



Ms. Kathleen Fralic
Engagement Lead
Planning & Development, HRM
Regionalplan@halifax.ca

September 23, 2020

Re: Protecting Sandy Lake – Sackville River in the Regional Plan

Dear Ms. Fralic,

I write today to bring further attention to an important ecological area requiring protection in the context of the Regional Plan review and the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP).

Trips By Transit is one of 27 member groups comprising the Sandy Lake – Sackville River Regional Park (SL-SRRP) Coalition. We fully support the efforts of SL-SRRP to ensure protection for the ecological unit which is the Sandy Lake-Sackville River watershed, including its submission to the RP+10 review (<https://www.sandylakecoalition.ca/rpsubmission>).

Sandy Lake – Sackville River Regional Park Virtual Tour Video Link: https://youtu.be/ziT3sAeW_uY

Issues of Interest

Time is running out for Sandy Lake Regional Park. Since 1971, Sandy Lake and the Sackville River have been identified in city planning documents as an outstanding place for a park, both from an ecological and recreational perspective. More than 1,000 acres is protected at Sandy Lake and Jack Lack, but the vision for the park has not yet been achieved. Study after study has shown we need a bigger Regional Park at Sandy Lake to keep the area wild and sustainable.

A fantastic feature that attracts people to Halifax is the close and easy access to nature. In an age where jobs are more portable, quality of life is a city asset that can drive immigration to the city, and keep people here. Sandy Lake is a place that provides nearby nature, where outdoor recreational opportunities abound, for all ages, year-round. The lands around the lake are already used unofficially by citizens of HRM for recreational purposes through a network of existing trails. Currently, a wide variety of outdoor activities are conducted on these lands, including mountain biking, bird watching, swimming, paddling, fishing, dog-walking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, to name a few.

More and more, cities (and health authorities) are coming to understand the extensive health benefits of providing people with access to nature. HRM is talking about the [benefits of nature](#), but here's a chance for the city to secure this piece of "green" health infrastructure. Free, easy access to nature can prevent and treat mental and physical health challenges, and make communities more attractive to live in.

Halifax is ready and waiting for a "greenbelt," so we can enjoy the benefits that cities like Ottawa and Toronto have seen from this planning approach. The [Halifax Green Network Plan](#) (HGNP) of 2018 identifies the Sandy Lake area as one of the last 3, large greenspaces in urban Halifax. Sandy Lake – Sackville River is a hotspot in need of protection, making it a priority for actualizing the HGNP, and for the [Our HRM Alliance](#). Focusing development where it is best

suited, and protecting greenspaces where merited (Sandy Lake!) makes for an efficient and attractive city.

We understand how interconnected the entire area is from an ecological perspective. Recent studies by scientists and park planners indicate any further development within the Sandy Lake/Marsh Lake watershed will negatively impact the existing park assets through to the Sackville River, and will affect flooding conditions along the river, including the Bedford floodplains.

In the Halifax Green Network Plan and early city planning documents, Sandy Lake is indicated as an area to create and grow a Regional Park. We support the Sandy Lake – Sackville River Regional Park Coalition in its call to expand the Regional Park by an additional 1,800 acres. We also support the Coalition's request to have the Halifax Green Network Plan be included in its entirety in the Regional Plan. Additionally, we also support the Coalition's request for HRM to research a new Regional Park boundary, based on science, for what a full, functioning park should be. An expanded Regional Park will provide more opportunities for people to access nature, yet will be big enough to keep ecological processes intact.

Now is a crucial decision-making point

We understand an application for Secondary Planning for lands immediately west of Sandy Lake is imminent by at least one developer. This creates a new urgency for us to find solutions that protect the Sandy Lake-Sackville River watershed.

We ask that:

- *The SL-SRRP be expanded by 1,800 acres (refer to Map 1 in the SL-SRRP submission). Research the SL-SRRP boundary in the RP+10 process so that new boundaries based on science are established to encompass all remaining essential watershed to be protected and managed as a regional park for all time. That would mean finding "win-win" solutions that serve both the community and present landowners needs.*
- *The Halifax Green Network Plan (HGPN) be included in its entirety in the RP+10.*
- *All requests in Sections A, B and C of the SL-SRRP Coalition submission be addressed and implemented within the RP+10 review.*

Conservation work still to be achieved

We are thankful HRM has shown leadership with the recent passing of HalifACT and for the HGPN Map 5 amendment to the Regional Plan's conservation design development agreement.

HRM's acquisition of 160 acres next to Marsh Lake for the park in 2015 gives us some assurance the city indeed wants to expand and secure the park area.

We look to the RP+10 to expand the existing boundary to protect and enhance the existing watershed for all time.

Sincerely,
Chelsea Hanoun
Program and Volunteer Director, Trips By Transit

Chelsea Hanoun

cc: Mayor Mike Savage, HRM Council members, Leah Perrin, HRM Planning, Sandy Lake - Sackville River Regional Park Coalition