

# SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

## Overview

For a city like HRM, being sustainable means growing smartly through the establishment of a sustainable transportation system, sourcing sustainable energy, designing sustainable buildings and open spaces, and reducing the impacts of solid waste and wastewater on the environment. But the most important action HRM can take is to densify its existing urbanized core.

## A Focus on Sustainability

HRMbyDesign's Downtown Plan states that a sustainable city is one that is densifying to use existing infrastructure and is investing to make walking and transit a real alternative for commuting. It is a city that recognizes that to be truly sustainable it must meet the test and principles of the triple bottom line: social and cultural sustainability, economic sustainability and environmental sustainability.

Sustainability is a fundamental underpinning of the design approach to the Regional Centre and downtown Halifax. In recognition of its importance, the theme of sustainability is found in several sections of the Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and the Design Manual. HRM is committed to the concept of sustainability by facilitating greater densities and intensities of use, showing leadership in the sustainable design of public buildings and spaces, and investing in public transportation.



## HRM Can LEED

The Downtown Plan supports principles of sustainable building design as part of the design program for downtown Halifax development. The site plan approval and bonus zoning provisions will encourage major developments to incorporate sustainable design practices such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) or equivalent certifications.

Currently, mandatory requirements for energy conservation and sustainable design standards such as LEED are not enabled under the *Halifax*



*Regional Municipality Charter* or provincial Building Code Regulations, which regulate construction practices throughout the province. HRM and the Province, under the leadership of the Department of Energy, are currently reviewing policies and legislation in this area. It is HRM's intent to undertake a Sustainability Functional Plan that will coordinate work with the Province in strengthening existing municipal and provincial regulation in the areas of energy conservation and sustainable building and site design (see page 2 for more detail).

In the interim, the Land Use By-law will include requirements to maximize sunlight penetration and minimize wind impacts on sidewalks, particularly in relation to high-rise developments, and for rooftop landscaping and greening. Beyond these requirements, HRM and other levels of government can lead the way in achieving sustainable and energy efficient design in the tendering of development projects for publicly-owned lands.

In line with these sustainability strategies, the Downtown Plan will also increase opportunities to rehabilitate underused or deteriorating historic resources with new functions to strengthen the unique character of downtown and will support a high quality public realm, walking and increased transit use.

### **Sustainable Public Spaces**

Sustainable open space design is already implemented in HRM and it should continue to lead in the demonstration of sustainable practices in the design of public spaces through a variety of ways: use of alternative energy such as geothermal energy and district heating concepts, the provision of active transportation infrastructure, facilities for organics and recycling, tree planting, use of local materials in public space design, and use of solar and energy efficient lighting systems. The Open Space Functional Plan to be undertaken after adoption of the Downtown Plan will address sustainable design guidelines for public spaces.

### **HRM's Sustainable Environmental Management**

Sustainability is a strategic corporate initiative in HRM, with the goal being to include sustainability in everyday decision making. HRM's Senior Management Team and Executive Management Team recently endorsed six pilot projects to test a proposed Corporate Sustainability Filter (sustainability management and planning tool) over the next few months, with the objective of having this tool in place by the end of the fiscal year 2008-09. All major corporate decisions would go through the filter to determine their sustainability, social and environmental impacts.

Over the past few years HRM has focused on completing a portfolio of sustainability plans and strategies built around HRM's integrated systems approach to clean air, land, water and energy. These plans include:

- Clean Air Strategy
- Corporate and Community GHG Plans
- Climate SMART and related tools
- HRM Climate Change Risk Management Plan
- Waste Management Strategy

- Water and Wastewater Management Strategies
- Active Transportation Plan
- Community Energy Plan
- Regional Plan
- HRMbyDesign

These plans and strategies have been endorsed by Regional Council, the Regional Plan Advisory Committee and other committees where applicable, and each has its own detailed list of recommendations and priorities. HRM is now at the transition stage of developing policy to effectively implement these plans, strategies and performance measurements.

### **Sustainability Functional Plan**

As referenced on the previous page, the Downtown Plan is recommending that a Sustainability Functional Plan be undertaken to address matters of environmental responsibility and stewardship, including public and private development, and encompasses streets, parks, and buildings.

The Sustainability Functional Plan shall consider the following topics:

- Mandatory sustainable building & public space design guidelines
- Waste diversion
- Water conservation
- Brownfield development
- Microclimate sun angles, wind impacts, urban forest canopy
- Energy/district heating
- Public transit, cycling and walkability
- Protocols and targets for climate change and sea level rise
- Provincial legislative changes to enable HRM to regulate aspects of the above matters, including sustainable building design.

### **For more information:**

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