



Our HRM Alliance

Submission to the Regional Plan Review Process

August 21st, 2020

1. Introduction and Background

Our HRM Alliance is a coalition of 63 organizations across health, environment, trails, business, community growth, and transportation sectors advocating for a sustainable future through greenbelting and complete communities. The Alliance believes that strategic growth and protection of the places that matter will build a desirable, healthy and equitable place to live. The member organizations of the Alliance are powered primarily by volunteers and reflect thousands of citizens across all settlement types and regions of Halifax Regional Municipality.

Our HRM Alliance sees itself as having played an instrumental role in the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP). Initially, the Alliance was a key force building public interest in a plan for a Halifax greenbelt. During the process of the HGNP's creation the Alliance contributed essential community knowledge and continued to build public awareness for the value of greenbelting and supporting complete communities. Now that the plan has been approved, Our HRM Alliance will continue to be an advocate, prioritizing the full implementation in time to preserve our rich green network.

Our HRM Alliance also finds a role in building livable, complete communities with members working on issues of housing affordability, poverty, accessible recreation, active and public transportation and business improvement. The Alliance believes in smart development where we are strategic in planning *where to grow* and *where to protect*.

This Regional Plan review is of specific focus to Our HRM Alliance as it holds significant opportunities to advance strategic growth of complete communities and protect the Halifax Green Network. This submission details the specific concerns of the coalition in regards to the Regional Plan review. Throughout the review, the Alliance may supplement the submission as more information is available and projects progress.

2. Green Network

2.1. Green Network Plan Implementation

Our HRM Alliance supports and calls on HRM for the full and aggressive implementation of the Halifax Green Network Plan through Halifax's Regional Plan. Some items of the HGNP have specific impacts on our members and the Alliance as a whole. Our requests and priorities regarding these items are detailed below.



A. Corridor protection

Corridors are the foundation of our natural spaces – without them, even protected greenspaces will not be able to thrive. Because of this, it is essential that HRM takes a firm approach to preserving and supporting the corridors identified in the HGNP. We must review and integrate the HGNP Ecology Map into the Regional Plan and require all development to prioritize and not overlap with essential and important ecological corridors. Regional zoning must be reevaluated based on the HGNP’s identified corridors. To better allow such actions, the Municipality may consider ecological corridors as transportation corridors or work with the Province to increase the timeline available to acquire parkland upon zoning changes.

Precedent
[Halifax Green Network Plan Actions 2, 30, 35](#)

[HalifACT Actions 20, 25, 26](#)

The Chebucto peninsula is at high risk of complete connectivity loss and faces the highest pressure for development. The Regional Plan should call for specific planning around connectivity on the Chebucto peninsula to fully protect remaining corridors from development and to work with the Province to restore severed corridors.

[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 32](#)

B. Guiding Policy, Zoning, and Development

The unanimous adoption of the Halifax Green Network Plan in 2018 and HalifACT in 2020, as well as the unprecedented community support for climate, nature, and sustainability – seen through the climate marches, support for Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes and the success of the Shaw Wilderness Park amongst many other events – have shown that now is the time to be ambitious and committed in building our community around sustainability. The Alliance sees a core step in this, locally, as ensuring that the Halifax Green Network guides where we grow.

The Green Network Ecology Map must guide our Regional growth decisions. Specifically, through the Urban Service Area and other zoning techniques. It is essential that the Ecology map be reviewed, updated where necessary, and integrated into the Regional Plan. The corridors mapped in the Regional Plan (Map 4) are insufficient in defining corridors and guiding development. Now that adequate data and mapping is available through the HGNP, it is essential that the Regional Plan prioritize ecology, recreation, natural resources, and cultural landscapes to make development decisions.

Precedent
[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 29](#)

It is essential that other maps in the Halifax Green Network Plan be integrated into the Regional Plan to ensure information gathered on outdoor recreation, working landscapes, and socio-cultural landscapes also guide planning decisions.



One of the essential ways that the HGNP and Ecology Map must guide growth is in the revision of the Regional Plan's growth centres. Growth centres must only be carried into the next iteration of the Regional Plan where they do not overlap with the Green Network. This is detailed in Section 4 of this document.

[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 29](#)

There is a need to clarify the zone(s) correlated with the Halifax Green Network. At the time of the last review, a plan for Halifax's Green Network did not exist. With this plan in place, confusion remains regarding what a green network looks like, in terms of zoning. The Alliance calls for clarity to this zoning matter during the review process.

The Regional Plan should allow for and require protection of environmentally sensitive areas during discretionary planning applications and master planning exercises.

[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 3 and 4](#)

The Alliance expects there will be a relative overhaul of the Regional Plan Section 2.2 given the adoption of the Green Network Plan. Because of this, it is challenging to specify changes needed between E-3 to E-12. Outside of Section 2.2, SU-4 and SU-5, G-6-G-10, G-15 and G-16, of the Regional Plan should be amended to prioritize the Halifax Green Network.

C. Stormwater management

Green infrastructure has several co-benefits in addition to managing stormwater. Compared with conventional grey infrastructure alternatives, naturalized stormwater ponds are aesthetically pleasing, more effective at removing contaminants from stormwater before it re-enters the watershed, and can provide wildlife habitat; they provide wetland functions such as water cooling and storage. Naturalized stormwater ponds, compared with grey infrastructure alternatives, increase adjacent lot values and therefore tax revenues. Green infrastructure features add desirables and marketable assets to communities.

The Regional Plan including SU-7 to SU-12 should be updated to prioritize the use of green infrastructure features in the stormwater management and establish a Stormwater Management Plan and program as outlined by HalifACT.

Precedent
[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 11, 12, 13](#)
[HalifACT Action 14](#)
WQM Functional Plan (Stantec 2010)

D. Clarification of Watercourse Buffers

The quality and health of watercourses are an important asset in our communities. It is significantly less costly to maintain the health of these features than to have to correct them. Alongside benefits to water quality, increasing the riparian buffer would increase habitat for riparian species and also allow more space for filtering contaminants from adjacent development before they enter watercourses - Riparian



wetlands filter contaminants, provide habitat for wildlife, and absorb water during flood events; language is needed that emphasizes the importance of buffers for wetlands as well as for watercourses.

Having a consistent buffer across all areas within the municipality would provide clarity for landowners and adequately protect watercourses. A 100-metre vegetative buffer for all watercourses and 50-metre vegetated buffers from the highwater edge of stream, brook, tributary, and wetlands in HRM should be mandated and identified with Environmental Protection zoning.

Precedent
Builds on the recommendations of the [Halifax Green Network Plan Action 6](#)

Environmental Protection zoning should be applied to sensitive riparian areas and wetlands, including coastal marshlands, floodways, and large wetland complexes. Although wetlands are given some degree of protection under the NS Wetland Conservation Policy, valuable wetlands are still lost when compensation requirements are met. An environmental protection zoning by-law would recognize the importance of a no loss approach for wetlands that provide important services for the municipality such as flood regulation, coastline protection and water quality.

[Water Quality Monitoring Functional Plan \(Stantec 2010\)](#)

E. Engagement and Stewardship

Planning is needed to adequately provide for stewardship of the Halifax Green Network including its valuable ecological spaces and corridors. The Regional Plan should recognize this need and develop a plan for the local stewardship of the green network. This should allow for addressing the sustainable use of greenspaces through public education, and engagement along with creating sustaining financial and organizational support for stewardship of the Halifax Green Network. There is a significant opportunity to support the work of community-based volunteer groups already present across HRM.

Precedent
[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 43](#)

F. Nature Access

Park closures and limitations related to the Pandemic have put even more strain on access to nature and greenspace. These issues call us to take high level action to provide equitable access to greenspace. The Regional Plan should incorporate service level targets taking into account the historically disproportionate access to nature based on factors such as income level and race. Targets should require access to a spectrum of natural facilities.

Precedent
[Halifax Green Network Plan Actions 49-54 Urban Forest Master Plan Section 6.2 and Action 1](#)



Densifying neighbourhoods such as those within the Regional Centre results in higher populations of urban resident while access to greenspace stays relatively the same. The Regional Plan should investigate infrastructure charges for parks and work alongside amendments to the Halifax Charter to require parkland dedication for increased densities, not just new subdivision developments.

[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 61](#)

2.2 Green Network Areas of Consideration

Throughout the maps and chapters of the Halifax Green Network Plan, Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes (BMBCL) is identified as a high value socio-cultural, ecological, and recreation space. Recent council decisions have showcased widespread support for the area as an essential piece of Halifax's Green Network. Changes are needed in this review to reflect this movement and support for BMBCL including expanding the Regional Plan's Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Conceptual Area (Map 11) to include the HRM-owned lands, the BANC Approved Concept Plan's identified trailhead, and undeveloped land within the BMBCL area for maximum flexibility for park decision. It is also a priority that the primary access points be identified with sufficient specificity to ensure that the access points meet the basic requirements for a regional access identified by the Friends of BMBCL. The Alliance also asks for consideration and planning for the BMBCL viewsheds.

Precedent
[BANC Concept Plan 2013 Regional Council Staff Report on BANC Lands](#)

[Halifax Green Network Plan Map 3, 5, and 10](#)

Sandy Lake houses core areas and important corridors as well as well as rich ecological diversity and unique nature-based socio-economic, educational and recreational opportunities. The area has been recognized for five decades, provincially, municipally and locally, and in scientific reports and studies, as an asset to all of Halifax municipality, indeed to the whole province.

[Halifax Green Network Plan Maps 3, 5, and 10](#)

In order to adequately protect these values, the Alliance asks that the 2015 Sandy Lake Conceptual Boundary currently being used by HRM be researched and expanded based on science, to include all lands needed to protect the park's assets, as outlined in the community's new Recommended Boundary for Proposed Sandy Lake-Sackville River Regional Park (SL-SRRP). These lands should be considered as an environmentally sensitive area and be prioritized as an extension of the Regional Park. The Regional Plan needs to prevent development that would further degrade the existing SL-SRRP viewshed or weaken this ecosystem containing an astounding variety of wildlife, including 14 Species-at-Risk and magnificent multi-aged Acadian forest, and that protects the Sackville River flood plain (a major watershed and natural corridor identified in the HGNP). The current value conflict within the Regional Plan of lands in the SL-SRRP area is of high priority to be resolved. The area is zoned for housing yet has core areas and corridors which must be prioritized.

[Cost of Servicing Plan \(CBCL\)](#)



The Purcell's Cove Backlands are recognized throughout the Halifax Green Network Plan as a valuable space for outdoor recreation, socio-cultural value, as well as ecological value. The area holds core areas and important corridors. The Regional Plan currently does not reference the Purcell's Cove Backlands and should define the Backlands, as recognized in the HGNP. The Regional Plan with associated maps should also be amended to recognize the acquisition of the Shaw Wilderness Park. As recommended in the HGNP, the Regional Plan should clearly define and establish open space planning in the remainder of the Purcell's Cove Backlands to recognize its essential part in Halifax's Green Network and the importance and fragility of the landscape.

[Halifax Green Network Plan Maps 3, 5, and 10; Action 66](#)

The Alliance supports the independent submissions to the Regional Plan review process from the Friends of Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, Sandy Lake-Sackville River Regional Park Coalition, and Backlands Coalition which speak to the needs of these areas from the Regional Plan in greater detail.

3. Complete Communities: Affordable Housing, Aging in Place, Accessibility

The Regional Plan needs to adequately define aging in place and create policy better enabling aging in place, where it does not contradict with the Halifax Green Network. Specific reference and allowances around opportunities for aging in place should be considered to integrate into S-1 and S-2.

It is essential that the Regional Plan recognize the unique housing and settlement needs of historically marginalized residents including the African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities. The Alliance sees a need for significant, meaningful, and actionable consultation met with prioritization and flexibility during the Regional Plan review process. The Regional Plan's settlement sections should identify methods to prioritize affordable, accessible, and complete neighbourhoods for communities facing historic and continued barriers from our planning and governance systems.

[Precedent Halifax Green Network Plan Action 78 and 79](#)

[HalifACT Action 34](#)

4. Growth Centres and Growth Trends

As called for in the Halifax Green Network Plan, the Alliance recognizes the Regional Plan review's essential role in refining the identified growth centres (Regional Plan, Map. 1) to reflect information gathered by the Halifax Green Network Plan and other priority plans. Growth and protection must be considered at once and growth in Halifax need not occur where we have valuable natural spaces to protect. There are communities where growth is ideal and can contribute to livable, age-friendly complete communities. Of course, such refinement requires engagement from local communities and the Alliance cannot adequately access each growth centre. We call for the following criteria to exist for growth centres which remain through the review:



- The growth centres do not overlap with essential or important corridors, core areas and corridors, and areas of high environmental value, as outlined in the HGNP Ecology Map.
- The growth centres have an adequate plan for sustainable transportation connections to the Regional Centre and to primary services.
- The growth centres have adequate plans and requirements to build or enhance complete communities with access to essential services.

Precedent
[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 29](#)

Based on this criteria and considerable on-the-ground experience through our membership the Alliance calls for the Urban District Growth Centres at Sandy Lake and Susie’s Lake (within Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes) to be removed.

[Cost of Servicing Plan \(CBCL\) HGNP Map 5](#)

Urban Service Area should not be expanded in this review in any cases where it overlaps with the Halifax Green Network or does not provide for specific accessibility, aging in place, or affordable housing needs. The Regional Plan, when created in 2006 set out to maintain this boundary throughout the life of the plan. The Alliance maintains that it is not necessary and would in fact, be harmful to expand this boundary for development. Allowing for unnecessary expansion of this area will sacrifice the Green Network, encourage sprawl, and increase the costs incurred by HRM’s residents.

[HRM Quantifying the Costs and Benefits of Alternative Growth Scenarios \(Stantec\)](#)

[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 29, 35, 37](#)

The Regional Plan should be amended to prioritize the redevelopment of brownfield sites and other underdeveloped urban infill sites rather than undisturbed greenfield sites.

[Halifax Green Network Plan Action 31](#)

5. Conclusion

This report has detailed sections and elements of the Regional Plan that Our HRM Alliance believes need to be addressed during this review period to keep Halifax Regional Municipality on track for sustainable growth and building healthy, equitable communities. The unanimous adoption of the Halifax Green Network Plan in 2018 and HalifACT in 2020, as well as the unprecedented community support for climate, nature, and sustainability – seen through the climate marches, support for Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes and the success of the Shaw Wilderness Park amongst many other events – have shown that now is the time to be ambitious and committed in building our community around sustainability. We look forward to working collaboratively with HRM’s Regional Plan Team throughout the review process.



Signed by the Our HRM Alliance membership:

Ecology Action Centre
Hike Nova Scotia
Canadian Association for Retired Persons Nova Scotia
Sandy Lake Conservation Association
Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes
Backlands Coalition
Trips By Transit
Downtown Halifax Business Commission
The Village on Main (Main Street Dartmouth Business Improvement District)
North End Business Association
McIntosh Run Watershed Association
Purcell's Cove Area Residents Action Committee
Beechville, Lakeside, Timberlea (BLT) Rails to Trails Association
Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association
Friends of Hemlock Ravine
Halifax Regional Trails Association
Preston and Area Trails Association
Penhorn Lake Area Trails Association
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Nova Scotia Chapter
Canoe Kayak Nova Scotia
Eastern Shore Forest Watch Association
Five Bridges Wilderness Heritage Trust
Ducks Unlimited Canada – Nova Scotia
Sackville Rivers Association
Sackville Lakes Park and Trails Association
Save Bedford's Waterfront Society
Citizens' Climate Lobby – Halifax
Canada Green Building Council – Atlantic Chapter
Dalhousie Office of Sustainability
Ferguson's Cove Neighbourhood Association
Friends of McNabs Island Society
Halifax Field Naturalists
Halifax Urban Greenway Association
Lake Echo Watershed Association
Shore Active Transportation Association
Shubenacadie Watershed Environmental Protection Society
St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association



Williams Lake Conservation Company
Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization
Cole Harbour Rural Heritage Society
Dalhousie School for Resource and Environmental Studies
FUSION Halifax
Genuine Progress Index (GPI) Atlantic
Halifax Cycling Coalition
Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia
It's More Than Buses
Lucasville Community Association
Musquodoboit Harbour and Area Community Association
North End Community Health Centre
Purcell's Cove Neighbourhood Committee
Rural Coastal Communities Network
Walk n' Roll Halifax
Wyse Society for Sensible Urban Development, The
YWCA Halifax
Akoma Holdings Inc.
Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission
Quinpool Road Mainstreet District Association
Sackville Business Association
Spring Garden Area Business Association
St. Margaret's Bay Chamber of Commerce
Community Society to End Poverty
Halifax North West Trails Association