

**HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**  
**DRAFT BIRCH COVE DESIGN STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**  
**PROJECT 01150** - Birch Cove Design Study (from Western Shore Bedford Basin Land Use Planning Study)

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**3:00 p.m.**  
**July 8, 2009**  
**St. Peter's Anglican Church Hall**

**Present**

Colin Darlington, Chair  
Manon Giroy  
Terry Drisdelle, WFDC  
Maria Medioll  
Mike Horwich

Wayne Ingalls  
Anne Muecke, United Gulf Developments  
Navid Saberi, Untied Gulf Developments

**Staff Present**

Paul Morgan, HRM  
Alana Hines, HRM

**District 16 Councillor**

Councillor Debbie Hum

**Ekistics**

Ross Cantwell  
Peter Klynstra  
Rob LeBlanc  
David Harrison

**SUMMARY MINUTES**

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The meeting commenced at approximately 3:00 p.m.

**1. Opening Comments**

Paul Morgan handed out an agenda and gave opening remarks to refresh the committee's memories of where we've been, the purpose of the meeting and the future direction.

Wayne Ingalls asked how consensus would be reached. Paul Morgan said what we hope to achieve is consensus, where issues can be discussed and come to a resolution where everyone is satisfied. If we are not able to do this, a vote would have to take place. When the report goes to Council, there is another opportunity for expression of decanting opinions. Colin added that it is the committees responsibility to provide Council with a full appreciation of options, thoughts, ideas and the like, not necessarily a single answer.

Wayne further said he noticed that United Gulf appears to have three members on the committee and if it comes to a vote, he said he is sitting at the table representing three community organizations, the three United Gulf members are representing United Gulf. Anne Muecke said that Navid and her are alternates so only would be able to vote. Wayne said he was satisfied with this answer.

Paul Morgan did a quick review of the project indicating that Council approved the study last year and said there was a RFP sent out outlining what the project was trying to achieve. A steering committee was approved by Community Council with 7 members - United Gulf has one vote, the Church has one vote, the others are citizen members and Councillor Hum is a non-voting member. What ever the recommendation of the committee will be will go to Council. Prior to going to

Council the recommendation will be reviewed by Regional Planning Advisory Committee (which may or may not agree with the recommendations of this committee and they can make their own recommendations to Council). This committees recommendations may also be reviewed by a watershed advisory committee. A workshop took place in April to get ideas from people. This was followed by the public meeting held on June 10<sup>th</sup> with the alternative design scenarios. The purpose of this meeting is to give the consultants direction as to the preferred alternative so that they can prepare a report that will come back to the committee for review and then go out to the public for presentation and comment. If satisfactory, the committee will make their recommendation to Regional Council. Members of the public will have a chance to comment at the next meeting and before Council can approve any amendments, a mandatory Public Hearing will take place.

Colin wanted to confirm that the role of the Committee is to provide direction to the public participation program for Birch Cove Study area. Colin wants to know if the committee should be providing direction or guidance. Councillor Hum said that the Committee's role is to provide guidance to help make decisions.

## **2. Communication Strategy**

Councillor Hum indicated that she is not comfortable about the public awareness of this project and has indicated that she doesn't feel comfortable going forward with a preferred alternative as she feels there has not been full public participation. Councillor Hum said she envisioned the Steering Committee to take on more of a leadership role and indicated that it's not the fault of the Steering Committee, she anticipated this committee to take on the role like the Bedford Waterfront where a group of citizens took the lead role early on and consultants then came in. The Birch Cove process is a little different, but she wanted the Steering Committee to feel this was community lead, this is what the Steering Committee wants not what anybody else wants and you are saying yes or no. Secondly

Councillor Hum indicated that she hasn't been comfortable with the lack of communication in getting public awareness about this initiative and also getting people to come out to the meetings. She said she has had some feed back from the public on this but it is also her own feeling that there would have been more than 20, 25 or 30 people involved in public participation. She said in the early stages she believed there was participation from approximately 50 people prior to the Steering Committee being formed. There has been very few people turn out and a lot fewer than she had anticipated.

She indicated that she discussed this with Paul Morgan and Roger Wells and Austin French about going forward with an preferred alternative with the little participation. Even with creating a preferred option with the committee today she thinks what will happen from the public's perspective is that will feel this is being implemented without sufficient general public input. To bring an option to Council and feel there was full public participation and public awareness she doesn't feel that the project is at that stage yet.

Paul Morgan said in terms of communication with the role of this committee verses the Bedford Waterfront Committee, they are identical. The process that the committees are going through are identical and in terms of the committees involvement and guidance, this is an important meeting .

The difference Paul indicated that he has seen between the two processes is certainly the turn outs, the Bedford Waterfront turn outs have been larger, the last public meeting had well over 100 people. There are various reasons for this, one which Paul believes is people don't show up to meetings such as these unless they have a problem with the project. One thing that is obvious on the Bedford Waterfront is the growing eye sore with the fill being placed in the Bedford Basin and it is an important piece of land to the Community, so he thinks that helped with the turn out.

Councillor Hum said that the public needs to get this information and she doesn't feel comfortable that the general public are receiving this information for Birch Cove, even on line and with the survey. Paul indicated that the communication strategy consisted of advertising in the Chronicle Herald/Mail Star and the two weekly news paper - Sackville Bedford Weekly and the Halifax Clayton Park News. The only difference between the two project's communication strategies, in Bedford Councillor Outhit request a newsletter go out to all his constituents and that was done.

Councillor Hum said that was discussed this past week at the meeting with Austin, Paul and Roger, that direct notice to every resident in Bedford (designated area) and she is most concerned from the northern boundary of her district through to old Rockingham and all the neighborhoods along the Bedford Highway and would like to extend it beyond that such as Kearney Lake. She believes that many of the residents in these areas are not aware of this project at all.

Colin said so far the communication has been passive, it has to be seen in one of the local papers. According to what Paul has said, all the normal tools to advertise. Colin asked Councillor Hum if it was her decision from the meeting she had with Staff to go active with the communication. Councillor Hum said certainly more active but also she wanted to give the Committee a chance to discuss and what level of comfort the committee has with respect to communication and she also indicated that she is looking at holding another public information meeting in September (summer time is not a good time).

Ross Cantwell, real estate consultant on this project, indicated that he has met or had conversations with the new owner of The Cove, the owners of the Wedgewood Motel, St. Peter's Church, United Gulf and their two properties, Irving regarding their gas station, and the owner of Farmer Clem's, which is the majority of the major land owners of the core part of the study area. Someone asked if Ross has spoke to CN Rail and Ross indicated that he has not spoken to them.

Colin summarized that to date Councillor Hum is dissatisfied with the communication strategy. Councilor Hum indicated that she wanted this meeting to be cancelled as she didn't feel that the Committee is quite ready to select an option without the community having full knowledge of this project. She thought it might be better to have another public meeting in September and get more feed back. In the interim an intensive communication champagne could be put on to let people know of the project and the public process of this design study. After discussion with Staff, she decided to let the committee know her feels and indicated that at the end of the day the Steering Committee has to have a comfort level on the public participation. Councillor Hum indicated that some ways to get public awareness is to send out a flyer (including the history of this project); getting the media to do a story on this project (similar to the Bedford Waterfront one); Public Service Announcement sometimes doesn't get the message out. She wanted to get feedback from the Steering Committee and from the Consultants and how to proceed.

Colin said that Councillor Hum raised many issues and one issue is whether the Steering Committee

satisfied that we have achieved the objective and ensuring that we have reached members of the community.

Paul Morgan said an HRM Communications Specialist released a press release for both Bedford Waterfront and Birch Cove and both went out at the same time. The press picked up on the Bedford Waterfront more than Birch Cove. In terms of going forward, Staff proposed trying to reach a consensus on a preferred option now and when the public meeting happens in the fall, HRM will make sure that everyone in Councillor Hum's district will get a notice and HRM will do everything they can to ensure everyone knows about it. If at that public meeting we get a sense that people are not happy with the solution and we need more input, then the Committee can at that time decide not to go to Council at that time and go back to the drawing board (acknowledging this is outside of the contract with the Consultants).

Paul Morgan also pointed out that notices were posted on the Church bulletin boards, the Dakin Residents Association had consultation so they were aware of it. Councillor Hum said she sent out emails to residents and community groups about the meetings but there still hasn't been really good feedback. One thing that was suggested in the meeting with Staff, was getting more of the church groups advertising in their weekly bulletins.

Manon said there was no one at the last public meeting for Birch Cove and the Bedford Waterfront meeting was very large. She also indicated that many people she has talked to don't know anything about this project.

Peter Klynstra said that we are working on the back of the Western Shore Study, which has very large public participation, and this almost like round two. This study provided more information to us specifically about what we are doing here than the Bedford Visioning Study provided at a much more in depth level. At that time consultation took place with 20 + community groups, two extra rounds of public meetings were held to ensure people could come out and have input, and all the information from that has been brought forward for this project, so we are not walking into this project from ground zero, we are standing on the shoulders of the previous study, with an usually high public participation process.

David Harrison said there was a lot of participation for the Western Shore Study and suggested that any communication that goes out links these two projects as this project is an outcome of the Western Shore Study. Peter further said quality of participation is as important as quantity of participation. In terms of quality Peter indicated that there is a very good level of public participation and in terms of quantity, this project is standing on the back of a significant public participation process.

Wayne Ingalls said he believes it is wrong to compare this project with the Bedford Waterfront project. Bedford as a community has been established for a long time. The Birch Cove has very new subdivisions and new communities. Bedford is established and has a cohesion that is lacking from Birch Cove and is likely the reason for the smaller amount of participation compared to Bedford. Having said that, Wayne indicated that he took the Birch Cove documentation to the annual picnic on July 1<sup>st</sup> and at the general meeting he presented the documentation. The reaction that he got was horrified, whose going to do that, they are going to ruin it, all was harsh and not very useful. This was the first they had heard of this project for Birch Cove, it was news to all of them. To summarize, Birch Cove shouldn't be compared to Bedford, on the other hand, many people in the community

do not know about the Birch Cove project.

Colin said if the Committee was to go back a month or two we lose that time which puts HRM into contractual challenges with the Consultant. He further stated that whether we are happy with the level of public participation or not, we know that we want there to be a continued or growing communication with the community. Therefore, Colin proposed that HRM consider looking at the passive communication strategy and continue this and encourage the communication staff to try and engage the media with the information on this project and that an active communication program, using the Councillor's power to get the word out to her district with as much information on this as possible. As part of the communication strategies we dry on Peter's point that this is a continuing step of a larger project of the Western Shore Study and link this information to this project. Colin further stated there needs to be a target audience. Councillor Hum said the more people who are aware the better and it can go beyond District 16, but it is important that District 16 residents are aware. Colin wants a target matrix be looked at - what's been done, what's going to be done and against whom and how so that we can all feel that the Committee has achieved what they want to achieve and can go to Council and say yes we feel there has been adequate public participation. Colin asks who does this.

Councillor Hum said we will engage communications people within HRM to do a two page flyer, with some history and where we hope to go. David Harrison said we need to engage communication in the next month or two; he also indicate that the Committee does have a good foundation between round one (Western Shore Study) and the current feedback. The feedback should be coming in between now and September. Councillor Hum said she looks at this as a two-phase communication strategy and hopes that the next meeting has more people in attendance. Coin asked that whom ever is engaged with the communication strategy that they report to the committee so that the Committee can be satisfied that action has taken place. David Harrison suggested that the Stakeholder Report from the Western Shore Study be linked to the Birch Cove Project on the website. He also suggested adding a snap shot of opinion at that point in time on the Birch Cove project.

Rob LeBlanc, Ekistics, outlined what Ekistics was asked to do for this project and said that changing this to present a draft report rather than the final preferred alternative at the next public meeting would have contractual challenges. Rob said there are two implications - (1) the project was meant to run in tandem with Bedford and hence the cost saving; (2) if we go into September and present a draft that could come back with changes, at that point we would have 3D models built, sketches will be done; all financials and proforma will be done. If we have to take a step back at that point the cost will be substantial; it's not a couple of thousands of dollars. Colin suggested that we keep on the track as originally proposed and get the word out to the public that this project is going on. For the record, Rob wanted to bring up the implications if the project was to get off skew. Colin wanted to know what it would mean contractually if we had to take a step back. Rob said that if we have to present a draft plan rather than the final plan and have to re-do proforma's and models and drawings, etc. it would be a substantial cost (in to the ten's of thousands of dollars), where as if it gets off track in terms of timing it might be a few thousand dollars.

Maria Medioll asked if there has been a causal relationship established between the lack of people attending meetings and people who allegedly haven't heard about the meetings. Where are assuming

people didn't come because they didn't hear about it, but it is quite possible people just chose not to attend, because the issue that seems to get people aroused is development, not the design. She also indicated that she sent out emails to people to inform them and asked them to attend and they just chose not to come.

Navid Saberi said that the difference between this project and the Bedford one, as he is involved with both projects, is the scale, the Birch Cove is about 1/6 of the Bedford project and is of a difference significance. They are two totally different projects and this project will never be made as interesting as the Bedford one because the scale is not there. Another issue is that there has only been a few people involved that actually will end up doing something in the near future versus the Bedford project where things will happen a lot faster and sooner. From a business perspective, Navid indicated that he sent out many emails and has received no responses on this project. Navid said what is key is making it do-able and it will happen. If people are not interested they won't come out and they won't complain. Usually the only people who usually come out are the people who are dissatisfied. Navid suggested putting up a sign to let the community members know what's going on.

Councillor Hum suggested leaving the communication strategy at this point and re-visit this issue at the end of the session.

### **3. Review and approval of the draft minutes of the public meeting held on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009.**

The committee reviewed the minutes and approved them.

### **4. Review of the alternative design concepts and the preferred alternative - lead by**

Discussion by the committee and Ekistics took place on the alternative design concepts and the preferred alternative. Ekistics lead the discussion.

Peter indicated that people seemed to like parts of all the options and there wasn't a clear scheme of how to proceed with one option. The biggest theme that came from the public is they want this to be a village centre with a village atmosphere and mixed use was clearly envisioned in this theme. Wayne said he disagreed and that they were told this not asked this. He said he had the impression that when referring back to the Regional Plan which said this areas was going to be one of the nodes, and everything has been based on this.

Anne Muecke said that from the workshop there was a sense that it would be nice to have a centre there, a place to go to, a destination node. Peter said that was actually written on the survey with their comments and reminisced about old businesses that use to be there and that it should be a pedestrian centre. One thing that was taken from the workshop was to create a village centre, don't let it become a strip mall.

Paul Morgan said this didn't originate with the Regional Plan, this whole study originated with the Western Shore and Bedford Basin Study. This study this area should be an area with development

and priority status. Councillor Hum said that the Regional Plan was clearly articulated that the China Town Lands be considered higher density development opportunity (as discussed during the Western Shore Study) and looking at opportunities and sites in the immediate area here, it was the Councillor Hum's recommendation to look at this area.

Discussion took place surrounding the Bedford Highway round-a-about. Councillor Debbie Hum indicated that the traffic engineers for HRM would have to approve any design. The Committee endorses roundabouts but doesn't oppose a criss-cross intersection with lights.

Access to the lands on the waterfront and trail connection was discussed in detail as each option proposed something different. The key issue, from the Western Shore study, is a trail that connects Hogan's Point and Shore Drive and how to get people on to that and how to get people into China Town is a big issue. The three options included a throw garage; throw improved existing facilities; and an overpass.

Councillor Debbie Hum said she could foresee a fair bit of traffic getting backed up close to the roundabout and she thinks this needs to be verified by the traffic engineers. Peter confirmed it would be about 5 or 6 cars. Someone asked what the traffic engineers preferred option would be and it was confirmed that it would be an overpass with the roundabout.

The committee strongly endorses the overpass option for this element. Councillor Hum said that she feels the parking situation needs to be looked at a little more as she is not confident that there is sufficient parking there. Peter said Ekistics would take this as direction to maximize the amount of parking we can get on that road (designed for on street parking).

Church Lands - Right now the church lands are zoned highway commercial (which permits parks). The idea was to show the maximum development that is possible on the church property and to incorporate into the policy that if the church wanted to sell parts of their land it added value to the church land. Mike Horwich said that the church (St. Peter's) doesn't want to give their land away. Councillor Hum said that everyone is cognitive of the fact that the church owns the property (where the park is) and they have the right to sell that land.

Councillor Hum said this is a great opportunity for recreation for leisure activities and there are strong feelings withing the community that they want to retain that area as a recreational open space. Councillor Hum asked if the church would be agreeable if HRM was to look at buying this lot (where the park is). At the end of the day, Councillor Hum said that the church would want to maximize their investment in this parcel of property and it is important to have the church's feedback.

Navid suggested a density swap for this land. Ann Muecke said considering that HRM is making a huge investment in the waterfront park, will HRM also really be interested in retaining this parkland on the church lands. It was noted that there is a lot of new recreation being proposed in the new development along the waterfront. Paul Morgan cautioned the day lighting option to the brook due to high flows during wet weather conditions and mixing of sanitary sewage with stormwater

flows.

There are a lot of good reasons to opening up the brook but there are also reasons not to open it up. The general consensus is not to daylight the brook and to show development on the church lands (with possible density swapping). Debbie said this area also has to be looked at for alternatives uses besides a church as the church may not always be here, as they may want to re-build in the future.

To summarize the church land discussion, the committee endorses developmental option instead of the open water option (as it is not practical at this time to day light the brook) and recognizes opportunities for a density swap.

Wedgewood Motel/The Cove - Peter advised that the new owner plans to keep it like it is for the foreseeable future. The development form for the future would be the same as it is now.

The view coming down Kearney Lake Road to the Basin was discussed. In every option the idea was to keep development heights low and out of the primary view so the view is not blocked.

Councillor Hum asked if Ekistics could look at ways to sight, design, opening up unique view planes.

A discussion took place on private verses public views.

There was also a discussion on the village feel for this area. Navid said that a village feel is only going to work on one side but the appearance of the other sides should look like the village feel though facades and appearance.

Pedestrian access locations were discussed as there was a concern for crossing the Bedford Highway.

The committee endorses minimizing impact in this area with the extent of the massing while maximizing the site lines (creating views).

Waterfront side of the Bedford Highway - Discussion took place surrounding the access to the waterfront. Rob indicated that with the roundabout the section in the middle is flush with grade. The option with the signalized intersection has ramps ( there would be a drop down to get into the underground parking plaza). Another option is to keep it as it is today and add an entrance to the underground parking.

Anne Muecke indicated that it is important for people to see into the development. She said if it looks like a barrier it will be a barrier. Others agreed.

Further discussions included access and egress; parking; Farmer Clem's and Irving locations.

Peter indicated that the 3 options of the waterfront are very similar - with public walk way along the waters edge; parking would be underground. The public doesn't want to see a sewage treatment plant here (come back to this later on). There is a marina in all options as well, with mixed use buildings.

Discussion took place on heights and Rob did some sketching. The group agreed that the 3 buildings is too many for this site and it would be better with 2 buildings with a little bit of height. Councillor Hum said she would like to see the dynamics of 1 building on the site. She agreed that 2 buildings would increase the possibilities but 3 buildings is too many.

David Harrison also mentioned that with less buildings the footprint could be more dynamic.

In summary the committee prefers two buildings with an innovative footprint with consideration for 1 building.

Discussions took place on the possibility of a Harbour Link. The committee doesn't endorse the harbour link. Ross also indicated that there are limitations for a harbour link. Paul Morgan suggested that the consultants address the feasibility of the ferry terminal in the report.

The committee discussed a transit node in the Village Core and endorses this idea.

Parking was discussed in detail and the report is to have an established number of parking spaces. Boundaries to be defined for possible on street parking.

It was noted that pedestrian and bike access is important.

### **Adjournment**

Rob LeBlanc indicated that he would prepare a record of the decisions made at this meeting and prepare the table of contents for the report.

It was noted that a news letter to residents, a 2 page notice, would go out including an update, history, work to date, future aspects.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:37 p.m.