

What We Heard Report Phase 3 - Draft and Final Plan

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
Phase 1 – Foundations	4
Phase 2 – Planning Direction.....	5
Phase 3 – Draft and Final Plan	5
2. WHAT WE DID.....	6
3. WHAT WE HEARD	7
Ecology.....	8
Recreation and Mobility.....	9
Improving HRM’s Existing Parks and Open Spaces.....	10
Cultural Landscapes	11
Other Themes and Comments.....	12
Sandy Lake	12
Intergovernmental Cooperation.....	12
A Plan for Action	13

Maps

Map 1 – Growth Areas	14
Map 2 – Ecological Areas	15
Map 3 – Recreation & Mobility Network	16
Map 4 – Cultural Landscape Elements & Priority Areas	17

1. INTRODUCTION

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is developing the *Halifax Green Network Plan* (HGNP) as recommended in the *Regional Municipal Planning Strategy* (Regional Plan), approved in 2006 and revised in 2014, which calls for a *Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan* for the Region. The Regional Plan provides a framework for how the HRM wants to grow and develop as a vibrant and sustainable Region and community. The HGNP will establish a planning and land management framework for open space to help advance the multiple environmental, social, cultural, and economic objectives of the HRM, as well as informing future development and growth patterns.

HRM is committed to engaging the public and stakeholders throughout the planning process, and extensive engagement has been conducted as part of the development of the HGNP in accordance with the HRM Community Engagement Strategy. Consultation included multiple avenues for stakeholder groups and citizens across the region to participate. The objectives of the engagement process were to:

- Broadly engage the community (regional centre, urban, and rural communities) and stakeholder groups (provincial departments, NGOs, First Nations, ethnic groups, and other interests).
- Provide numerous opportunities for stakeholder groups with various interests to give input to balance economic, environmental, and socio-cultural interests.
- Provide opportunities for public involvement that are convenient and accessible.
- Build on past engagement successes (e.g. Regional Plan 2014) to provide continuity and acknowledge prior contributions.

Engagement for the HGNP was done in three phases:

Phase 1 – Foundations

The first round of engagement was conducted from May to July 2015. During this time residents from the regional centre, urban and rural communities, as well as various stakeholder groups, had the opportunity to provide their thoughts and perspectives on the issues, opportunities, values, and vision that should inform the HGNP.

The following engagement tools were used during the first phase of engagement:

- An online mapping tool
- Two (2) open houses
- Ten (10) pop-up open houses
- Two (2) stakeholder workshops focused on the cultural landscape
- Surveys: online and in-person
- Three (3) stakeholder workshops
- One (1) government workshop and two (2) meetings
- Six (6) stakeholder meetings

These engagement tools resulted in feedback by approximately 560 people from across HRM, for a total of over 9,000 comments and/or ideas. The feedback informed the Phase 1 *What We Heard Report*, as well as the *State of the Landscape Report* to the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee and Regional Council, that formed the foundation for developing the HGNP.



Pop-up engagement session at the Halifax Central Library

Phase 2 – Planning Direction

Phase 2 engagement was conducted between April and May 2016. To facilitate the highest levels of engagement, citizens were offered opportunities to participate and provide feedback in person, at home, or online, using the following engagement tools:

- Interactive online mapping tool
- Eight (8) open houses across HRM
- Questionnaire (online and in-person)

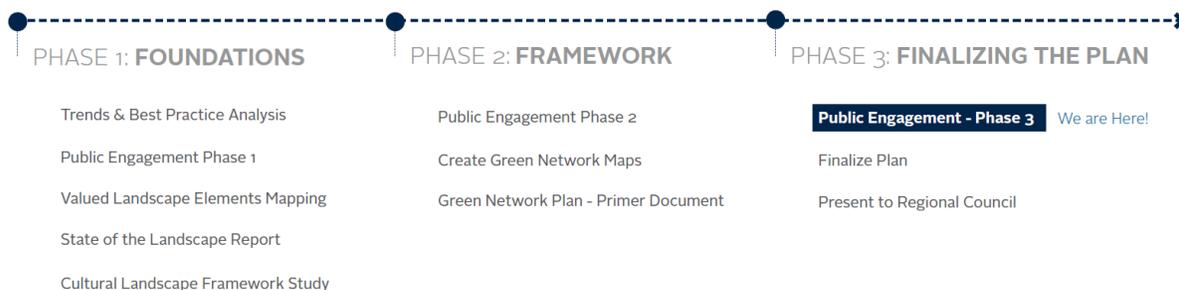
Using these tools, residents from the regional centre, urban and rural communities, as well as various stakeholder groups, were presented with the draft plan, and were provided with the opportunity to provide feedback. This process produced the Phase 2 *What We Heard Report*.

Phase 3 – Draft and Final Plan

Engagement in Phase 3 was conducted in May/June 2017, and has led to the drafting of the final Halifax Green Network Plan. More information on the engagement tools used for Phase 3 is available in the next section.

Public and stakeholder input collected in all three phases of consultation has helped inform the policies and strategies outlined in the proposed HGNP. This report outlines the feedback received in Phase 3 of consultation. Additional information on the HGNP, including the Phase 1 and 2 *What We Heard* reports, are available online here: <https://www.halifax.ca/about-halifax/regional-community-planning/community-plans/halifax-green-network-plan>

PROJECT TIMELINE



2. WHAT WE DID

The objective of Phase 3 was to develop a detailed implementation framework and to finalize a proposed plan for Regional Council’s approval based on the sum of all public and stakeholder feedback received in the three phases of the HGNP’s development.

Engagement in Phase 3 consisted of a series of public meetings, conducted in May/June 2017:

- May 15, 2017 – Dartmouth
- May 16/17, 2017 – Halifax
- May 31, 2017 – Upper Tantallon
- June 7, 2017 – Middle Musquodoboit
- June 8, 2017 – Sheet Harbour
- June 12, 2017 – Musquodoboit Harbour

The public meetings consisted of a staff presentation, as well as a question and answer period. The meetings were conducted in an “open house” style, and open to all members of the public. Informational boards displaying the proposed maps, as well as a primer document produced after engagement in Phase 2, helped to inform the discussion. Participants were asked to provide written comments as well as being encouraged to participate in the spoken question and answer period.



Open house with information panels and maps

3. WHAT WE HEARD

HRM received many comments from a wide variety of people and organizations. Discussion was directed along the five themes representing the functions of the HGNP, below. Additional themes emerged from the discussion and submitted comments, as detailed in the sections that follow.



Generally, participants were highly supportive of the development of the *Halifax Green Network Plan*, expressing strong concern for the future ecological wellbeing of the region, wildlife health, and access to recreational areas among other themes.

"Promote HRM as a place within nature, not nature within the city. Use this to inform planning decisions."

- Participant

"At the recent National Environmental Educators conference, a study was referenced that asked subjects to describe their happiest childhood memory. The replies almost always involved an outdoor, natural experience; almost never indoors."

- Participant

Ecology

The *Ecological Areas Map (Map 2)* identifies several key components of the regional open space system that need careful management to preserve the health and integrity of HRM's ecosystems. Participants were asked to review and comment on fifteen biodiversity and landscape connectivity strategies related to the map, and to suggest other strategies. A summary of the comments expressed is as follows:

- Participants expressed concern for a wide range of ecological and environment issues, including climate change, sea level rise, soil erosion, biological diversity and wildlife habitat.
- Of particular concern was the impact of provincial highways and proposed highway expansions on natural corridors and wildlife movement.
- A significant number of participants emphasized the importance of the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes wilderness area, expressing strong support for the establishment of a regional park in the area.
- Participants stated concern for impacts of the forestry industry on natural areas, and the provincial Department of Natural Resources' role in preserving these areas.
- Several participants praised HRM's use of multi-value mapping as a tool for land management and suggested the Green Network could be used as an example in the rest of Nova Scotia.
- Some participants suggested additional lands to be designated as ecologically significant:
 - Bowater lands by Mill lake, St Margarets Bay
 - Lands by Robert Lake and Griswold Lake, located to the east of the northern part of Porters Lake
 - Ingram river valley that connects the center of the province to the Atlantic Ocean at Ingramport
 - One participant recommended extending the “potential fragmentation area” on Porters Lake to the east to encompass the head of the Chezzetcook Inlet, where they were concerned about active transportation connectivity with Gaetz Brook



Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area (Halifaxtrails.ca)

Recreation and Mobility

The *Recreation & Mobility Network Map (Map 3)* consolidates recreation information from multiple municipal plans and policies to show large regional connections. Participants were asked to share any suggestions to improve or implement the map's recommendations. Suggestions included:

- Providing greater funding for maintaining recreational trails with different standards for different environments;
- Restoring and maintaining historic first nations routes;
- Improving infrastructure for active transportation (such as bicycle lanes to provide connectivity to parks);
- Installing more amenities at trail heads (such as shower/washroom facilities, transit stops, bicycle repair stands, etc.);
- Increasing investment in trails for motorized recreational vehicles (e.g. ATVs);
- Adding more paved sections to certain routes prone to flooding;
- Highlighting connections to the Trans-Canada Trail; and
- Recognizing the recreational value of older service roads.



Active transportation on the Chain of Lakes trail

Improving HRM's Existing Parks and Open Spaces

Considering the importance of multifunctional, connected open spaces, participants were asked how HRM can work to improve the function of the municipality's existing parks and open spaces. Monitoring and improving water quality in HRM's lakes, rivers, and watersheds was a concern for many participants, particularly in relation to anaerobic, blue green algae counts, soil topography and phosphate loading in urban waterways, pump house overflow and Stormwater impacts, and re-assessing HRM's current watershed studies. Several participants suggested expanding efforts to improve the region's food security by promoting urban agriculture within existing parks and through additional land acquisitions on the part of HRM. Other suggestions included:

- Limiting the development and proximity of tall buildings next to parks;
- Investing in trail development;
- Installing natural play structures;
- Allowing commercial services within some parks to generate revenue and employment while enhancing the user experience;
- Using active transportation infrastructure as an educational resource to foster a sense of stewardship among users of protected landscapes; and
- Using NSPI line areas for native flora to help sustain the bee population.



Shubie Park (Halifaxtrails.ca)

Cultural Landscapes

Participants were asked to comment on preliminary mapping of cultural landscape elements and priority areas to help in the development of the *Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan (Map 4)*. A summary of the comments is as follows:

- Many comments focused on First Nations issues, including concern over First Nations Land and other Treaty concerns, sacred sites and burial grounds, highlighting First Nations history such as historic use of waterways and other natural sites, as well as access to historical lands. These issues warrant further consideration as HRM's *Cultural and Heritage Priorities Plan* continues to be developed.
- Some participants suggested additional lands to be included in the mapping as archeologically/culturally significant:
 - Micou's Island, Lake Banook, the Chain of Lakes system, and the Musquodoboit River Valley were suggested as significant First Nations sites
 - Historic industrial sites like the historic Industrial corridor from Williams Lake to the Northwest Arm and the Purcell's Cove quarries
 - Historic housing along Riverside Avenue in Musquodoboit Harbour
- Other commenters expressed hope that the next stages in developing *the Cultural and Heritage Priorities Plan* would provide a 'roadmap' for establishing credible cultural landscape recognition, invite community led initiatives to assist in shaping cultural landscapes, and provide opportunities to promote the richness of HRM's diverse heritage and address inequality.



**Aboriginal
Significance**



**Cultural and
Historical
Significance**

Other Themes and Comments

Some participants highlighted other concerns, including the importance of promoting complete communities to limit sprawl, identifying areas suitable for renewable energy investment, and controlling the location of cell towers in ecologically sensitive areas. Several themes are discussed further here:

Sandy Lake

A large number of participants expressed a desire for much greater protections for the wilderness around Sandy Lake and Marsh Lake in Bedford, lands that fall outside of the existing Sandy Lake Park. Park users were concerned about nearby forestry activity and the potential impact on the area's ecosystems. Several participants pointed out that areas around Sandy Lake may also possess archaeological and cultural significance. Overall, the natural recreational and ecological value of the Sandy Lake Area was highlighted by many participants.



Sandy Lake Park (Halifaxtrails.ca)

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Many participants emphasized the need for exceptional cooperation between HRM and other government bodies, such as the Province and other municipalities, to realize the goals set out in the HGNP. Cooperation with the provincial Department of Natural Resources was seen as particularly important, given participants' concerns for forestry activity on Crown Lands. One participant suggested that HGNP should refer directly to policies of the provincial Natural Resources Strategy to facilitate provincial cooperation in implementation. Cooperation with adjacent municipalities was seen as important for protecting natural corridors that cross municipal boundaries

A Plan for Action

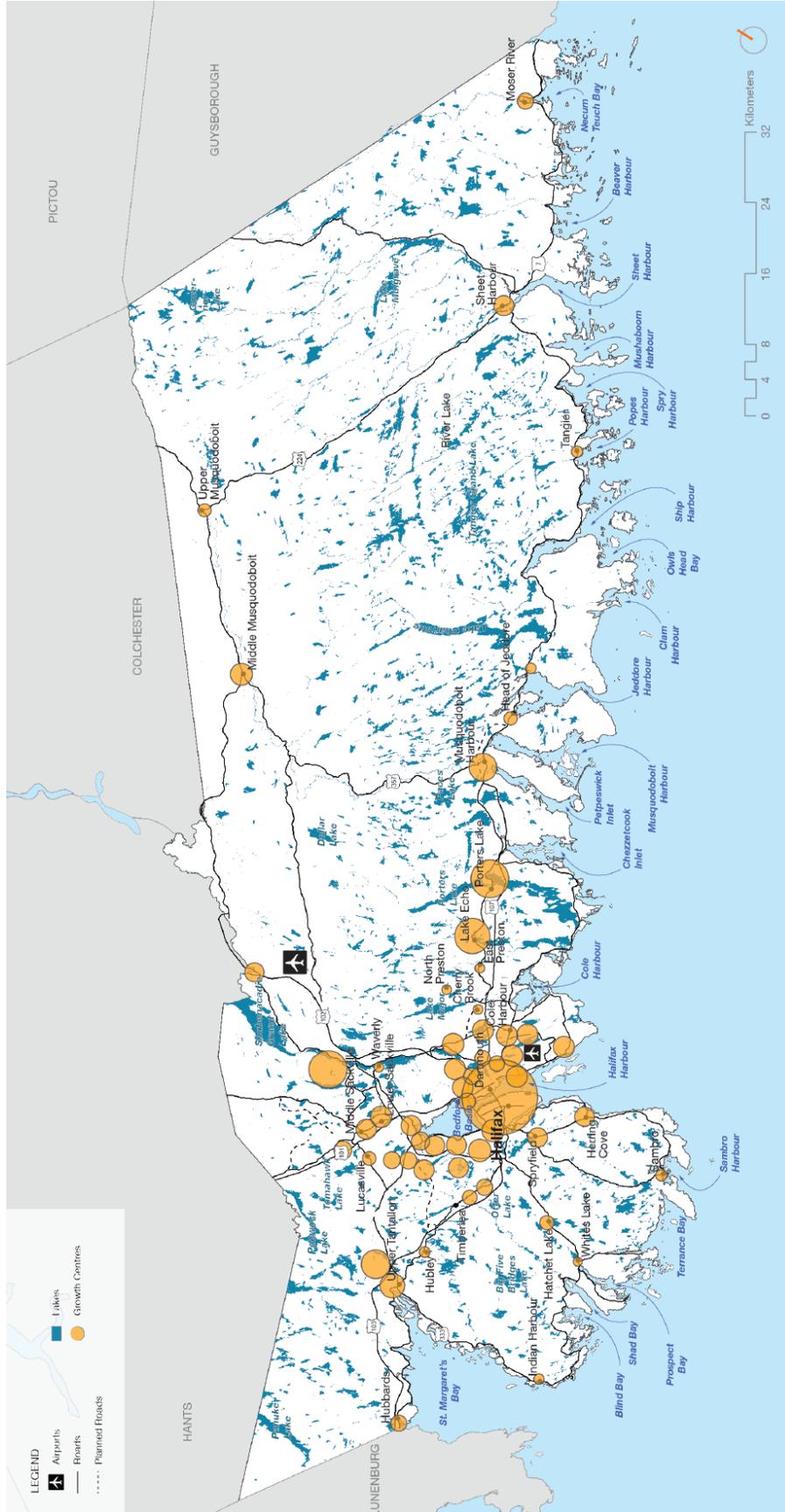
Participants were asked to reflect on what actions or tools they thought would have the most positive impact in realizing the proposed Green Network. Participants were asked to consider different levels of protection, including:

- Purchasing land;
- Applying zones that limit uses to conserve land;
- Clustering development to protect open spaces; and
- Improving the functions of existing parks and open spaces.

A summary of the feedback received is as follows:

- Participants suggested several implementation tools, including:
 - The creation of new zoning for significant or sensitive areas;
 - Investments in new and existing recreation trails;
 - Land acquisition;
 - Introduction of transferable development rights;
 - Prioritization of lake and water health;
 - A moratorium on development in certain areas pending the solution of some issues identified in the HGNP (such as wildlife connectivity through ‘pinch points’); and
 - Engaging with community groups to activate joint protection and use of lands.
- While some participants pointed out certain significant areas that were already protected locally or provincially, most participants suggested that the Municipality could play a strong role in realizing the vision of the HGNP.
- Many participants stated the importance of HGNP priorities being reflected in other plans as well as the Municipality’s land use by-law, to ensure that implementation is achieved.
- Given the fast pace of development, speed of plan implementation was a concern for some participants. Some suggested that plan and by-law amendments be prioritized in ‘pinch’ areas.
- Several participants stressed the importance of effective communications, pointing out that the plan will have the greatest impact the more people are informed about the issues and goals it seeks to highlight.

Map 1 - Growth Areas



Map 2 - Ecological Areas



Map 3 – Recreation & Mobility Network



Map 4 – Cultural Landscape Elements & Priority Areas



Priority Areas

- 1 Hubbards to Tantallon
- 2 Glen Haven to Indian Harbour
- 3 Prospect Inlet
- 4 Sambro to Purcell's Cove
- 5 Bedford Hwy. 2, Birch Cove to Head of Basin (Old Post Road to Windsor)
- 6 Shubenacadie Canal
- 7 Dartmouth Central Common
- 8 The Prestons
- 9 Head of Chezzetcook to Lawrencetown
- 10 Cow Bay to Lawrencetown
- 11 1917 Halifax Explosion Impacted Area
- 12 Northwest Arm Waterscape
- 13 Connaught Avenue Corridor
- 14 Citadel and Halifax Common Lands
- 15 Uniacke Square, Gottingen / Brunswick Creighton Corridor
- 16 Sheet Harbour and Waterscape
- 17 Musquodoboit Valley