

# PUBLIC COMMENTS

# SUMMARY DOCUMENT

*A summary of feedback from HRM by Design  
Forum 4, September 2007*

HRM by DESIGN  
Regional Centre Urban Design Study  

---

www.hrmbydesign.ca

HALIFAX  
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

## **Table of Contents**

What inspired forum participants.....	3
Suggestions/Concerns/Comments by Category.....	4
Scenarios Comments.....	8

## WHAT INSPIRED FORUM PARTICIPANTS

- Change (in particular – in the area of the Cogswell Interchange)
- Carmichael/George St. pedestrian promenade
- Historic heart and heritage protection
- Great streets (that don't compromise economic viability)
- Pedestrian focus
- Open spaces
- Increase in residential and office space
- Integration between sides and retail at street level
- Walkability
- Architecture
- Public spaces – Flatiron plaza
- Improved skyline
- Halting urban sprawl
- Massing controls
- Creating an identity for Halifax
- Human scale
- A city for people
- Connectivity
- Positive approach and process
- Form based code/floor space index – clarity in planning process
- Design freedom within defined scope
- Diversity and mixed use
- Cogswell and Cornwallis Gateways
- Building to sidewalk (no parking lots)
- Interesting paving treatments (i.e. Carmichael/George St)
- Trees on north/south streets
- Density can pay for improvements
- Clearer, more predictable development rules
- There is a lot of existing capacity (even without much height)
- Precincts – the character they evoke
- Landmarks/postcard views
- Reinvigorating older buildings
- Public participation
- New ideas about sustainability
- Openness to change
- Cogswell as a focal point
- Increased density, while respecting heritage
- Eliminating ugly buildings
- Focusing growth in a structured, manageable way
- Unified vision, city wide, big picture that reflects heritage
- Bookends concept

## SUGGESTIONS/CONCERNS/COMMENTS

### **Streets:**

- 1) Argyle Street should be closed to vehicular traffic and become a pedestrian only area.
- 2) Extend the pedway system, particularly into the new Cogswell office area.
- 3) Stronger pedestrian links between waterfront and downtown.
- 4) Greater weather-protected connectivity between buildings.
- 5) Consider the unfavourable winter climate.

### **Events:**

- 6) Drinks/food at public meetings.
- 7) Schedule should be more closely adhered to - sessions started late.
- 8) Panel members should have been re-introduced by the moderator for the Q&A.
- 9) Facilitators should ensure dialogue stays on topic and that report-back/note taking is reflective of group discussion.

### **Height:**

- 10) Go for more height. Cities with high-rise towers on podiums have much better liveability and walkable streets. E.g. Vancouver.
- 11) Existing tall buildings are not of high enough architectural quality to preserve their domination over the skyline. Higher towers (10+ stories) of greater quality should be added to minimize the impact of lesser buildings.
- 12) Ensure there are no infringements of the existing view planes from the Citadel.
- 13) The plan disregards an opinion held within the development community that the street grid couldn't support high-rises without significant wind effect.
- 14) The only acceptable high-rise buildings in Halifax are Purdy's Wharf. The rest should be considered mistakes and dispensable.
- 15) Halifax is known as the 'City of Trees', we should respect this definition and restrict building heights so they do not exceed the tops of our tallest trees (60-70 feet), with the exception of select public buildings, church spires or a town clock.
- 16) Respect the Regional Plan in regards to MPS policy 6.2, which instructs the Municipality to make every effort to preserve or restore views from Citadel Hill.
- 17) Not enough density downtown. There needs to be more height in the CBD, challenge the view planes.
- 18) Low rise offices should be considered.
- 19) Concern about tall building locations and ratio to lot size, and proximity and impact on lower, existing heritage buildings.
- 20) Citadel Hill is not the only important perspective of the city.
- 21) Having podiums with point towers is a good idea. Improves the pedestrian experience and less shadow impacts.
- 22) Uniform, low heights are desirable.
- 23) Height is not an issue, however it should not be concentrated in one location of the downtown (Cogswell).
- 24) More height is allowable on the edges of the downtown.
- 25) Small scale buildings to respect small-scale streets and blocks.

26) Taller buildings can be accommodated in a sensitive, artistic way. Design quality is critical.

27) Residential height west of Citadel – along Spring Garden Road.

**Views:**

28) Lack of views to the Citadel from the harbour and Dartmouth.

29) Consider revisiting view planes and ramparts bylaws.

**Heritage:**

30) Adaptively re-use heritage buildings to make them viable. Maintain façade and add height.

31) The historic character of downtown should be maintained.

**Architecture:**

32) Concern about ‘design style’ depicted in plan renderings.

33) Concern about texture and scale of developments (e.g. Bishops’ Landing is too large for one developer).

34) Concern about details in architecture being stringently controlled – materials, style, quality, etc.

35) Environmental sustainability should be the top design priority – i.e. opportunities for solar power, wind power generation, green roofs.

36) Quality and design are more important than height.

37) Emphasize signature buildings and districts.

38) We must raise the bar in terms of quality design.

**Missing elements:**

39) Downtown Dartmouth must be considered.

40) Gottingen Street must be part of the downtown plan.

41) The Citadel is not integrated into the plan.

**Sustainability:**

42) The plan does not address sustainability, human health, social justice, or community.

43) Car-free zone(s) downtown.

44) Include opportunities for urban gardening/agriculture.

**Affordability:**

45) Families will not relocate to downtown from the suburbs because it is too expensive to live downtown.

46) Unless urban housing costs are addressed, more downtown development will result in more traffic, commuters and pollution.

47) Use bonus amenity bylaws to achieve low income and non-profit housing spaces.

48) Affordable units must become a part of all buildings, and necessary incentives must be created.

49) An affordable housing strategy should be developed.

## **Cogswell**

- 50) Would like to see a circular plaza with radiating arteries at Cogswell, as in South America and Washington, D.C.
- 51) Emphasize existing opportunities for development in downtown. Cogswell is too far in the future to meet emerging demand.
- 52) Buildings could be as undesirable a barrier as the Cogswell interchange between the north end and downtown.
- 53) Important to reconnect street grid.
- 54) Must be mixed use.

## **Implementation:**

- 55) Built form framework must be embraced in order to implement these proposals.
- 56) Public investment is paramount.
- 57) Private capital should not overwhelm the public realm.
- 58) Must focus on practicality. Nothing to compel owners of privately owned property to follow this design concept for the city.
- 59) Need institutional will as well as political (e.g. buy-in from universities).
- 60) Concern that special interests will upset this process.

## **Process:**

- 61) Forum participants were not reflective of broader community demographics. Not enough representatives of low-income, non-profit, or arts interests.
- 62) The proposals were too complicated.
- 63) A 3-hour event is not enough time for citizens to digest all of the information presented. The process seems rushed.
- 64) Two workshops during the day and only one evening session favours participation by architects and developers, and is more difficult for volunteers to heritage advocacy.
- 65) Too little consultation on what appear to be 'final' options.
- 66) Don't forget the Regional Plan when assessing downtown development.

## **Density:**

- 67) Bringing more people downtown will expedite the construction of a third harbour bridge.
- 68) Our population is currently shrinking.
- 69) Estimate of 5000 new occupants in downtown is concerning (too many people in a small area and no parking).
- 70) We don't have the population base to support this plan (versus the Vancouver model). Churches and schools are already disappearing from the core.
- 71) How we will encourage families to live downtown.
- 72) Direct more population to the urban core – not only the 25% as the Regional Plan suggests.
- 73) Growth should be directed to other areas of the Regional Centre (e.g. Dartmouth) until transportation issues are resolved. The harbour is a significant barrier.
- 74) There will be an increased demand for services with more people (police, fire, transit, etc).
- 75) We need 50,000 more people on the peninsula to become 'vibrant', not 5000.

76) Density targets proposed should be a maximum; space needs to be conserved to allow things to happen.

**Site-Specific:**

77) Opposed to buildings on the Centennial pool triangle lot of 60' to 79'. This development would weaken the historic Citadel north neighbourhood with the loss of its foci (the view of the greenery of the citadel).

78) The proposed 'inviting esplanade' at Rainnie Drive would not be, as it would block the view of historic buildings.

79) The Centennial pool property is a monument to our country's heritage (a 1967 Centennial project) and should not be made redundant to benefit a few residential buildings.

80) Downtown Dartmouth should become a draw/destination for young families.

81) Address vacant lots on Barrington and Gottingen Streets.

**Traffic/Transit/Parking:**

82) Plan must incorporate design solutions for truck traffic and displaced parking.

83) Transportation options seem to be lacking. Need to be considered comprehensively.

84) Transportation and transit seem to be considered separately from urban design.

85) There should be a maximum versus minimum allowable number of parking spaces downtown or per development.

86) Transportation options for seniors and those with disabilities need improvement.

87) Need attraction circulation downtown like 'Fred' and other shuttle services.

88) Need clear connections to areas surrounding the downtown (transportation nodes).

89) Multi-modal public transit should be embedded in the plan.

90) Transit priority lanes should be included in the plan.

91) Consideration to developers investing in transportation infrastructure in exchange for variances.

92) Ferry service should be expanded.

**Open Space:**

93) There should a key public space created on the waterfront.

94) Make the artillery park public.

95) Provide increased public access to the harbour.

**Development:**

96) Need to consider the economics of development, not only height.

97) Developers have a responsibility to provide infrastructure, but must be supported by municipal government in maintenance.

98) Car focused developments that conflict with pedestrian focus.

99) Cascade effect of Dartmouth Crossing on other retail centres and residential areas.

100) Open/recreational space and other amenities should be required in multi-unit buildings.

101) Identify where big projects should locate (e.g. new Metro Centre).

102) Incentives are necessary to encourage good development.

**Precincts:**

- 103) Concern with micromanagement by dividing an already small area into districts.
- 104) Enhance arts district with new art gallery, symphony hall.

**Neighbourhoods:**

- 105) Provide basic services and opportunities for small business in all neighbourhoods (e.g. grocery stores, banks, etc).
- 106) Real protection is required for established neighbourhoods.
- 107) New buildings need to reflect the character of existing neighbourhoods.
- 108) Work with school board to ensure educational infrastructure is present in neighbourhoods to attract families.

**Other:**

- 109) Port redevelopment should be considered.
- 110) Comparisons to other cities like Boston/Toronto/New York should be avoided.
- 111) Safety considerations (structure/fire).
- 112) Replace Big Move #10 with 'Recreation'.
- 113) Incorporate way finding.
- 114) Promote culture. An iconic, cultural centre as a landmark.
- 115) Dockyards, Navy, Halterm must be considered in the plan.

## SCENARIOS – COMMENTS

- 1) All scenarios have too many tall buildings and density in close proximity to heritage buildings.
- 2) Existing vacant land is adequate to meet future needs - excess height is not necessary.
- 3) All scenarios look the same, lack of differentiation.
- 4) Bookends define the downtown.
- 5) All need more imagination.
- 6) All scenarios seem to put 'all their eggs in one basket' with the bulk of new, high buildings in Cogswell.
- 7) Why limit potential where it makes sense? i.e. height in Cogswell
- 8) Need flexibility for office space. Some large floor/space tall buildings are necessary.
- 9) Need flexibility in residential development as well. Some low/med/high density to ensure affordability.
- 10) Footprints of buildings appear to be taking up entire lots.
- 11) Scenarios risk not addressing empty lots in center of downtown – they should be the priority.
- 12) More height could be considered at Cogswell, while respecting the view planes elsewhere to increase the likelihood of economic viability.
- 13) Add new public buildings. Define where new landmarks will go.
- 14) Low-rise (under 10 stories) with high density.
- 15) Historic spine.
- 16) Celebrate topography. Market hilliness of the city.

- 17) Add more height to build in the possibility of increased capacity over time. Shouldn't only plan for short-term opportunities.
- 18) Address residential development opportunities near Citadel Hill.
- 19) A more inviting transition is necessary from the north end to downtown.
- 20) A new scenario reflecting higher densities (both commercial and residential).
- 21) Opportunity for increased residential emphasis west of Barrington.