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MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair and Members of CDAC
FROM: Ben Sivak, Community Policy Program Manager
DATE: September 14, 2020
SUBJECT: **Centre Plan Package B Community Engagement**

Public engagement on the Centre Plan has been guided by the [Centre Plan Community Engagement Strategy](#) approved by Council in 2015, with more detailed Community Engagement Plans presented and endorsed by CDAC for Package A draft planning documents ([Jan. 2018](#)) and Package B ([Nov. 2019](#)). The purpose of this memo is to provide CDAC with an overview of completed Package B community engagement, and to outline a framework for moving forward given the continued uncertainty and public health risks associated with COVID-19.

COVID-19 Impact on Centre Plan Community Engagement

Draft Package B was first presented to CDAC on [March 4, 2020](#) and by March 13, 2020 12 pop-up events and 10 stakeholder sessions were completed (Attachment A). However, eight public meetings scheduled from March and April were cancelled until further notice in response to the COVID-19 pandemic public health and emergency measures.

Centre Plan Package B had ambitious timelines which included completing community engagement by April of 2020 and bringing the planning documents to a public hearing by September of 2020. The project timelines have been impacted by the pandemic because the project can not move forward without adequately consulting the community. In a memorandum to the Mayor and Council circulated in March of 2020, staff indicated that in-person meetings were an important component of the Centre Plan process and that the project timeline would be updated when there was greater certainty on when these public consultations could be safely completed. Staff also indicated that online engagement opportunities would be enhanced.

Since then, staff published a series of online surveys on key themes to both educate and continue to engage the public on key policies proposed in Package B. Staff have also continued to receive correspondence and requests for phone calls and virtual meetings with stakeholders and residents. In July 2020, CDAC also re-initiated its meetings to review draft Package B in a virtual format.

The following table summarizes the Centre Plan Package B engagements completed both before and during the COVID-19 state of emergency.

Table 1: Completed Centre Plan Package B Community Engagement

Community Engagement (pre-COVID 19 state of emergency)	
CDAC Meetings	1 (March 2020)
Pop-Ups	10 (50 comment cards)
Stakeholder Sessions	12 (85 attendees)
Public Meetings	8 (scheduled but cancelled)
Community Engagement (post-COVID state of emergency)	
CDAC meetings	4 (July - September 2020)
Correspondence	70 (approx.450+ comments tracked)
10 Online Surveys	1,615 responses
Stakeholder meetings	upon request

P&D Framework for Community Engagement Under Social Distancing Measures

The COVID-19 state of emergency is expected to continue this fall and possibly into 2022 depending on factors such as the development of a vaccine. Given this context, on September 1, 2020 Council approved amendments to the *COVID-19 Administrative Order*¹ which provides direction to Planning & Development on how to carry out and adjust community engagement practices to respect health and safety requirements for societal gathering. The presence of COVID-19 accelerated some of the changes to engagement HRM has already been moving towards based on the following key principles:

- respecting the states of societal gathering;
- providing access to engagement opportunities through a variety of mediums;
- responding to legislative/regulatory process requirements; and
- strengthening inclusion, improve our processes and remove barriers to participation.

The framework states that all future community engagement, in particular longer processes such as Centre Plan, will need to plan for and be tailored to the following possible states of social gathering:

- **Heavily Restricted State of Public Gathering** (pandemic uncontained, high rates of infection, mobility restricted) when most community engagements should be delayed due to the state of shock, grief and hardship in the community;
- **Limited State of Public Gathering** (pandemic controlled, low rates of infection, mobility allowed, social distancing required) when online, mail or phone tools are primarily supported, with limited in-person meetings that follow public health protocols; and
- **Large or Full Public Gathering Permitted** (pandemic ends, or public health indicates limited need for social distancing): a mix of in-person and online tools should still be used as large meetings may still be psychologically difficult.

¹ See August 11, 2020 [staff report](#)

Revised Centre Plan Package B Community Engagement Plan

Based on the community engagement completed to date, staff have identified two main areas of focus to complete the engagement phase of the project: 1) establish residential neighbourhoods, and; 2) the Saint Patrick Alexandra Site. Established residential neighbourhoods is a key component of Package B that is generating the most public interest and warrants further efforts to gather feedback from residents and community groups. In the case of the Saint Patrick's Alexandra site, additional efforts are being made to consult with the Indigenous and African Nova Scotian community in Halifax's north end, given Council's direction to explore zoning changes on the site.

Based on the community engagement framework approved by Council on Sept. 1, 2020, the revised community engagement plan for Centre Plan Package B assumes an extended *limited state of public gathering* in 2020/2021 which would make most in-person public meetings logistically challenging or impractical. Consequently, staff are proposing to complete the Package B community engagement process by further enhancing on-line engagement opportunities while also providing limited opportunities for small in-person walking tours with interested community groups. Based on best practice research, staff propose the following community engagement framework for the Saint Patrick's Alexandra site, and for the established residential neighbourhoods, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Proposed Centre Plan Package B Additional Community Engagement

Saint Patrick's A. Engagement Process (September – December)	
WHAT?	HOW?
Two introductory stakeholder meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-engagement calls and stakeholder letter directed to diverse community groups. • Introductory virtual meetings to present purpose of engagement, proposed process and seek feedback and support.
Online survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey to invite comments and stories about the value of the site to the community, and seek feedback on potential development options, public benefits and other planning issues. • Survey will include access to a recorded online presentation for self-directed information; • The survey will be open for approximately 8 weeks (Sept. – Nov, 2020)
Virtual Community Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed to take place in November, the intent of the meeting is to present and seek community's feedback on whether the current policies should be maintained, refined or changes
Community Follow Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed to take place in December or early January, staff intend to report back to the community to present the community feedback received and outline refined options that could be recommended to Council. This follow up may take the form of a virtual meeting, or other online tool, depending on the community feedback received on the engagement process.
Written Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written comments will be accepted until mid-December.

Established Residential Engagement Process (November – December)	
WHAT?	HOW?
“Ask Me Anything (AMA) Session”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned for November, this online live event will include a short presentation from staff and invite written questions and comments that will be responded to by staff in real time.
Three Established Residential Virtual Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These presentations will be offered during different times of the day and focus on what is proposed to be changed for the established residential neighbourhoods, including different areas of the Regional Centre. The meetings will be hosted through MS Teams Live Event software and will include an online as well as phone-in option. Participants will be able to ask questions. The meetings will be broadly promoted through all Centre Plan and HRM social channels and e-mail lists. Recorded presentations and “What Is Changing?” Fact sheets will also be posted.
Small virtual meetings and/or walking tours with interested community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These virtual meetings or small outdoor walking tours are intended to enable neighbourhood groups to connect with staff and provide feedback on the topics of interest to them. The opportunity will be promoted through Centre Plan stakeholder e-mail list and social media and will be accommodated based on request.
Written comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written comments will be accepted until mid-December.

The engagement initiatives outlined above provides for a robust way to complete the Centre Plan community engagement process that respects the states of societal gathering, provides access to engagement opportunities through a variety of mediums, responds to legislative/regulatory process requirements, and strengthens inclusion. The revised approach also provides greater certainty related to the project timelines and creates momentum for an adoption path culminating in a public hearing tentatively targeted for the second half of 2021.

Staff look forward to receiving CDAC’s feedback on this updated approach for community engagement for this important project.