

HRMbyDesign will increase vibrancy and beauty of downtown Halifax

HRMbyDesign has engaged the public in a democratic, community-led process to determine the vision for our downtown and to establish new policy that will make the vision a reality. Over the past two years the citizen-led Urban Design Task Force has consulted, engaged and communicated with thousands of members of the public to ensure that the resulting plan creates a vibrant, exciting and beautiful downtown for residents and visitors. It is a plan that balances our rich past with a vibrant and beautiful future. Without this plan, we will continue to see parking lots on our waterfront, vacant and underused properties throughout the downtown, crumbling heritage resources in need of support through legislation and incentives for restoration, and an ongoing out-migration of young, highly skilled workers looking for a dynamic and progressive place to live and work.

In a recent letter to the editor, there were a number of inaccuracies that we would like to address to ensure that Herald readers have the correct information about the enhanced heritage protection that is a large part of HRMbyDesign. This Plan will neither encourage nor allow 30 high-rises in the central business district, nor will it encourage the demolition of heritage resources. On the contrary, HRMbyDesign will provide strengthened heritage protections and directs any future tall buildings to those areas where tall buildings already exist, thereby preserving the heritage heart of the downtown. Finally, HRMbyDesign is creating new planning policy and has no ability to influence applications being processed under current policy.

The establishment of the Barrington Street Heritage Conservation District (HCD), HRM's first ever HCD, will occur with the adoption of the Downtown Plan. It will help protect and conserve this continuous, well-defined heritage area through improved demolition and rehabilitation guidelines, and a tax incentive and grants program designed to stimulate the revitalization of this historic streetscape.

Improved demolition control is also being sought through provincial legislative amendments to help protect the stand-alone heritage buildings not located in the Barrington Street HCD, and through the identification of two other future heritage conservation districts – Historic Properties and Barrington Street south. Heritage design guidelines in the new Design Manual will guide appropriate development and design of buildings integrated with, and next to existing heritage buildings both inside and outside of HCD's.

Another protection for heritage exists within the proposed development approvals process and proposed downtown land use by-law. Under the existing development agreement process, new development projects can be negotiated to heights up to the ceiling of the Citadel and Ramparts View Planes. We have seen this occur countless times over the years, as evidenced by the many tall buildings in our central business district. In many cases, HRMbyDesign is actually reducing heights below those attainable under current policy, to a pre-established maximum that has been agreed upon by the public throughout this process. These heights have been widely consulted and are informed by the local neighbourhoods, adjacency to heritage conservation districts or other tall buildings, view planes, access to public open spaces such as the waterfront boardwalk, and many other factors. Further, the new bonus zoning agreement process will provide protection

for heritage through onsite restoration or improvements as a public benefit to be provided by the developer.

Draft #2 of the Downtown Halifax Urban Design Plan will be released for public review on **September 15**. Interested residents will have six weeks to review the Plan documents, with all final comments to be directed to HRM by **October 24**. Plan documents will be available as of September 15 at www.hrmbymdesign.ca and CD and hard copies can be obtained at 40 Alderney Drive, 2nd floor Alderney Gate in Dartmouth.

I strongly encourage you to participate in this public review period to ensure that we take the best possible plan for our downtown to Council in early 2009 and achieve our goal of improving the vibrancy, beauty and sustainability of our regional showroom – downtown Halifax.

Dale Godsoe
Chair, Urban Design Task Force