

HALIFAX

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Item No. 14.1.3
Halifax Regional Council
April 26, 2016

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

SUBMITTED BY:

John Traves, Q.C. Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by 

Jane Fraser, Acting Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 18, 2016

SUBJECT: Argyle Street and Spring Garden Road Streetscaping Projects

ORIGIN

Item 11.1.9, July 21, 2015 motion of Council directing staff to: "...develop business cases with funding from account CD000002 – Downtown Streetscapes – Capital Improvement Campaign for the Argyle Street and Spring Garden Road streetscaping projects, including detailed project scope, timelines, cost estimates, and funding strategy. Staff will return to Council for approval to proceed".

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter:

70 (1) The Municipality may...beautify, improve and maintain property owned...by the Municipality;

79 (1) The Council may expend money...for...streets, culverts, retaining walls, sidewalks, curbs & gutters;

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to complete the preparation of detailed design and construction documents for major streetscaping projects on **Argyle & Grafton Streets** and **Spring Garden Road**, as described in this report, and tender these projects with funding from account CD000002, Downtown Streetscapes – Capital Improvement Campaign under the Q146 – Planned Strategic Projects Reserve.

BACKGROUND

HRM's 2011-2016 Economic Strategy has the strategic goal of building a vibrant and attractive Regional Centre. One of the objectives is an urban core investment campaign supported through an on-going dedicated reserve fund for urban core beautification and infrastructure improvement projects. The campaign was originally imagined as a five year \$50 million capital plan, cost-shared equally with other orders of government. When it was determined that the capital plan did not meet the eligibility criteria under the Building Canada Fund, and there were no other federal or provincial funds under which it would be eligible, Regional Council rescinded its motion that the \$17 million municipal commitment be contingent upon cost-sharing, and directed staff to develop the business cases for the two priority projects and return to Council for approval to proceed.

Argyle and Grafton Street

In 2013, twelve projects that would signal a meaningful commitment to the Regional Centre were identified by the Strategic Urban Partnership and evaluated. Out of those, the Argyle Streetscaping Project was determined to be the most strategic. The project was seen as a chance to strengthen a popular entertainment district while taking advantage of efficiency in design and construction by aligning with the Nova Centre construction timeline.

Originally conceived as a two block project on Argyle Street between Blowers and Prince Streets, the project was later expanded to include Grafton Street between Prince and Carmichael Streets. This was done following a feasibility study carried out by the Province for an underground walkway between the Nova Centre and the Scotiabank Centre. At \$7 million, this feature was deemed too costly, but in order to strengthen the connection between these facilities, HRM developed a design concept for a high quality street level connection.

Spring Garden Road

The Spring Garden Road Streetscaping Project scored second highest of HRM's strategic urban core investments. The Spring Garden area is the main shopping district in Halifax's downtown core and the high number of office workers and residents in the area, its popularity as a tourist destination, and the presence of a large student population support the street's vitality. As a result, it has limited passenger vehicle usage, heavy transit ridership, and high pedestrian volumes but its narrow sidewalks lead to crowding and congestion.

A streetscaping plan was prepared to address these issues in 2009 but was never implemented. It proposed to better accommodate pedestrians and transit users through sections of widened sidewalk, including the creation of enough space for new bus shelters. The undergrounding of overhead wires and the addition of richly detailed paving treatments, street trees, benches, and decorative lighting would transform the feel of the street into a public space that residents would enjoy using. The project would also link the Public Gardens and the Central Library with a distinctive and legible treatment that fosters a sense of place and a high degree of civic pride.

DISCUSSION

Business cases based on schematic designs and cost estimates were prepared for each of the priority streetscapes and are described briefly below.

BUSINESS CASE FOR ARGYLE & GRAFTON SHARED STREETSCAPES PROJECT

In order to inform the business case and potentially construct the project in time for the opening of the Nova Centre, a contract was awarded to Ekistics Plan + Design to provide landscape architectural and engineering consulting services for the design of this project. The contract includes the preparation of schematic and detailed designs, cost estimates, schedules, construction and tender documents. The cost estimate based on the schematic design has been used to inform the business case and Ekistics will advance the final design of the project toward the construction phase upon Council approval to proceed.

Project Scope

The project extents include Argyle Street between Blowers and Prince Streets, Grafton Street between Prince and Carmichael Streets, and enhanced sidewalk treatments on Prince and Carmichael in the project vicinity. The schematic design proposes a streetscape that encourages pedestrian and

commercial activity along Argyle and Grafton Streets with the removal of barrier curbs and the installation of decorative unit pavers across the entire right-of-way. A number of streetscape amenities are also proposed including decorative lighting, street furniture, trees, public art, planters, and possibly overhead canopies. Tactile warning strips will facilitate universal access. The project would transform these streets into dramatic public spaces that encourage people on foot to linger and enjoy the space, while still allowing access and loading by vehicles.

Cost Estimates and Funding Strategy

Based on the preferred schematic design option prepared by Ekistics, the 'opinion of probable cost' has been estimated at \$6.8 million.

Assuming minimal cost sharing from the Nova Centre equivalent to re-instatement of public infrastructure surrounding their development, this cost may be reduced to approximately \$6.6 million.

HRM may also wish to pursue a contribution from the Province for the Grafton Street component on the basis that this portion of the project originated in response to the notion of a tunnel which was originally contemplated by the Province. This funding request has not been initiated.

Economic Benefits of the Project

Group ATN economic consultants, were engaged by HRM to prepare an economic analysis for the proposed streetscape upgrades on Argyle/ Grafton Streets as well as on Spring Garden Road. The report, based on a review of 15 North American Streetscape Projects¹, confirms the general belief that improved accessibility, especially for pedestrians, and a safer, more welcoming environment created by streetscape projects will result in positive spin offs. While the impacts of these types of projects are generally not well researched in terms of metrics, and it is difficult to place a dollar value on the expected benefits, a review of other similar projects suggests the following quantitative outcomes may be reasonably expected:

- Customer traffic increase.
- Retail and food service sales increase (post development increases ranged from 9% to 32%).
- New business emergence and new jobs in the area.
- Attraction of private investment to the area.
- Increases in assessed value of property and property tax revenues (changes in property values were reported in the case studies between 13% and 30%)

Benefits to Small Business Owners

One of the key benefits of the project will be to local small businesses who install seasonal sidewalk cafés on Argyle and Grafton Streets. These facilities have typically necessitated the construction of a temporary sidewalk but once the curbless streetscape is implemented, these will no longer be required, resulting in significant annual savings to each. Furthermore, the streetscape project may create the opportunity for bar and restaurant operators to apply for "annual" sidewalk cafés, as recently enabled in By-Law S-1000 "Respecting the Regulation of Sidewalk Cafés".

Other Project Costs - Operating Costs

Increasing the quality of finishes and the range of amenities provided is likely to result in increased operating costs, as well as an increased future cost at such time as the project requires recapitalization.

In consultation with staff from TPW – Road Operations & Construction and Operations Support – Corporate Fleet, it has been identified that the removal of barrier curbs will necessitate a specialized

¹ Vanderbilt Avenue (Plaza St to Dean St), Brooklyn – 2006 and 2008; Bronx Hub, the Bronx – 2009; St. Nicholas Avenue/Amsterdam Avenue, NY – 2010; Willoughby Plaza, Brooklyn – 2006; Columbus Avenue (W. 96th Street to W. 77th Street), Manhattan – 2010; Charles City Permeable Streetscape, Iowa – 2009; Cherry Creek North & Fillmore Plaza, Colorado – 2011; South Grand Blvd. & Great Street, Missouri – 2011; Park Avenue & US 50 Redevelopment Phase 1, California; Grant Avenue in Odessa, TX – 1991; North Clark Street, – 1999 and 2001; Barracks Row, Washington, DC. – 2003 to 2004; Lancaster, California – 2010; Lodi, California – 1997; The Quartier des Spectacles, Montreal – 2007

snow clearance program to minimize damage to streetscape elements. This will require the removal of snow (instead of piling) and possibly the acquisition of specialized 'gentler' equipment. The project is also contemplating the use of Bigbelly solar waste compactors for this area.

Staff's understanding of the operating costs is evolving as the design progresses, but an order of magnitude estimate of \$30,000/ year has been identified for snow removal and waste management.

With regards to the equipment, it has been identified that two specialized pieces of equipment estimated to cost approximately \$400,000 (combined) may be needed. While the equipment will be used for other areas as well, in order to ensure it is available by winter 2017 for Argyle-Grafton, the costs have been included in the Argyle-Grafton budget estimate.

Timelines

Construction could be expected to begin no earlier than mid-August 2016 so it may not be feasible to complete all parts of the project before winter. The construction schedule will be firmed up as the detailed design proceeds.

BUSINESS CASE FOR SPRING GARDEN ROAD STREETScape PROJECT

Streetscape plans and tender-ready construction documents were prepared for Spring Garden Road between Queen Street and South Park Street in 2009 but the project did not proceed to construction due to insufficient funding. Since then, improvements based on the 2009 plan, but modified through the design process for the Central Library, have been implemented at the Queen Street intersection. The modified design includes a different lighting style and unit paver colour and pattern than originally proposed. For the purposes of carrying out the business case, cost estimates for the 2009 plan were updated based on this new palette.

The 2009 design also proposed streetscaping improvements along South Park Street, but these have been eliminated from consideration under the business case in order to reduce costs.

Project Scope

The Spring Garden Road Streetscape Project would encompass the area between Queen Street and South Park Street and would include extensive undergrounding of overhead power and communications infrastructure, replacement of all above ground municipal works including existing asphalt road pavement, widened sections of sidewalk with unit paver detailing, curb and gutter (possibly granite), catchbasins, decorative streetlighting, traffic signals, as well as the installation of trees and site furnishings. Hours for loading are proposed to be limited (before 10am) and the seven existing on-street parking stalls are proposed to be removed.

Cost Estimates and Funding Strategy

Based on the updated design described above, an "opinion of probable costs" has been estimated at approximately \$11 million. In order to reduce this sum, consultants were asked to cost a modified design option (e.g. using standard curb and gutter instead of granite curbs and normal intersections instead of raised intersections). This option has been estimated at approximately \$9.5 million. As the final design could end up as a hybrid of these two options, the ultimate capital request will depend on whether or not net Argyle-Grafton costs can be reduced through cost savings or cost sharing.

Cost sharing is not accounted for in the estimate for Spring Garden Streetscaping, but may provide some reduction if opportunities to cost share with any utilities are identified as the design advances.

Finally, with easily updated tender-ready designs from 2009 already complete, the project may be a good candidate for cost-sharing from other levels of government should new funding become available, i.e. it is nearly "shovel-ready".

Economic Benefits of the Project

As described above under the section for the Argyle/Grafton project, improved accessibility, especially for pedestrians, and a safer, more welcoming environment created by streetscape projects is expected to result in a number of positive spin offs for the municipality.

Other Project Costs - Operating Costs

Increasing the quality of finishes and the range of amenities provided will result in an increased future cost at such time as the project requires recapitalization, but should not result in as significant a change in the day to day operating costs as the Argyle/ Grafton project, unless a snow removal program is contemplated in association with this project as well. As the project advances through detailed design, further elaboration of operating costs will be carried out

Timelines

The balance of funds remaining after implementation of the Argyle & Grafton Shared Streetscapes will be used for design and construction of the preferred design option for the Spring Garden Road Streetscape. As such, updating the 2009 tender ready drawings for Spring Garden Road could commence as soon as the Argyle – Grafton project is complete.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Finance has confirmed budget availability in Capital Account CD000002, Downtown Streetscapes - Capital Improvement Campaign, as shown below.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Budget Summary: | CD000002 Downtown Streetscapes - Capital Improvement Campaign |
| | Cumulative Unspent Budget \$16,691,941 |

Argyle & Grafton Project

The net project cost is estimated to be approximately \$6.6 million.

Spring Garden Project

The balance of funds remaining after implementation of the Argyle & Grafton Shared Streetscapes will be used for design and construction of the preferred design option for the Spring Garden Road Streetscape. At this time, this balance is estimated to be approximately \$10.1 million.

Operating Costs

As the projects advance through detailed design, further elaboration of operating costs will be carried out.

RISK CONSIDERATION

A risk analysis for each project was carried out in the process of preparing each business case. At this point the most significant risk for the Argyle/Grafton Project is completing the design in time for construction in fall 2016, our target to ensure completion prior to the Nova Centre's anticipated spring 2017 opening. The most significant risk to the Spring Garden Streetscape Project is that cost overruns in the Argyle/Grafton Project reduce the amount available to fully execute the proposed Spring Garden Project. These risks will be mitigated through effective management of projects costs, actively seeking cost reductions or cost sharing for both projects, and/or by reducing the level of finishes on the Spring Garden Road project as described above.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Argyle Grafton Project

Information sessions with the general public, internal and external stakeholders, including a special public meeting on the subject of accessibility, were conducted between December 2015 and February 2016.

Furthermore, there was extensive consultation, publicity, and monitoring during a six week pilot project carried out in the summer of 2015. Additional broad consultation with the public is not anticipated, however stakeholder consultation will continue primarily related to addressing the needs of business and property owners immediately adjacent to the construction zone. At least one more broad public information session is planned and there is a project website in place where updates and milestones will be shared.

Spring Garden Project

Consultation was carried out in 2008 with individual property and business owners, as well as with a variety of stakeholder groups. A public open house was also held, at which best practices were presented, and participants were provided with an opportunity to comment on the design elements and concepts. A presentation of three design options was also made to the Spring Garden Area Business Association (SGABA). In 2013 there was public consultation and engagement with SGABA related to the Central Library and the improvements at the Queen Street intersection. Further discussions with this group are expected to determine the best way to undertake consultation with its membership prior to moving forward with this project.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The potential addition of street trees will advance the objectives of Halifax's Urban Forest Masterplan.

ALTERNATIVES

ARGYLE & GRAFTON SHARED STREETSCAPES PROJECT

1. The scope of this project could be reduced to the original two block section of Argyle Street proposed (between Prince and Blowers) by deleting the Grafton Street component. This option is less expensive than the recommended option, but the benefits are also less. The reduced scope alternative is not recommended by staff.
2. Council could decide to not proceed with this project. This option is also is not recommended.

SPRING GARDEN ROAD STREETSCAPE PROJECT

1. Council could decide to not proceed with this project. This is not recommended by staff.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

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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