



Fall 2004

Table of Contents

Alternatives	
Evaluation	2
How Will the Regional Plan Work?	4
Working With Other Levels of Government	5
Interim Growth Measures Update	5
You Asked About	6
Community Involvement	8
Process	8



The Foundation of the Regional Plan

As the Regional Planning Committee evaluates which **Alternative for Growth** will be recommended to Regional Council, it's helpful to review the foundation strategy that is the root of the alternatives.

The foundation strategy outlines how the Regional Plan will address the goals and objectives, which were designed from an earlier phase of public consultation and approved by Council in January 2004.

Using the foundation strategy as a guide, municipal policies will be prepared to:

Preserve and protect open space, cultural and heritage sites and landscapes. Open space is important for parks, natural resources, recreational trails, wildlife corridors and so much more. Protecting this land, as well as coastlines, lakes, rivers and the valuable cultural and heritage sites will help preserve the very assets that make HRM a special place to live.

Encourage mixed-use communities. Creating neighbourhoods that mix businesses, stores and offices with a range of affordable housing choices makes it much easier and more cost-effective to provide municipal services. This supports a healthier life-style by encouraging walking, biking and public transit use.

It also reduces the amount of land we consume for development, leaving more available for open space like parks and natural resource protection.

Provide a range of choices for where people live. Not everyone in HRM wants the same lifestyle. But everyone wants the ability to choose his or her own way of life. HRM is unique and special in our landscape of contemporary, stylishly urban living, family-oriented suburban neighbourhoods and beautiful, serene country settings. Establishing a variety of centres, as well as allowing some controlled development between the centres, will help ensure we maintain that range of choices for current and future residents.

Support the Capital District. A strong regional economic and cultural centre is critical to a strong and healthy municipality. This makes providing fast and efficient public transit routes easier, as the focus is on getting a large number of people from a variety of locations around the region into one specific area. It's important to note, however, that economic development will not only be encouraged in the Capital District. Other prominent economic centres will include Burnside and the airport as well as important local and rural centres.

Encourage alternatives to driving to work. Encouraging walking, cycling and the use of public transit will reduce poisonous greenhouse gas emissions, reduce or avoid congestion and encourage active lifestyles.

Make the best use of existing and future infrastructure. Roads, water lines, sewers and sewage treatment plants are costly to build and to maintain. Planning in advance for how much of each we will require, and how much use they will get, will allow us to spend tax dollars on building and maintaining what we know we'll need, rather than on fixing problems later on.



Evaluating the Alternatives

After the Regional Planning Alternatives for Growth were presented to Regional Council and the public in the spring, the Regional Planning Committee began guiding a complex evaluation process.

Combined with important public input, the evaluation will determine which alternative offers the best solution for accommodating up to 100,000 new residents in the region over the next 25 years.

The alternatives are all based on the same foundation strategy, which addresses the Regional Planning goals and objectives. It focuses on encouraging mixed-use communities; preserving as much rural resource land and open space as possible; supporting the Capital District as the economic centre; and concentrating on public transit to get people around.

For the evaluation, the Regional Planning Committee is looking at how the alternatives differ from one another - primarily in the location and size of the residential centres, the transportation routes that link them and the costs associated with each.

The Centres

The centres are the building blocks of all three of the proposed alternatives. They will be the building blocks of the Regional Plan and of the future of HRM. They determine where most new development will occur and where most new residents will live.

So how do we determine where the centres should be? Research - lots of research - and good quality public input.



Residential 'centres' are the building blocks of the Regional Plan.

Allocating New Employment Areas

In conjunction with identifying the settlement areas, we can forecast where economic, and therefore workplace, centres would be located. We can also look at how planning can be used to reinforce HRM's economic potential.

According to research by Gardner Pinfold, the top five economic drivers are the universities, Defence, hospitals, public administration, finance and insurance. All of these are located in or around HRM's Capital District.

The same research shows that future major employment areas are likely to be: the Capital District, Burnside Industrial Park, Bayers Lake Industrial Park and the Halifax International Airport. Rural areas like Sheet Harbour, Middle

Over the summer, the evaluation process focussed on identifying which centres in each of the three alternatives would be the most promising for population and employment growth over the next 25 years.



Each centre was rated based on a set of criteria including:

- the degree of traffic congestion between the residential centres and the major employment centres
- the potential for local employment growth
- its proximity to existing or potential parks, hazard lands or acid-bearing slate
- the existence of a culture or heritage centrepiece
- the suitability of soil for septic disposal, small sewage treatment plants or clustered septic systems
- whether or not residents in a proposed centre had expressed interest in becoming a growth centre

The centres with the best ratings stayed on the maps as future locations for growth.

Once these centres were selected, potential future population was allocated to each centre. To do this, four main factors were considered - land supply, market demand, existing settlement and the sewage treatment capability.

This future population was added to the existing population (according to the 2001 census) to project the total population of each centre for 2026.

Musquodoboit and Musquodoboit Harbour may also see some growth in local employment.

The study also predicts a continued increase in people working from private homes or rural offices.



HRM's Capital District is one of the region's major employment centres.

Evaluating the Alternatives

Transportation Studies & Traffic Model

Once we know where residents will live and work, we need to look at whether our roads and transit are able to handle the day-to-day travel needs.

The QRS II Traffic Model is a computer traffic modelling program that can assess the impact of each of the alternatives on HRM's roads.

Using the model, we can predict how new areas of residential development and the new and existing employment areas will affect traffic congestion on roads.

It can also determine how adding new transit and roads could shift traffic patterns.

Using the population and employment numbers from the centres evaluation, we can determine if the current roads and transit systems will be able to handle a substantial increase in traffic from the new residents and jobs in the various centres in each alternative.

If the model indicates problems, we can make adjustments to see what improvements, like better public transit or new or widened roadways, would be needed to handle the increased traffic. The costs of these improvements would be added to the overall cost of each alternative.

The model can also look at how much residents would pay to travel between home and work; how many emissions they create; and how many collisions they cause.

These tests will be done for all three alternatives to identify which would provide the most cost-effective way to meet the transportation demands of the increased population.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) & High Capacity Transit (HCT) Studies

These studies help identify which methods of transportation would work best for the region.

They look at the potential role of fast ferries, rail and improved rapid bus services over the next 25 years.

This research will be used to help determine what transportation improvements would be best suited to a particular issue raised by the traffic model.

For example, the studies show that for a corridor to qualify for high capacity transit service, it should have existing relatively high ridership routes; a large proportion of work trips to the same destination; a combination of major peak period origins and destinations; opportunities for the introduction of alternative technologies; and the potential for new development.



This image shows a portion of the roadway network from the QRS II Traffic Model. The thick blue bars indicate roads with high traffic volumes.

Costs

The cost analysis looks at the costs related to growth in population and employment. These costs will be determined for each alternative over the next 25 years. For example, we can project the cost over the next 25 years of owning and maintaining a new road.

The analysis looks not only at the costs to HRM, but also at the total cost of future growth to the taxpayer. There are three levels of costs to be considered:

HRM Costs - What it costs the municipality to deliver services like piped water and sewer, fire and police services, libraries, etc.

Private Costs - What it costs the homeowner to purchase a home or a building lot, to operate a car, to operate an onsite well and septic system, and to purchase other necessities like fire insurance, etc.



Other Public Costs - What it costs other levels of government for things like school buses and healthcare increases due to inactivity, etc.

Conclusion

Each of these pieces will be used to compare and contrast the alternatives, based on the amount of open space they preserve, the extent of change needed to the existing transportation network and the overall costs for making the alternative a reality.

The preferred alternative could draw elements from each of the proposed alternatives to create a hybrid to best address the challenges of a large and diverse municipality.

The Regional Planning Committee will consider all the information gathered from the evaluation and will select a preferred alternative this fall. The Committee will then present the preferred alternative to Regional Council for their approval in December.

Regional Council is the decision making body for this critical step. They must ensure that the selected alternative addresses the goals and objectives which Regional Council approved last year and which the public has directed.



How Will the Regional Plan Actually Work?

The Regional Plan will outline the vision of the future of HRM. But it is not a stand alone document.

The Regional Plan has a 25-year life span. Some parts will start to take effect immediately and you will see results quickly. Others will happen over time.

To make the Regional Plan happen, many municipal documents will need to be adapted to adjust to the new policies.

There are currently 18 Municipal Planning Strategies (MPS) - more commonly known as community plans - in HRM. These plans outline growth strategies for communities and have their own set of by-laws that apply specifically to them.

They deal with development, transportation and many other topics at a community or local level. They are the plans that help keep communities or areas different and unique.

The community plans are effective in realising the local goals, but they don't realise the Regional Planning outcomes, like a regional transportation system, a regional parks system or regional economic infrastructure.

The Regional Plan, on the other hand, is a policy document that outlines the policies that will be used across the entire Halifax Regional Municipality. It will provide overall strategies for how HRM should grow and develop. It will provide minimum standards that the community plans will need to meet.

Some aspects of the existing community plans will need to be adapted to meet these policies, once the Regional Plan is approved.

A new Regional Land Use Bylaw will also be a part of the Regional Plan. This is an implementation document. That is, it will explain - through specific regulations - how the policies in the Regional Plan will be carried out.

For example, one goal of the Regional Plan is to "Enhance rural and local economies and reinforce rural quality of life." (Goal 4.7). One part of achieving this goal is to specify how HRM will support natural resource industries like agriculture, forestry, mining and fishing.

This one element of the Regional Plan could affect the various plans in the following ways:

Regional Plan: The Regional Plan could include a general policy designating certain areas as rural resource lands. It would also include a map outlining the "Rural Resource" lands. This would mean these lands would be used primarily for resource based economic activities like agriculture, forestry, mining and fishing.

Regional Land Use (Zoning) Bylaw: The Regional Land Use, or Zoning Bylaw, would create a "Rural Resource Zone". It would outline specifically what resource uses would be permitted and under what conditions. (i.e. what agricultural, forestry, mining, fishery or other natural resource uses would be permitted on these lands.) The Regional Land Use Bylaw could also stipulate which type and amount of secondary uses, like recreation, tourism or residential, would be permitted within the zone.

Community Plans: The community plans would contain more detailed policies dealing with opportunities and issues important at the local or community level. These may include policies regarding the types and locations of facilities used for resource-based industries that could be built on the rural resource land. These could include policies about agricultural processing plants, sawmills, pulp mills or fish processing facilities.

The community plans would also outline the method for approving construction of these facilities. They could also contain more specific policies regarding where and how much residential development, or other uses, could occur within the "Rural Resource Zone".

Community Land Use (Zoning) Bylaws: The Community Land Use, or Zoning Bylaws, would contain a more detailed "Rural Resource Zone" for the particular area. They would describe exactly what would be permitted on each specific parcel of land. They would also include regulations outlining how development may occur, including things like lot size, setback provisions, screening/buffering requirements, road access requirements, parking requirements, etc.

Between the Regional Plan & the Community Plan Review

After the Regional Plan is adopted, but before the community plans are reviewed, development will continue to be permitted. There may be measures, like development agreements, put in place during this time that would provide development opportunities consistent with the new Regional Plan policies. This would involve considerable public input.

The community plans, or Municipal Planning Strategies, are the plans most residents are familiar with. However, the Regional Planning policies could also have an impact on other government policies and documents that will need to be updated and adjusted to fit with the new Regional Plan.

An outline of what will be included in the Regional Plan and how the Regional Plan will work in conjunction with other documents will be explained in more detail in future Regional Planning communications.

Legal Terms

The legal or legislative term for the Regional Plan is the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS).

The legal or legislative term for a community plan is a Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS).



Working With Other Levels of Government

As a municipality, HRM has its own governing body - the Mayor and Regional Council. They operate as authorized under the Provincial Municipal Government Act (MGA).

The Municipal Government Act governs the activities and operations of all local governments in Nova Scotia. It regulates what HRM has authority over and what we can't change alone.

According to the Municipal Government Act, the purpose of a Regional Plan (or any municipal



Elements of the Regional Plan, like protecting environmentally significant lands will require co-operation among different levels of government.

planning strategy) is to guide the development and management of the municipality.

HRM's Regional Plan will be subject to the review and approval of the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations.

Once the Regional Plan is approved by Regional Council, the Minister's staff will review the document to make sure it complies with matters of provincial interest like housing, flood risk areas, drinking water, agriculture and infrastructure.

The Municipal Government Act currently doesn't include provisions to carry out some of the policies being considered in the Regional Plan.

With this in mind, Regional Planning staff have been working closely with representatives from the Province to ensure they are aware of what those policies will likely include. This co-operative partnership is critical to ensuring the approval of the Regional Plan and to facilitate its implementation.

Some of the government departments involved in the Regional Planning process include Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations; Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Labour and federally, Environment Canada.

Interim Growth Measures... What Happens Next?

Interim growth measures (IGM) were adopted in January 2004 to allow Regional Council and the public to have valuable input into the pattern of development for the future of HRM.

Without these measures, there was a clear risk that hundreds or thousands of as-of-right development applications would be sent through the system before any new guidelines were established. That would mean the Regional Plan would have had little effect on where HRM would grow. The decisions would already have been made.

Once the Regional Plan is adopted, the *interim* growth measures will be lifted as the Regional Plan is implemented, creating a *permanent* growth management program. This will encourage development in some areas of the region and limit it in other areas.

The Regional Plan will identify the areas that research and public input have determined are the best places to develop. It will provide policies that limit development to those areas that want to grow and where it would be cost-effective to support new development.

Some of the areas currently covered by the IGM will become growth centres, where development is encouraged. The Regional Planning policies will influence what type of development is permitted. For example, more clustered and mixed-use development will encourage residences and small businesses to co-exist in new neighbourhoods or subdivisions.

This encourages walkable communities and a healthier lifestyle. It also preserves more open space

and makes it easier and more cost-effective to provide some municipal services. Public input has indicated it is important to achieve these goals.

Although growth will be guided to new and existing centres (see page 2), some growth will take place *between* centres as well. However, development approvals will depend on economic and environmental factors. For example, proof of sufficient quality and quantity of water or sufficient transportation capacity could be required before a new unserviced subdivision would be approved.

Monitoring the IGM

A report being presented to Regional Council this fall, outlines the impact of the interim growth measures. They are being monitored by four key elements: lot and house prices; lot availability; housing affordability and employment in the construction sector.



HRM and the Province are working together to include proof of sufficient well water quality and quantity as a requirement before a new unserviced subdivision will be approved.



You Asked About...

Balancing Urban and Rural Lifestyles

Encompassing Downtown Halifax, Downtown Dartmouth and the Gottingen Street, Spring Garden Road and Quinpool Road areas, the Capital District belongs to every resident of HRM. It is the regional and provincial centre for government, business, culture and entertainment. Maintaining this strong centre is critical to the region as a whole.

The Capital District is a destination for businesses, for residents and for tourists.

Having a major regional business district allows informal, but important interactions like face-to-face meetings with business professionals or government officials. This proximity is critical for interdependent operations like hospitals and research facilities or insurance companies and banks, which play an important role in a vibrant, globally-competitive economy. Having a strong economic core also helps attract new business to our region.

Similarly, tourists can enjoy a variety of activities close to many downtown hotels. Museums, boat cruises, shopping and a wide variety of restaurants are just a short walk away.

A strong centre is also important for maintaining an efficient public transportation system. Public transit can be focussed on getting people from a wide range of locations to one central destination.

However, the focus on the Capital District cannot detract attention from the important suburban and rural areas of HRM.



The Regional Plan will need to strike a balance between the very different, but equally important, urban and rural lifestyles in HRM.

User-pay Initiatives

HRM wants to ensure that new growth can pay for itself. Some services, like road maintenance and garbage collection are universal - everyone in the municipality receives them. They're paid for by property taxes.

Other services are area-specific. There are different ways that these services are paid for, including area rates and capital cost charges. These are examples of user-pay initiatives that can be used to ensure the service is paid for by the resident who is receiving it and not necessarily by the whole municipality.

The Regional Plan will include policies, where appropriate, that encourage this kind of innovative method of cost sharing among the municipality, developers and new residents.



Some services, like road maintenance are paid through property taxes, others require cost sharing by area residents.

More than 'bedroom communities', the suburbs and rural areas of HRM also make a valuable contribution to the whole region.

Mining, farming, fishing, forestry and other rural enterprises add variety to HRM's economy, which helps keep it strong and dynamic.

The rural landscape also encourages healthy lifestyles by offering opportunities for hiking, boating, skiing and other physical activities.

The beauty of our region lies in our rich diversity. Office workers can easily commute from their busy, bustling downtown office building to a trendy urban condo, to a friendly, efficient suburb or to their family home on a farm or in a fishing village.

Residents can as easily take in a world-class event like the Nova Scotia International Tattoo, as go deep sea fishing or for a wilderness hike in one of our many regional parks.

Protecting these very different elements of HRM will help provide a lifestyle choice that is, or should be, the envy of anyone not lucky enough to live here.

Groundwater Quality & Quantity

Currently no studies are required before HRM gives approval to new subdivisions to determine if an adequate quantity and quality of groundwater is available to support the new population.

In some unserviced subdivisions in HRM, increased development has directly impacted the quantity of water available for the existing wells. Residents have had to drill deeper and deeper, running the risk that their well will run completely dry.

The Regional Plan will include policies that facilitate proper studies being carried out to verify that there is sufficient water quality and quantity **before** a new subdivision will be approved.

To do this, changes must be made to the provincial Municipal Government Act.

Regional Planning staff are currently working with the Province to determine the appropriate changes to the legislation.

You Asked About...

Housing Affordability

The Regional Plan could have a direct impact on housing affordability. If the Municipality doesn't plan growth carefully, housing prices could increase. However, with a well researched Regional Plan, we will be able to better provide a range of affordable housing in HRM.

One key to maintaining housing affordability is defining where the urban growth boundary should be - that is the line inside which piped services like water and sewer are offered.



1975 Regional Development Boundary

If the area is too small, the supply of serviced land won't be able to keep up with the demand, which will drive up the cost of purchasing a house. If the serviced area is too large, it will cost the municipality too much to provide the services and property taxes will go up. Either way, residents would pay more.

The Regional Plan will identify where the urban growth boundary will go; where it will strike the best balance to keep both the cost of housing and the cost of property taxes low.

Another key to maintaining housing affordability is to encourage mixed-use developments. A mix of housing types on vacant urban sites will ensure a range of housing costs and styles that meet a variety of needs and income levels.

Transportation investment also plays an important role in maintaining housing affordability. The Regional Plan is focussing on providing more easily accessible public transit. That will reduce the need for residents to own cars to commute to work. It costs approximately \$10,000 per year to own and operate a car. An efficient transit system could help a family get by with only one car, instead of needing two or more.

The Regional Open Space Plan

Open space includes forests, rivers, lakes, bays, farms, environmentally sensitive areas, human heritage sites, parks, golf courses and any other land or water area that is kept permanently or semi-permanently undeveloped.

Any land that is only slightly modified can also be classified as open space. This kind of land can be set aside for environmental, recreational and resource values and issues.

Open space planning is the foundation of the Regional Planning process. The green and blue open spaces around our communities have shaped where we live. Now we want to shape where we live around them.

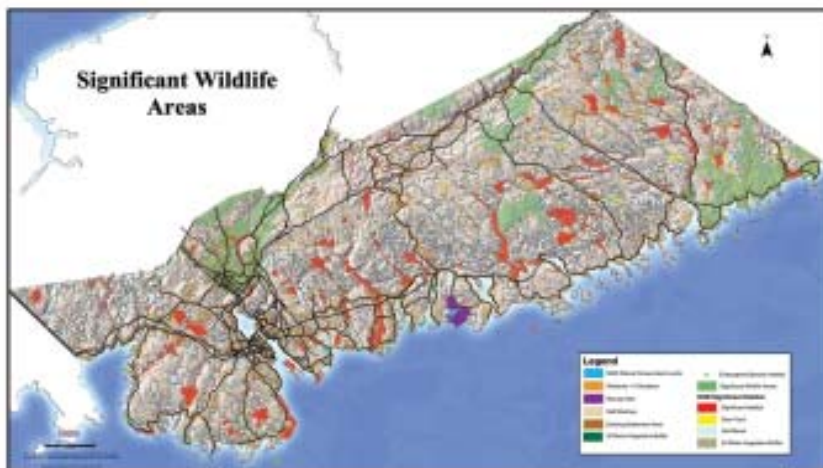
The retention of open space for farming, fishing, forestry, hunting, tourism, recreation and mining is important to ensure we continue to benefit from our natural resources.

By preserving open space for environmental and economic development, we can also conserve wildlife and ensure that our water remains fishable and swimmable.

Much of HRM's open space and natural resource land has been categorized and mapped as part of the Regional Planning process.

Some of these maps include our currently protected natural resources and open space, potential regional parks and open spaces and significant wildlife areas.

Visit the Regional Planning website at www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning to view the maps and learn more. (Microsoft Explorer required for optimum viewing.)



Protecting as much open space and natural resource land as possible is a critical element of the Regional Plan.



Community Involvement

Valuable, timely and effective input from residents is a critical part of ensuring the Regional Plan outlines the future that HRM citizens really want.

For the past two years, public consultation on the Regional Plan has focussed on information sharing and information seeking, with HRM residents and community groups offering opinions on a wide variety of topics. It is this feedback that has shaped the Regional Plan so far.

But it doesn't stop there. Over the next several months, HRM will continue to provide citizens and stakeholder groups with information about the evaluation process and the recommendation of a preferred alternative to Regional Council. Watch the Regional Planning website and local media for updates. The recommended alternative - which will be the basis of the Regional Plan - is expected to go before Regional Council in December.

If you are interested in further information, or belong to a group that would like a staff presentation, please contact the Regional Planning project office.

Implementation Working Group

Members of the Implementation Working Group represent the many sectors interested in and directly impacted by the Regional Plan. They represent business, heritage, tourism, the environment, natural resources, health care and the development industry. Residents groups will also be included.

Beginning in late October, this group will meet regularly to discuss the various tools that will be needed to implement the policies outlined in the Regional Plan. They will work through and collaborate on finding solutions that best meet the diverse needs of all sectors. Their recommended implementation tools could include regulatory, financial and incentive-based tools.

Upcoming Public Input

Following Regional Council's endorsement of a preferred alternative, targeted for year's end, a series of public meetings will outline for residents what opportunities it will offer for the region. The meetings will outline in further detail where the new residential growth areas and transportation requirements will be, as well as some details about the policies that will be needed to make it all happen.

Watch for the dates and locations of these meetings to be announced early in the New Year.

Public Hearing

Ultimately, the Regional Planning Committee expects to deliver a Regional Plan to Regional Council in the spring of 2005. This will begin a formal adoption process, which will include another series of public information meetings and a formal public hearing. The hearing will be the final opportunity to participate in the Regional Planning process.

Stay up to date!

Things are happening very quickly with Regional Planning. To best keep you up to date, we're putting together an email distribution list. We will only use it to keep you informed of upcoming events or major milestones in the Regional Planning process. If you would like to add your name to the email list, please contact us at regplan@halifax.ca or 490-5857.



Regional Planning Process and Time Frame

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| Step 1 Public Awareness Campaign
(June to September 2003) | Step 5 Evaluation of Alternatives
(June to October 2004) |
| Step 2 Public Consultation to Develop Goals,
Objectives & Opportunities
(September to December 2003) | Step 6 Recommend Alternative to Council
(October to December 2004) |
| Step 3 Develop Alternatives
(December 2003 to March 2004) | Step 7 Develop Regional Plan
(December 2004 to March 2005) |
| Step 4 Public Consultation on the
Alternatives
(March to June 2004) | Step 8 Adoption of Regional Plan
(approximately 4 to 6 months) |



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