soon. Some concrete steps could be taken, including much better, regular, maintenance of what is now on the D C and improved lighting for greater safety. If nothing else, this process has enhanced citizen interest in our Common and allows us to review its remarkable history.

Thomas Gribbin

This note is in response to the request for public ‘feed back’ on the DRAFT Dartmouth Common Management Plan (DCMP) issued Nov ’09. This is generally a positive plan with a strong vision for those portions of the Common where the vision has already been clearly established such as the Dillman Park sector. In still other areas the vision will remain as such, as extensive tree planting along boulevards or commercial developments at the Wyse / Nantucket intersection are really beyond the purse or control of the municipality. In still other areas the vision for a Dartmouth Common are clouded by pre determined concepts based on the ‘land bank’ scenario so beloved of the former municipal council. Without diminishing the benefits of the bulk of the Plan it is this ‘land bank’ scenario that I wish to address. Throughout the Plan we have references to the Common as a valued OPEN SPACE:--- Ref. 1.2 Master Plan Objectives p.2 “ The Dartmouth Common is a public place with historical significance as an *open space for the community....*” ; Ref. 4.1 Vision p.32 “Dartmouth Common provides a highly valued and *unique green oasis of open space* in the middle of the city.” Ref. 5 Master Plan Layout p.40 “As a highly visible and valued publicly held open space in Central Dartmouth, *the Common is not a land bank available for the development of public structures.*” Ref. 5.4 Open Space recreational Concept p.41 “The Common is valued as a green oasis of *open space in the middle of the city....*” (author’s Italics) WHY this constant reference to the open space value of the Common and then proceed without significant analysis or rationale into the section Ref. 5.6 Facilities Concept “Large scale permanent structures are proposed for the Central Common area. *Their purpose being –ensure and enhance the vitality of existing buildings* (Sportsplex ; High School ; Transit Terminal) “” (authors Italics) This appears a self serving and shallow rationale for development in Public Park Land. The need for a bus terminal is expressed through approx 18000 daily users and 1300 bus trips, of which there is no doubt. However, the debate over the Dartmouth Common Central Core area is not about the inherent value and benefits to residents of a variety of good causes: Bus terminal; Sportsplex ‘Fieldhouse’ and parking expansion ; improved sports field and expansion of the Dartmouth High School building. This public debate and this new DCMP must be about these “good causes” believing they having the right to A), consider, B) plan for and C) implement their well meaning schemes **unto Public Park Land**. These actions are squarely in the tradition of the Common as ‘Land bank’ so thoroughly decried elsewhere in this DCMP. WHY does the DCMP not examine and present for public debate a supportive analysis or, on the other hand, a debunking of the blunt assertions from the three major built facility proponents that they have NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO BUILD OVER PUBLIC PARKLAND?

Many interested citizens, strongly represented at all the Public input occasions , have argued diligently to try and ensure a recognition of the Dartmouth Common Central Core area as the jewel of the city entrance ; however our city administrators continue to see all lands of the currently designated Common --except those wisely fenced for their own protection by the former Mr Dillman -- as a land bank . It is because these lands are unmaintained and undeveloped as more typical park land that the development advocates (bus terminals etc.) see them as waste ground ready to receive a building or

parking lot. These lands are parkland, once lost to pavement we will never see them returned to public recreational / open space use. This will be a great and irreparable loss to the entrance experience to Dartmouth and future generations of Dartmouthians who use, or live nearby or pass through the continually diminishing Dartmouth Common.

Many people at the public meetings were surprised at the rather underhanded way the city had bypassed the Dartmouth Common Act which had for a decade or so protected the Common from further physical development ---- unfortunately not also providing the impetus to salvage the remaining areas and turn them into parks rather than those 'garbage filled waste lands!'. We collectively learnt that the bus terminal was a done deal and that the Steering Committee for the newly proposed Dartmouth Common Plan was composed of relevant HRM staff with representatives from Metro Transit , the Sportsplex and the School Board . No citizen or former friends of the Dartmouth Common Committee representation ---- a clear case of the foxes guarding the chickens!!! There was an air of futility at the public meeting as citizens questioning their administrators' preconceived plans to little avail. And once again with this DRAFT DCMP we see little (if any?) change from all earlier manifestations of the Plan which in essence (not a too cynical interpretation) re iterates a vision which has already been established , for parts of the Common ; proposes a vision that ,through fiscal reality, will remain a vision for other parts of the Common ; and clouds the vision for the only real proposed action ---the expansion of the bus terminus onto Public Park land.

Note --- HRM has no funding proposed for any of the visions of the DCMP but funding is in place with Metro Transit for the Terminal expansion and planning is well advanced for significant expansion of the Sportsplex Building and parking lots. The Dartmouth Common lands are a gift and magnificent addition to the potential beauty of one of the city's main entrance points -- they are currently open space parkland. Once lost they will never return to open space. If the Common remains were officially designated and managed as Parkland the surrounding land users would have to seek expansion opportunities in more appropriate areas (yes indeed a challenge , but nothing not met on a regular basis in other jurisdictions) . Imagine the future potential for open space in our city --- a pocket of ecologically diverse , healthy woodland (admittedly after some HRM maintenance !) . A quiet walk, a great open space and a potentially wonderful collar of green spaces right in the downtown. If all else fails and the DCMP proposal to extensively build over the Public Open Space lands proceeds then the Plan must strongly emphasise that the bus terminus and field house are public facilities and as such be designed as facilities which sit in a Public Park with appropriate site furniture, public art, significant tree planting and well finished general detailing. The site work and landscape architectural component must be strong and help integrate the facility into its 'home' ---the Dartmouth Common parkland. And B / the remaining 'urban woodland' be designated / zoned Dartmouth Common Parkland and redeveloped in the manner of the neighbouring Dillman Park .