



Urban Design Project Update

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

URBAN DESIGN PROJECT

AUGUST 2003



Halifax Harbour, the Capital District

The Capital District

The downtown cores of Halifax and Dartmouth are important to all residents of HRM, no matter where they live. The busy waterfront and other historic and cultural attractions bring hundreds of thousands of visitors to the region. The economic and political capital of the Province generates millions of dollars in tax revenues and employs a large percentage of the regional workforce. Yet the downtown streetscape, our window on the world, is showing wear and tear — cracked and heaved sidewalks, graffiti and litter, damaged or missing street furniture, few trees on the main streets and a declining urban forest.

So, two years ago, HRM established the Capital District Task Force to spearhead an integrated approach to service delivery. Working closely with downtown business commissions and provincial agencies, the Task Force brings together all the relevant HRM departments to focus on establishing and maintaining a healthy, vibrant urban core.

Better Buildings, Better Spaces

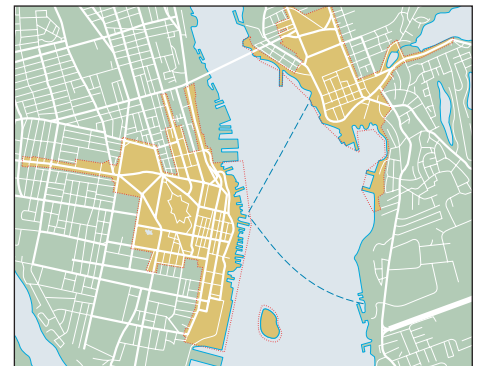
Urban design is the art and science of making better buildings and better places. It isn't only about the way things look, but also how they work.

Buildings need to be attractive and functional. They must fit the local context, and be easy to build, maintain and operate. Places — streets, squares, parks, and waterfronts — should enhance the distinct character of the city, be safe attractive public spaces that are easy to navigate, and encourage walking.

Well-designed buildings and places should also be universally accessible so everyone can comfortably use them. They should be able to adapt to changing times, and promote diversity and choice. Good design equals good value — it is not a costly and optional add-on.

The Urban Design Project

With a mandate to promote better urban design for the Capital District and beyond, the Task Force commissioned a consulting



Map of the Capital District

This newsletter provides more information on the Urban Design Project and invites you to attend an Open House on Wednesday, August 27 at City Centre Atlantic, 5523 Spring Garden Road. The open house will begin at 5:00 pm, with a presentation at 7:00 pm. You will be able to see the drawings and plans, meet the Capital District team and the consultants, and share your ideas on urban design in the Capital District.



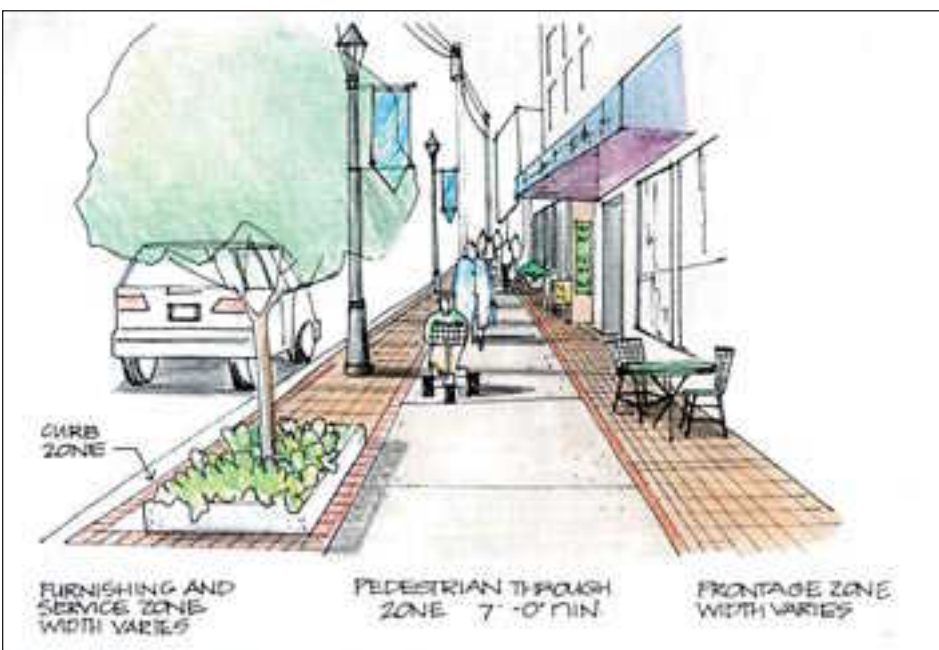
Downtown Halifax



Dartmouth Waterfront



Diagram showing location of five theme districts within the Capital District



Sidewalk zones

team led by Gordon Ratcliffe Landscape Architects, and including Griffiths Muecke and Semaphore Design, to carry out the Urban Design Project. There are five main parts to the project:

- Development of a set of streetscape design guidelines, dealing with public spaces — how to design and build safe and attractive sidewalks, plant street trees so that they are sustainable, and how to select and install street furniture.
- Streetscape improvement plans for the five major business areas in the Capital District — Barrington, Gottingen, Portland and Alderney, Quinpool and Spring Garden.
- A visual identity program for the Capital District and marketing ideas
- Design of a complete wayfinding system to get cars and pedestrians to major attractions in the downtown.
- A survey of the best ideas and approaches used by other cities to improve urban design in their downtowns, focusing on private property.

Streetscape Design Guidelines

Streets play a vital role in creating a unique community identity, healthy business environment and public space for citizens to use and enjoy. The street is a multi-functional place. It provides circulation for pedestrians and vehicles, access to buildings, a route for utilities, storage space especially for vehicles, and public space for human interaction. Getting the balance right between all of these functions can be a big challenge. For too long, cars have dominated our streets and pedestrians have made do with the space left to them. In the Capital District we also have challenges that other cities don't, particularly our narrow sidewalks and winter weather.

The Streetscape Design Guidelines will help HRM staff and other people with an interest in our downtown streets create attractive, interesting and functional public spaces. The guidelines cover sidewalks, street crossing zones, bus stops and other transit facilities, street trees, lighting, and the choice and placement of all the different items that are collectively called street furnishings.

Some of the key principles that underpin the Guidelines are:

- A successful street will be a busy street. A degree of congestion is a good thing if well managed.
- Give pedestrians priority.

- Use design to emphasize the identities of different areas, while also making the Capital District a recognizable entity.
- Excellent maintenance is critical to the vitality and success of city streetscapes. No new capital projects without adequate resources for maintenance!
- Follow the principles of Universal Design — streetscapes should be accessible to all ages and levels of mobility.
- Make streets safer for pedestrians and vehicle users.
- Invest in trees — protect existing trees and plant new ones wherever possible.

The Guidelines are not intended to be rigid rules. There will be many occasions when they will need to be adjusted to solve particular problems.

Here are two examples of Streetscape Design Guidelines — for sidewalks on the main business streets and pedestrian routes, and for planting trees.

The Sidewalk System

To ensure a well organized and usable space, the sidewalk system consists of five zones. The constant feature of all Capital District sidewalks will be a 7-foot wide pedestrian throughway (occasionally 5 feet in very tight spaces), paved with broom-finished concrete, free of all obstructions. This will provide a smooth surface for everyone to use including people wheeling strollers, or using wheelchairs, walkers or walking canes, and will accommodate winter maintenance. All sidewalks also include a curb zone — most curbs will be cast-in-place concrete, but in special heritage areas, the curbs will be cut granite.

Sidewalks over 8 feet wide will also have a separate service and furnishings zone where street furniture and amenities will be placed. On the main business streets and important pedestrian routes, this area of the sidewalk will be paved with concrete pavers that will bring additional colour and texture to the street.

Sidewalks over 14 feet may also include a frontage zone, next to the buildings. This area may also be surfaced with decorative paving and can contain some additional street furnishings such as removable planters, pay phones and garbage receptacles.

At street corners, often very busy areas, the intersection zone is designed to allow space for pedestrians to pass easily, with a curb cut system that will be safe and convenient for all users, including tactile surfaces to help guide persons using walking canes, and eliminating steep grade changes.

Street Trees

The secret to successful street trees is to select the right species and plant them properly so their roots have space to spread out and receive sufficient moisture. Downtown Halifax and Dartmouth have many trees — but not on the main business streets. Good sized trees can do more for a street than almost anything else. They provide interest and movement to enliven the street, shade and cool the sidewalk, act as a buffer between pedestrians and the traffic, reduce stormwater run-off, and reduce airborne pollutants.

The best way to plant a new street tree is in a raised planter that keeps salt from getting into the roots and protects the trunk from damage. In very tight places however, trees can be planted in tree grates provided an irrigation source is provided and the grates are kept free of litter.

Street Furniture

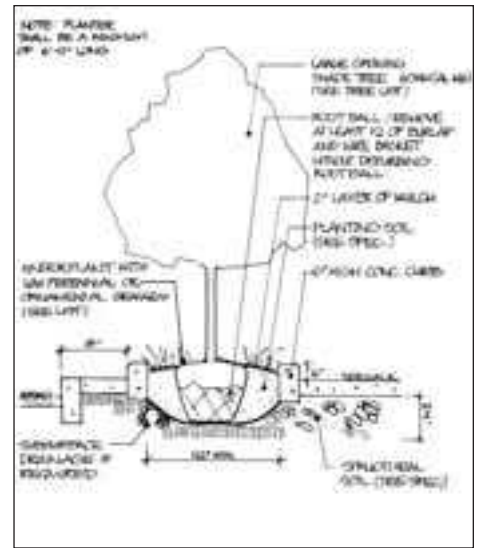
Street furniture (benches, garbage containers, bicycle parking etc) should be selected to be attractive, durable, easy to maintain and resistant to vandalism. It should be clustered wherever possible to reduce clutter on the sidewalks.

Five Streetscape Plans

Working with local business associations and residents, the Urban Design Project has prepared streetscape enhancement plans for the five main business streets in the Capital District. All five plans contain some elements that tie the different areas of the Capital District together (a common sidewalk system, wayfinding signage) and other projects that reinforce the special character of each street. Here are key points from the community consultations and some sample recommended streetscape projects. Two things that all five streets would like to see: better maintenance (dealing with garbage, snow and ice, looking after trees and planters, and making repairs), and more comfortable pedestrian environment.

Barrington

Barrington Street is on the upswing after several decades of deterioration as the shopping focus switched to malls and suburban “big box” stores. There is no shortage of people on the street, with thousands of workers, tourists, students, and people enjoying downtown dining and entertainment. Increasingly, too, they are being joined by new downtown residents.



Tree planting detail



Trees on Prince Street, Dartmouth



Street Furniture in Victoria Park



CAPITAL DISTRICT

Forging the Capital District Identity

How do we communicate the uniqueness or significance of a special “Capital District”? What visual elements reflect the age, character and cultural heritage of our downtown core? Answering these questions is the challenge in creating a visual identity for the Capital District of HRM.

After seeing the harbour and the peninsular landmass, it is the built character of our downtown that is memorable for visitors. The waterfront, Citadel Hill, the architectural heritage, the streets and public spaces all define our capital area's character. With repeated visits, these landmarks and streetscapes create a sense of an area's history, character and vitality.

Downtown Halifax and Dartmouth showcase a rich variety of architectural design dating from its settlement in 1749. Government House and the Provincial Legislature buildings are key examples of physical expressions of the idea of a 'capital'. The age of these buildings, their historic and symbolic significance is reflected in the choice of forms and typography used in the Capital District visual identity, and in wayfinding signage.

Decorative wrought iron is a common material and technique used on and around many of the sites surrounding the capital building and in the downtown. The Capital District identity uses a scroll form common to ironwork seen here. It also refers to a different kind of capital, that of the “cap” on the architectural columns such as those featured on the face of the Province House.

The colours and typography used are coordinated with the parent identity of the Halifax Regional Municipality for a family appearance and greater continuity.



Fence at Government House



Public Gardens gate



Column capital, Province House



Provincial Legislature

Wayfinding

Wayfinding helps first time visitors to an area literally to 'find their way' through an unfamiliar environment. This typically means a series of messages in a recognizable 'family' of signs, including vehicular and pedestrian signs.

Wayfinding signs provide directions using text and arrows to the top destinations and attractions. These are placed at key decision points along a path. This path usually begins from the beginning of one's journey and ends at the arrival at a chosen destination.

A well-planned wayfinding program considers what information is useful to a first-time user or visitor. Once someone is familiar with a path to their destination, they may not need the signs to find their way on subsequent visits. The wayfinding signs will then act as confirmation and reassurance that one is on the right path.

The additional, and equally important, function of these signs is to establish the identity of the Capital District, and to mark the boundaries of the sub-districts contained within. This identity is also used on marketing materials that may be seen in advance of a visitor travelling to the Capital District.

The proposed Capital District Wayfinding Sign designs include the following components:

- district identification
 - directional information to top destinations, orientation, or interpretive information
 - sub-district identification, where applicable
- The family of signs in the Capital District includes:
- Capital District approach pageantry (street banners)
 - large and small signs identifying the Capital District and the sub-districts
 - signs directing vehicles
 - signs directing pedestrians
 - street signs
 - parking signs
 - pedestrian orientation and interpretive signs.

The design style is related to the ironwork theme evident in the Capital District visual identity. The sign posts are fabricated to reflect the character of gates and entrances of the oldest decorative ironwork in our area. The colours and typography are in the same family as the main HRM identity.

Each sub-district has a unique colour that will be included on signs, maps and marketing promotion. The sub-districts are

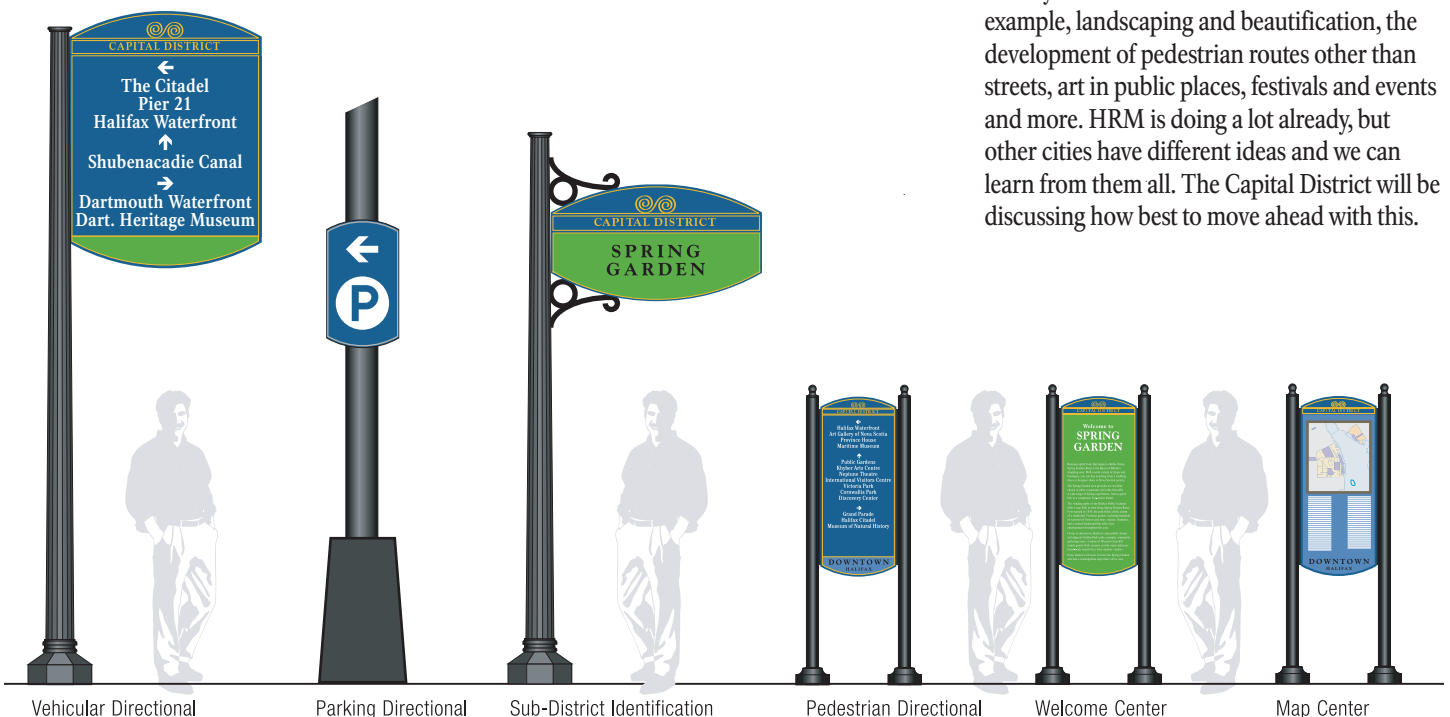
- Waterfront (both Halifax and Dartmouth)
- Downtown Halifax
- Downtown Dartmouth
- Gottingen
- Spring Garden
- Quinpool.

Promoting Better Urban Design — Ideas from Other Cities

The Capital District of Halifax Dartmouth is not alone in trying to respond to changes in the expectations of its citizens, and changes in the economy. Many cities across North America and in Europe are confronting the same challenge. They are all discovering that a healthy downtown means getting people there to work, live, visit, shop and have fun. Although there are differences in approach, some common themes emerge. The bottom line is that many of the assets that have been taken for granted in the past, if properly developed and enhanced, are the key to creating a successful future.

The general approach is to take four steps. The first step is to determine what is of value that you want to preserve, enhance or recreate – for example in HRM we might list architectural character and charm, connection to the harbour, views, street trees, connection to the past, and a comfortable and enjoyable street experience with lots of interesting features. Second, provide clear information to developers and their designers, and the people in HRM who design streets and parks about what is required of them. Third, make sure that you have access to the expertise you need to judge the quality of the developments that are proposed. And fourth, apply the same standards to all development whether it comes from the private sector or is an HRM project.

In addition to paying careful attention to new development, there are other ways to enhance city life. They include encouraging businesses to connect what they do with the activity on the street — sidewalk cafes for example, landscaping and beautification, the development of pedestrian routes other than streets, art in public places, festivals and events and more. HRM is doing a lot already, but other cities have different ideas and we can learn from them all. The Capital District will be discussing how best to move ahead with this.



Vehicular Directional

Parking Directional

Sub-District Identification

Pedestrian Directional

Welcome Center

Map Center

HALIFAX

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

CAPITAL DISTRICT

invites you to attend

**A Public Open House and Meeting for
The Capital District
Urban Design Project**

Wednesday, August 27

**Open House 5:00 to 9:00 pm, Presentation 7:00 pm
City Centre Atlantic, 5523 Spring Garden Road**

The Urban Design Project is looking at ways to promote good urban design in downtown Halifax and Dartmouth, and includes

- **urban design guidelines for the Capital District**
- **a visual identity program for the Capital District**
- **a wayfinding signage system for pedestrians and vehicles**
- **streetscape plans for the five main commercial streets: Barrington, Gottingen, Portland/Alderney, Quinpool and Spring Garden**
- **ideas and approaches for private design from other cities.**

For more information or to request an Urban Design Project newsletter, call 423-8629 or e-mail lesley@griffithsmuecke.com.