

HALIFAX

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Item No. 14.1.2
Halifax Regional Council
January 29, 2019

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: January 22, 2019

SUBJECT: Development of a Regional Mountain Biking Strategy

ORIGIN

September 19, 2017 Regional Council Meeting Motion:

MOVED by Councillor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee:

THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report on developing a Regional Mountain Bike Strategy similar to that of Western Australia and British Columbia, including:

- The formation of a Regional Mountain Bike Advisory Committee comprised of key stakeholders (such as Mountain Bike Halifax) to help guide the Strategy.
- Identifying and strategic planning of sustainable mountain bike trails / infrastructure in HRM
- Identify funding sources.

A combined initiative from a Recreation, Ecotourism (like the British Columbia Mountain Bike Tourism initiative), Health & Wellness perspective to develop and market Mountain Biking in HRM to become a world-class destination. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipal Charter, sections 61, 63, and specifically 79(1)(k), (x), and (ah):

79(1) The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for:

(k) recreational programs;

(x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose;

(ah) playgrounds, trails, including trails developed, operated or maintained pursuant to an agreement made under clause 73(c), bicycle paths, swimming pools, ice arenas and other recreational facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to:

1. Discuss this report with mountain biking and other associated organizations, highlighting the role of the municipality in the use of municipal lands for mountain biking trails as a component of an overall strategy to developed by such groups;

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2. Consider mountain biking trails and related infrastructure in the development of future recreational trail programs and projects within HRM open space; and
3. Consider the development of supportive infrastructure for the McIntosh trail system, which might include parking lots and other amenities, through future capital budget plans.

BACKGROUND

On September 19, 2017, Regional Council requested a staff report on the development of a regional mountain biking strategy, citing examples from Western Australia and British Columbia. Regional Council's discussion leading to the request for a staff report highlighted the following:

- Recognition that biking comes in a variety of forms
- Mountain biking is a growing recreational activity
- Most current trails exist on unauthorized portions of land
- Other municipalities in Nova Scotia have embraced mountain biking as a contributor to local economic development through the growing adventure tourism sector

Mountain biking is an overall reference to a variety of activities and sports associated with riding bicycles off-road, typically over rough terrain. It occurs within wilderness settings, often across the same areas where hiking or other shared uses occur. Informally and without permission, this includes provincial, municipal, and private lands. There are several different forms and styles of mountain biking, including:

- *Cross Country (XC)* - This is the most popular form of recreational mountain biking occurring on single and double track trails enabling riders to experience the outdoors, unique terrains and landscapes, scenic views, and a sense of adventure over longer continuous routes.
- *All Mountain* - This involves versatile riding on natural land forms up hills and long back country single track trails with naturally occurring obstacles.
- *Trail* – This involves riding on a trail through the forest.
- *Downhill* - This involves descending at higher speeds like downhill skiing and usually requires a chair lift to get to the top.
- *Free Riding* -This involves non-competitive forms of riding with flowing trails, berms, jumps, speed and technical trail features.
- *Dirt Jumping* - This involves a dedicated area with a progression of dirt hills or a “pump track” which is a circuit trail of jumps and berms.
- *Mountain Bike Trials* – This involves slow, static hopping onto different structures and through obstacles.
- *Competitive Mountain Biking*- There are several competitive disciplines within mountain biking such as Downhill, Enduro, Cross Country, Four Cross (4X) and Short Track. Mountain biking is an Olympic sport and is part of the Canada Games.

This report is concerned with overall recreational mountain biking, rather than specialized sport components. This captures the most popular or generic element of mountain biking, which is also the focus of the strategies that are cited in Regional Council's motion. This typically involves travelling to shared single or wider track hiking trails that are typically comprised of natural features that are of interest to riders. Such trails are typically improved by mountain biking groups, sometimes with bridges and other built features. Such trail systems can become regional destinations.

DISCUSSION

This report provides information about mountain biking in the regional and local context, reviews the activity's governance and promotion, describes what is contained within a comprehensive strategy, and discusses the municipality's possible role in such strategies.

Regional Context

There are not necessarily good resources to accurately account for the exact number of participants in mountain biking in the Maritimes. The use of online resources such as Trailforks to track users and their locations is increasing and shows that there is a steady increase in participants from 2013 to 2018. It is clear that the popularity of the activity is growing based on an increasing number of mountain biking trails that have been developed in the Atlantic region, such as the following:

“Gorge” Kentville, Nova Scotia

The “Gorge” is a 64.5-acre municipal park that is owned by the Town of Kentville and operated in partnership with the Annapolis Valley Mountain Bike Association. The development of the site was driven by the mountain bike community to provide an appropriate area, while minimizing unauthorized trail development. The site contains trail systems for shared use of hiking, snow shoeing and mountain biking, along with a dedicated skills park. The level of trail riding difficulty is identified from recreational to advanced with technical features throughout the park. There is a small parking lot, a picnic shelter, a portable washroom, a bike repair station, wayfinding and trail signage. The Gorge is a popular destination for mountain bike events, including this year’s 2018 Canada Cup National Cross-Country Mountain Bike Competition.

Keppoch Mountain, Antigonish Nova Scotia

Keppoch Mountain is a 300-acre site located in Antigonish, Nova Scotia that was established with financial support of the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality of the County of Antigonish. The area has over 20 km of non-motorized multi use trails, including mountain biking for beginner to advanced riders. The location hosts a variety of riding events and provides amenities such as a shuttle service to the top of the hill for trail users. The site is operated year-round by a volunteer non-profit society.

Railyard Mountain Bike Park, Truro, Nova Scotia

This bike park is in Victoria Park, a municipal park, and provides riders from all backgrounds and abilities a wide range of riding opportunities, including exploring the trails and unique landscapes. The Railyard also includes a Bike Skills Park and a Short Track area.

Fundy National Park, New Brunswick

Fundy National Park has integrated recreational mountain biking on several shared trails that allow riders to experience coastal areas and Acadian forests. New single-track trails are being developed in collaboration with the International Mountain Bike Association. The park has also added a pump-track facility.

Sugarloaf Provincial Park, New Brunswick

Sugarloaf Provincial Park, in New Brunswick’s Appalachian Mountain Region, contains 25 km of hiking and biking trails along with the only downhill mountain bike park in Atlantic Canada with an accessible chairlift for bikers. The mountain bike park trails are designed for beginner to advanced riders. The site is a destination for various events, including an annual 3-day bike festival.

Many of trails in Atlantic Canada are upon public lands, and as noted above, they are may also be supported by municipalities and other levels of government.

Local Context

Although mountain biking occurs throughout HRM, the municipality does not have a significant amount of direct experience with the planning and development of mountain biking trails. However, in 2014, Regional

Council approved a proposal from the McIntosh Run Watershed Association (MRWA) to design, build, and operate approximately 27 km of single-track trails for non-motorized recreational use, including mountain biking, trail running, hiking and snowshoeing on municipal portion of lands between Spryfield and Herring Cove. MRWA also received authority from the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources to establish trails on adjoining Provincial lands.

Other volunteer organizations such as Mountain Bike Halifax have been collaborating on the project. Early phases have been completed, with additional work being planned (Attachments A and B). The proposed trail system, once completed, will be a regional amenity. Local riders have expressed that the site, compared to other regions, has unique natural features which have formed a trail system over “granite whale backs”. This is currently the only officially approved single track trail system on municipally owned land. However, this project has been a strong impetus for the September 19, 2017 Regional Council motion. This group hopes to grow the activity and the presence of mountain biking trails in HRM. It noted that with the success of this group in the McIntosh Run area, increasing consideration needs to be given toward the provision of supporting infrastructure such as trailhead parking.

Aside from this, the municipality does offer some recreation programming for youth and mountain biking, but this is limited in scope.

Governance and Advocacy

Mountain biking has international, national, provincial and local bodies and groups that aim to develop all levels and forms of mountain biking through advocacy and capacity building, including:

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA Canada)

IMBA Canada is a national not for profit organization that advocates for mountain biking, and trail access across Canada. Founded internationally in 1988, and nationally in 2004, IMBA supports and represents over 35,000 cyclists worldwide in all forms of mountain biking: cross country, downhill, and freeride. IMBA Canada's mission is to ensure that Canada is home to a strong and vibrant mountain biking community, riding a world class network of mountain bike trails. Its guiding principles includes *Speak, Build, Respect, and Ride*.

Cycling Canada

Cycling Canada is a National Sport Organization that promotes cycling, including the sport of mountain biking, in Canada. The organization's guiding strategies include developing coaching, instructors, officials, volunteers, organizers and staff; developing elite athletes; accessibility to cycling opportunities; providing national and regional training centres; and financial stability. Bicycle Nova Scotia is a member of Cycling Canada.

Bicycle Nova Scotia

Bicycle Nova Scotia (BNS) is a provincial organization of cyclists in Nova Scotia made up of commuters, mountain bikers, racers, recreational riders and elite athletes, who work together to grow cycling in Nova Scotia. The organization is invested in promoting cycling culture, improving infrastructure, and strengthening the cycling community in Nova Scotia. BNS has developed a five-year strategic plan in 2015, of which mountain biking is a component. This strategic plan includes five key strategic areas:

- General Organizational Aspirations
- Competition
- Touring and Recreation
- Education and Safety
- Transportation

Mountain Bike Halifax

Mountain Bike Halifax (MBH) has been working collaboratively with MRWA on the McIntosh Run project. As a newly formed volunteer organization, it has a broader mandate to provide, preserve, and promote sustainable mountain biking in HRM. Its objectives are to promote:

- the benefits of mountain biking from a recreation, ecotourism and health & wellness perspective;
- sustainable Mountain Biking trails in HRM for all levels of riders from beginner to advanced; and
- Halifax (HRM) as a world-class Mountain Biking destination.

While mountain biking is referenced by groups other than specifically Mountain Biking Halifax, the establishment of a clear structure of governance is a matter that is currently being addressed within the broader group. A clear governance structure and roles are important foundational pieces which are necessary to be able to develop a comprehensive strategy for the future guidance to the mountain biking community. A clear governance structure would also assist both the mountain biking community and the municipality in being able to respond appropriately to a single entity with a common voice.

Development of a Mountain Biking Strategy

The Western Australia and British Columbia mountain biking strategies are well known. One of the reasons for this is because of their comprehensive scope. They outline ways to grow mountain biking through increased participation, developing trails and other infrastructure, and realizing economic development benefits through tourism. In this regard, the Western Australian Mountain Biking Strategy outlines the most practical approach to how to grow mountain biking. It has a variety of strategies and recommendations that are organized across five objectives, as follows:

1. *Planning and Governance: Establish a strong and coordinated approach to mountain biking and governance*
 - This objective recognizes that there is need to formalize relationships of groups and organizations.
2. *Participation: Support and increase mountain bike participation and community involvement*
 - Increasing the participation between genders and age levels and abilities and promoting it through effective communications, events calendars, and promotions are a key objective.
3. *Trails, Facilities and Infrastructure: Develop a statewide network and sustainable trails, facilities and associated infrastructure*
 - This objective recognizes that there is a strong need for trails and supportive infrastructure, particularly with increased participation. Associated with this, there is a need for such trails to be sustainable and well-planned, designed, and maintained.
4. *Tourism and Marketing: Raise the recreational sport and tourism profile of the Western Australian Mountain Biking*
 - Areas such as Western Australia have become renowned as destinations specifically for mountain biking. This objective is to capitalize on this through tourism promotion and the organization of events.
5. *Resourcing: Develop a diverse revenue stream to ensure economic sustainability*
 - Long term funding needs to be secured from multiple stakeholders across all levels of government, the tourism sector, private businesses and the mountain biking community.

The objectives above, and their components, are found to have a great deal of applicability to how a local strategy might be developed and organized, potentially as a more detailed plan that could fall within the already existing overall Bicycle Nova Scotia Strategy. Mountain biking groups are already starting to formalize governance structures, and there are several initiatives underway that readily fit within the types

of objectives that are noted above. A comprehensive local strategy would pull these together and clarify the relationship of the mountain biking initiatives related to the existing Bicycle Nova Scotia Strategy.

Developing a Local Strategy and the Role of the Municipality

In considering the main elements from strategies such as the Western Australian Mountain Biking Strategy, the development of a similar strategy would be most appropriately driven from within the Mountain Bike community itself. Similar to other sports, it is important that the specific sporting community play a leadership role in the development of a comprehensive strategy to guide its future plans, governance and stakeholder relationships. There are, however, important roles for the municipality and other levels of government. One is being a participant in the development of such a strategy. The other is in accommodating the development of trails on public lands, considering funding requests for trail development, providing trail inspections, and planning and developing supportive infrastructure such trail head facilities.

At this time, the municipality is considering how to best proceed with both a recreational trails program, including whether to advance with a community partnership model and how such a program might be funded and projects prioritized. Additionally, standards need to be considered. This is an emerging topic as the municipality increasingly acquires wilderness lands and considers how they may be most suitably developed for recreational purposes. For some municipal wilderness lands, such as the Western Common, there are established plans and on-going construction projects to establish trails, but these do not necessarily contemplate mountain biking trail development of the type that is outlined in this report.

Next Steps

The development of a comprehensive strategy is viewed as being of benefit to advancing mountain biking within the municipality, but as noted, this type of plan is best developed by the mountain biking community with the municipality as a participant. It is therefore recommended that staff continue discussions with mountain biking groups, particularly with regard to outlining the role of the municipality in the development of trails. The information within this report is also viewed as being useful as a resource to be shared with mountain biking groups towards the possible development of a comprehensive strategy.

Even in the absence of such a comprehensive strategy, with the increasing popularity of mountain biking, it is recommended that the municipality consider how mountain bike trails and related infrastructure might be accommodated with the development of future municipal recreational trails and programs. More immediate consideration also needs to be directed towards a review of the trail system at McIntosh Run, where the popularity of this area is leading to need to consider the development of supportive infrastructure, that might include parking lots and other amenities. These could be considerations in future capital budget plans.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial impacts to consider at this time. Any future costs related to mountain biking trails and related infrastructure would be considered as part of capital and/or operating budgets and, as such, would return to Council for approval.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this report. The risk considered rate low.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The development of this report involved engagement with local mountain bike groups.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific environmental implications that have been identified as this report addresses the recreational activity of mountain biking. Examples of other Mountain Biking strategies outlined in this report provide direction regarding sustainable trail development and minimizing unauthorized trail usage which can provide guidance any future strategy.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: Regional Council may choose to direct staff to lead the development of a Mountain Biking Strategy. This is not recommended as it has been identified that the development of a strategy should be initiated and led from within the mountain bike community.

Alternative 2: Regional Council may choose to direct staff not to participate in the potential development of a strategy if requested. This is not recommended as HRM can play an important role in the development of any future strategy.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Photograph Examples of Single Track Trails at McIntosh Run

Attachment B: MRWA Single Track Trail System

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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Attachment A
Photograph Examples of Single Track Trails at McIntosh Run



