

**HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

**Dartmouth Main Street Area Plan Review Workshop (PN1286)**

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**7:00 p.m.**

**Thursday, May 20, 2010**

**Stevens Road United Baptist Church-Gym**

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE:** Marcus Garnet, Senior Planner, Regional & Community Planning  
Maureen Ryan, Senior Planner, Regional & Community Planning  
Fred Wendt, Planner, Regional & Community Planning  
Susan Caldwell, Planning Controller, Regional & Community Planning  
Stephen Betts, Planning Assistant, Regional & Community Planning  
Darrell Joudrey, Planner, Planning Services  
Shanan Pictou, Urban Design Technician, Heritage & Design  
Roddy MacIntyre, Transportation Engineer, Traffic & Right of Way

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor Darren Fisher, District 6  
Bill Mills, Main Street Business District  
Greg O'Brien, Manager, Traffic & Transportation, Terrain Group  
David Blades, Project Engineer, Terrain Group  
Kevin Brooks, Active Transportation, Terrain Group  
Christine Garnet, Volunteer

**PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE:** **Approx. 45** (40 on sign-in sheet; a few did not sign in)

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The meeting commenced at approximately 7:00 p.m. Participants sat around tables which were provided with handouts, large-format maps, stickers, note tags and pens. Each table focused on a particular aspect of the proposal (overall concept; development rules; transportation; streetscaping). Seats were not pre-assigned.

**1. Opening Remarks/Introductions/Purpose of the Meeting**

Councillor Darren Fisher welcomed and thanked everyone for attending, after which he introduced Bill Mills from the Main Street Business Improvement District (BID).

Mr. Mills advised that the business owners and residents are interested in building a more people-friendly community along Main Street.

Marcus Garnet thanked people for coming, introduced himself and asked each of the HRM and consultant staff to introduce themselves. He advised everyone that each table in the room focuses on a particular theme, and encouraged everyone to move among the tables and offer feedback, insight, comments and ideas after conclusion of the formal presentations. He noted that juice and cookies were kindly donated by the BID.

## **2. Background & Purpose**

Using slides, Mr. Garnet provided background information, explaining how the process originated with a Streetscape Study prepared by Ekistics, during which participants had strongly indicated that they wanted more pedestrian-friendly streets and buildings, with rear-yard parking, peaked roofs, wide sidewalks, street furniture, landscaping, parks and some reconfiguration of streets. At a capital investment level, that visionary exercise has already begun to be implemented through streetscaping on Hartlen Street and renewal of the parkette at Main and Woodlawn. At a policy and regulatory level, the Streetscape Study has led to a review of the Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-Law for the area, and this review began a couple of years ago. The plan review process has already hosted three public workshops, and Mr. Garnet explained that the purpose for tonight's meeting is to refine the preferred development concept, propose plan policies, refine the draft development rules, and share interim findings and concepts for the local street network. He encouraged attendees to raise any questions or share their thoughts after the formal presentation, in view of the large amount of material to be covered.

## **3. Concept and Proposed Rules**

Marcus Garnet used additional slides to present the latest draft Proposed Development Concept, which seeks to optimize the mix of uses, building shape, height and size, and parking configuration. He pointed out the latest concept changes, including wider setbacks from sidewalks and reduced building heights. He displayed a short Sketch-Up video comparing the latest proposed development concept with the currently existing development along Main Street, and acknowledged the important contribution made by Planning Technician Scott Leblanc, who could not attend as he was on vacation. (Note: the illustrations do not show landscaping or trees, because this particular analysis focuses on buildings and the spaces between them.)

Mr. Garnet explained that the Proposed Development Rules embody a new approach to zoning known as Form Based Coding, where the emphasis shifts away from segregating land uses toward integrating mutually supportive uses and shaping the buildings which frame the streets and public spaces. The proposed zoning would be as-of-right to encourage re-investment in the area, and would affect such aspects as surface parking, siding, walls, windows, roofs and accessory buildings. Prominent sites would have special requirements and opportunities. One of the zones comprises three sub-zones, or Precincts, to enable more detailed rules to respond to differences in context. Using photos and diagrams, Mr. Garnet explained each of the proposed zones and precincts, together with the main purposes and requirements of each. Copies of the draft Municipal Plan policies were provided at the relevant tables.

## **4. Transportation Study Findings (Greg O'Brien, Terrain Group)**

Mr. Greg O'Brien made a Power Point presentation on the Main Street area's traffic and transportation issues and opportunities. He emphasized that Main Street is a major arterial street carrying high traffic volumes with numerous commercial driveways. He stressed that the primary purpose of Main Street is to move traffic through the area with a secondary function to provide land access. He indicated that traffic levels on Main Street have been fairly stable during the peak hours.

Mr. O'Brien informed the public of several concepts being considered, such as shared parking away from Main Street, looped driveways to avoid the need to reverse onto Main Street while reducing

barriers to walking and cycling; left-turn lanes, medians, roundabouts, reconfigured intersections and strategic short bicycle lanes; and extending Hartlen Street from Main Street through to Lakecrest Drive, or connecting Tacoma Drive to Lakecrest Drive near Stevens Road while providing a pedestrian walkway between Lakecrest Drive and Main Street.

Many of these schemes, especially roundabouts and the Hartlen Street extension, would require significant land acquisition and/or construction costs. No substantial changes could be implemented without careful study followed by Council debate, nor could any be implemented without the allocation of funding.

## **5. Questions and Comments**

What are the numbers if this plan was to roll out?

Mr. Garnet replied that he did not have the anticipated number of new residents available at the meeting, but that he has calculated this and can provide it by way of follow-up. *[Note: Follow-up from Planning Staff indicates the following future growth assumptions under the proposed concept: 245 additional dwelling units added over the next 10 years, followed by another 770 added over the following 15 years, leading to a total of 1235 new and existing dwellings in the study area in 25 years' time, compared with a total of 465 new and existing dwellings in 10 years' time, and compared with a total of 220 dwellings already existing at present. These numbers do not include the established low-density neighbourhoods beyond Lakecrest and Tacoma, which neighbourhoods are assumed to remain unchanged. The Regional Plan assumed an average household size of 2.53 people per dwelling as of 2001 for suburban areas, declining to 2.19 by 2026. Medium to higher densities in a mixed-use centre such as the Main Street community core would be most attractive to singles and young or retired couples, so this ratio is likely to be lower for the study area.]*

The same participant asked, "If more people are to come to this area, what impact is that going to have on the existing traffic problem?"

Mr. Garnet replied that he has already provided the growth allocations to the transportation consultants based on development scenarios under the proposed new zoning rules. He explained that the next part of the transportation study will develop traffic model projections for 10-year and 25-year residential growth assumptions for the area. Residential growth is needed to support the walkable retail which participants want to see in the area.

Another attendee asked whether a pedway has been considered.

Mr. Garnet replied that staff have conceptualized a pedway at Main and Gordon as one of a number of theoretical possibilities, though this is not being proposed and the cost would be high.

What is the schedule concerning the rules?

Mr. Garnet answered that the next steps are to fine-tune the rules and then take them to Council for public hearing and, hopefully, adoption by this Fall. Plan policies supporting the rules will be part of this package.

Under the new zoning which includes rear parking, to what extent have business owners voiced concern about parking for their customers?

Mr. Garnet replied that business has been represented through the BID, and that front yard parking was eliminated near the outset of the plan review process on the basis of the earlier public input from the Streetscape Study. Mr. Garnet had considered and suggested side-yard parking as a possible compromise, but at the plan review workshops a clear preference was expressed by most participants for rear parking. He noted that the Lego modeling analysis gave careful consideration to parking ratios and configurations. He and Mr. Mills agreed that the existing parking and access does not work for motorists any better than for pedestrians, because the parking is divided between front and rear yards with difficult access between the two. Mr. Garnet felt that if all the parking were rationalized in one location at the rear of each property, it would actually be easier to find a parking space.

Have strategically located public car parks been considered?

Mr. Garnet replied that they have been suggested, and are to be considered as part of the Transportation Study.

Could Metro Transit move closer to Sobeys [rather than further away as presently planned]? It is difficult to walk to buses carrying grocery bags.

Mr. Garnet noted that Metro Transit are moving to Tacoma and Hartlen. He advised that he would bring up the needs of grocery shoppers next time he meets with transit staff. *(Follow-up note: Metro Transit advise that, as the shopping development has become busier, it has become increasingly difficult and risky to operate transit service through the lot. Metro Transit generally does not operate in parking lots and the Tacoma situation was an historic hold-over. For this reason, Metro Transit always encourage developers to locate their building close to the roads with parking at the side or rear. Where retailers insist on front-yard parking, there might be future opportunities to encourage them to locate a shopping cart corral close to the nearest on-street bus stop. )*

The area [south of Tacoma Drive] is like a big box area. What is the possibility of having setbacks between residential and commercial property?

Mr. Garnet explained that larger setbacks are proposed between existing low-density residential neighbourhoods and any redevelopment in this big-box area.

What about solar panels on the roofs? We don't want this problem here, as it is in other communities in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Garnet replied that solar panels would be permitted under the proposed concepts to enable eco-friendly environment. Pitched roofs would be an opportunity to incorporate panels.

Prohibiting reflective or tinted windows would prevent people from using photovoltaic glass on buildings.

Mr. Garnet expressed appreciation for the comment, and replied that staff will give some thought to this.

An individual stated they are disappointed with the Transportation Study, and want HRM to stop being concerned about moving cars or traffic via roundabouts or expanding intersections, and that the concern needs to be for moving people.

Mr. O'Brien advised that the transportation study is not yet completed. He suggested that even if 20% of residents used transit, 80% would still be in cars. He emphasized that this reality needs to be considered in the study. The traffic model assumes that a specified proportion of trips will be made by transit.

Mr. Garnet indicated that an express bus service is planned from Porter's Lake to Halifax within the next 3-4 years, and ultimately from Musquodoboit Harbour. This service could divert some trips along Main Street from automobile to transit.

What about considering a transit only lane?

Mr. O'Brien noted that the study does not include studying bus only lanes on Main Street due to lane requirements of adding additional lanes to Main Street; however, transit priority options are being considered at the Major/Gordon intersection to allow transit buses to possibly bypass the queue of through vehicles. It was also noted that Metro Transit is represented on the project steering committee. Councillor Fisher stated that Main Street transit is in the plans.

An individual stated that transportation has to be addressed here before increasing housing density is considered.

A resident of Lakecrest advised, "I have been attending all the meetings and am concerned about the traffic coming down Lakecrest Drive in the winter time as it is dangerous with the children in the area." She added, "I've counted 700 cars between 7 and 9 am, and with the proposed construction it would make it easier for people to access and drive down Lakecrest Drive."

Councillor Fisher stated that he is working on having one of the accesses closed off on Lakecrest.

The resident stated that she does not feel the residents of Lakecrest are being listened to, and that she had been given to understand that the access could not be closed off as it is needed for emergency vehicles.

Some differences of opinion were voiced as to whether or not this is still the case.

At this point, Mr. Garnet encouraged the attendees to move around between the various topic tables, discuss their concerns and ideas with staff and others at each table, and offer their insights. He noted that there would be a staff person at each table who would take their concerns and comments back to him and/or the consultants for consideration.

## **Informal Comments**

Several themes emerged during the informal conversations with participants:

### ***Transportation:***

- **Short-cutting, speeding and traffic along Lakecrest:** A resident of Lakecrest counted 700 cars in the two-hour morning peak using Lakecrest between Helene and Mountain. Cars also come off Main at Helene and do a sharp left turn to get onto Lakecrest. Residents would like to see the connection to/at Helene Ave closed. The roadway where Helene curves onto Lakecrest should be for fire access only. On the other hand, it was noted that if Helene has public access only to Main, then traffic going from Helene to Lakecrest will need to travel along Main to get to Lakecrest, and this does not seem to make sense. (Motorists can already make a right turn onto Lakecrest from Main just east of Mountain Ave.) There was also concern by Lakecrest residents about the consultants' idea of having the parking for Main Street businesses accessed off Lakecrest, lest it result in increased traffic on their street. *[Note: a follow-up comment from Transportation staff suggests that less driveway access to Main Street would improve Main Street traffic flow and encourage more through traffic to stay on Main Street rather than shortcut on Lakecrest Drive.]*
- **Dangerous pedestrian crossings:**
  - The pedestrian crossing at McDonald's is dangerous.
  - Where Helene curves onto Lakecrest is dangerous to cross.
  - Pedestrians are at risk if they cross on the west side of Gordon/Major and Main Streets, because left turning traffic from Gordon does not stop for pedestrians on the crosswalk. It was also felt that there is not enough time for pedestrians to cross Main Street at this location. It was suggested that staff look at only allowing pedestrians to cross on the side closest to Smitty's. *[Note: as follow-up, staff have referred this violation pattern to Police Services for enforcement.]*
- **More greenery along Main St.** would change the appearance to a "people place" so that traffic will slow down accordingly.
- **There are a couple of pedestrian walkways from the Oakwood Avenue area** giving access to the Sobeys and Shoppers retail areas for nearby residents. These are heavily used and would benefit from some plantings.

- **Walkway between Lakecrest and Main:** A local business and property owner indicated that he has been attempting to obtain an easement to enable him to provide a public walkway between these two streets.
- **Driveway access to the Petro-Can on Major:** There was some discussion about the driveway closest to the intersection being re-configured so that drivers could not turn left into the gas station from Major at that location; one could only turn left into the station at the driveway further away from the intersection. A participant suggested that the nearer driveway could be for exiting only, while the one further from Main could be for entry only. Transportation staff suggested that the driveway closest to Main be restricted from left turns - i.e., it would become a right-in/right-out driveway - with the other driveway (the one further away from Main Street) continuing to offer full access and egress.
- **The intersection of Lakecrest and Major** is plugged in the morning peak.
- **A left turn is needed for authorized vehicles for local residents off Kuhn** onto Main. *(Arrow pointing to westernmost intersection of Main St. and Kuhn Rd.)*
- **Could you not have two bus depots** (bus shelters only) for shoppers? *(double-ended arrow along Hartlen pointing to spot on Lakecrest between Raymond and Mountain and also to Hartlen / Tacoma intersection.)*
- **Could a bus come down Lakecrest Drive?** *[Note: a follow-up comment from Transportation staff suggests that a bus on Lakecrest would be unlikely without a connection to Main Street to loop the route.]*
- **Some felt that they did not like any of the transportation options being presented** and were concerned that if staff approved the report, then that meant these options were a done deal. Transportation staff replied that this is not the case and that HRM is doing the study in order to get all the relevant information to help plan the transportation network, and that it is quite possible that none of the options being presented at the meeting would actually get implemented as shown. Residents were advised that any proposed changes would require Council approval before moving forward.

***Property Development:***

- **The possibility of positive change is exciting.** Buildings have gone up, buildings have come down but the possibility of well designed buildings and streetscapes in future is exciting.
- **Underground parking** should be required at Gordon and Main St.
- **Reflective or tinted glass:** It was suggested that this could be permitted where photovoltaic panels are used, thus providing an incentive for sustainable development.
- **Perhaps Sobey's could put a strip mall** on the lower parking lot along Tacoma.

- **The lot between the intersection of Oakwood Ave. and Valleyfield Dr.:** There is very high pedestrian traffic on the pathway cutting diagonally across toward the entrance to Shoppers Drug Mart. This lot would be better set aside as a parkette with a formalized pathway, rather than used for a second townhouse which would obscure the visibility of Shoppers Drug Mart from Valleyfield Road.
- **Kuhn Drive zoning:** A local resident expressed appreciation for the proposed new rules for this area.
- **Kuhn Drive piped services:** A local resident asked whether piped sewer services are planned for this small neighbourhood. Mr. Garnet advised that he has discussed this with Halifax Water, and they indicate that costs would be very high and this is not planned.
- **Woodlawn Road Parkette:** A local resident expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Councillor and HRM staff to accommodate his concerns which he had voiced at an earlier workshop.
- **Historical note:** Bareng Court is former pasture land.

Fourteen participants also filled out comment questionnaires.

The meeting concluded at approximately 9:30 pm.