

# Introduction to Halifax

## Sustained growth through responsible investments

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is the vibrant, thriving economic hub of Canada's East Coast. For more than a decade, the municipality has been evolving its fiscal discipline and capacity to deliver increasing public services and form a solid foundation for future prosperity. The approach continues to deliver value for taxes and business confidence—73 per cent of the 2018 Citizen Survey respondents said that they get at least good value for the services they receive, while 85 per cent of the 2018 Business Confidence Survey respondents noted that they are optimistic about their current and future economic prospects (Halifax Index, 2018).



## Overview of Halifax Regional Municipality

The City of Halifax was first incorporated in 1842. It was later joined by the County of Halifax (1879), City of Dartmouth (1961) and the Town of Bedford (1980). In 1996 these individual entities were amalgamated into the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM).

HRM is the capital of Nova Scotia and is its largest and most diverse municipality, with more than 400 kilometres of shoreline defining a robust seaside culture. HRM is home to about 46 per cent of the province's population and is forecast to have 444,000 people by 2019 (Canmac Economics, 2018). It is a modern example of urban, suburban and rural living in Canada, generating 52 per cent of Nova Scotia's gross domestic product (GDP).

HRM has a youthful and multicultural spirit, and growth and development is evident in many areas well beyond its historic downtown and inner-city communities. As the largest city east of Montreal, HRM serves as the regional center for nearly three million people. This context allows the municipality to prosper among its competitors and boast many attributes typical of much larger cities.

HRM's diverse economy spans many industries, including financial services; aerospace and defence; information and communication technology; ocean technology; energy; life sciences; and transportation and logistics. With one of the largest concentrations of post-secondary institutions (six universities and three community college campuses) and one of the best educated workforces in North America (close to 70 per cent of the working age population has post-secondary certification), HRM offers a sustainable, talented workforce for its knowledge-based economy. Despite its modest size, HRM is considered one of Canada's 'hub' cities. The municipality is set to experience GDP growth of 1.2 per cent in 2019. In recent years, HRM has out-paced many of its peer cities in levels of GDP growth and immigration levels.

## Municipal Government

The Halifax Regional Municipality is governed by a Regional Council/Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) form of government, including one Councillor for each geographic area and an independently elected Mayor. Currently, there are 16 Councillors representing 16 distinct areas of the region. The CAO provides advice and guidance to Regional Council, while carrying out relevant Regional Council policies and programs. The municipality has over 4,000 employees providing a wide range of services and programs as mandated by Regional Council. Services include:

- Public Transit
- Policing
- Fire and Emergency
- Streets and Roads and Sidewalks
- Recreation and Cultural Programs
- Libraries
- Community Planning
- Economic Development
- Regulatory and Compliance
- Environmental Stewardship and Services
- Water, Waste Water and Storm Water is provided by the Halifax Regional Water Commission, a regulated utility



The municipality operates on a 12-month fiscal cycle, from April 1 to March 31 of the following year. Under provincial law, it is required to prepare a balanced operating budget for ongoing items such as salaries, wages and other recurring costs, in addition to a capital budget for fixed assets. The operating budget is balanced. The capital budget is financed through a combination of debt (long-term assets), federal and provincial cost sharing, reserves and transfers from the operating budget (capital from operating).

### Regional Council's Multi-Year Strategic Plan

At the beginning of its term, Regional Council establishes its priorities for next four years. These priorities provide direction to municipal staff related to where to focus change, growth, and improvement efforts that will benefit the regional communities.

The strategic plan articulates vision, mission, and values and establishes a framework to deliver Regional Councils' priorities for the period 2017-2020.

The following approved Council priority areas support its mission to deliver high-quality public service that make a positive difference in citizens' lives.

- **Economic Development**
- **Service Delivery**
- **Healthy, Liveable Communities**
- **Social Development**
- **Governance & Engagement**
- **Transportation**

### **Key Initiatives Aligned with Council Priorities**

The following are some of the important projects and activities within the municipality's business plans that support Council's vision and mission for HRM: "We take pride in providing high-quality public service to benefit our citizens. We make a difference."

***Economic Development:*** HRM is a sought-after business destination that promotes business investment and is responsive to the needs of the community

- Through a partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia, HRM and a local business advisory panel, HRM is reducing red tape and improving service delivery, making it easier to do business here.
- The municipality continues to identify potential commercial taxation changes to help small businesses.
- The Cogswell Redevelopment Program will see a new neighbourhood built – where the Cogswell Interchange now stands – designed to connect downtown with the north end and waterfront, creating a stronger, more inclusive network of communities.

***Service Delivery:*** HRM meets the needs of the people it serves, resulting in greater satisfaction with, and confidence in the municipality

- HRM takes pride in providing high-quality public service that are aligned with improving customer service and make a positive difference in citizens' lives. The municipality's Performance Excellence Program facilitates corporate performance excellence training and engagement, and provides mentorship to Lean Six Sigma-trained employees
- Through both short and long-term planning, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) will continue to advance critical initiatives including the ICT Strategic Plan, IT Asset Management, and Enterprise Content Management Strategy to drive exceptional customer service delivery through technology enhancements.
- Staff will continue to implement the new Recreation Services software to significantly improve customer experience while exploring opportunities to increase unstructured play and improve access to programs and services.

**Healthy, Liveable Communities:** *HRM is a safe, liveable and sustainable community that encourages public engagement and participation in civic life*

- Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency continues to increase inspection volumes. Fire Safety Maintenance inspections program will evolve to include daycares, places of worship, and bars/restaurants.
- HRM is increasing support for community gardens, community ovens, urban orchards, and bee-keeping. Investment continues to flow to existing and new recreational infrastructure including the Dartmouth Multi-Pad Arena, the Zatzman Sportsplex, and the St Andrews Recreation Centre Design.
- HRM remains focused on acquiring access to parklands including Blue Mountain Birch Cove, Shaw Wilderness Park and Porters Lake Canal, as well as completing and initiating other master plans.

**Social Development:** *HRM's communities have access to social infrastructure that supports all segments of the community*

- The municipality continues its work with the Housing and Homelessness Partnership to establish new funding tools, and to remove regulatory barriers to developing seniors/supporting housing and secondary suites in existing homes.
- The renovated Musquodoboit Harbour Library and Recreation Centre, along with the Dartmouth North Community Centre and Library, have introduced modern facilities, technology and community gathering places including an adaptable 'outdoor library'.
- HRM continues to implement Youth Programs as part of the municipality's Youth Plan (Youth Advocate Program, Youth Live, Youth Leadership, Youth Advisory Committee, Youth Rec).

**Governance and Engagement:** *HRM's governance structures and communications approach provide maximum opportunity for public engagement in and appropriate stewardship of municipal affairs*

- HRM is one of 40 municipalities around the world selected to participate in the Bloomberg Foundation program. Bloomberg Harvard staff, Harvard University faculty, the Bloomberg Philanthropies and What Works Cities team, and a range of experts will help the municipality strengthen its ability to use data in decision-making and to solve urgent and complex challenges.
- Municipal staff are completing best-practice reviews and auditing current community engagement programs across all lines of business to ensure communication uses consistent terms, plain language and accessible information (multi-lingual or icons/graphics).
- The Audit & Finance Standing Committee approved two independent, competency-based members to provide oversight to the external auditor.

***Transportation: Integrated, multi-modal, long range plan to move people and goods in HRM in support of neighbourhoods, communities & economic growth***

- Halifax Transit achieved its 100% Accessible Fleet goal, while improving accessibility at more than 200 bus stops.
- Through the second year of its Moving Forward Together Plan, Transit modified nine routes to optimize resources and ridership, initiated the Bus Rapid Transit Study, and began exploring the feasibility and potential of routing transit priority corridors through engagement programs for the functional designs for Bayers Road and Gottingen Street.
- The Integrated Mobility Plan features approximately \$22.7 million in capital investments to advance the Plan's active transportation third-year objectives including functional studies to address gaps in targeted sidewalk networks, new sidewalk projects (85 per cent of projects tendered), moving the Macdonald Bridge Bikeway Connector Project to detailed design, and completing the Sackville Greenway.