



**City of Halifax**

# **Halifax Common Plan**



October 1994

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## **City Council Approval of the Halifax Common Plan - 13 October 1994**

*This Halifax Common Plan was approved by Halifax City Council on 13 October 1994.*

### **Approving Resolution:**

#### **Re: Halifax Common Plan**

1. adopt the changes to the Draft Halifax Common Plan as shown in Appendix A of the staff report dated 23 September 1994;
2. adopt the amended Halifax Common Plan as a basis for management, detailed planning, capital expenditures and evaluation of proposals for the Halifax Common;
3. instruct staff to incorporate the Halifax Common Plan in the Municipal Development Plan and investigate and recommend other appropriate legislation, such as an ordinance, to implement this plan;
4. instruct staff to prepare a five year capital and operating plan for the Halifax Common for Council's consideration and inclusion in the City's budget.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A team of city staff from the Development and Planning, Engineering and Works and Recreation Departments have been responsible for the preparation of this plan. They include:

### **Development and Planning Department**

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### **Engineering and Works Department**

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### **Recreation Department**

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Other City of Halifax staff involved in the plan preparation were:

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Engineering and Works Department:  
B. N. Kennedy, Traffic Services Supervisor.

The planning process was coordinated by Bernard Moe, Planner II, under the supervision of William B. Campbell, Senior Planner.

The plan also reflects many of the concerns and ideas gained from the public through workshops and written submissions. The public input is documented in a separate report entitled: **Halifax Common - Summary of Results of Public Meeting and Workshops (27,28,29 November 1992) and Written Submissions.**

## HALIFAX COMMON PLAN - TABLE OF CONTENTS

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

i

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Planning Process 1

Approach and Organization 1

#### B. HALIFAX COMMON

Overall Goal 2

History 2

Description 3

Objectives and Policies 3

1. Public Place with Diverse Uses 3

2. Special Character, History and Beauty 5

3. Circulation System 11

4. Relationship to Downtown and Surrounding Neighbourhoods 14

#### C. CITY-OWNED LAND AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

Overall Goal 16

Description 16

Objectives and Policies 17

1. Continuous Open Space and Pathway System 17

2. Preserve Public Open Space 20

3. Increase City-owned Land 21

4. North and Central Commons 22

5. Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road Area 29

6. Cost Effectiveness 35

7.	Private Commercial Use and Funding	36
8.	Safety	39
<b>D.</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION - PRIORITIES</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION</b>	<b>43</b>

**TABLES**

Table 1:	City-Owned Land	17
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**LIST OF MAPS**

		<b><u>Following Page</u></b>
Map 1:	Halifax Common	3
Map 2:	Precincts in Halifax Common	3
Map 3:	Halifax Common: City-Owned Land	3
Map 4:	Halifax Common: Setting in City	3
Map 5:	Halifax Common: Ownership	4
Map 6:	Halifax Common: Selected Features	4
Map 7:	Halifax Common: Views and Landmarks	6
Map 8:	Halifax Common: Major Traffic Routes	11
Map 9:	Halifax Common: Pedestrian Links	13
Map 10:	Halifax Common: Recapture Lands	21
Map 11:	North Common, Central Commons and Wanderer's Grounds - Existing Features	22

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This plan contains concepts, policies, and actions for the Halifax Common.

In the Parkland Plan for Halifax, which was adopted by Council in 1991, a plan for the Halifax Common was scheduled for preparation in 1992-1993. To reinforce this in August 1991, Council requested that staff bring forward a plan for the Halifax Common. This request arose partly from concern about the increasing number of changes and demands for use and the need for a plan and additional protection for the Halifax Common.

Terms of reference and a planning process were then set out and followed. Background research was carried out and documented in the **Halifax Common Background Report** completed in November 1992. Following that, public views were obtained through workshops and written briefs. These public views have been documented in **Halifax Common - Summary of Results of Public Meeting and Workshops(27,28,29 November 1992) and Written Submissions**. These two documents should be consulted in conjunction with the plan.

The main goals of the plan are to:

- o Provide short and long term direction for the whole Halifax Common within the original land grant. This is about 235 acres including both built up areas and open space.
- o Provide short and long term direction for design and use of city-owned land and open space within the Halifax Common. This is approximately 158 acres including parkland, building sites, streets, sidewalks, and boulevards.

### Halifax Common

The first part of the plan deals with the entire Halifax Common within the original 235 acre grant made in 1763. The boundaries of the original grant were not well defined until 1859 when there were streets around the entire Common. The Halifax Common in this document is based on the 1859 boundaries as shown on Map 1.

This larger area is dealt with under four headings as follows:

#### **Public Place with Diverse Uses**

First and foremost the Halifax Common is a public place. A significant portion is still publicly owned by municipal, provincial or federal government with a mixture of public or quasi-public buildings and large public open spaces. Private use and private ownership has been quite limited and only a small portion along Spring Garden Road is in private ownership. There is a diversity of activities and uses, largely for the public, which includes health care, education, sports, recreation, gardens, and cultural activities.

The primarily public use is in keeping with the provisions of the original charter provisions which call for the Common to be for "the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax forever." Although the range of public uses have changed with time, by and large, this original intention was followed.

The following key recommendations are made:

- o Maintain and increase the public nature and accessibility.
- o Permit private use within defined limits.
- o Promote and protect diversity of activities and places.

### **Special Character, History and Beauty**

The entire Halifax Common as it exists today has a distinct character and integrity of its own. This plan recommends that the distinct character and integrity be recognized and strengthened and that a common design language be developed to create a cohesiveness throughout the Common.

Aspects of the special character include:

- o **Open Space.** Open space is evident throughout, either in the form of wide open spaces, or buildings interspersed with open space.
- o **Trees.** Trees are abundant on streets, boulevards, and in larger stands. These are an important living legacy.
- o **Views and Landmarks.** These provide interest, a visual focus, identity, sense of place and facilitate orientation.
- o **Historic Significance.** Historic events and places in the Halifax Common are an important part of Halifax's heritage.
- o **Freshwater Brook.** The original grant was based on the lands which drained into Freshwater Brook. Griffin's Pond in the Public Gardens and the Egg Pond are remaining parts.
- o **Public Buildings.** There are many large and widely spaced public buildings.
- o **Wide Streets.** These streets include important arterial routes to Downtown.
- o **Wide Sidewalks.** These are particularly evident near the Public Gardens and Victoria Park.

- o **Black Iron Fences.** These border public open spaces and both public and private developments.
- o **Strong Edges.** Strong edges are created through contrast between the larger scale public development and open spaces inside the Halifax Common and the more dense, private development outside.

### **Circulation System**

Safe and efficient vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic circulation and parking is important. Because of its location adjacent to the Downtown, several major traffic routes go through the Halifax Common. This plan recommends the following:

- o Investigate street patterns and traffic issues in a larger context to determine opportunities for changes to streets in the Halifax Common.
- o Improve pedestrian connections both in built up areas and open space.
- o Maintain and enhance current parking, particularly in the areas adjacent to the public open space.
- o Provide more bicycle stands and continue use of off-street pathways for bicycle travel.

### **Relationship to Downtown and Surrounding Neighbourhoods.**

Events, activities and attractions in the Halifax Common relate closely to the rest of the Downtown area and surrounding neighbourhoods. This plan recommends strengthening relationships to the rest of the Downtown area and surrounding neighbourhoods through strong pedestrian connections and other means.

### **City-Owned Land and Public Open Space.**

The second part of the plan deals with the city-owned land, which is largely public open space for public recreational or leisure activities. Within the 235 acres, the City of Halifax owns and has control over about 158 acres as shown on Map 3. Of this 158 acres, approximately 94 acres are accounted for by: North Common, Central Common, Wanderer's Grounds, Camp Hill Cemetery, the Public Gardens, Victoria Park, Parks and Grounds Depot, historic residence at the corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road, Junior Bengal Lancers (Leased), Wanderer's Lawn Bowling (Leased), Seniors' Building (Leased), Fire Station on University Avenue, Civic Hospital on University Avenue, Dairy Deli on Robie Street, Queen Elizabeth High School, and the former Grace Maternity Hospital. Streets, sidewalks and boulevards account for the remaining 64 acres of city-owned land.

Important features of the city-owned land and open space and the recommended directions for this land are:



## **Continuous Open Space and Pathway System**

The city-owned parcels form a continuous open space and pathway system practically throughout the Halifax Common from north to south. This plan recommends strengthening the continuous open space and pathway system and providing greater access to some parts.

## **Preserve Public Open Space**

The loss of public open space was a major public concern and it was pointed out that public buildings, while still used for public purposes, are no substitute for open space. This plan recommends there be no further loss of public open space.

## **Increase City-Owned Land**

City Council specifically called for the Halifax Common Study to identify:

"Ways and means of protecting the integrity of the Common including opportunities for recapturing areas formerly part of the historic Common."

This plan recommends that the city seek to recapture, through ownership, some of the land it formerly owned, when existing buildings are no longer required. Some possibilities for recapture are identified as: the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; Nova Scotia Community College - Halifax Campus; and the Victoria General Hospital parking lot on South Park Street. Two city properties, Queen Elizabeth High School, and the former Grace Maternity Hospital are being used by other agencies but revert to the city when they are no longer in use by those agencies.

## **North and Central Commons**

This is the area that most people think of as "the Common" and the largest and the most used part of the open space system. This area serves several functions including: organized sports; activity centre for children and youth; passive or casual recreation; special events; and, a major travel route for pedestrians, cars, busses and bicycles. Balancing these activities and physical improvements to the facilities are important issues.

This plan recommends the following:

- o Incorporate more landscaping and trees on the North Common, retaining important views where appropriate.
- o Continue use for organized sports but create a better balance by providing space for more passive, unorganised activities.
- o Improve safety through redesign and relocation of activities and pathways.

- o Recognize that the area serves partially as a neighbourhood park.
- o Redesign and possibly relocate the Centennial fountain.
- o Upgrade the swimming and wading (spray) pools and the Egg Pond as part of an integrated water feature. In 1994 a skate boarding facility is to be put in the Egg Pond. This should be regarded as a short term use.
- o Improve the physical link between the two areas.
- o Prepare a detailed design for the North and Central Commons.

### **Wanderer's Ground and Bell Road Area**

The Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road area is an important part of the public open space system. This is a key location close to the Public Gardens and the commercial areas in the Downtown. Besides the Wanderer's Grounds this block includes the Parks and Grounds Peninsula Depot, the Junior Bengal Lancers, the Wanderer's Lawn Bowling Club and the Seniors' building. The Parks and Grounds Depot will have to remain as part of this area in the shorter term. The existing location of the Parks and Grounds Depot is very efficient for serving the Halifax Common area and the entire Peninsula and considerable investment has recently been made to improve it.

This plan recommends the following:

- o Over the long term, make the entire block into a multi-purpose, all season public activity area including athletic, cultural and special events with general public use and access.
- o Prepare a detailed design for the Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road Area in order to achieve this.
- o Continue use as an important athletic venue with improvements for baseball and field sports (e.g., soccer, football).
- o Investigate and pursue other options for the location of the Parks and Grounds Depot, except for the greenhouses, over the longer term but only if the new location is equally effective for serving the Halifax Common and the Peninsula.
- o Retain and protect the historic residence at the corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road for various public uses.
- o Discuss with the Junior Bengal Lancers and the Wanderer's Lawn Bowling Club the best long term location for their facilities, whether in the Halifax Common or elsewhere.

- o Evaluate the Seniors' building and if it is concluded that retaining the building not cost effective, remove the building.

### **Cost Effectiveness**

Principles have been followed in the plan to help achieve high quality of development and maintenance while containing costs. Flexible multi-purpose use of areas are emphasized as a cost effective measure. Existing facilities are proposed to be retained whenever possible. Low maintenance costs are emphasized, geared to the ability of the city to maintain the facilities and grounds. Events that generate revenue for the city are encouraged.

### **Private Commercial Use and Funding**

A key issue is the private use of public land. Private or quasi-private groups have used some public open space for temporary events and charged admission for attendance. This issue was discussed extensively in the public sessions. There was general agreement at the public meetings that these events could be beneficial to the city as a whole and they were acceptable within limits. This plan recommends privately sponsored events allowed if approved by Council, and it is demonstrated that the event is for the benefit of the city and satisfies all goals, objectives and policies in this plan.

### **Safety**

The North Common is characterized by sports activities taking place too close to activities taking such as walking, sitting, and casual unorganised play. This plan recommends that the playing fields be separated with more space for the passive, casual activities.

Personal safety, particularly after dark, is a further concern throughout the Common and this plan recommends better lighting and design to improve this.

### **Implementation - Priorities**

This document presents an overall plan for the Halifax Common. It includes general concepts for future use and design of specific areas and policies to guide development and use. The implementation is to be phased as resources permit. The plan would be implemented in the normal budget approval process each year. There is no commitment to spending at this time.

Within the plan a number of projects have been identified as priorities. The following are the proposed priorities:

1. Maintain and enhance the special character and beauty of the Halifax Common. Develop a common design language to create cohesiveness throughout the whole area. This should be particularly emphasized on publicly owned land and encouraged on private property.

2. Carry out a detailed design for the North and Central Common based on the concepts and policies in this plan with special attention to:
  - Water features
  - Passive areas on the North Common
  - Neighbourhood parks
  - Views, landscaping and trees on the North Common
  - Safety
  - Paths
  - Physically linking both areas
  - Access
3. Carry out a detailed design for the Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road area based on the concepts and policies in this plan. The general concept is that the whole Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road block should, over the long term, remain under city control and be consolidated for a multi-purpose all-season public area which includes athletic events, special events, concerts, public gatherings, and general public use.
4. In conjunction with the Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road Area:
  - (a) Investigate and pursue other options for the location of the Parks and Grounds Depot, except for the greenhouses, over the longer term. Primary consideration shall be a new location which is equally effective for serving the Halifax Common and the Peninsula.
  - (b) Retain and protect the historic residence at the corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road for various public uses.
  - (c) Discuss with the Junior Bengal Lancers and the Wanderer's Lawn Bowling Club the best long term location for their facilities, whether in the Halifax Common or elsewhere.
  - (d) Evaluate the Seniors' building and if it is concluded that retaining the building is not cost effective, remove the building.
5. Encourage an appreciation and understanding of the history and role of the Halifax Common through education and interpretive means and in conjunction with this:
  - (a) Consider the design and development of a Freshwater Brook Trail with interpretive features such as signage.
  - (b) Provide interpretation and information on history and landmarks in the Halifax Common through signs and plaques and a promotional brochure.

## A. INTRODUCTION

### Planning Process

This document sets out a plan for the Halifax Common. It includes goals, objectives, policies, design concepts and actions to guide its future planning and development.

In the **Parkland Plan for Halifax - A Program for Setting Priorities for the Acquisition, Planning and Development of Parkland**: which was adopted by Council in 1991, a plan for the Halifax Common was scheduled for preparation in 1992-1993. To reinforce this, in August 1991, Council requested that staff bring forward a plan and specified elements which should be included. This request arose partly from concern about the increasing number of changes and demands for use.

Terms of reference and a planning process were then set out and followed. Background research was carried out and documented in the **Halifax Common Background Report** completed in November 1992. Following that, public views were obtained through workshops and written briefs. These public views have been documented in **Halifax Common - Summary of Results of Public Meeting and Workshops (27,28,29 November 1992)** and **Written Submissions**. These two documents should be consulted in conjunction with the plan.

### Approach and Organization

The report is organized as follows:

**Section B - Halifax Common** includes an overall goal, objectives and policies for the entire Halifax Common. The entire 235 acres of the original Common grant is shown on Map 1.

The Halifax Common area is further divided into three precincts for planning purposes - the North, Central and South Precincts as shown on Map 2.

**Section C - City-owned Land and Public Open Space** includes an overall goal, objectives and policies for the city-owned land, primarily open spaces and parks, within the larger Halifax Common as shown on Map 3.

Future use and design of these city-owned public open spaces are the primary focus.

**Section D - Implementation - Priorities**, describes projects and programs which have been identified as priorities. The implementation is to be phased over a long period as resources permit.

**Section E - Protective Legislation** examines options and provides a recommendation on legislation to be used to protect the Halifax Common and assure that the plan is followed.

## B. HALIFAX COMMON

### Overall Goal

The Halifax Common will:

Remain a vital, living part of the city and continue to serve the needs of the citizens in the spirit of the original grant.

Provide a diversity of high quality public uses and spaces.

Be a place where special physical character, beauty and history will be emphasized.

### History

The tradition of common land goes far back in history in Britain and eastern parts of North America. Common land arose from the manorial system where wasteland was given to commoners for pasturage for livestock. These lands were originally under manor lords in Britain but eventually many have come under municipal authority.

Historically common land has been subject to common rights including the right of free access for all commoners. Under these common land rights, the owner of common land was prevented by law from erecting structures and obliged to leave the land open.

Many do not realize the full extent of the Halifax Common and the features found on it. It is about 235 acres and roughly defined by the area which drained into Freshwater Brook. The Common was first surveyed in 1759. The actual grant of the Common took place in 1763. Key words in the grant are:

"I Jonathan Belcher, Esquire, Lieutenant Governor of His Majesty's Province of Nova Scotia or Acadie, by virtue of the power and authority given to me by his Present Majesty King George the Third, grant land lying and being in the Peninsula of Halifax containing in the whole two hundred and thirty five acres for a Common for the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax forever."

In 1841, the City of Halifax was incorporated and from then on management was guided by the provisions of the City Charter. The first charter gave title to the city and directed Council to manage and control it:

"to and for public and common benefit of the City of Halifax according to the true intent and meaning of the original grant."

The Common was developed primarily for public uses either in buildings or open space. Now well over half of the original area, including parkland, public streets and sidewalks and boulevards remains as open space. The type of development and the mixture of

uses make this area unique. It is important to plan the whole area, and for this purpose policies of this section of the plan cover the entire historic Halifax Common.

### Description

The Halifax Common is defined here as the entire 235 acres which was the original Common grant. By 1859 all the major roads around the Common were built providing a definite boundary. The Halifax Common used in this study and report is based on the 1859 boundary as shown on Map 1. Within the city, it is located in the Downtown area on the Peninsula just east of the Central Business District as shown on Map 4. In a broader context, the Halifax Common and Point Pleasant Park are parts of one open space connected by Young Avenue. This larger system should be strengthened.

For purposes of planning the area is divided into three precincts as shown on Map 2: North, Central and South. The precincts will be referred to in the plan.

**The North Precinct** is the area which most people would recognize as "The Common". It is bounded by Cogswell, Robie, Cunard and North Park Streets.

**The Central Precinct** is bounded by Cogswell Street, Robie Street, Jubilee Road, the boundary line between the Nova Scotia Museum and the city-owned land to the south and Ahern Avenue.

**The South Precinct** is bounded by the boundary line between the Nova Scotia Museum and the city-owned land to the south, South Park Street, South Street, Robie Street and Jubilee Road.

For planning purposes, the western slopes of Citadel Hill are regarded as an associated area.

### Objectives and Policies

There are four main objectives for the Halifax Common. The following is a discussion of each. After each objective are policies to achieve the objective.

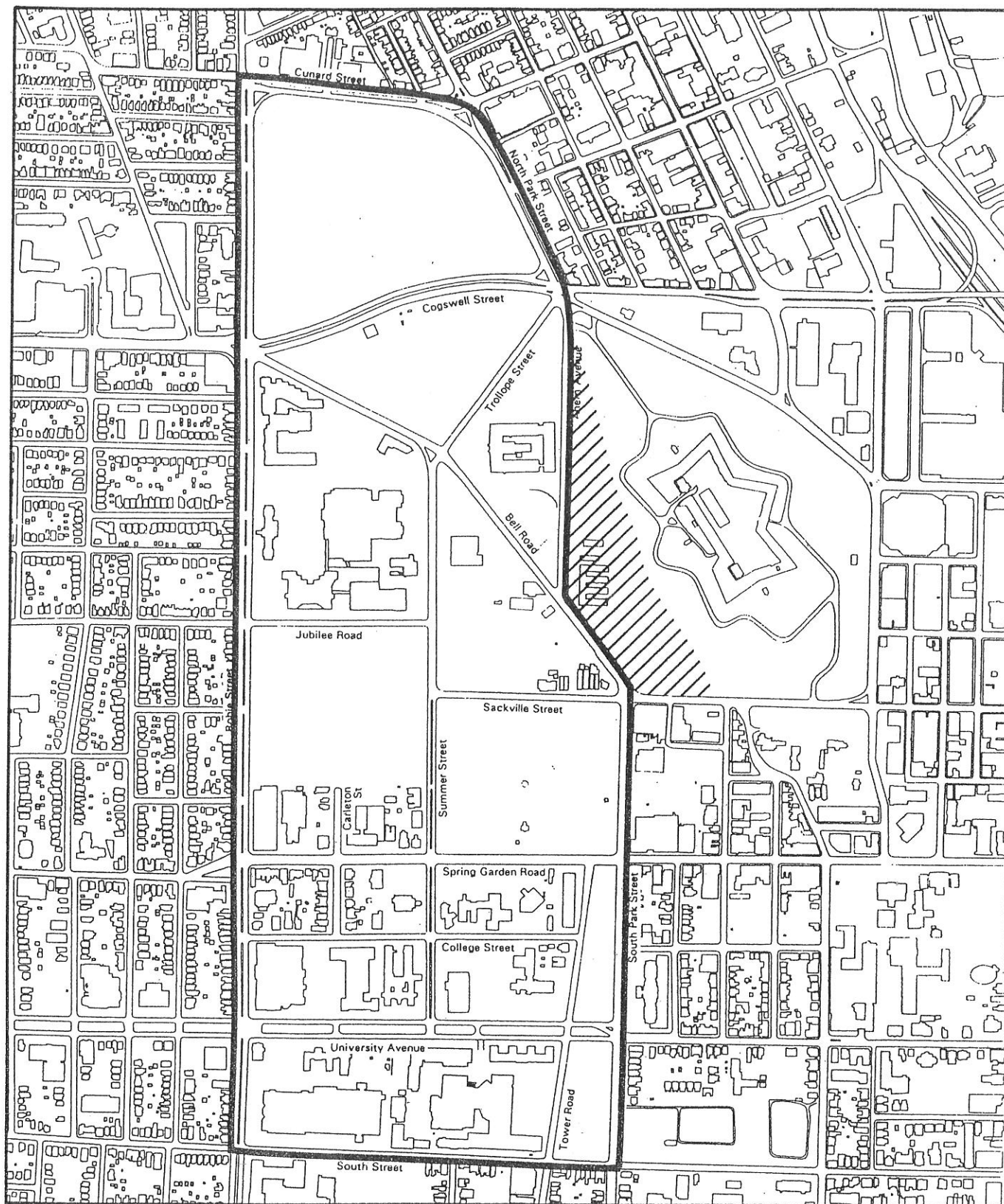
#### 1. Public Place with Diverse Uses

##### **Objective:**

**A public place where a diversity of uses and activities will continue in harmony.**

There has been a history of placing public facilities and institutions on the Halifax Common in the interest of the "public good". Within this 235 acres, most buildings and open spaces are public or quasi-public. Over 200 acres, including streets, are still publicly owned. Most buildings were constructed by the provincial government including hospitals, university, museum, and community college. There is one Federal Government building, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation building and two religious

# Map 1: Halifax Common



— Halifax Common  
▨ Associated Area

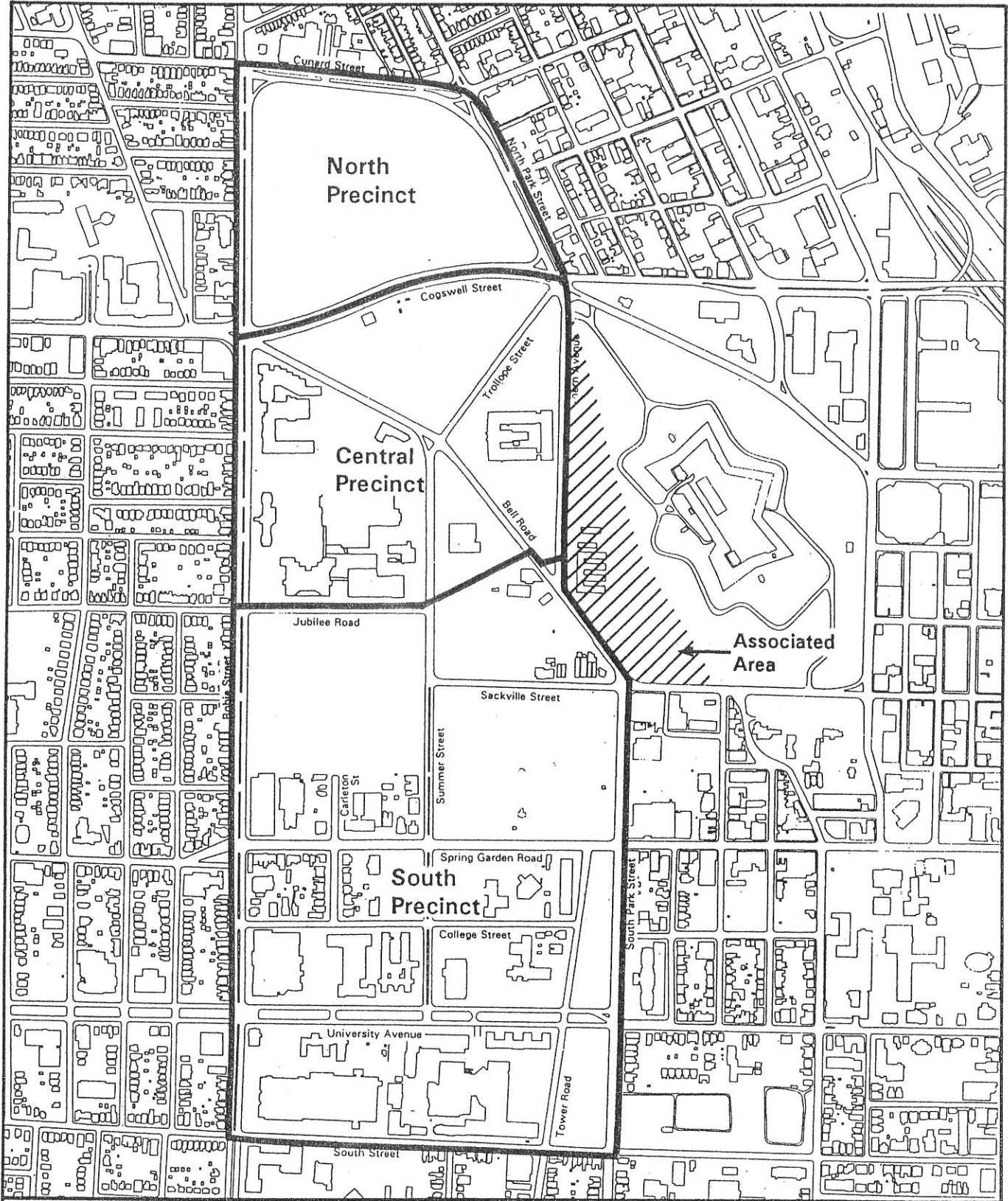
6 June, 1994



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Map 2: Precincts in Halifax Common

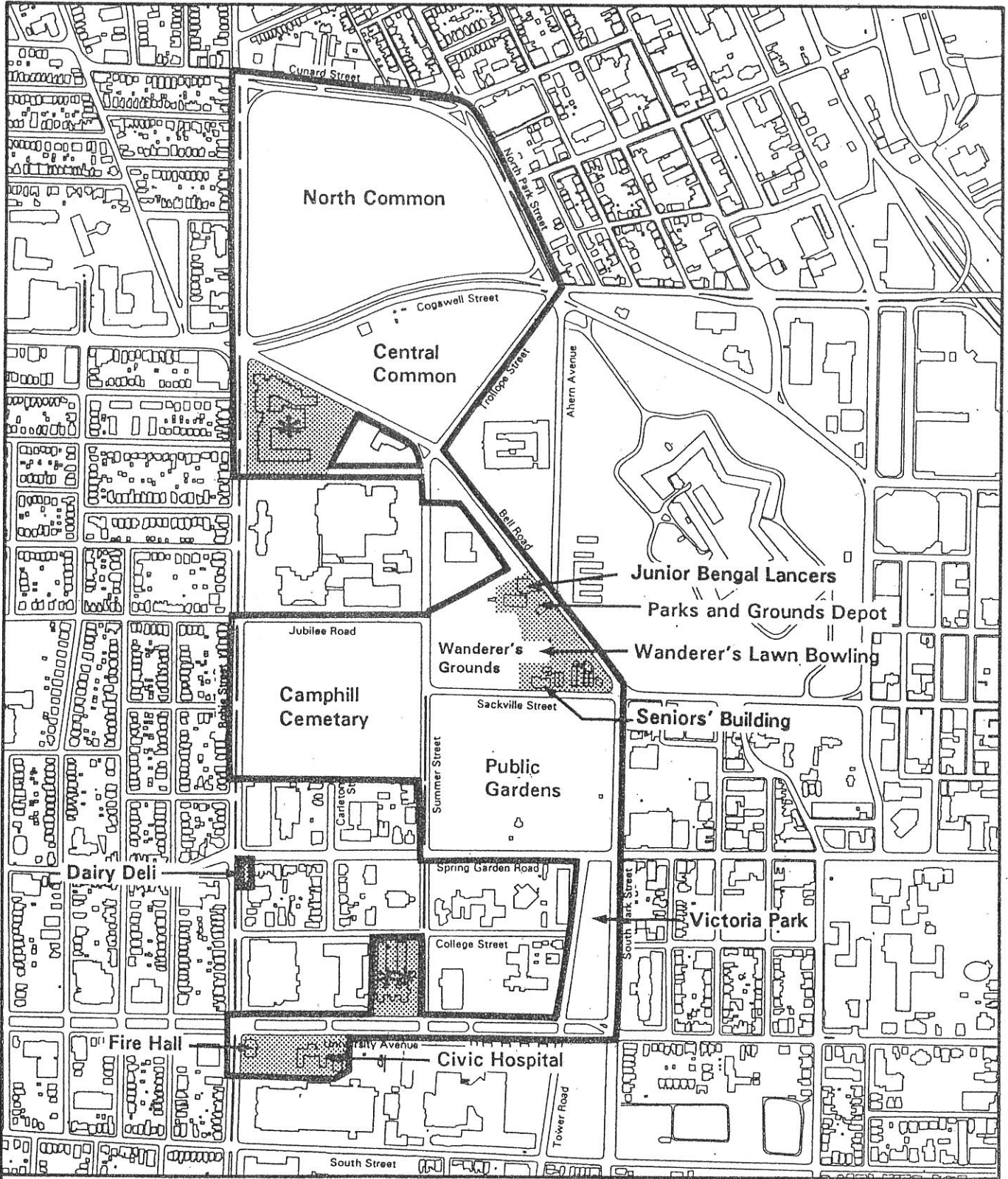


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# Map 3: Halifax Common - City-Owned Land



City-Owned Lands
  Public Open Space
  Other

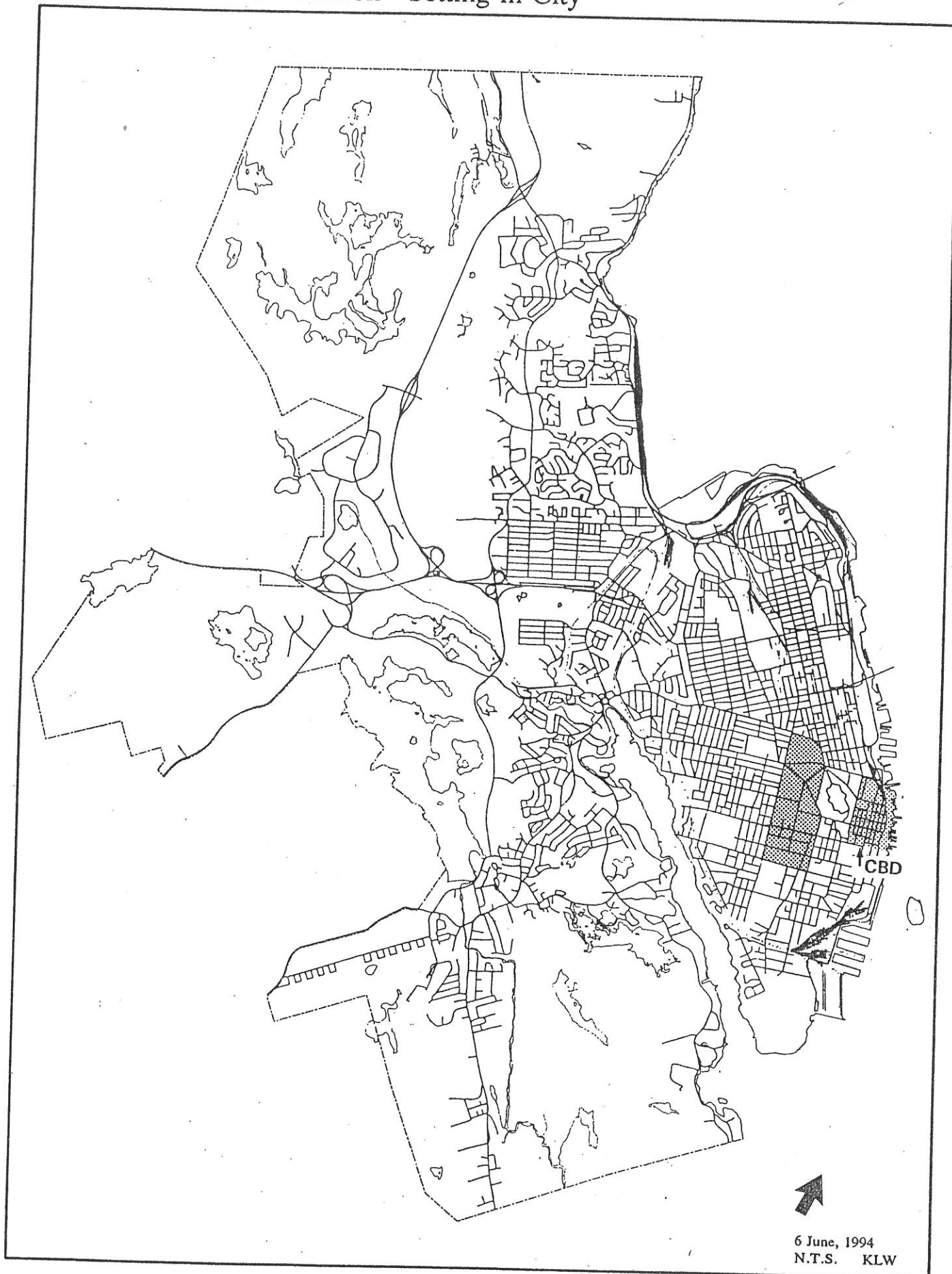
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\* Reverts to City of Halifax when declared surplus.  
 \*\* Reverts to City of Halifax when no longer used for maternity hospital or education.

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Map 4: Halifax Common - Setting in City



6 June, 1994  
N.T.S. KLW

buildings - the All Saints Cathedral and Sacred Heart School of Halifax. There are about 80 acres of public open space owned by the City of Halifax, not including streets, sidewalks and boulevards. The only privately owned area is along Spring Garden Road and Carleton and Summer Streets which was deeded over to private development in the 1800's. Land ownership is shown on Map 5.

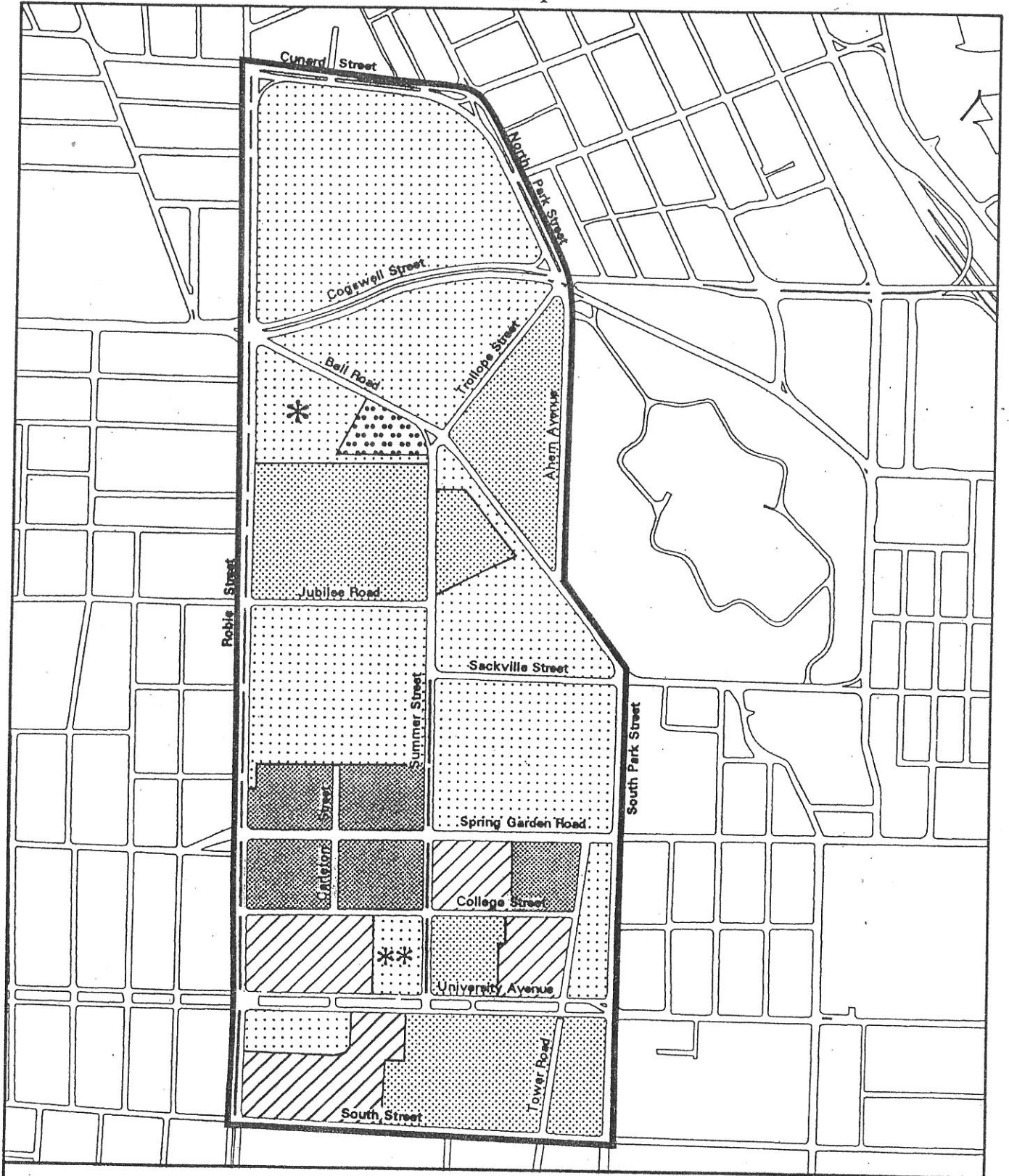
There is a richness and diversity of activities which are illustrated on Map 6 - Halifax Common: Selected Features. These include:

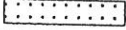
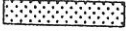

- Outdoor leisure and recreation of all types for all ages - Playing or watching sports, public gatherings, special events, children playing, people enjoying parks and gardens.
- Living in residential development on Spring Garden Road, Summer Street and Carleton Street.
- Health care in hospitals on South Street, University Avenue, Summer Street and Jubilee Road.
- Study and education in Dalhousie University, the Community College, Queen Elizabeth High School and Sacred Heart School of Halifax.
- Cultural life in the Nova Scotia Museum.
- Professional offices and some retail outlets on Spring Garden Road.
- Worship in the All Saints Cathedral.
- Major transportation routes for people going to and from the Downtown and facilities on the Common.
- Thousands of people working in or going to the various buildings and facilities.



### Policies

- 1.1 The city will continue to promote a diversity of activities in the Halifax Common which will include health care, education, sports, recreation, gardens, and cultural activities.
- 1.2 The city will maintain the public nature of the Halifax Common, as envisioned in the original terms of the grant.
- ✓ 1.3 The city will facilitate public involvement in the future planning and design of the Halifax Common.

# Map 5: Halifax Common - Ownership



-  City
-  Province
-  Federal

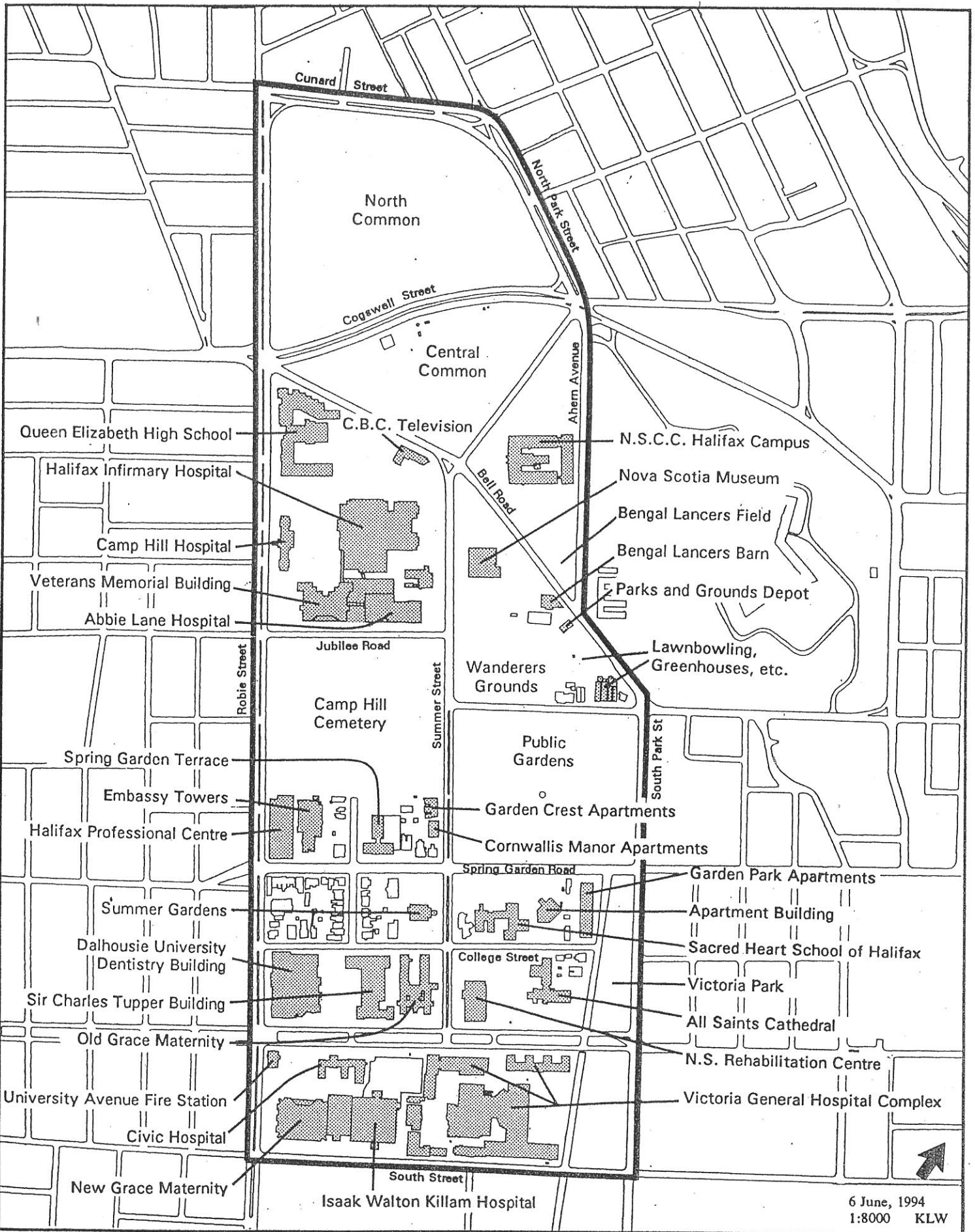
-  Private
-  Private-Institutional

6 June, 1994

\* Reverts to City of Halifax when declared surplus.  
 \*\* Reverts to City of Halifax when no longer used for maternity hospital or education.

  
 1:9000 KLW

# Map 6: Halifax Common - Selected Features



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## 2. Special Character, History and Beauty

### **Objective:**

**Strengthen the Halifax Common as a place of special character, history and beauty.**

The Halifax Common, including both built areas and open space is a special district. The 235 acres has a distinct character which can be recognized and remembered. It provides us with a sense of place. People can recognize where they are and form a mental image of the area.

This distinct character is largely due to the fact that 235 acres of land in the centre of the city were set aside for public and military uses from the beginning. This land was largely kept in public use and this has led to a mixture of public uses, architectural style and landscaping over the years. There is an opportunity to build on this distinct character and image.

The following is a description of special elements in the Halifax Common and opportunities for improvement and protection.

### **Open Green Space**

The most noticeable feature is the open green space. The most prominent part is the series of city-owned "parks" which make up over 80 acres in a nearly continuous chain which follows the original Freshwater Brook. As shown on Map 3 - City Owned Land and Public Open Space, these include the North Common, Central Common, Wanderer's Grounds, Public Gardens, Camp Hill Cemetery, Victoria Park and the boulevard on University Avenue.

This series of parks is the traditional heart of the city park system and the most central, visible and used park area in Halifax. It contributes significantly to the overall image of the city. The greenness or vegetative landscaping of these city-owned parks must be preserved and increased.

In addition to city-owned open space, there is a great deal of open green space associated with the large institutional buildings. Some examples are landscaped areas around the Nova Scotia Museum, the Community College, All Saints Cathedral and Camp Hill Hospital. Some private development within the Common such as Summer Gardens and the Park Victoria adjacent to the Common have also included significant landscaped green space.

The western slopes of the Citadel, including the Garrison Grounds, while not part of the Halifax Common, contribute significantly to a sense of open space. Also, this space offers special opportunity for special events and sporting events.

The visual interest and appeal of the open space is part of the distinct character. However, the importance of the open space goes much further than this. The city-owned open space is the most important park and recreational space on the Peninsula serving a wide range of needs.

The future design and use of the city-owned open space is covered in detail in Section C: City-Owned Land and Public Open Space.

### **Trees**

The number and extensive variety of trees adds interest. Trees occur predominantly along streets and in boulevards delineating the streets and edges of open spaces. Trees are also found in larger groups, the most notable being in Camp Hill Cemetery and the Public Gardens. The predominance of deciduous trees and a twelve foot canopy, which means no branches below twelve feet, increase the feeling of openness. Trunks and leafy crowns add interest by filtering views. Large trees also serve to add a sense of time and permanence to the area, solidifying its place in the history of the city.

### **Views and Landmarks**

Enjoyment of views is an important part of the Halifax Common experience. The views across the North Common toward the Armoury and the Citadel are excellent examples. Important views should be identified and steps taken to protect and enhance these views where possible. One example is the view looking north along South Park Street from South Street. South Park Street is wide and well treed and because it slopes down, the entire length of the street and the Citadel can be seen. However, the Victoria General hospital parking lot detracts from this view and a park or other appropriate use in place of the parking lot would open up and enhance this view.

Landmarks, natural or man-made, denote places of importance, provide visual focus, give a place identity, and help people to orient themselves in a larger context. Landmarks include: the bust of Sir Walter Scott; the ornate front gates of the Public Gardens; the statue of Robbie Burns and the Oland Fountain in Victoria Park; the Centennial Fountain on the North Common; and the sandstone armoury on North Park Street. The most prominent landmark nearby is the Halifax Citadel which can be seen from many points of the Halifax Common. These and other landmarks should be preserved. Also, the creation of other landmarks which build on the special character should be encouraged.

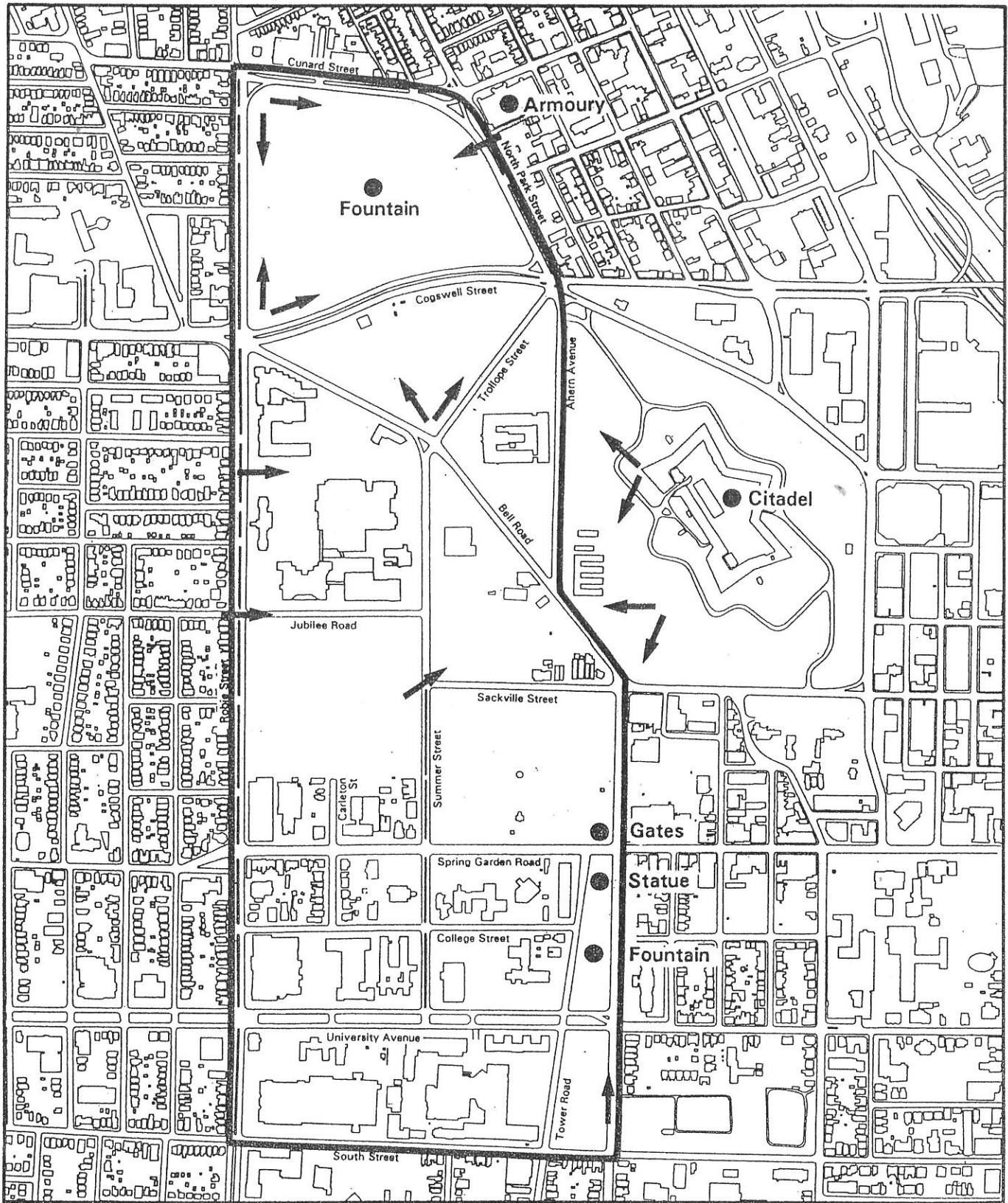
Some of the important views and landmarks are shown on Map 7.

### **Historic Significance**

The Halifax Common has a great deal of historical significance. Along with the Citadel it was the site of important historic events. The military and the Citadel played a central role in the history of the North Precinct. There are a number of registered heritage properties in the Halifax Common. The historic residence at the corner of



Map 7: Halifax Common - Views and Landmarks



← Views  
● Landmarks

6 June, 1994



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Sackville Street and Bell Road, the Public Gardens, the Sacred Heart School of Halifax, the streetscape on Carleton Street and the Garden Crest Apartments on Summer Street are registered as heritage properties by the city. The Halifax Common was designated as a historic site under the City Charter in 1971. The Garden Crest Apartments were registered by the province as a provincial heritage building and the Public Gardens were designated as a National Historic Site in 1987.

This concentration of places of historic importance, along with recreation and cultural activities, makes the Halifax Common a tourist attraction and important to Downtown businesses and the city generally.

### **Freshwater Brook**

Another historic feature is Freshwater Brook which once ran through the entire Halifax Common. The Common was roughly defined as the land which drained into Freshwater Brook. There are remnants of this brook at Griffin's Pond in the Public Gardens and the Egg Pond was once a part as well. The opportunity to build on Freshwater Brook as a theme should be further investigated. This is further elaborated on in Section C.

### **Public Buildings**

There are many large, widely spaced, public buildings which give a distinct public image. These include university buildings, hospitals, schools, and museums. In some parts a campus like setting has been created with buildings surrounded by green space. The density of buildings increases as one moves from north to south culminating in the hospital area along University Avenue. Continued beautification of these public buildings and their grounds is important.

### **Streets, Block Form and Sidewalks**

Streets, boulevards and sidewalks make up approximately 64 acres of the public land. They carry traffic but they also are part of the special character, identity and life of the Halifax Common.

The form of the streets and blocks here is different from areas immediately outside the Halifax Common. In the North and Central Precincts, streets run at odd angles rather than in the rectangular grid system. The grid is found in the South Precinct but in larger blocks with large public buildings and facilities. Only in the area which was privately developed beginning in 1818 does the street grid reappear at a scale similar to most older parts of the city.

Streets add beauty and enjoyment. For example, the boulevards on Cogswell Street, Robie Street, Summer Street and University Avenue and the many tree-lined streets add significant beauty and greenery. Underground wiring, landscaping, proper street lighting and signage could add to this. Several wide arterial streets accommodate traffic going to and from the Downtown and other employment centres. As thousands cross it by car, bus, bicycle or foot every day, it is important that the experience of travelling across or within the Common is a positive one.

Wide sidewalks, which occur predominantly in the South Precinct around the Public Gardens and Victoria park, are another important element. One of the pleasures is strolling along the wide sidewalks, separated from traffic by a wide tree-lined grassed area between the curb and sidewalk.

Traffic circulation is covered in detail under Objective 3.

### **Black Iron Fences**

Black iron fences can be found throughout the city. However, there is a notable concentration in the Central and South Precincts. These include the fences which run around the Wanderer's Grounds, Parks and Grounds Depot, Public Gardens, Camp Hill Cemetery, along the bottom of Citadel Hill, the Victoria General Hospital parking lot, and around the Oland fountain. There are over four kilometres of these fences in the Halifax Common in total. Many private developments use black iron fences to visually link and associate their developments with the Halifax Common. These include Park Victoria, Summer Gardens and the Convent of the Sacred Heart. This element should be protected and encouraged.

### **Edges**

An edge exists where there is a noticeable change or contrast between one part of an urban area and another. The greater the change, the stronger the edge. The Halifax Common has strong edges because the type of development on the public land is quite different from the development of the largely private land outside the Common. The edge of the North Precinct is defined by the contrast between the green open space and the residential and commercial development on Robie, Cunard, and North Park Streets. South of the six corners intersection, the eastern edge is formed by the western slopes of the Citadel. Further south along South Park Street the edge is formed by the contrast between the Public Gardens and Victoria Park and the commercial and residential development. Another example of contrast is the change in Spring Garden Road at South Park Street. Inside is the Public Gardens and the north end of Victoria Park while outside to the east is one of the busiest commercial areas in the city. Along South Street the edge is less clear. Along Robie Street the edge is clear with a strong residential area west of Robie Street and open space, a high school, hospitals and a cemetery to the east.

Edges are entrance points and, as such, are important places to concentrate and highlight characteristics, and locate interpretive features and landmarks.

## Policies

### General

- 2.1 Maintain and enhance the special character and beauty of the area. Develop a common design language to create cohesiveness throughout the Common. This should be particularly emphasized on publicly owned land and encouraged on private property. The elements which create this special character and beauty include: open space, trees, views and landmarks, historic significance, Freshwater Brook, public buildings, wide streets, wide sidewalks, black iron fences and strong edges.

### **Green Space**

- 2.2 Permanent and temporary parking lots should have proper landscaping, screening and maintenance.
- 2.3 Boulevards will be preserved and new ones established where appropriate. Emphasis will be placed on maintaining and enhancing boulevards with vegetative landscaping.
- 2.4 The extension of a park from the existing Victoria Park to South Street via the Victoria General Hospital parking lot should be pursued. In the short term landscaping and maintenance should be enhanced on the existing parking lot. Alternative public uses may be considered.

### **Trees**

- 2.5 Maintain and enhance the abundance and variety of trees on streets, boulevards, and in larger stands as an important living legacy.

### **Views and Landmarks**

- 2.6 The open views of the North Common as shown on Map 7 will continue to be an important component and should be preserved and enhanced where appropriate.
- 2.7 In preparing detailed designs for specific areas important views should be further identified and steps taken to enhance these views where possible.

## **Historic Significance**

- 2.8 An appreciation and understanding of the history and role of the Halifax Common will be encouraged through education and interpretive means.
- 2.9 Where appropriate, important historical elements will be protected through legislative means.
- 2.10 Interpretative information on history and landmarks through signs and plaques will be provided as appropriate.

## **Freshwater Brook**

- 2.11 Freshwater Brook should be further investigated as a special historic feature and, if appropriate, developed as a theme for future planning and development initiatives.

## **Public and Private Buildings**

- 2.12 Continued and further beautification and landscaping of public and private buildings and their grounds should be encouraged. All land and buildings should be made attractive to people at ground level, building on special characteristics of the district.

## **Streets, Block Form and Sidewalks**

- 2.13 Streets, sidewalks and pathways will receive the following treatment:
- (a) Streets, sidewalks and pathways will be made safe, pleasant, and well lit.
  - (b) Special treatment of sidewalks, lighting, benches, and signage in keeping with the character of the area should be provided.
  - (c) Cost effective alternatives to asphalt for pathways should be examined.
- 2.14 Visible services and infrastructure within the public street right-of-way, such as overhead wiring, street lights, transformers etc. should be aesthetically pleasing in keeping with the character of the Halifax Common. Overhead wiring should be put underground.

## **Black Iron Fences**

- 2.15 Black iron or its equivalent should be the primary material used for fencing on public land. Private development should be encouraged to reflect the black iron motif.
- 2.16 Functional fencing for sports activities will be permitted.

## **3. Circulation System**

### **Objective:**

**Provide an efficient and safe circulation system for vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic.**

Council specifically requested that traffic and circulation be looked at in the Halifax Common Study. Map 8 illustrates major traffic routes.

### **Street System**

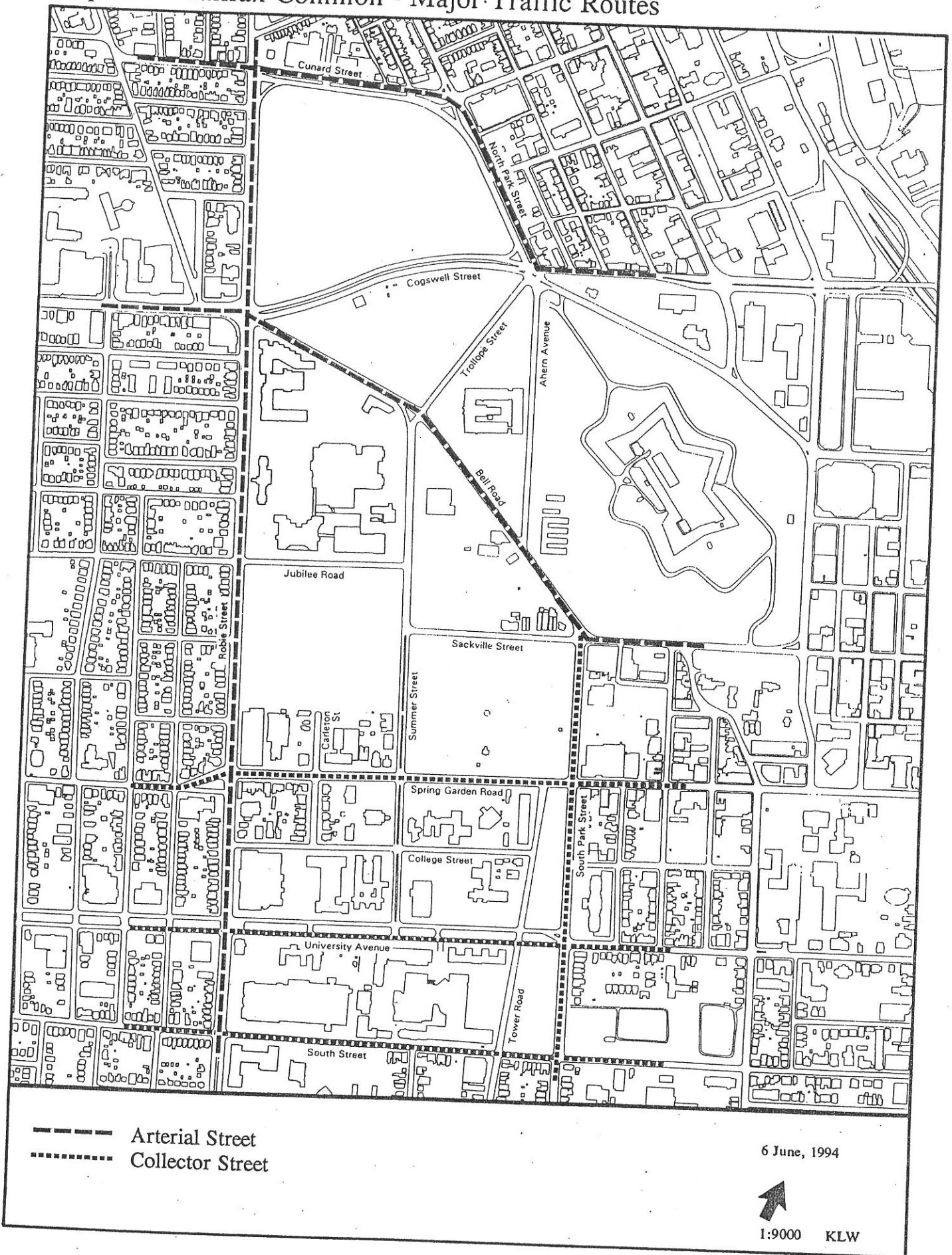
There are several principle streets through the area. Most vehicular and pedestrian traffic going to the Central Business District and employment and recreation areas in the Common passes through here.

The Task Force on City Traffic Report of May, 1991 identified Cunard Street, Bell Road and Robie Street as arterial streets and South Park Street, Spring Garden Road, University Avenue and South Street as collector streets. These major traffic routes will continue to be important to overall traffic flow. One specific traffic issue is the six corner intersection of Rainnie Drive, Cogswell Street, North Park Street, Ahern Avenue and Trollope Street. The Canadian Park Service has said that visitors to the Citadel find this intersection very confusing. Also public comment reveals that many feel it is confusing and perhaps unsafe for pedestrians. Ways of improving the intersection should be investigated.

The possibility of closing streets or opening new streets in the Halifax Common to improve traffic or the open space system was discussed by both staff and the public. Some possibilities discussed were: closing Trollope Street or Ahern Avenue; closing Sackville Street between Summer Street and South Park Street while extending Jubilee Road to Bell Road at Ahern Avenue; and realigning Ahern Avenue to connect directly to South Park Street.

However, the impact on traffic of such changes would go far beyond the Halifax Common and street patterns and traffic issues should be reviewed in a larger context. Such a review could provide an opportunity for closing, realignment or redesign of streets in the Halifax Common. While closing of streets could create more continuous open space, it could also decrease pedestrian safety because the open space is more isolated from the view of passing traffic.

Map 8: Halifax Common - Major Traffic Routes



## **Bicycles**

Travel by bicycle either to work, or for recreation (exercise, sightseeing) is becoming increasingly popular. Bicycles generally travel on city streets along with vehicular traffic and the safety of the cyclist is a concern. Part of the solution is education, safety consciousness and enforcement of traffic laws for both cyclists and drivers. Bicycle stands should be placed at appropriate locations throughout the Halifax Common. Bicycles are already permitted on paths in the North and Central Commons and Victoria Park and this should continue. A city-wide recreational trails system which is accessible to bicycles is being considered in the Long Range Parkland Plan and this should be coordinated with the Halifax Common Plan.

## **Parking**

Convenient parking is required for those who use the Halifax Common for sports or other leisure activities and future design should take these needs into account.

Some residents said there is a problem with non-residents parking in adjacent neighbourhoods. These residents requested that care be taken not make this problem worse.

## **Pedestrian Linkage**

Convenient and safe pedestrian links are important. In the South Precinct there is the particular problem of long blocks where pedestrian connections are weak. The city should encourage pedestrian links through these long blocks as illustrated on Map 9. Pedestrian linkage within the city-owned land is covered in Section C - City-Owned Land and Public Open Space.

Safe pedestrian crossing of streets, particularly near recreational activities on the Common, is important.

## Policies

### **Street System**

- 3.1 The city should investigate ways of improving traffic at the six corners intersection: Rainnie Drive, Cogswell Street, North Park Street, Ahern Avenue, Trollope Street.
- 3.2 Closing, realignment or redesign of streets within and bounding the Halifax Common should be further investigated during the proposed design plans for the North and Central Common and Wanderer's Grounds. Special attention should be paid to improvement of traffic flow, pedestrian and bicycle safety, parking and implications of any changes to connecting street systems and adjacent commercial and residential areas.



## Bicycles

- 3.3 The city should encourage bicycle travel by the following measures.
- (a) Continuing to permit and encourage bicycle travel on off-street pathways designed for that purpose.
  - (b) Placing bicycle stands at appropriate locations on city-owned land and encouraging them on other property.
  - (c) Tying bicycle routes in with city-wide bicycle route plans.

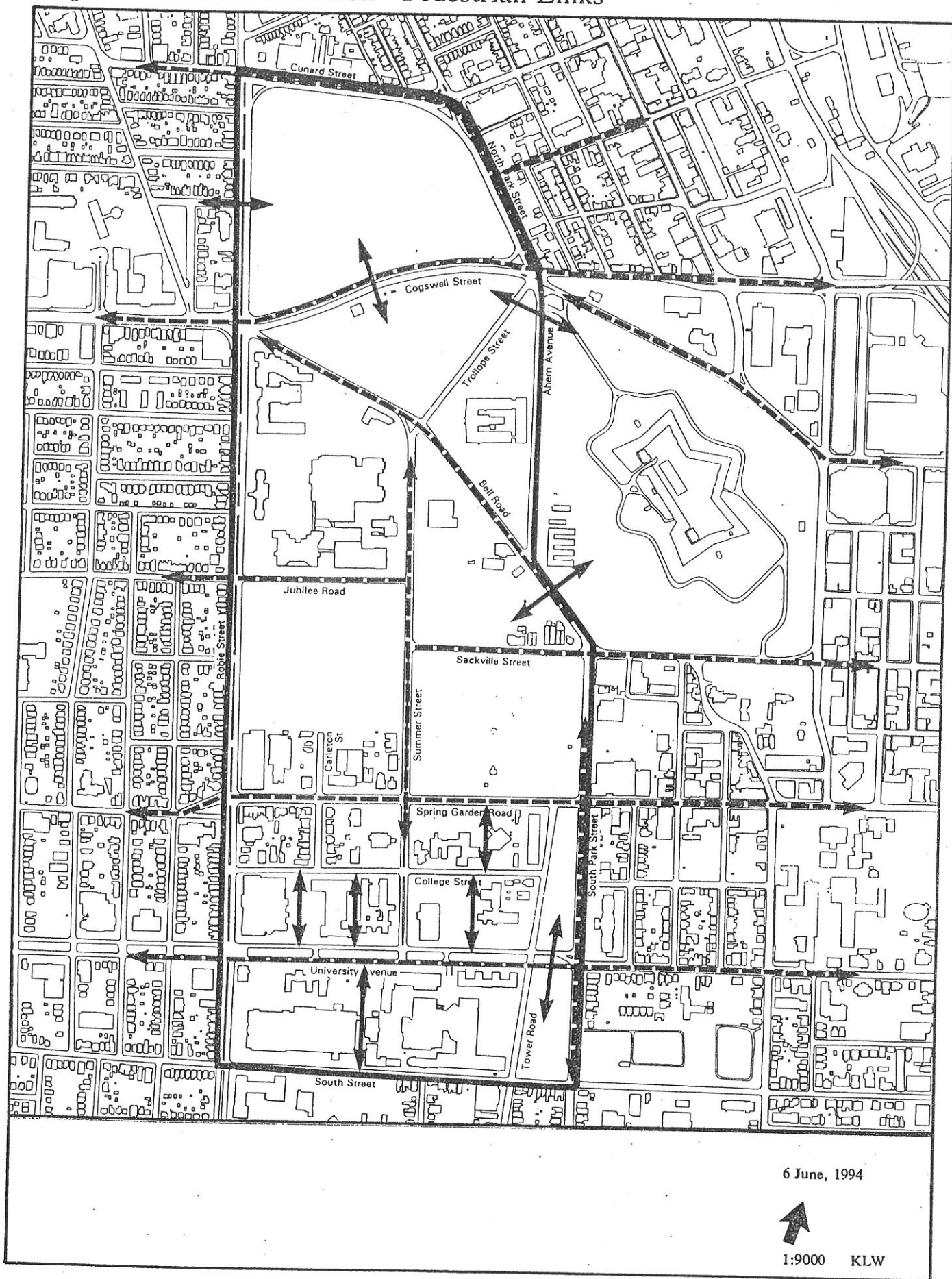
## Parking

- 3.4 Convenient parking should be maintained for those who use the Halifax Common for sports or other leisure activities and this convenient parking will be taken into account in any future design.
- 3.5 Where feasible, underground parking for major institutional uses should be encouraged.
- 3.6 The effect of parking on local streets in residential neighbourhoods should be taken into account in any changes to parking in the North and Central Precincts.

## Pedestrian Linkage

- 3.7 Pedestrian linkages should be improved through the whole Halifax Common.
- 3.8 The city should encourage a strengthening of pedestrian linkages, especially around public buildings in long blocks in the South Precinct where hospital, university and other buildings present barriers to pedestrians. Paths around and, in some cases, through buildings should be encouraged where appropriate as illustrated on Map 9.
- 3.9 There should be continued attention to ensure safe pedestrian crossings of streets, particularly to recreational areas.

Map 9: Halifax Common - Pedestrian Links



#### 4. Relationship to Downtown Areas and Surrounding Neighbourhoods

##### **Objective:**

**Strengthen the relationship between the Halifax Common and the rest of the Downtown and surrounding neighbourhoods.**

The Halifax Common is part of the Downtown area and adjacent to central neighbourhoods and its relationship to these areas is important. It has many facilities and attractions within walking distance of the commercial areas in the larger Downtown area. This includes both outdoor activities such as sports, races and public gatherings as well as all the hospital, educational and cultural facilities and activities. Adjacent neighbourhoods relate closely to the Halifax Common. The public open spaces, particularly the North and Central Precincts, are within easy walking distance of surrounding residential areas and serve partially as neighbourhood parks.

Connections and pedestrian routes to the rest of the Downtown and to surrounding neighbourhoods should be strengthened as shown on Map 9:

##### Policies

- 4.1 Every effort should be made to maximize the interrelationship between the Halifax Common and the rest of the Downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods.
- 4.2 Special events which benefit the Downtown should continue to be held in the Halifax Common and on Citadel Hill.
- 4.3 There should be well defined safe pedestrian routes to strengthen the relationship between the Halifax Common and the rest of the Downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods. In particular emphasis should be on "green corridors," directive and interpretive signage, and rest stations.

The following routes should be a priority:

- o Cunard Street and North Park Street;
- o Cogswell Street;
- o Rainnie Drive and Duke Street;
- o Ahern Avenue and Sackville Street;
- o Jubilee Road and Sackville Street;
- o Spring Garden Road and Coburg Road;
- o University Avenue and College Street; and
- o South Park Street

4.4

Along Sackville Street, the green entrance to the Halifax Common between Citadel Hill and the Royal Artillery Park should be retained and enhanced.

4.5

Future design and facilities should reflect that the Halifax Common serves the surrounding neighbourhoods at the same time as it serves a wider city function.

## C. CITY-OWNED LAND AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

### Overall Goal

The city-owned land in the Halifax Common will be preserved largely as public open space for a variety of outdoor recreation and leisure activities or other suitable public uses.

### Description

Excluding streets, the City of Halifax owns about 94 acres of land in the Halifax Common. As stated in the Terms of Reference for this study "in the planning for the future of the Halifax Common, the emphasis will be on land under the control of the City. Provincial and federal land will be considered secondarily."

Land owned by the city is identified on Map 3 and Table 1 and more specifically includes:

- o The North Common, an area bounded by Cogswell Street, Robie Street, Cunard Street and North Park Street;
- o The Central Common, the triangular parcel opposite the North Common across Cogswell Street plus city-owned land around the Nova Scotia Museum.
- o The Wanderer's Grounds, Junior Bengal Lancers site, Lawn Bowling site, Seniors' building site, Parks and Grounds Depot, historic residence at the corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road, Public Gardens, Camp Hill Cemetery, Victoria Park, the boulevard on University Avenue, the University Avenue Fire Station, the Civic Hospital, and the Dairy Deli on Robie Street.
- o Queen Elizabeth High School. Assessment records show the owner of Queen Elizabeth High School as the Halifax Board of School Commissioners. This will be returned to the city when it is declared surplus by the School Board.
- o Former Grace Maternity Hospital. The City of Halifax conveyed this land to Dalhousie in 1912 for educational use with the condition that it would revert to the city if the educational use ceased. Subsequently, Dalhousie University and the City of Halifax conveyed the property to the Salvation Army Grace Maternity Hospital. It reverts to Dalhousie University if the maternity hospital use ceases and to the city if the educational use ceases. The maternity hospital and the educational use have now ceased so the property reverts to the City of Halifax.

Almost all of this land is open space and accessible to the public. There are also about 64 acres in public streets, boulevards and sidewalks owned by the city in the Halifax Common.

Table 1 - City-Owned Land

	Area in Acres
North Common	29.0
Central Common	13.0
Camp Hill Cemetery	15.9
Public Gardens	16.7
Victoria park	2.2
Wanderer's Grounds	3.2
Parks and Grounds Depot	1.6
Historic residence (Sackville Street and Bell Road)	0.2
Bengal Lancers (Leased)	0.6
Lawn Bowling (Leased)	0.9
Senior Citizens Club (Leased)	0.2
Fire Station - University Avenue	0.4
Civic Hospital - University Avenue	2.1
Dairy Deli -Robie Street	0.2
Queen Elizabeth High School	5.5
Former Grace Maternity Hospital	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>93.8</b>
Streets, Sidewalks and Boulevards	64 acres
<b>Total City-Owned Land</b>	<b>157.8 Acres</b>

Objectives and Policies

There are eight main objectives for the city-owned land and public open space. The following is a discussion of each. After each objective are policies to achieve the objectives.

1. Continuous Open Space and Pathway System

**Objective:**

**Strengthen the continuous open space and pathway system.**

There is an opportunity to strengthen a continuous public open space system. The existing parts of this system starting from Cunard Street are: North Common, Central Common, city-owned land near the Nova Scotia Museum, Wanderers Grounds and adjacent area, Public Gardens, Camp Hill Cemetery, and Victoria Park. The Public Gardens, a key part of this continuous open space system, remains closed for the winter largely to protect the sensitive plant life from damage and to give the city a chance to do necessary maintenance. There was public interest expressed for more access to the Public Gardens by opening them on some basis in the winter. Efforts have been made

over the years to extend the period the Public Gardens is open. A method of providing more year round access such as visual access, while protecting the vegetation, should be investigated. One possibility is a "window on the garden" provided, for example, by a restaurant. Moving and renovating or rebuilding the current canteen with access directly off Spring Garden Road and large picture windows providing a view into the Gardens could be one solution. Further study is required to determine feasibility.

In the Camp Hill Cemetery there is an opportunity to establish an interpretative program in the building located there.

Victoria Park is a major pedestrian thoroughfare. With an alley of trees between the Robbie Burns statue and fountain, it is an attractive part of the open space system and should be further improved. Some current problems are:

- o Trees are in poor condition;
- o Benches are in poor condition;
- o Sidewalks at the Spring Garden Road end need redesign and reconstruction; and
- o The view of Victoria Park from Spring Garden Road is partially obstructed by the bus shelter.

The recapture of the Victoria General Hospital parking lot for a park or a park combined with other features would complete the open space system from one end of the Halifax Common to the other. This has been discussed at various times in the past. At the very least, strong representation should be made to the province for proper landscaping.

A strong pedestrian system through a combination of sidewalks and paths should be emphasized. Safe pedestrian crossings should be provided wherever paths cross streets. Visual connections and scenic views should be emphasized to enhance attractiveness. The course of the Freshwater brook which is shown on Map 10 may be a good historical theme for a connecting pathway. The Egg Pond and the Griffin's Pond in the Public Gardens are part of the original Freshwater Brook. These and other water features could be put on or near the Freshwater Brook pathway. Interpretive signs describing parts of the Historic Common or historic events could be another feature. This pathway should tie into another off-street pathway to Citadel Hill. As much as possible these main pathways should be for pedestrians and bicycles. Access for people with disabilities should be a consideration.

The fountains on the North Common, Public Gardens and Victoria Park are landmarks and important features of the open space system. Because of budget constraints, these and other fountains in the city are to be shut off in 1994. In light of their importance, particularly in conjunction with a water theme, the fountains should be continued.

The paved pathways in Victoria Park, Central Common and North Common are uneven and difficult to maintain and generally detract from the attractiveness. Alternate materials for pathways should be investigated. Paths on the North Common require special consideration and this is covered in Objective 4: North and Central Commons.

## Policies

- 1.1 Efforts will be made to strengthen and maintain a continuous public open space throughout the Common from Cunard street to South Street.
- 1.2 The city will enhance physical and visual access to public open space in future development and planning initiatives.
- 1.3 Ways of providing more access in winter to the Public Gardens, while protecting sensitive plants, should be investigated. A facility with access directly from Spring Garden Road with large picture windows providing a view into the Gardens should be considered.
- 1.4 Efforts to extend opening of the Public Gardens in the "shoulder season" should be continued.
- 1.5 In the Camp Hill Cemetery, an interpretive program should be established in the building located there.
- 1.6 The design of Victoria Park should be enhanced. Some things to be considered are:
  - a) Improvement of trees and benches;
  - b) Redesign and reconstruction of the sidewalks at the Spring Garden Road end; and
  - c) Relocation or redesign of the bus shelter to improve the view of Victoria Park.
- 1.7 The city, in cooperation with the provincial government, should seek to continue the open space system through the Victoria General Hospital parking lot to South Street. The following possibilities should be examined.
  - (a) A park as an extension of Victoria Park.
  - (b) Continuation of a playground.
  - (c) Underground parking.
  - (d) A cultural centre, possibly combined with parking.
- 1.8 Fountains and other water features should continue to be an important element of the Common.



- 1.9 A continuous pedestrian route through the Halifax Common and safe pedestrian crossings on streets should be developed. Freshwater Brook should be investigated as a theme. Interpretive features should be part of this trail. One possibility is an interpretive centre at Cunard and Robie Streets to provide a view of Citadel Hill, the Common and the Armoury, and provide information on the Common and Citadel Hill.
- 1.10 A stronger pathway connection between the Halifax Common and the Citadel should be developed through signage, gates and other means.
- 1.11 The experience of walking through public open space should be enhanced by, for example, creating small nodes or places in which to stop and rest and gain protection from the elements.
- 1.12 Care will be taken where possible and appropriate to make pathways and entrances to public open space accessible to people with disabilities.

## 2. Preserve Public Open Space

### **Objective:**

**Preserve existing public open space for a variety of recreational and leisure activities.**

The city owns about 94 acres of land excluding streets, sidewalks and boulevards. Of this approximately 80 acres are open space. The public use and enjoyment of this open space for outdoor activities has always, and will continue to be important. The public stated strongly that there should be no further decrease in the amount of open space. The point was also made by the public that the use of the Common for public buildings should not be a substitute for open space.

The total amount of open space should not be decreased and the total amount of green or vegetative parts of this open space should remain the same or preferably be increased.

### Policies

- 2.1 The amount of public open space in the Halifax Common will not be decreased.
- 2.2 On city-owned land, the total amount of vegetative landscaping should be retained and, where practical, be increased and improved.

### 3. Increase City-owned land

#### Objective:

**Increase the amount of city-owned land through recaptured of land formerly owned by the city.**

City Council specifically called for the Halifax Common Study to identify:

"Ways and means of protecting the integrity of the Common including opportunities for recapturing areas formerly part of the historic Common."

Several areas were investigated for possible recapture and these were largely supported by the public. The proposed areas are: (See Map 10)

<b>Federal</b>	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation site at Summer Street and Bell Road
<b>Provincial</b>	Community College site at Bell Road and Trollope Street. Victoria General Hospital parking lot on South Park Street.

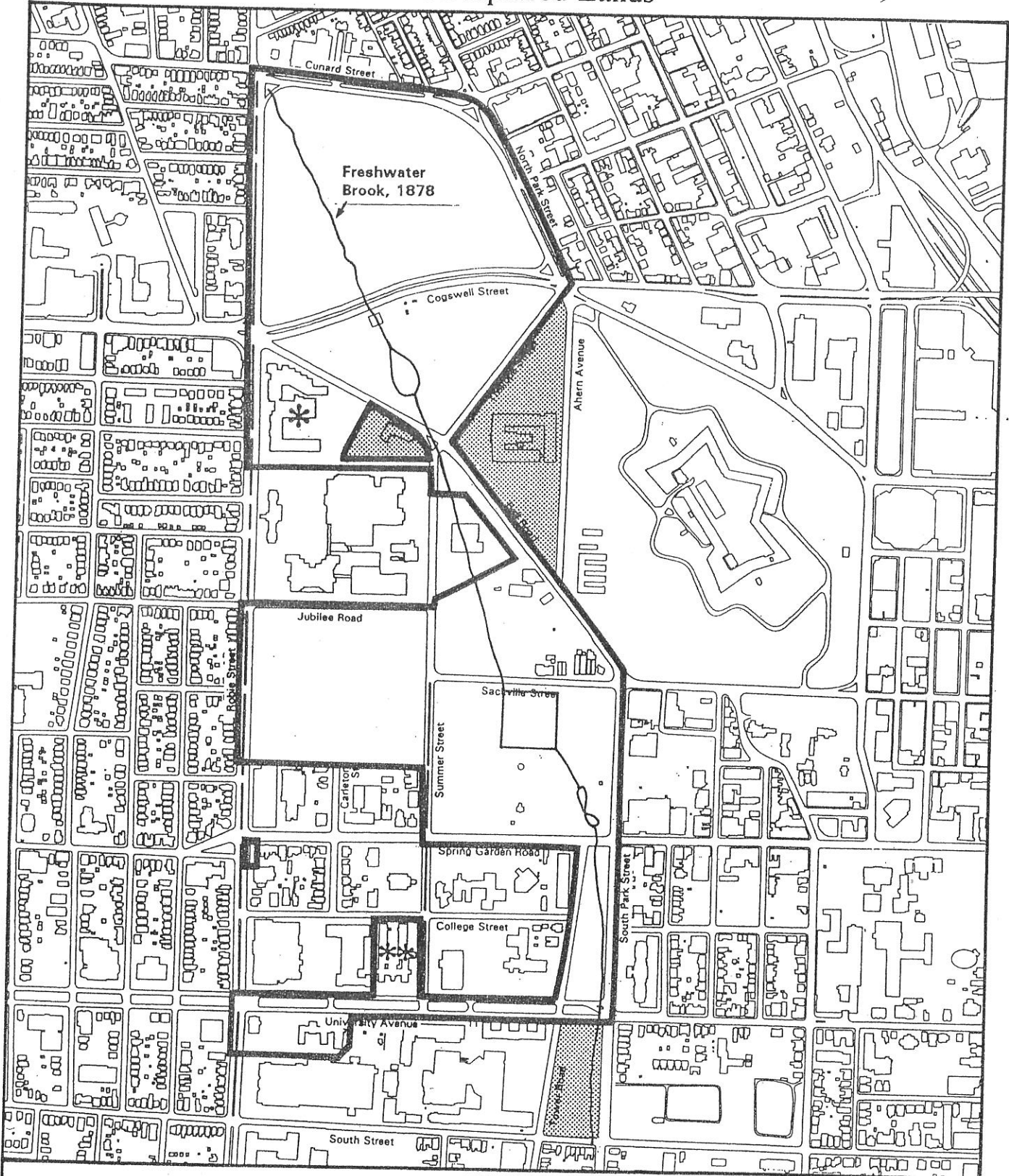
These would only be acquired by the city when the buildings or land are no longer required for their current use. The city would have to take the initiative to acquire these sites. Queen Elizabeth High School, and the former Grace Maternity Hospital are considered under city control and are therefore not on the recapture list. There is no specific use recommended for this recaptured land. However, future use must be consistent with the objectives and policies of this plan.

City ownership is the best means of control. However, if ownership is not possible, then the city should actively seek the cooperation of other property owners. The possibility of the city seeking to acquire the Department of National Defence property (military buildings along Ahern Avenue) and the Garrison Grounds was discussed, possibly as a future location for Junior Bengal Lancers. However, the Canadian Park Service has indicated that it intends to continue to use the Garrison Grounds and they wish to acquire the Department of National Defense property. No city action to acquire this property is recommended but the city should continue to coordinate with the Canadian Park Service on uses and activities in those areas.

#### Policies

- 3.1 The amount of land owned by the City of Halifax will not be decreased.
- 3.2 The city will seek to increase the amount of land under city ownership through recapture of lands. Specifically, the city should

# Map 10: Halifax Common - Recaptured Lands



City-Owned Lands  
 Possible Recaptured Lands

\* Reverts to City of Halifax when declared surplus.  
 \*\* Reverts to City of Halifax when no longer used for maternity hospital or education.

6 June, 1994



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seek to reclaim the following sites when the buildings or sites are no longer required for their current use.

Federal Canadian Broadcasting Corporation at Summer Street and Bell Road.

Provincial Community College site at Bell Road and Trollope Street.

Victoria General Hospital parking lot on South Park Street.

- 3.3 The city will continue to coordinate with the Citadel and the Department of National Defence on uses and activities in the Garrison Grounds, the Department of National Defense lands and the slopes of the Citadel.

#### 4. North and Central Commons

##### **Objective:**

**Provide for a mixture of recreation and leisure uses on the North and Central Commons with an emphasis on enhancing opportunities for passive or casual enjoyment, improving safety, and upgrading facilities.**

The North and Central Commons are closely associated in both location and function. People using them come from local neighbourhoods, the entire city and the region. It is the area that most people think of as "the Common".

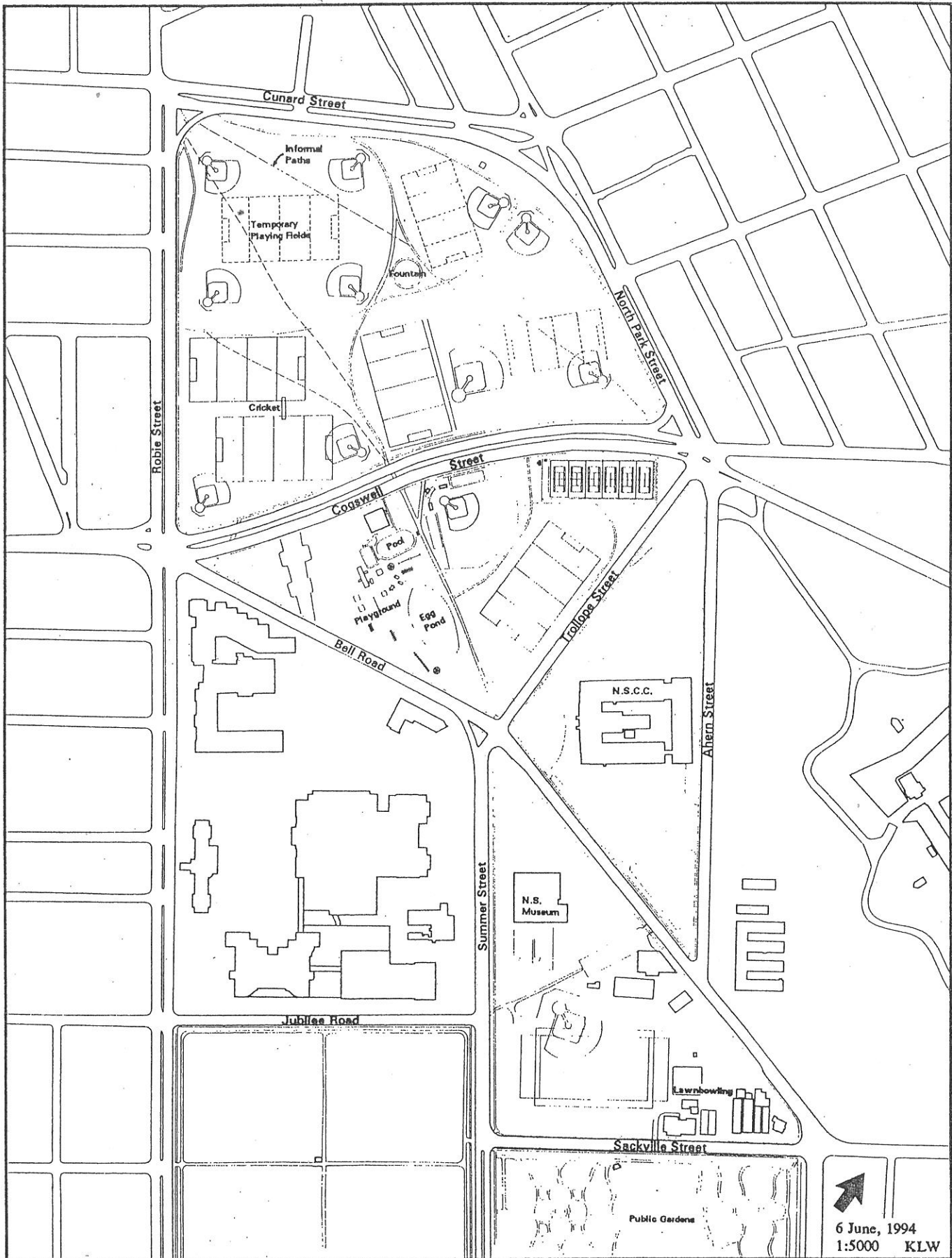
This is the largest and the most used part of the open space system. The North Common is approximately 29 acres and the Central Common 13 acres. These are largely flat, open areas with landscaping and trees on the periphery.

##### Current Uses

Current uses are shown on Map 11. The North and Central Commons serve several functions with organized sports predominating. On the North Common for organized sports, there are nine softball or slowpitch diamonds, one baseball diamond, and one field hockey field. In one area, a touch football field and cricket field are combined with two of these slowpitch diamonds. In the fall there are two soccer fields, one at diamond 6 and 7 and one at diamond 8 used for High School, Junior High School and small college practices and games. In addition there is a rugby pitch between diamonds 1, 2, 3, and 4. On the Central Common is the Canada Games softball diamond, a soccer field and 6 tennis courts.

During prime time (all day on weekends and after 5:00 p.m. on weekdays from May to October) all playing fields are used for scheduled users. During non-prime time

Map 11: North Common, Central Common, and Wanderer's Grounds - Existing Features



(weekdays prior to 5:00 p.m.), there are a limited number of scheduled users which allows more free time for citizens. For both prime and non-prime time the facilities are available for use by the general public by following appropriate booking procedures.

Another function is an activity centre for children and youth on part of the Central Common. The facilities there include a swimming pool, wading (spray) pool, children's playground and a skate boarding and basketball area on the portion paved for Grand Prix racing.

Passive or casual recreation which includes walking, jogging, sitting, picnicking, watching team sports and informal play is a further function. The pathways, fountain, Egg Pond and various open spaces are geared to passive enjoyment.

The North and Central Commons are also used extensively for special events such as the Natal Day celebrations, Grand Prix auto racing, military exercises, bicycle events, walkathons and running events. Finally the North and Central Common is a major travel route for pedestrians, cars, busses and bicycles. Adjacent land owned by the province, the large green area north of the Community College, is also used by the public for recreation.

#### b) Issues

A number of important issues related to the North and Central Commons have emerged.

#### **Retaining Views and Use of Landscaping**

The views across the North Common to the Citadel and the Armoury as well as the view of activities from surrounding streets are an important part of the Halifax experience. However, there is a need for more landscaping and trees in the North Common. Retaining and enhancing these views while incorporating more landscaping and trees will be important.

#### **Retaining a Mixture of Recreational Uses With a Greater Emphasis on Passive or Casual Recreation**

There is a growing demand for organized team sports; children and youth activities; passive or casual recreation; and special events. This mixture of uses should continue with greater emphasis on passive or casual usage.

There are several reasons for proposing a greater emphasis on passive areas. It should reduce the safety hazard to cars and people from flying balls by providing more space for walking and casual enjoyment. At present, flying balls present a hazard to passers by on some of the streets. Redesign or realignment would improve this.

More passive space will better serve the needs of the surrounding neighbourhoods where there is a shortage of neighbourhood park space. The role as a neighbourhood park for

surrounding neighbourhoods was emphasized at the public meetings. A number of people at the public meetings who felt that too much space was scheduled for sports leagues and not enough for passive or casual usage. People who use the park for casual, informal activities are largely from nearby neighbourhoods whereas people playing team sports come from all over the city and metropolitan area. It was suggested that further efforts should be made to obtain the views of residents of these neighbourhoods as more detailed design work is done.

More space for passive or casual usage responds to national and local recreation trends with more people taking part in more casual, unorganized activity (Walking, relaxing, informal play etc.)

Active sports should still remain an important part of the area but some sports facilities may have to be removed from the North and possibly Central Common to create a better balance of passive and active uses. There is a growing demand in Halifax for soccer, rugby, softball, slowpitch, baseball and cricket facilities. If these facilities are reduced, they will need to be accommodated elsewhere to meet this growing demand. The Mainland Common will have a variety of active sports facilities which will serve the same city-wide function as the Halifax Common.

Some suggestions for treatment of passive or casual space are: properly design and landscape the spaces to make sure they are primarily suitable for passive activities; include an open field or meadow for informal play and recreation; and, provide one ball diamond or sports field which is not scheduled but always available for pick up games.

### **Improvement to Sports Fields**

Some improvements should be made to sports fields. Some of the ball diamonds are not oriented properly and the evening sun shines directly in the batters eyes. This should be corrected.

### **Improvement to Safety**

There is a safety concern for people walking on or near the Common or passing cars being hit by balls from the games taking place. The North Common and to some degree the Central Common are attempting to accommodate active sports, passive enjoyment and pedestrian and vehicular traffic in too small a space. Also people often do not walk on paved paths, but right through playing areas interfering with the games. There are several measures which could be taken to improve safety including: realignment of the playing fields; improved fencing; and installing signs to inform people.

### **Future of the Fountain**

The fountain in the North Common should be continued in some form. This idea was supported by the public. The fountain is now 27 years old and in need of major repairs and this is the time to consider changes. It does provide a spectacular view and commemorates Canada's Centennial. On the other hand it is not at a human scale and

designed only for viewing from a distance. It could remain at its present location or possibly be relocated to another area, for example, near the Willow tree intersection. A more human scale, interactive fountain is preferred regardless of location.

### **Future of Egg Pond, Wading (Spray) Pool and Swimming Pool**

In the eastern part of the Central Common there are several water features - the Egg Pond and the swimming and wading (spray) pools. The Egg Pond was part of the original Freshwater Brook. It has gone through many changes. At one time it was landscaped with trees around it and was used for outdoor skating in winter and with small boats to ride on in the summer. Now it is a rundown concrete basin with a crumbling stone wall and no trees or water. There is \$40,000 in the 1994 Capital Budget to put a skateboarding facility in the Egg Pond.

Wading pools are no longer permitted as the stagnant water in them poses health problems and the wading pool was converted to spray pool some time ago. One problem with the spray pool is its proximity to the Canada Games Diamond. The swimming pool is inadequate to serve present needs and must be upgraded.

Efforts should be made to maintain these important features in some form. In the longer term these three facilities should be considered together for upgrading and integration into a larger water feature. The Egg Pond has historical significance. The swimming and spray pool are important facilities used by young people and the public supported them. An integrated facility could be efficient, attractive and useful and should be further investigated. As part of this investigation, the city should look at the need for the swimming pool in connection to the Centennial Pool. For the Egg Pond alternate designs to restore it as a water feature should be examined to find one which is easily maintained and economically feasible. Relationship to the playground and the basketball and skateboarding area should be considered as well.

### **Future of Playground and Skateboarding and Basketball Facility**

In the same area as the water features are a playground and a paved area used for skateboarding and basketball. This paved strip at Cogswell Street and Bell Road was originally created for the Grand Prix racing. It is presently used for basketball and skateboarding and its future will be reviewed in 1995. The playground has recently been upgraded and is well used. A survey done in July and August of 1992 showed the playground to be by far the busiest in the city with a total attendance of 4303 in those two months. This is more than twice as many as the next busiest playground at the George Dixon Centre. The users are parents and tots, daycare centre groups, children of team members playing on the Common, visitors to the city, and children from nearby neighbourhoods, particularly apartment buildings.

The public supported retaining and further improving the playground. In addition to this larger playground the public suggested scattered playgrounds should be provided, in particular on the North Common, to better serve the nearby neighbourhoods. Safe pedestrian access to these play grounds is important.



The basketball and skateboarding area appears to be well used and should be retained as well in some form.

### **Future of City Building**

The city building on the Central Common currently is used mainly for the swimming pool and occasionally for daycare, day programs run by the Recreation Department, special events held on the Common and as a washroom facility during scheduled events. The existing building should be examined to determine if it meets current needs.

### **Realignment and Improvement of Pathways**

Paths on the North Common require special consideration. There are several informal pathways which are heavily used. Changing the location of pathways consistent with informal pathways or introduction of landscaping elements to direct people to existing paths should be investigated. The open expanse offers a large space contrasting sharply with the surrounding areas. This contrast is interesting; however, the openness offers little opportunity for protection from the elements, human scale environments or rest areas. There is an opportunity to enhance the experience by creating small places in which to stop and rest.

### **Redesign of North and Central Commons**

A redesign and realignment of the North and Central Commons based on the general direction given in this plan is recommended as a future undertaking.

### Policies

#### **Retaining Views and Use of Landscaping**

- 4.1 The views across the North Common will be retained while incorporating more landscaping and trees.

#### **Retaining a Mixture of Recreational Uses With a Greater Emphasis on Passive or Casual Recreation**

- 4.2 A balanced mixture of recreation activities will be provided on the North and Central Commons.
- 4.3 Playing fields and other facilities for active organized sports will continue; however, emphasis will be placed on increasing opportunity for passive activity such as walking, relaxing and sitting.
  - 4.3.1 The need for soccer and other types of playing fields within the Halifax Common will be reviewed when detailed redesign of areas of the Common are carried out and the city will attempt to accommodate this need on the Halifax Common or elsewhere in the city.

- 4.4 Future use and design should recognize that the North and Central Commons act partially as a neighbourhood park. Further steps should be taken to obtain the input of surrounding neighbourhoods.
- 4.5 Some playing fields may be eliminated to make more room for passive areas. If sports fields are removed, they should, as appropriate, be replaced or compensated for by:
- (a) New facilities elsewhere in the city.
  - (b) Lighting sports fields to extend playing time.
- 4.6 Detailed landscape design will be done to prevent or discourage programmed activity in passive areas.
- 4.7 Variety will be created in passive areas through such things as vegetative landscaping, benches, and water features.
- 4.8 Where feasible, large open green areas for unstructured casual play should be provided.

#### **Improvement to Sports Fields**

- 4.9 Sports fields will be redesigned to ensure proper orientation relative to the sun and to prevent conflict with pedestrian and vehicular traffic, for example, balls from going out onto the street.

#### **Improvement to Safety**

- 4.10 Safety will be a primary consideration in design and location of activities.

#### **Future of the Fountain**

- 4.11 The Centennial fountain will be retained in some form.
- 4.12 The fountain should be redesigned and possibly relocated to achieve a more human scale and interactive feature.
- 4.13 The following possibilities for the fountain should be considered.
- (a) Keeping it at its present location or possibly moving it near, for example, the Willow Tree intersection area.

- (b) Incorporating the fountain in a larger water feature such as a pond reflecting the Freshwater Brook theme.

#### **Future of Egg Pond, Wading (Spray) Pool and Swimming Pool**

- 4.14 For the long term, the swimming pool, spray pool, Egg Pond area should be considered for upgrading and design as a well planned, low maintenance, integrated water feature.
- 4.15 In conjunction with this integrated water facility the following should be investigated:
  - (a) The need for a swimming pool in connection with other existing public swimming facilities, e.g., Centennial Pool.
  - (b) The feasibility of restoring the Egg Pond as a water feature.
- 4.16 In the long term, the Egg Pond should be retained as a water feature in some form if it is economically feasible. The skateboard facility on the Egg Pond should be regarded as a short term use.

#### **Future of Playground, Skateboarding and Basketball Facility**

- 4.17 The playground on the Central Common should be retained and improved. Detailed design is required to ensure compatibility and safety.
- 4.18 There should be other smaller playgrounds scattered around the North Common to serve nearby neighbourhoods. These should be properly landscaped, effective neighbourhood play space.
- 4.19 The basketball and skateboarding area which is presently on the paved strip should be retained in some form, subject to detailed design. An alternate or more permanent location for a skateboard facility should be found.

#### **Future of City Building**

- 4.20 The city building should be used as an all purpose building for activities and information on the Halifax Common. If it is not required for city purposes, it should be removed.

## **Realignment and Improvement of Pathways**

- 4.21 A detailed design of a pathway system is required to ensure proper all-season use, compatibility and safety. Such a design should ensure a continuous pathway system and where possible reflect current walking patterns.
- 4.22 The experience of walking through public open space should be enhanced by creating small landscaped nodes or places in which to stop and rest and gain protection from the elements, particularly on the North Common.
- 4.23 A means to allow safe pedestrian flow between the North and Central Commons should be investigated. An emphasis should be placed on providing one continuous parcel of land.

## **Redesign of North and Central Commons**

- 4.24 A detailed redesign of the North and Central Commons based on the goals, concepts and policies in this plan should be carried out.

## **5. Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road Area**

### **Objective:**

**Accommodation of existing sports, leisure and maintenance facilities in the short term with, over the longer term, subject to detailed design and acceptable accommodation of existing facilities, an all-season public activity area for athletic, cultural and special events.**

### **General Description** (See Map 11)

Many interests, significant recent investment, and long established uses must be considered in any changes to the Wanderer's Grounds area. This block includes the Wanderer's Grounds (5.2 Acres), Junior Bengal Lancers (0.6 acres), Lawn Bowling (0.9 acres) Seniors' building site (0.2 acres), Parks and Grounds Depot (1.6 acres), and the historic residence at the corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road (0.2 acres) for a total area of about 9 acres. This whole area is being treated as one block for future design.

### **General Concept**

The whole Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road block should, over the long term, remain under city control as a multi-purpose, all-season public area which includes athletic events, special events, concerts, public gatherings, and general public use. This could accommodate medium sized outdoor events rather than large special events and concerts. This block is in an important location - across from the Public Gardens and

close to the Downtown commercial areas. There is no flat, centrally located, large outdoor gathering area now. The Wanderer's Grounds has long been the location of athletic events and some special events and this would build on that tradition.

A design of the entire block based on the long-term concept of a multi-purpose facility should be prepared. This design should have the flexibility to accommodate existing uses in the shorter term and possible expansion with the relocation of some existing uses over the longer term.

While pursuing the long term goal, changes and improvements may have to occur to current facilities on the site. Ongoing improvements and changes should fit into the overall design for the entire block.

An important consideration in multi-purpose public use is the surface of the sports field. With a proper artificial surface the area could be multi functional with special events, sports and general public gatherings. Also the whole area could be left open for general public access, possibly to be closed at night similar to the Public Gardens. With natural turf on the trophy playing field, use of the area would have to be very restricted to prevent damage. Playing time would have to be limited to about 16 to 20 hours per week and very limited uses outside of sports would be possible.

### **Wanderer's Grounds**

The Wanderer's Grounds was established in 1886 when the Wanderer's Amateur Athletic Club leased the land. The Club improved the grounds and built a club house. Track and field and baseball were the main activities. In 1958 the city took over the Club's lease. The main facility now is a baseball field, the only full sized field in the city, which is heavily used in the summer. There is also a sportsfield which has largely been used by high schools in the Fall.

There has been significant capital investment in the Wanderer's Grounds. In the late 1970's lighting for the sports field and baseball field was installed. By 1993 a drainage system was installed and redesign and sodding was completed. In 1993-94 a trophy sports field (soccer, football, rugby, field hockey) was constructed. There is a growing demand for high quality "trophy" fields. It was intended that baseball be relocated in 1995 when the baseball field at the Mainland Common is expected to be ready, depending on the capital budget. The Wanderer's Grounds will continue to be used for athletic along with cultural and special events within the long term plan for this area.

The need for baseball fields should be reviewed before removing the Wanderer's Grounds field as the field may still be needed and could provide scheduling flexibility. There are eight teams using the field now and participation in baseball is growing. In Nova Scotia, the number of players grew 25 percent between 1992 and 1993 (from 12,000 to 15,000) and in the Metro area it grew by 20 percent (from 1100 to 1400). In the near future the greatest growth will likely be for the Bantam class (15 and under) which requires a smaller junior field. The Wanderer's Grounds field could serve as a Junior and Little League field. The backstop would remain but the outfield fence would

be removed as it is not needed for Little League. This would provide two junior fields in the city, at the North Common and the Wanderer's Grounds, and one senior field, at the Mainland Common.

An official size track and field facility is not recommended for the Wanderer's Grounds. Small public school field days are held there and this could continue. The track is not the official National Standard size and considerable expense would be required for upgrading. There are presently no National Standard track and field facilities in Nova Scotia but one is proposed for the Mainland Common. Good quality track and field facilities are now available at St. Mary's University and Sackville.

The press box and washrooms are used in connection with athletic events on the Wanderer's Grounds. A building to serve athletic and other events is needed. Previously the Seniors' building on Sackville Street was used for this. Improvements to washroom and locker facilities are required.

### **Parks and Grounds' Peninsula Depot**

The Parks and Grounds' Peninsula Depot occupies about 1.6 acres and includes a new depot office, storage and parking areas, and greenhouses. The depot has been on this site since the turn of the century. About 1970 it was recommended by staff and a consultant that the main Parks and Grounds depot be built at Cowie Hill in Mainland South and a depot to serve the Peninsula remain at the Halifax Common site. This location is central to the Peninsula and near the Public Gardens and other parks that are part of the Halifax Common.

The facility is for day to day maintenance of Peninsula parks. The greenhouses serve the entire city. Special events are also handled from here. It has been added to and improved over time and the total investment in the facility is now estimated at between \$3 and \$4 million of which 65 to 70 percent is in the greenhouses. In 1990 a new depot office was built, styled to fit in with the Common. This new depot was designed for expansion. Future plans for the Depot include expanding the building, paving the yards and further beautification.

City policy has been to avoid any encroachment on green areas of the Wanderer's Grounds with the depot. Efforts have been made to landscape and screen the yards from Bell Road. There is very limited space for expansion and great effort is necessary to avoid conflict with existing recreation facilities. Outdoor storage of materials is not appropriate for this area and heavy equipment storage areas should be adequately screened.

The city should actively investigate and pursue other options for location of the Parks and Grounds Depot except for the greenhouses. However, a large investment has been made there and it should be moved only if the new location is equally efficient for serving the Halifax Common and the peninsula. The existing parks and grounds depot facility provides an important service facility. It is believed to be in the most efficient location for maintenance of all the park areas in the Halifax Common and the rest of

the parks in the peninsula. One possible alternate location is the Armoury just across from the North Common, should it become surplus. As a minimum, much better screening and landscaping is necessary. The greenhouses should remain as an annex of the Public Gardens with the green houses more accessible to the public. Ongoing upkeep and development of the depot will be necessary. Any short term decisions must be in keeping with the general long term concept for the whole block. Efforts to beautify the depot to compliment the park setting should continue.

### **Historic Residence at the Corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road**

The historic residence (a registered heritage building) should be retained and protected and continue to have public uses such as tourism, a restaurant or tearoom.

### **Junior Bengal Lancers**

The Junior Bengal Lancers lease land and facilities from the city. The facility includes a barn, a newer indoor riding facility and an outdoor riding area across Bell Road on the Community College property.

The Junior Bengal Lancers are a colourful and interesting feature in the centre of the city which has value as an attraction to tourists and city residents. There is a long tradition of horses on the Halifax Common beginning with the military using the area for riding, training and horse racing. Later, city police horses were kept here and there was a horse racing track. However, the facilities need improvement as the barn and yards are run down. Some possible problems for the horses and riders are noise from traffic and special events and the dangers of crossing Bell Road to the outdoor riding area. A more spacious quiet location may be better. The best location for this activity, whether here or elsewhere, should be discussed with the Bengal Lancers. Discussions with Halifax Junior Bengal Lancers regarding its future at this location should be well in advance of any anticipated changes.

Some possibilities for relocation of the Junior Bengal Lancers equestrian facility are on the Mainland Common, which includes a facility in the Master Plan, or the provincial Atlantic Winter Fair site, which already has stables and riding facilities. Point Pleasant Park could be considered as well.

### **Lawn Bowling**

The lawn bowling facility was originally run by the Wanderer's Amateur Athletic Club but is now operated and maintained by the city and used by the Wanderer's Lawn Bowling Club. There are four bowling greens arranged in a square plus a clubhouse and a small equipment building. The club had about 75 members in 1993.

There are two lawn bowling facilities in Halifax, one on the Halifax Common and one at the St. Mary's Boat Club. The city is considering amalgamation of the two facilities. One option for the amalgamated facility outside of the Wanderer's Grounds area is the Mainland Common.

National standards require that greens be arranged in a square so the direction of play can be changed. The Halifax Common bowling greens meet this standard but St. Mary's does not.

Membership in lawn bowling remained at 500 for Nova Scotia over 1992 and 1993. In metro Halifax there were four clubs with about 350 members in 1993, an increase over 1992. There were about 140 members in the two Halifax Clubs with some overlap between the two memberships.

The best location or arrangement for the lawn bowling activity, whether here or elsewhere, should be discussed with the Wanderer's Lawn Bowling Club.

### **Seniors' Building**

The Seniors' building on Sackville Street was formerly the club house for the Wanderer's Grounds. The city took it over and now owns and maintains it. A seniors' club uses the main floor and a small portion is used by the Metro Resources Volunteers. In 1993 there were about 90 seniors using the building including a Stroke Club. There is a locker room and showers downstairs which are not used.

The city is now looking at the condition of the building and reviewing long term plans. The Seniors' building is in need of a major overhaul and without this the life expectancy is estimated at about two years. A study on the viability of the Seniors' building should be completed. If it is concluded that it is not worth repairing, it should be removed.

### **Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History**

The Nova Scotia Museum is not on city-owned land but it is in a key position and planning of the museum and the city-owned land must be carefully coordinated. The museum wishes to work closely with the city in future planning of the Halifax Common. Some areas of interest are a better connection to the Downtown and coordinating the museum with the greenhouses and heritage or interpretive features.

The museum has stated that it may be expanding in the next 10 years and is concerned that changes to the Wanderer's Grounds may have an impact on museum parking and building.

### **Policies**

- 5.1 The whole Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road block should, over the long term, remain under city control and be consolidated for a multi-purpose all-season public area which includes athletic events, special events, concerts, public gatherings, and general public use.
- 5.2 A redesign of the entire block based on the long term concept referred to in Policy 5.1 should be prepared. This design should have the flexibility to



accommodate existing uses in the shorter term and possible expansion with relocation of some existing uses over the longer term.

5.3 Ongoing plans, improvements and changes to existing facilities should fit into the design for the entire block prepared under Policy 5.2.

5.4 The Wanderer's Grounds will continue to be used for athletic events, along with cultural and special events over the long term.

5.5 For the Wanderer's Grounds the following policies will apply:

- (a) The need for baseball fields should be reviewed before removing the field from the Wanderer's Grounds.
- (b) There should not be an competitive track and field facility on the Wanderer's Grounds. Small public school field days on the Wanderers Grounds should continue. A jogging track should be considered for this area after the large baseball diamond is removed.
- (c) A building to serve athletic and other events is needed. The Press Box building should be improved or another building provided.

5.6 The Parks and Grounds Depot will remain as part of this area in the short term. The city should actively investigate and pursue other options for location of the Parks and Grounds Depot, except for the greenhouses, over the longer term. The existing location of the Parks and Grounds Depot is very efficient for serving the Halifax Common area and the entire peninsula and there is a large investment there. It should be moved only if the new location is equally efficient for serving the Halifax Common and the peninsula. The greenhouses should remain as an annex of the Public Gardens with the green houses more accessible to the public.

5.7 The historic residence at the corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road should be retained and preserved and continue to have public uses such as tourism, a restaurant or tearoom.

5.8 For the Parks and Grounds Depot, the following will apply:

- (a) Ongoing upkeep of the Parks and Grounds depot is necessary and will continue.
- (b) Any short term decisions for the Parks and Grounds Depot must be in keeping with the long term concept.

- (c) Efforts to beautify the depot to compliment the park setting should continue, particularly landscaping. Outdoor storage should be discouraged.
- (d) If the depot building is improved it must be in keeping with the long term concept for the entire Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road area block.

- 5.9 The city should discuss with the Junior Bengal Lancers the best long term location for its facility whether in the Halifax Common or elsewhere.
- 5.10 The city should discuss with the Wanderer's Lawn Bowling the best long term location or arrangement for its facility.
- 5.11 The city should evaluate the Senior's building and, if it is concluded that the building is not cost effective, it should be removed.

## 6. Cost Effectiveness.

### **Objective:**

**To design, develop, maintain and use the City-owned land and public open space and facilities of the Halifax Common in a cost effective manner.**

The cost of developing and maintaining the city-owned parkland and facilities is considered in this plan. A number of principles have been followed in the plan to help achieve reasonable quality of development and maintenance while containing costs.

Flexible, multi-purpose use of areas are emphasized. This is particularly true of the proposals for the multi-purpose, year round use of the Wanderer's Grounds and adjacent area, the water feature area and the children's play area.

There are no large new facilities proposed in the plan. Most of the proposals are aimed at improving the quality and function of existing facilities and grounds.

There is an emphasis on creating attractions to visitors. The historic Halifax Common can be a significant tourist attraction because of its special character and historic significance. Small changes made to pathway linkages, signage, sidewalks and promotion are inexpensive measures which can improve on this.

Low maintenance costs facilities are emphasized. However, it must be recognized that certain minimum costs are necessary to maintain and operate more than 80 acres of open space and a variety of facilities at a reasonable standard.

Safety is emphasized. Damage or injury from flying balls from games or danger of attack are potential costs to the city in terms of liability. The redesign of the North and Central Commons, along with the measures to improve safety after dark, should address these problems.

Commercial benefit to the city is an important consideration in deciding on future uses and development. Commercially sponsored events can benefit the city and it is proposed that these continue on the Halifax Common with appropriate policy and regulation.

### Policies

- 6.1 The city will make every effort to provide a high quality of development and maintenance. Maintenance costs will be an important consideration in design and development.
- 6.2 Flexible, multi-purpose use of areas should be emphasised.
- 6.3 Existing facilities and infrastructure should be used whenever economically feasible.
- 6.4 Safety will be emphasised in design to minimize liability and costs.
- 6.5 Commercial benefit to the city will be an important consideration in deciding on uses. In keeping with this, there should be an emphasis on creating visitor attractions.

## 7. Private Commercial Use and Funding

### **Objective:**

**Within acceptable limits, allow privately sponsored temporary events with paid admission and exclusion of the general public, and, encourage private funding of facilities and activities through joint ventures.**

The Terms of Reference directed the study to investigate:

"The private use and funding of recreation, cultural and commercial activities and facilities including charging admission for events."

As stated earlier in this plan, first and foremost the Halifax Common is a public place. Public use is in keeping with the provisions of the original charter provisions which call for the Common to be for "the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax forever." The general thrust of this plan is to maintain this public nature and increase accessibility for the citizens of Halifax.

At the same time private uses have taken place over the years and these have been generally accepted by the public. One advantage of private use which has been recognized is the economic benefit to the city. Private use and investment could continue to help to make the operation of the Common more cost effective through sharing of costs and increased revenue.

Two similar facilities were looked at to see how they handled private events and advertising. In the Boston Common it is not permitted to close off any area to the general public or charge admission to events. Also no advertising of liquor is permitted. In Hyde Park in London, England, which is not common land but a Royal Park, it is not permitted to close off any part of the park for privately sponsored events. Large events are held but the events must have an educational or cultural value and no admission can be charged. It is difficult to compare the Halifax Common to these two parks. It is, and has been, much more multi-functional than either of these parks and there is a tradition of private involvement within limits.

Some issues related to use of city-owned open space (North Common, Central Common, Wanderer's Grounds, Public Gardens, Victoria Park, University Avenue Boulevard) by private or special interest groups are:

- o **Should privately sponsored temporary special events be allowed and under what circumstances?**

Temporary events are those events where an area is closed to general use for a limited amount of time and admission is normally charged. Some examples of events which have been held in the past are: concerts, the visit of Pope Jean Paul III, and Grand Prix auto races on the North and Central Common; the Highland Games and car shows in the Wanderer's Grounds. The sponsoring group or organization provided all or part of the funding for the event.

Another type of temporary event is where a group reserves an area for their exclusive use. An example of this is the Young President's Club party which was held in the Public Gardens in 1992.

There was a general agreement by the public that privately sponsored events with paid admission on the Common are acceptable provided they are open to all with paid admission and the public is denied general use for only a short period of time. The overall benefits of some of these events to the city were recognized both in fees paid for the use of the land and spin off benefits to businesses.

The type of event and the amount of disruption was sometimes in question. Some members of the public felt the Grand Prix auto races and other events of this nature were not acceptable because they are too disruptive in terms of noise, amount of restriction (both in area and time) to public access and traffic problems. It was felt by some that clear policy and regulation was needed to deal with private events, such as Grand Prix racing, because of increasing demands for private use and conflicts with public use. Some felt the lack of knowledge of events was the most objectionable

aspect. If the public was kept better informed in advance about special events and private use of the Common there may be less objection to the events. Also, some felt that there is a need to better demonstrate the public benefits of these events.

Considering the tradition of holding privately sponsored events on the Halifax Common, the public views, and the benefit to the city, this study recommends they be allowed if approved by Council. It should be demonstrated that the event is for the benefit of the city and that it satisfies all goals, objectives and policies in this plan.

o **Should advertising and promotion be permitted for temporary events?**

Advertising in connection with these special events is generally accepted. This advertising and promotion goes with private sponsorship and should be accepted. Some of the public questioned sponsorship and advertising by beer and cigarette companies. Acceptable community standards, as judged by Council, would be the best guide on future advertising.

Permanent advertising by a private firm has not been done yet except for the Halifax Herald sign on the scoreboard in the Wanderer's Grounds. City staff are now working to develop guidelines for privately sponsored signs on public property.

o **Should commercial sales be allowed?**

Commercial sales have been held in conjunction with temporary events. Subject to meeting community standards, as judged by Council, this should be continued.

o **Should there be a charge for the use of the Common?**

Generally, the city has charged the sponsoring group for the use of the Common for special events including special athletic events. The broader issue of user charges is a city-wide issue which deals with charging private commercial organizations, sports leagues and others who use city sports facilities and parks. User charge policies are presently under review. It has been argued the Common has a special status and user charges should be dealt with differently from other city facilities. It is recommended that user charge policies for the Common should be the same as for the rest of the city.

o **Should there be private donation of permanent facilities?**

Private donation of permanent facilities should be permitted provided this does not restrict or impede public use and the display of the donors name meets city standards. The fountain in Victoria Park is an example of private donations of permanent facilities. This fountain was by donated by a family and a small plaque with the donor's name is on it. Further possibilities for private donation are sports facilities on which the donor or sponsor is identified.

- o **Should private funding for building and operation of facilities through a joint effort of the city and a private organization be permitted?**

Joint funding and operation of facilities have not been done on the Halifax Common. Two key aspects of this approach are ensuring city control of the land and the public access to the facilities. The option of joint funding and operation should be encouraged where appropriate and feasible.

### Policies

- 7.1 The city recognizes and supports the contribution made by privately sponsored cultural and recreational events on the Halifax Common.
- 7.2 Private use of city-owned open space for temporary special events will be permitted through Council approval. In giving its permission, Council will be satisfied that the commercial and private event is for the benefit of the city and that it satisfies all goals, objectives and policies in this plan.
- 7.3 In permitting sponsorship of temporary events on the Common, the city will ensure that any promotion or advertising during the event is consistent with and supportive of the overall cultural and social values of the city and its citizens. Council may identify specific products and causes that will not be permitted.
- 7.4 The city will investigate ways to keep the public informed in advance of privately sponsored events.
- 7.5 Commercial sales will be permitted in conjunction with temporary events, subject to acceptable community standards, as judged by Council.
- 7.6 Private donation of permanent facilities should be permitted provided this does not restrict public use and the display of the donor's name meets city standards.
- 7.7 The city will encourage joint ventures with private or non-profit groups to develop and operate cultural and recreational facilities on the Common.
- 7.8 User charges, where applicable, will be the same as for the rest of the city.

### 8. Safety

#### **Objective:**

**An area that is safe at any time.**

Council expressed concern about safety in the Common and asked whether additional lighting is required for safety and secure use after dark. The public had the same

concern. A safety audit of parts of the Common was carried out by the Police Department and ways to improve safety were recommended. In the North Common the audit reported that bushes near paths were safety hazards where people could hide and recommended that bushes near paths be removed. It was also recommended that pay telephones be placed nearer to the North Common. In the Central Common, the audit found the area much too dark and the nearest telephone too far away at 200 metres. It was recommended that the lighting on the path between the two fences and the playground equipment be improved.

In the Camp Hill Cemetery the audit reported that the area is not patrolled. It was also stated that there are many hiding places and the area needs more lighting but would be difficult to light. A proper safety audit for the Public Gardens has not been completed. This could be done later if deemed necessary. For Victoria Park it was suggested that, for greater safety, a telephone be placed in the middle of the park and non-functioning lights be repaired. The public also discussed the need for better safety and suggested more foot patrolling should be provided as a deterrent to crime.

### Policies

- 8.1 The recommendations from the Police Department's safety audit will be considered and appropriate action taken to improve safety in the Halifax Common on an ongoing basis. Particular attention to safety will be taken in future design.
- 8.2 Institutional and private property owners will be encouraged to investigate and improve safety of their open spaces.
- 8.3 Safety audits should be carried out as required in the future.
- 8.4 Additional foot patrolling by the Police Department should be considered as a means to deter crime.

#### D. IMPLEMENTATION - PRIORITIES

This document presents an overall plan for the Halifax Common. It includes general concepts for future use and design of specific areas and policies to guide development and use. The implementation is to be phased as resources permit. The plan would be implemented in the normal budget approval process each year. There is no commitment to spending at this time.

Within the plan a number of projects have been identified as priorities. The following are the proposed priorities:

1. Maintain and enhance the special character and beauty of the Halifax Common. Develop a common design language to create cohesiveness throughout the whole area. This should be particularly emphasized on publicly owned land and encouraged on private property.
2. Carry out a detailed design for the North and Central Common based on the concepts and policies in this plan with special attention to:
  - Water features
  - Passive areas on the North Common
  - Neighbourhood parks
  - Views, landscaping and trees on the North Common
  - Safety
  - Paths
  - Physically linking both areas
  - Access
3. Carry out a detailed design for the Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road area based on the concepts and policies in this plan. The general concept is that the whole Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road block should, over the long term, remain under city control and be consolidated for a multi-purpose all-season public area which includes athletic events, special events, concerts, public gatherings, and general public use.
4. In conjunction with the Wanderer's Grounds and Bell Road Area:
  - (a) Investigate and pursue other options for the location of the Parks and Grounds Depot, except for the greenhouses, over the longer term. Primary consideration shall be a new location which is equally effective for serving the Halifax Common and the Peninsula.
  - (b) Retain and protect the historic residence at the corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road for various public uses.



- (c) Discuss with the Junior Bengal Lancers and the Wanderer's Lawn Bowling Club the best long term location for their facilities, whether in the Halifax Common or elsewhere.
  - (d) Evaluate the Seniors' building and if it is concluded that retaining the building is not cost effective, remove the building.
5. Encourage an appreciation and understanding of the history and role of the Halifax Common through education and interpretive means and in conjunction with this:
- (a) Consider the design and development of a Freshwater Brook Trail with interpretive features such as signage.
  - (b) Provide interpretation and information on history and landmarks in the Halifax Common through signs and plaques and a promotional brochure.

## E. PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION

### 1. Background

Council requested that:

Upon completion of a plan for the Halifax Common:

"the matter of legislation to protect the geographical integrity of the existing Halifax Commons and guarantee no future erosion of city owned land be investigated."

When Council has adopted a plan, the form of legislation needed to carry out the plan needs to be determined. Protection of geographical integrity and a guarantee of no future erosion of city-owned land is a key part of the Plan. The plan also includes many other policies dealing with areas such as design, private use, and safety.

When a plan for the Halifax Common is completed there are a number of possible legislative avenues which could be taken. A review of these avenues and a recommendation is provided here.

### 2. Existing Protection

#### Original Grant Provisions and Common Land Rights.

The Halifax Common is protected under the original grant provision and common land rights. These provide general policies rather than specific policy and guidelines. They have given a general direction to the use, planning and development of the Halifax Common. The 1763 grant provision states that the Common is to be "for the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax forever." Although the type of public use has changed, the Common is, by and large, still in public use. Historically common land has been subject to common rights including the right of free access for all commoners. Under these rights, the owner is prevented by law from erecting structures and is obliged to leave the land open. This has had an effect. For example, in the early part of the 19th century there were attempts at enclosure and leasing to improve the land but these were defeated under this general legislation. In 1963 a consultant's report proposed construction of cultural and recreation centre. The public reacted against this and demanded that no more land should be used for buildings. In more recent times, concern about developing structures and fences has remained mostly for the part of the Halifax Common north of Bell Road.

#### Under the City Charter

In 1971 the Halifax Common was designated as a historic site under Section 425 of the City Charter. Also an existing Ordinance #10 Respecting the Common was established under the City Charter.

### 3. Options for Future Legislation

What vehicle should be used to best ensure the success of the Halifax Common Plan? There are several possible options.

#### Council Adopt Plan and Policies

The Halifax Common Plan could be adopted as policy by Council in the same manner as the Mainland Common Master Plan. When adopted by Council it would become Council's policy and any future development or activities would have to conform to this plan. Any substantial changes to the plan would have to be approved by Council. This would give flexibility to Council to administer the plan. However, it may mean less security to the Halifax Common and the public.

#### Incorporate in Municipal Development Plan

The Municipal Development Plan is one possible tool. The Halifax Common Plan could be incorporated into the Municipal Development Plan. This is not believed to be appropriate for the type of policy and implementation measures being proposed. Also Municipal Plans require approval of the provincial government which should not be required since it removes authority from the city for its own land.

#### A New Ordinance Under Section 425 of City Charter

The Halifax Common Plan could be implemented under the City Charter. The City Charter is established by provincial legislation and under this charter the city can establish ordinances to deal with a variety of matters. There is already an enabling section in the City Charter which could be used. Under Section 425 Council may "declare any area of land as a historic site and make ordinances and otherwise provide for the care, operation and protection of any historic site and landmark owned or held under lease by the city." The Halifax Common was designated as a historic site and Ordinance 10 was established under this section. These could possibly continue to be used as a vehicle for the Halifax Common Plan.

Other possibilities are the establishment of a new ordinance under Section 425 or the establishment of an ordinance under Section 427 which deals with the regulation, care and management of city-owned parks.

A new ordinance established under the City Charter administered by Council would have greater force than a resolution of Council, provide sufficient protection for the Common and the public and be subject to the standard administration practices of Council respecting ordinances.

#### Incorporate under Provincial Legislation

Protection of the Common could be incorporated under an act of Provincial legislation other than the City Charter. The disadvantage in this approach is that, to a large

degree, control would be taken out of the city's hands. Depending on the provisions of the act, it could lead to significant control by the Province. When the provincial government recently adopted legislation to control private development around the Public Gardens, the city opposed it strenuously. As a general principle it is important that the city retain authority over policy and regulation with the Halifax Common as it does over land use. This is particularly true since all cost of development and maintenance fall on the city.

#### **4. Recommendation**

Council should adopt the Halifax Common Plan by resolution and also incorporate it in some form in an ordinance established under the City Charter. Having the plan in an ordinance would give adequate protection to the Halifax Common and the public while ensuring that Council has the flexibility to administer the plan.