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Item No. 12.1.3
Community Planning & Economic Development
December 15, 2016

TO: Chair and Members, Community Planning and Economic Development

SUBMITTED BY: **ORIGINAL SIGNED**

Brad Anguish, Director, Parks and Recreation

DATE: November 28, 2016

SUBJECT: **North Preston Recreation Field**

ORIGIN

July 19, 2016 Halifax Regional Council motion:

“MOVED by Councillor Hendsbee, seconded by Councillor Craig THAT Halifax Regional Council request a recommendation report regarding the feasibility for provision of a recreation field in the North Preston area at 857 Upper Governor Street (PID 00639856 – currently owned by Halifax Water Commission). Furthermore, development of a recreation field would provide an opportunity to explore the possibility of a community build concept with local contractors.” **MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Section 79(1): Council may expend money required by the Municipality for: k) recreational programs; (x) lands and buildings required for a municipal purpose; (y) furnishing and equipping any municipal facility; (aa) streets, culverts, retaining walls, sidewalks, curbs and gutters; (ah) playgrounds, trails [...], bicycle paths, swimming pools, ice arenas, and other recreational facilities; and (aq) parking lots and parking structures.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) recommend that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to:

1. Develop a detailed site plan and other supporting analysis for non-regulation sized recreation field at 857 Upper Governor Street, North Preston;
2. Negotiate a long-term lease or purchase with Halifax Water; and
3. Include funding for construction of a non-regulation sized recreation field in the 2017/18 capital budget for prioritization with all other capital items for Council’s consideration.

BACKGROUND

On March 8, 2013, a meeting was held at the North Preston Community Centre concerning the lack of public green space in the community. It included HRM staff, local Councillor, Halifax Water staff, and members of the community. Discussions centred on the options for park space and focused on land that is owned by Halifax Water at 857 Upper Governor Street, North Preston (subject site) (Map 1 and Attachment A). It was noted that Nelson Whynder Elementary School, located immediately across from the subject site, does not have any substantial green open space. Subsequently, on July 19, 2016, Halifax Regional Council passed a motion requesting a staff report on the feasibility of the subject site for a recreation field and the possibility of a community-build by local contractors.

DISCUSSION

Need Analysis for a Recreation Field

North Preston has a population of 1,275 and a higher concentration of youth under the age of 20 (26.95%) compared to the rest of HRM at 21.39% (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census). When considering a catchment area between Lake Loon and Lake Echo north of Highway 7, there are ball diamonds but only one playing field for a population of 5,150 (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census). That playing field is located at Graham Creighton Junior High in Cherry Brook, 5.4 kilometers away from North Preston (Attachment B). Regardless of other facilities within this catchment area, of particular note is that there is limited open space of any type in North Preston.

While Regional Council's motion is specific to the feasibility of the subject site, staff considered options on other lands within North Preston to accommodate a recreation field. Based on a preliminary analysis, no alternative options were found immediately within the community based upon size requirements and availability.

Subject Site

The subject site was originally the location of the Allen W. Evans School. After it closed and was demolished, ownership transferred to the North Preston Community Development Association in 1997. The Association has since dissolved and in 2014, the subject site was sold in a tax sale to Halifax Water. Halifax Water purchased the property as it houses a water reservoir tower that was previously located in an easement.

The subject site has the following characteristics:

- is approximately 1.6 hectares in size;
- contains an access road, the Halifax Water reservoir tower, a light standard, a paved parking pad with a deteriorating retaining wall, the buried foundation of the former school, and a stone structure that is understood to have originally served as a marker, but which is in disrepair and does not appear to be of widespread interest within the community;
- contains naturalized shrub and grasses on the front half and dense forest on the back half of the subject site;
- includes a level area in the vicinity of the former school and two sloped areas on either side of the former school with exposed bedrock on the east side; and
- Is zoned P-2 (Community Facility Zone), which allows for public parks.

Halifax Water has indicated the size of the subject site exceeds its operational needs and it is agreeable to making the portion of it available for a community purpose, subject to approval by its Board. As noted above, the subject site is favourable due its immediate proximity to Nelson Whynder School and its central location within the community. Additionally, it is also only approximately 700 metres from the North Preston Community Centre.

Recreational Field Assessment

A "recreation field" refers to either a natural turf playing field or a natural turf ball diamond. A natural turf playing field can accommodate a variety of sports such as soccer, football, rugby, ultimate frisbee and field hockey depending on its size. A smaller playing field can still accommodate these activities but at a non-regulation level of play (Attachment C). Additionally, such fields act as passive open green space for unstructured activities.

With the absence of any recreational fields in North Preston, construction of a playing field that can be used for a variety of sports would provide the most benefit. In addition, consideration has been given to establishing a field that would be of a size to accommodate competitive play.

The initial review has determined that a smaller playing field fits within the bounds of the subject site, although further analysis on the characteristics of the lands needs to be undertaken. A larger field appears to be more difficult to be accommodate on the basis of the slopes of the subject site (Attachments D and E). Completion of the design process including the development of a detailed site plan including related site assessment (geotechnical investigation, environmental assessment, topographical survey) would confirm the size of field that can be accommodated, but it does appear that only a smaller field will be technically feasible.

As well, development of a ball diamond was also considered, but the dimensions and configuration of the proposed site would not accommodate that type of field and further, it would not provide the same options for activities as a playing field. When considering a catchment area outside of North Preston, between Lake Loon and Lake Echo north of Highway 7, there are three ball diamonds (Attachment B).

Therefore, it is recommended that Regional Council direct staff to proceed with detailed design and supporting technical analysis for a non-regulation sized recreation field for the site and include funding in the 2017/18 capital budget. Through that work, staff would also confirm the ability of the site to accommodate a larger field.

Community Consultation

Small group meetings were held in North Preston to receive feedback on potential options for the recreational use of the subject site. Input was received from North Preston Recreation Centre users, representatives of the Ratepayer Association, members of a Green Space Committee, and representatives of Nelson Whynder School. In addition, maps with both size options for a playing field were posted at the North Preston Recreation Centre to allow residents to leave feedback about the potential site. A summary of the observations from the consultation includes:

- favorable feedback towards a playing field with a preference toward a larger field that could be used for wider age ranges, could accommodate potential league play and would be available for hosting people into the community;
- a preference that the subject site be used to its fullest potential for recreation purposes that serve all ages, inter-generational, and family participation;
- consideration of an outdoor ice rink for winter use;
- consideration of walking paths around the field;
- consideration of a toboggan area;
- consideration for the possibility of a future spray park; and
- a place for cultural recognition (possibly recognizing the former school site).

This consultation supports the development of a playing field that can accommodate a variety of uses.

Lease/Acquisition of Land

Based on initial discussions, leasing the subject site or a portion of it from Halifax Water is likely the preferred option. Selling the property to HRM would be a disposal of an asset and as a result would be subject to Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUAR) approval. Should Regional Council approve

the recommended direction, staff would undertake detailed discussions on the best mechanism to enable the use of the site for a recreation field with Halifax Water. With regard to the development of the subject site for a playing field, Halifax Water staff have indicated no concern with the current access road being used for the recreation field access subject to the installation of a gate and other related access conditions.

Community Build Concept

Regional Council requested that staff explore the possibility of a community build concept with local contractors as part of this project. A community build concept which includes local contractor preference would be contrary to the intent of HRM's procurement policy which aims to provide openness, fairness, transparency and competitiveness. Further, it could breach the Canadian Internal Agreement on Trade (all Provinces) and the Atlantic Procurement Agreement (NB, NS, PEI and NL). Therefore, while HRM could legally give local contractors a level of preference, it would be contrary to Council's previous direction and could result in reciprocal action from other entities, effectively making it difficult for HRM companies to do business outside of HRM. Under the above noted agreements, if HRM imposes any local preference, other entities can impose an anti-HRM approach in return.

In order to meet Council's interest in providing preference to local contractors, HRM could consider providing a grant to a not for profit community group to undertake the work. That approach would not be ideal as it would result in a level of risk to the completion of the project and any group undertaking the work, as the group would need to have the resources and capacity to manage the type and scope of work. Additionally, HRM would not have the same oversight in terms of ensuring that contractors meet tendering requirements including performance surety, insurance and liability, warranty, and safety certification. Therefore, it is recommended that the establishment of the recreation field proceed through standard HRM tendering processes, which would include the ability for local contractors to bid on any tender.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The preliminary cost for the construction of a smaller playing field is estimated to be \$400,000. The preliminary cost of a larger regulation sized field is estimated to be \$1,400,000, although this may not completely account for some of the challenges of the site and may not be able to be accommodated on the site.

Should Regional Council approve the recommendation outlined in this report, staff would undertake the necessary design to enable the construction of a non-regulation recreation field for the site. Funding for the construction of a smaller playing field has been included in the proposed Capital budget for 2017/18 under CP00004 Sports/Ball Fields/Courts – New.

RISK CONSIDERATION

The risk of proceeding with this project is considered to be low.

Detailed site design and assessments will be undertaken in advance of proceeding with the project. Should costs be greater than what is anticipated, staff will return to Regional Council with options of how to proceed. The risk of not pursuing with the project is that North Preston will continue not to have a recreation field and other options will need to be explored.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As noted earlier, there was a meeting that predated and lead to Regional Council's motion. Following this, small group meetings were held in North Preston to receive feedback on potential options for the recreational use of the subject site. These included meetings with the North Preston Recreation Centre users and representatives of the Ratepayer Association, a Green Space Committee, and Nelson

Whynder school. In addition, maps with both size options for a playing field were posted at the North Preston Recreation Centre to allow residents to leave feedback about the potential site.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Potential site disturbance related to grading, tree removal, blasting/rock removal, drainage installation is anticipated. The impacts of these will be mitigated through detailed design and normal construction practices.

ALTERNATIVES

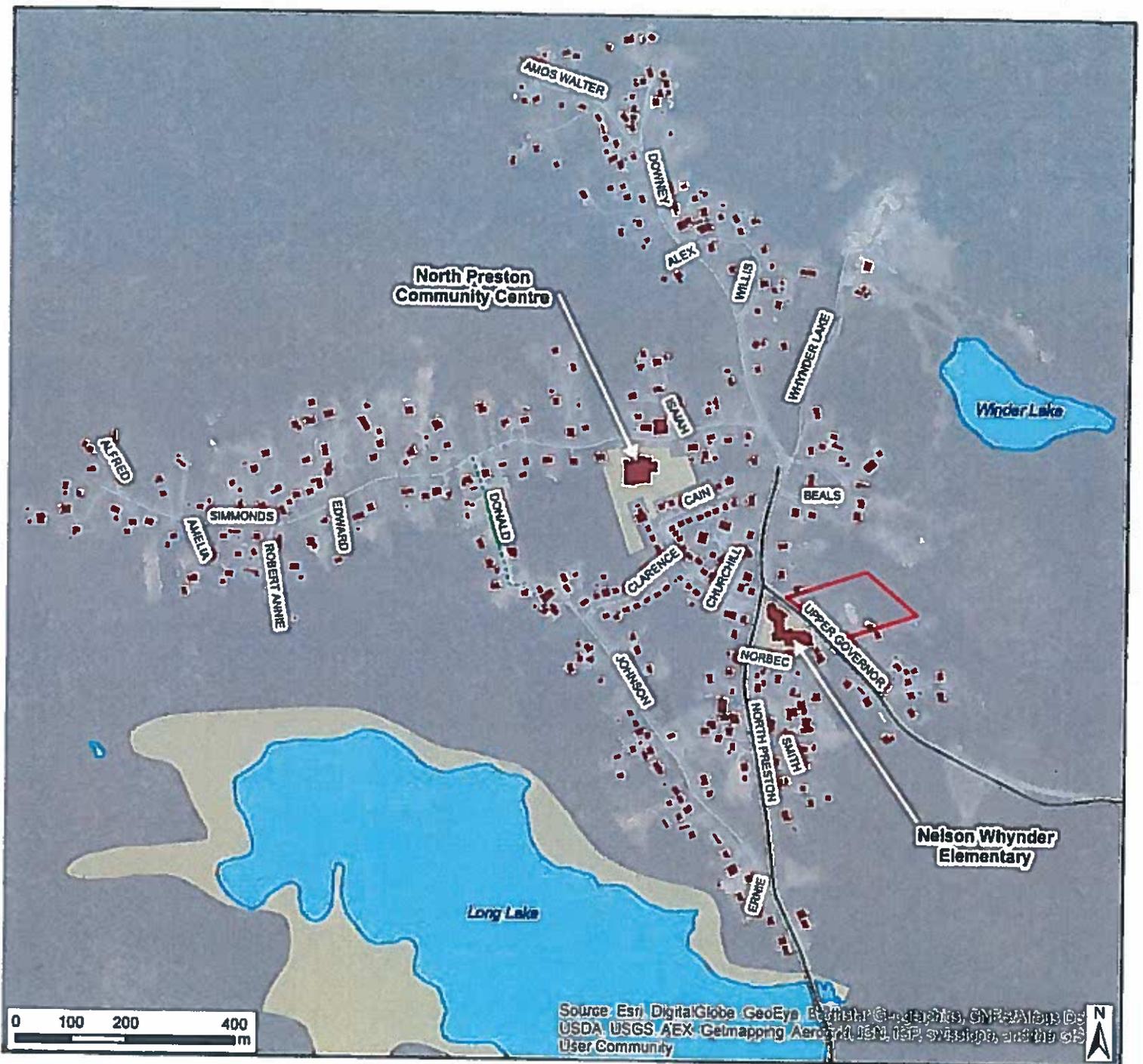
- Alternative 1: CPED could recommend that Regional Council direct staff to determine alternative recreational uses for the subject site. That would require additional analysis and a separate staff report.
- Alternative 2: CPED could recommend that Regional Council direct staff to consider an alternative location for a recreational field in North Preston to accommodate a regulation sized field. On a preliminary basis, no other lands have found to be immediately suitable and available so additional analysis would be required. This would delay construction of a recreation field in North Preston.
- Alternative 3: CPED could recommend that Regional Council choose to not to proceed with the development of a recreational field in North Preston.

ATTACHMENTS

Map 1	Context of North Preston
Attachment A	Site Detail
Attachment B	Sport Field Access Lake Loon to Lake Echo North of Highway #7
Attachment C	Field Size by Sport
Attachment D	Class B Natural Playing Field
Attachment E	Class C Non Regulation Playing Field

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

Report Prepared by: Philip Hammond, Recreation Planning Specialist, Parks and Recreation, 902.233.0593
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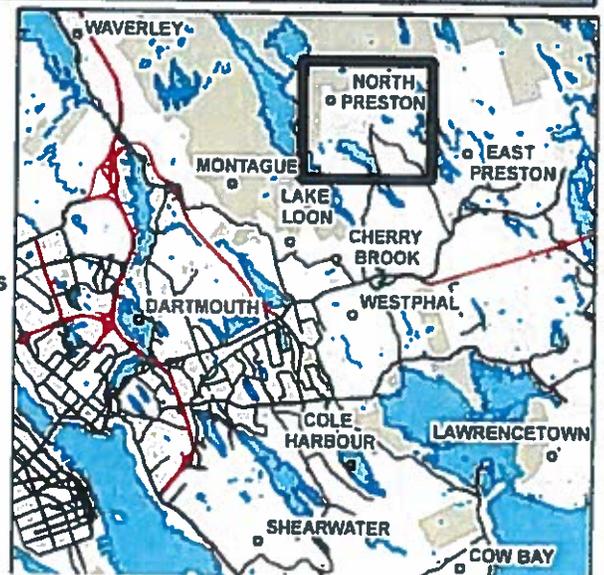
Map 1

Context of North Preston

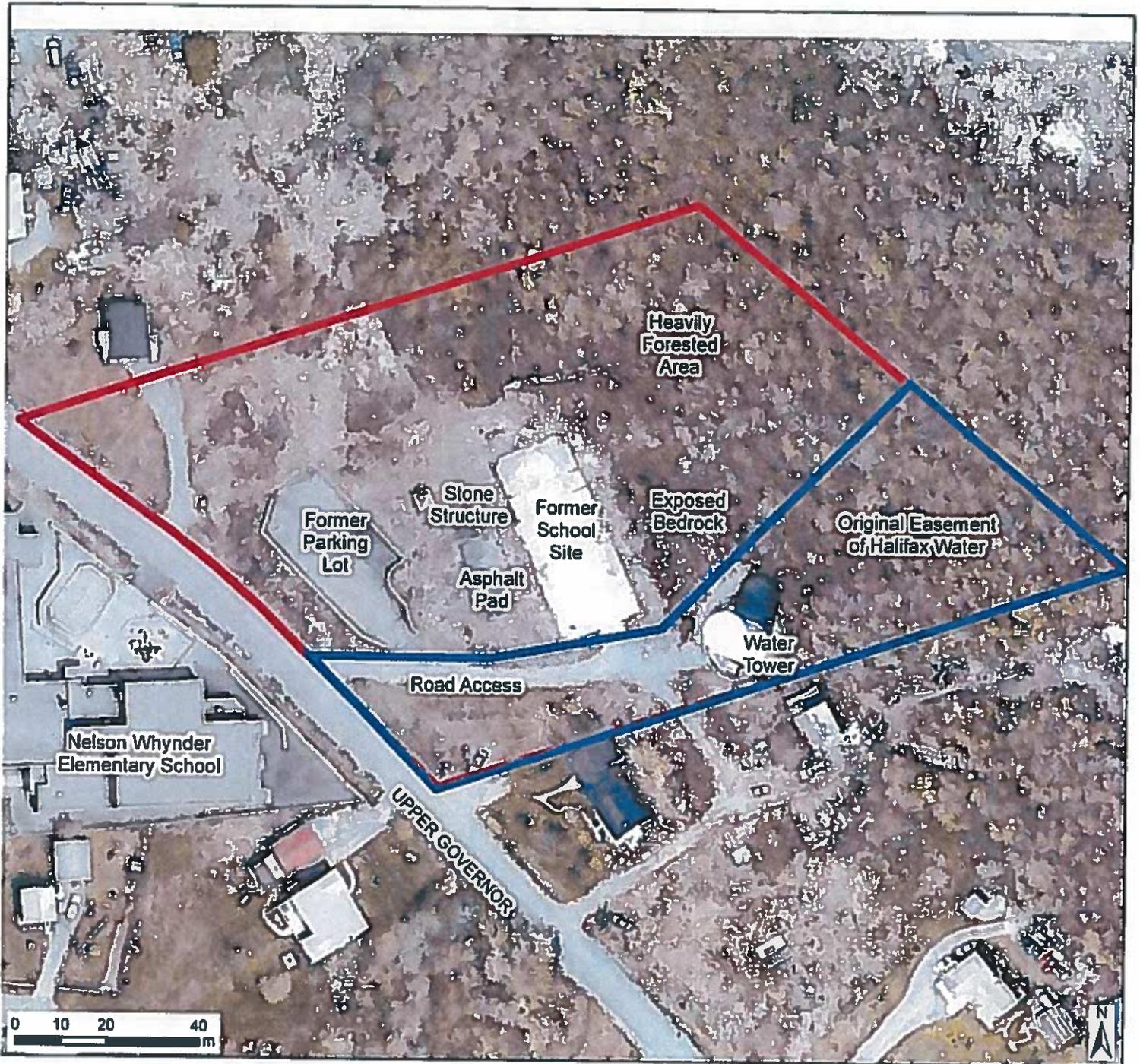
Produced by HRM Parks and Recreation

The accuracy of any representation on this map is not guaranteed.

- Site Boundary for Proposed Field
- Building Footprints
- Parkland, Crown Land and Wilderness
- Lakes and Ocean
- Highways
- Arterial Roads
- Collector Roads
- Local Streets
- Walkways and Trails



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Attachment A

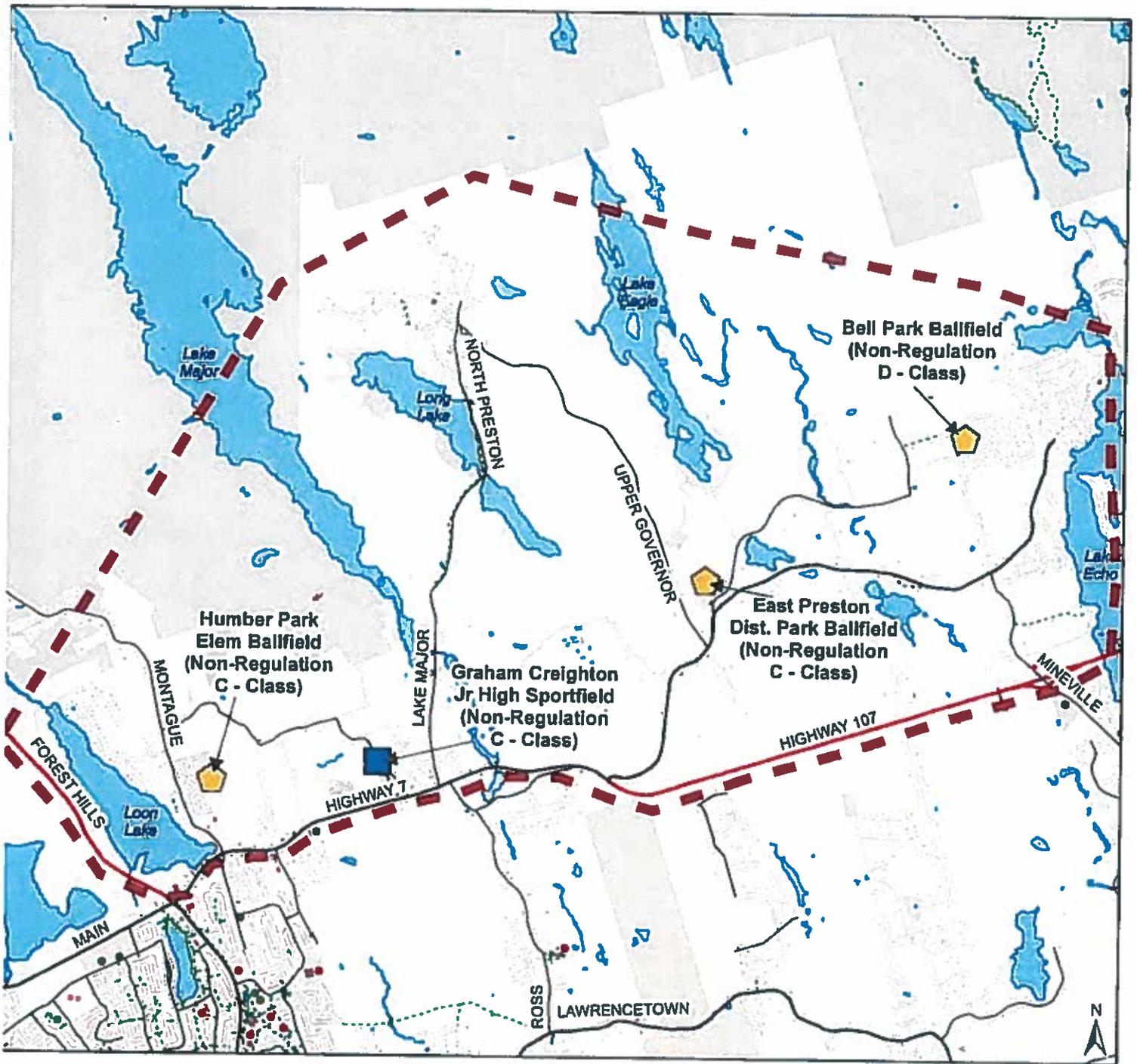
Site Detail
 857 Upper Governor Street, North Preston

- Site Boundary
- Original Easement of Halifax Water

Produced by HRM Parks and Recreation

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Attachment B

Sport Field Access Lake Loon to Lake Echo North of Hwy 7

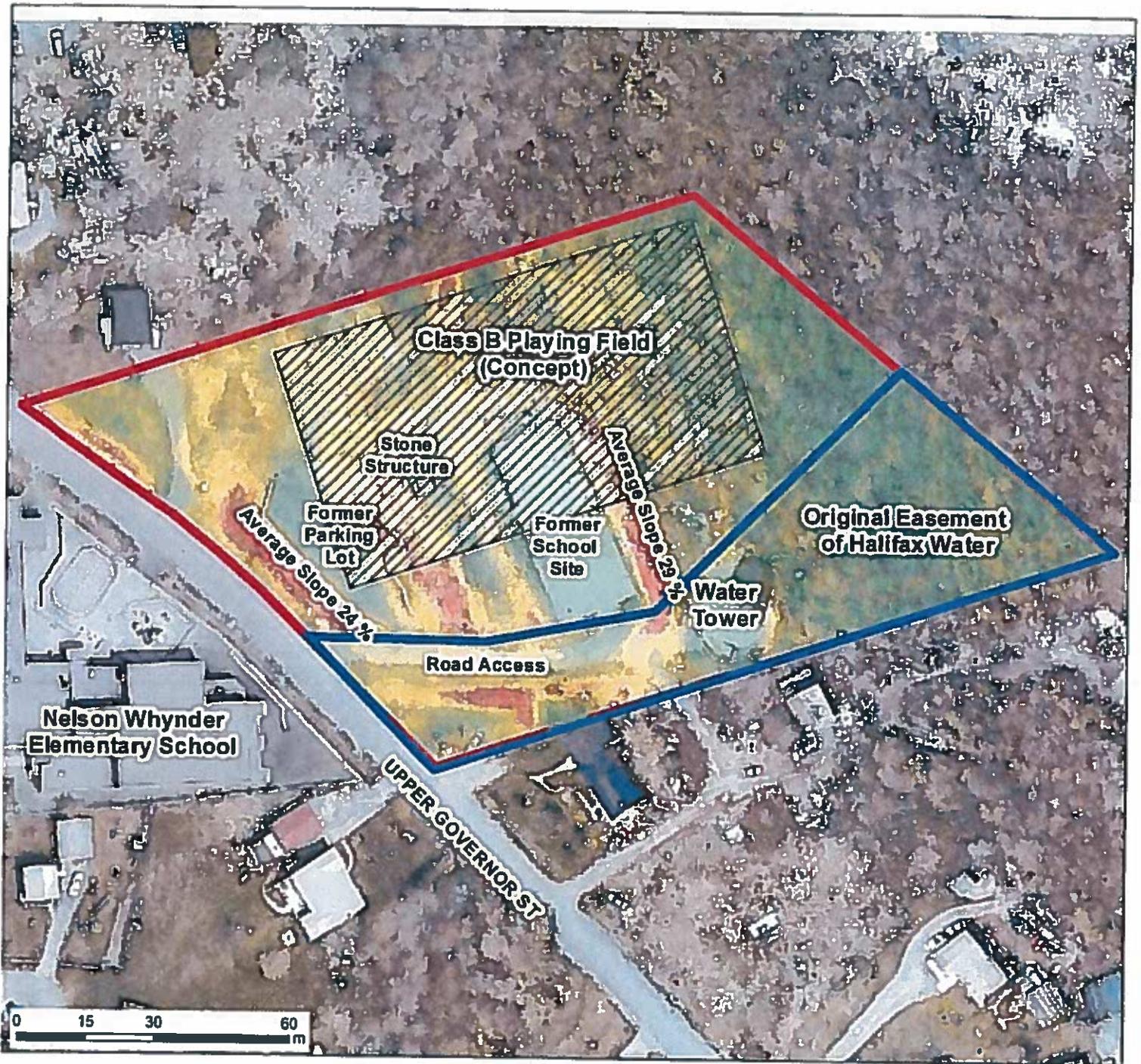
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-  Study Area Boundary
-  Ballfields Serving Lake Loon to Lake Echo
-  Sportfields Serving Lake Loon to Lake Echo
-  Other Ballfields
-  Other Sportfields
-  Parkland, Crown Land and Wilderness
-  Lakes and Ocean
-  Building Footprints



Attachment D

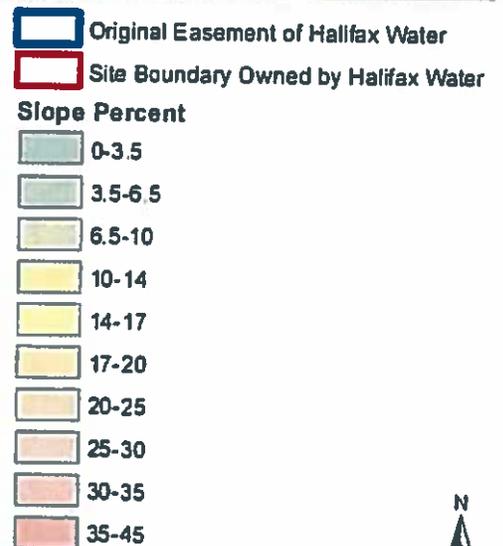
Concept Class B Natural Playing Field (Regulation Size)

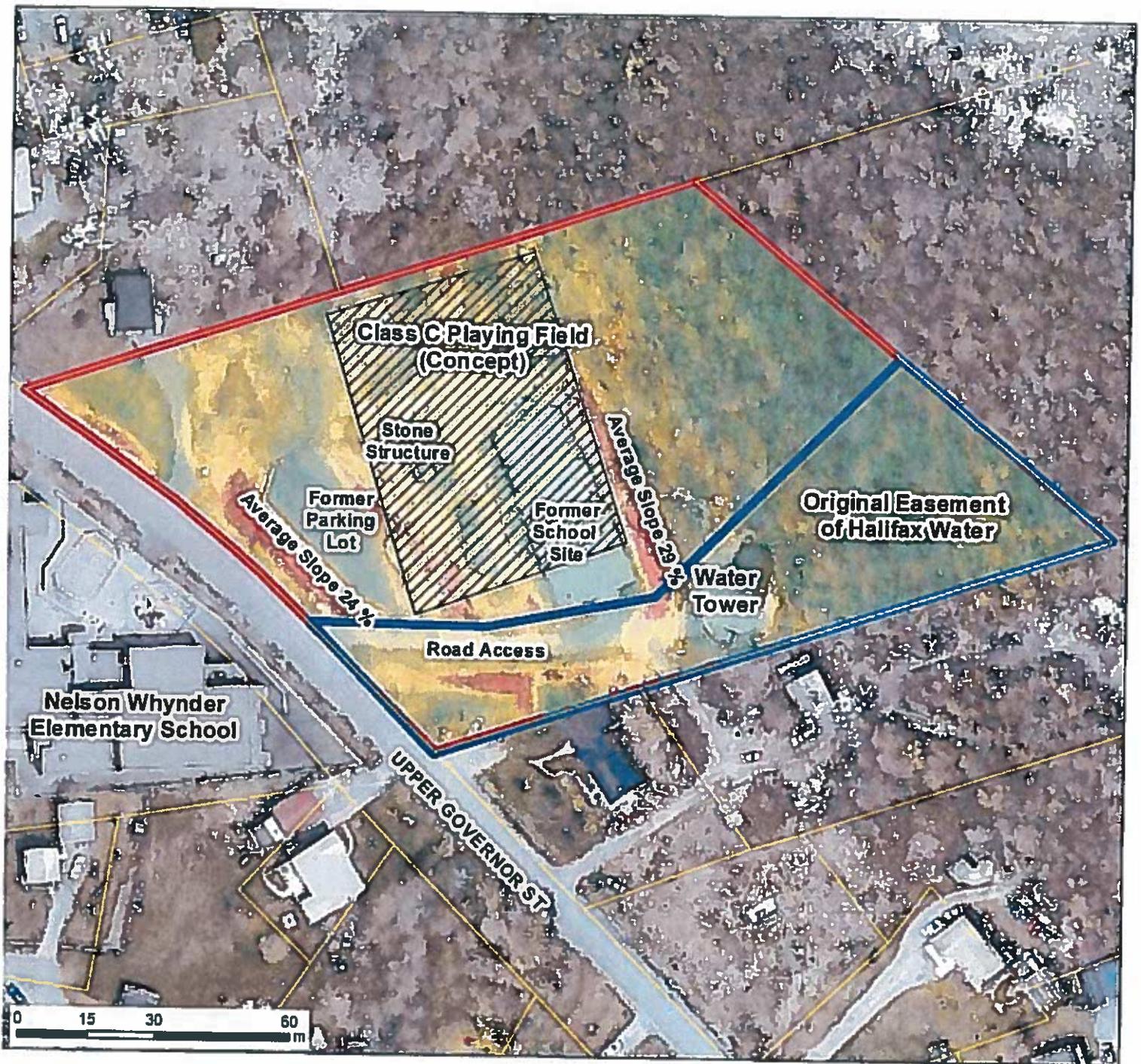
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Attachment E

Concept Class C Natural Playing Field (Regulation Size)

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