


HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 14.1.3
Halifax Regional Council
June 19, 2018

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Jane Fraser, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: May 22, 2018

SUBJECT: **Weekend Closures on Argyle Street**

ORIGIN

Staff generated in response to a letter from the Downtown Business Commission, March 14, 2018, to members of Halifax Regional Council.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, R.S.N.S. 2008, c. 39 Subsection 332(b)

"The Engineer may

(b) temporarily close a street, or part thereof, for the protection of the public, to allow work to be done on the street or on lands and buildings adjacent to the street or for any other purpose beneficial to the public interest."

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Direct staff to permit the routine non-special event weekend closure of Argyle Street to vehicular traffic between Prince Street and Blowers Street, during July and August 2018, during the approximate time period of Noon on Friday to midnight Sunday as requested by the Downtown Business Commission; and,
2. Direct staff to require the Downtown Business Commission, at their own expense, to collect data on the number of closures, degree of activity, opinions of visitors, business and property owners, any issues or concerns, and submit a report to Regional Council before May 2019.
3. Direct staff to provide no less than 21 days notice before the date of the first closure to all properties abutting the street closure.

BACKGROUND

On April 26, 2016, Halifax Regional Council directed staff to complete the detailed design and construction documents for a shared streetscaping project on Argyle and Grafton Streets and tender the project for construction. The objective of the project was to 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.

On November 4, 2017, the completion of the project was signified with an official opening event. Argyle Street remains a one-way southbound street while Grafton remains a two-way street. Both streets have marked drop-off and loading zones, as well as accessible parking. There is no standard on-street parking on the streetscape.

The Argyle and Grafton Shared Streetscape includes “pedestrian zones” and “shared zones”. Vehicles are not permitted to drive in the pedestrian zones and must stay between the warning strips in the shared zones.

While pedestrians can use the shared zones, the Motor Vehicle Act gives pedestrians priority only at intersections and other crosswalks. Pedestrians are permitted to cross the street midblock, but do not have priority and must wait for a gap in traffic. The laws for pedestrians, drivers and cyclists remain applicable to the shared zones and all road users must use care and caution on public streets.

DISCUSSION

The first of its kind in Atlantic Canada, the Argyle and Grafton Shared Streetscape project has transformed these streets into more people-focused public open spaces that support the vitality of downtown. The design prioritizes the pedestrian experience, enhances the connection between major destinations, and supports the flourishing entertainment district for residents, businesses, and tourists.

The design has received North American recognition by StreetsBlog as the 2017 Best Urban Street Transformation.

The purpose of the routine weekend closure is to facilitate more space for pedestrians and the ability of pedestrians within the streetscape area to cross Argyle street without vehicular conflicts. As concerns have been expressed about the potential for conflicts between eastbound Sackville vehicular traffic and pedestrians crossing Sackville at Argyle Street, the routine closure is expected to reduce the chance of this conflict.

The design features of Argyle Street, the attraction of the public space and the adjacent businesses already attracts significant pedestrian activity on weekends and Halifax Regional Police have routinely reactively closed the road to vehicular traffic to ensure public safety. Therefore, as vehicular traffic and local businesses are used to the closures of the streetscape areas, the routine weekend closing is expected to have little impact on the use of the space during the weekends.

Vehicular access to the adjacent properties must not be prevented during the weekend closures; therefore, it will be important for the Downtown Business Commission to monitor the behavior of motorists and pedestrians, and local business and property owners, and advise HRM of any necessary adjustments to manage the competing demands

The routine closure process is meant to complement but not replace the process in place for special event street closures of Argyle Street. Special events would continue to be managed through the existing 2014-010-ADM Administrative Order process. The routine weekend closures would not allow furniture, stages, portable washrooms or any other objects to be placed in the “shared zones”. This provision is necessary to ensure that emergency response vehicles would have a clear path and, unlike with a special event, a specific emergency response plan would not have to be developed and approved each time.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No significant costs anticipated. The road closure can be implemented by regularly scheduled staff of Transportation and Public Works who provide non-business hour service in the urban core.

RISK CONSIDERATION

The risk associated with the routine closures of Argyle Street has been identified as the unlikely occurrence of a collision between a vehicle and pedestrian that is attributable to a behavioral change resulting from the street closure. The risk of a collision would be similar for normal non-street closures days and Special Event road closures. It could be mitigated by Halifax Regional Police manual traffic control of the Sackville Avenue crossing but this would introduce an on-going financial cost to the proponents.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community consultation was not undertaken in the preparation of this report. The 2014-010-ADM Special Event process requires 21 days advance notice to abutting properties. It is recommended that this notice period is provided should Council approve closures.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations contribute in part to replacing motor vehicle traffic with active transportation modes and therefore contribute to healthier lifestyle and the reduction of fossil fuel usage and atmospheric emissions, including greenhouse gas emissions.

ALTERNATIVES

Halifax Regional Council could direct staff to implement the proposed closures during different start and end times, or different start and end dates, or refuse to approve any routine closures of Argyle Street.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Letter from Downtown Halifax Business Commission

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Bruce Zvaniga, P.Eng., Director, Transportation and Public Works, 902.490.4855

From: Paul MacKinnon

Sent: Wednesday, March 14, 2018 2:27 PM

To: streats@halifax.ca; david.hendsbee@halifax.ca; bill.karsten@halifax.ca; lorelei.nicoll@halifax.ca; austins@halifax.ca; mancint@halifax.ca; waye.mason@halifax.ca; smithli@halifax.ca; clearys@halifax.ca; russell.walker@halifax.ca; stephen.adams@halifax.ca; zurawsr@halifax.ca; matt.whitman@halifax.ca; blackbl@halifax.ca; steve.craig@halifax.ca; tim.outhit@halifax.ca; mike.savage@halifax.ca

Cc: Dube, Jacques <dubej@halifax.ca>; Zvaniga, Bruce <zvanigb@halifax.ca>; 'stjohnb@halifax.ca' <stjohnb@halifax.ca>; kelly.denty@halifax.ca; 'clerks@halifax.ca' <clerks@halifax.ca>

Subject: Request for weekend vehicle closures for Argyle Street in the summer months

Mayor Mike Savage and Regional Council,

The investment that HRM has made in a new and exciting Argyle and Grafton streetscape is paying immediate dividends. It has attracted a lot of interest from event organizers, including high profile national conferences. It won a people's choice award from StreetsblogUSA, and since its launch, we have been contacted by several cities, inquiring about the project.

The shared street design allows for the area to be obviously prioritized for pedestrians, which has happened organically over the years. In the summer months this should be even moreso the case. Downtown Halifax is requesting that the two blocks of Argyle between Prince St. and Blowers St. be closed completely to vehicular traffic during weekends (ie, Friday afternoon to Sunday evening). This would not be in conjunction with specific events (which would still go through HRM's Special Events Task Force). We would request this for every weekend in July and August. From an operational perspective, there are already gates attached for this purpose, and we would request that HRM operations be responsible for closing and re-opening the streets.

We have already been in conversation with HRM's Transportation and Public Works department, who feel this is a feasible request. They have advised that direction from Council would be required. We do not anticipate any significant negative impact. In fact, Halifax Police close the street during busy weekend evenings in the summer on occasion already. We would consider this a pilot project, and would want to work with HRM staff to monitor any negative impacts the closure might have.

Paul MacKinnon
Executive Director



www.downtownhalifax.ca

www.twitter.com/downtownpaul

cc Jacques Dube, HRM CAO
Bruce Zvaniga, HRM Director of Public Works
Kelly Denty, HRM Acting Director of Planning
Chief JM Blais, Halifax Police