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Item No. 12.1.1
Community Planning & Economic Development
Standing Committee
January 16, 2020

TO: Chair and Members of Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Kelly Denty, Director, Planning and Development

Original Signed

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: November 7, 2019

SUBJECT: A Streetscaping Program Framework for the Regional Centre

ORIGIN

On December 14, 2017, the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee passed the following motion:

1. Request a staff report regarding options and opportunities for a long-term streetscaping program for the Regional Centre that updates the rationale and priorities for projects, and establishes stable long-term funding; and
2. That staff review the letter from the urban core Business Improvement Districts.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter:

subsection 70 (1) "The Municipality may beautify, improve and maintain property owned or leased by the Municipality".

subsection 104 (1) "The Council may make by-laws imposing, fixing and providing methods of enforcing payment of charges for...(i) the municipal portion of the capital cost of placing the wiring and other parts of an electrical distribution system underground".

subsection 319 (4) "The Council may, by by-law, establish a pedestrian mall on a street or any other land owned by the Municipality";

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subsection 322 (1) “The Council may design, lay out, open, expand, construct, maintain, improve, alter, repair, light, water, clean, and clear streets in the Municipality”;

section 326 “Where the Council determines that wires and other parts of an electrical distribution or telecommunications system be placed underground, the Council may contribute to the cost.”

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:

1. Prepare a Streetscaping Administrative Order for Council’s consideration based on the framework described in the Discussion section of this report.
2. Advance opportunities for Regional Centre streetscaping (including, but not limited to those generally described in Attachment #3) for consideration in future capital budgets.
3. Continue working with representatives of Nova Scotia Power and Bell Aliant to achieve funding agreements with regulatory approval, for undergrounding projects including areas beyond the existing “pole free zone”.
4. Explore options for a by-law to recoup all or some of the municipal portion of the capital cost to bury overhead lines and return to Regional Council with a recommendation for consideration.

BACKGROUND

The main way that people form an image of a city is by travelling along its streets. Streets are a component of the public realm, and like municipal parks and open spaces, are available for everyone to use, without charge. Streetscaping considers how elements such as trees, lighting, street furniture, surface materials, underground wiring, public art, planters, and more, can be used to animate and support a street’s function as a part of the public realm. Street design can include aesthetic as well as practical considerations, in the same way that the design of a building may have functional as well as architectural goals. As HRM increases its focus on public transit, walking and cycling, streetscaping can also support these modes by adding shade, places to rest, and beauty to the pedestrian domain.

This report describes how existing Council policies support streetscaping; provides an overview of past initiatives; and proposes a framework for moving forward with streetscaping in the Regional Centre.

Supporting Policies

On April 5, 2016, Regional Council approved the Halifax Economic Growth Plan for 2016-21. The Plan has four overarching five-year goals, including “to make Halifax a better place to live and work”. Action #61 includes the development of “a long-term streetscaping program for the Regional Centre”. As set out in the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS), the Regional Centre encompasses the Halifax peninsula and Dartmouth between Halifax Harbour and the Circumferential Highway.

The 2017 *Integrated Mobility Plan* (IMP) recognizes that certain streets can be ‘places’ as well as transportation ‘links’ (Chapter 2, Complete Streets). Examples of ‘place’ streets include main streets within walkable commercial, cultural, or institutional districts. Streets that are ‘links’ are vital corridors for one or more modes of transportation. Streets can be both ‘places’ and ‘links’ to various degrees. The IMP supports streetscaping by citing the need to identify and prioritize those streets that serve as “places” and develop plans for their enhancement” (Actions 41,42,43).

The RMPS also supports aspects of streetscaping in parts of the Regional Centre: “When planning streetscape improvement projects for commercial areas or heritage districts... consideration shall be given to the underground placement of electrical and communication lines. Highest priority shall be given to projects within the Regional Centre...” (SU-23).

The recently approved *Centre Plan* augments the case for such investments in the core by creating opportunities to accommodate at least 40% of regional growth, largely in mixed-use developments designated as *Centres* and *Corridors*. Streetscaping has the potential to enable large areas of existing public space (streets) in these areas to serve social as well as transportation functions, and thereby support the area’s growing population. Policies 10.19 and 10.22 of the *Centre Plan* speak to the consideration of streetscaping in the capital budget and recognize the benefits to neighbourhood economic and social development that can be imparted by placemaking programs and urban design plans.

A major component of streetscaping is the planting of trees with appropriate soil volumes to support tree health and growth to maturity. Establishing a streetscaping program would support several actions of Halifax’s Urban Forest Masterplan (2014) particularly with respect to: prioritizing street tree planting in neighbourhoods lacking privately owned trees (Action 12); planting trees to support active transportation (Action 28); and using trees to decrease stormwater in highly impervious areas (Action 23).

Past and Current Streetscaping Efforts in HRM

The Municipality has commissioned a variety of streetscaping initiatives over the past decades including projects such as Barrington Street, Granville Mall, Bedford Row, and Argyle Street in downtown Halifax; Alderney Drive and Portland Street in downtown Dartmouth; and more. These projects have beautified the public realm with their decorative lighting, surface treatments, and vegetation; protected areas from power outages with their buried wires; and have elicited a great deal of civic pride. However, these projects have been carried out as opportunities and funding arose, largely in the absence of a formal “program”.

Challenges with this approach include:

- A lack of consistent ‘ownership’ as projects have been delivered by different departments over the years;
- Inconsistencies in style or extent of project execution;
- Operational challenges stocking and sourcing products like decorative lighting and paving due to a proliferation of styles;
- Challenges tracking asset condition and identifying budgets for replacement as non-standard infrastructure ages;
- Challenges maintaining the aesthetic integrity of projects due to uncertainty about what standards to follow when project areas are disturbed;
- The absence of a coordinated approach to burying overhead wires resulting in sporadic efforts on a voluntary basis by some developers, but not others;
- Delays/ termination of other street capital projects in the past, due inability to confirm funds for desired (but costly) streetscaping;
- Missed opportunities for cost effectively integrating streetscaping into other projects due to the absence of a long-term vision.

HRM’s current streetscaping activities in the Regional Centre include:

- A \$17.5 million capital initiative for the construction of two projects: *Argyle & Grafton Shared Streetscape* (complete), and *Imagine Spring Garden Road* (in the design phase)¹;
- The redevelopment of the Cogswell interchange will have a significant streetscaping component;

¹ <http://legacycontent.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/documents/160426ca1413.pdf>

- Upcoming changes to Alderney Drive near Dartmouth Cove will include consideration of streetscaping features for the Sawmill Creek daylighting, Dundas Street extension, and upgrades to the Portland-Alderney-Prince Albert intersection;
- Coordination with other transportation planning and development projects to ensure streetscaping elements are considered in areas where “Capital District” standards are intended to apply;
- A review of the Municipal Design Guidelines to clarify these standards and where they apply.

Argyle & Grafton and Spring Garden Road were prioritized according to criteria developed by the former ‘Strategic Urban Partnership’ and approved by Regional Council². Recognizing that this capital “program” will end once the Spring Garden project is built, the Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) Standing Committee would like to identify what the next priorities should be for public investment in the urban core public realm and how these should be funded. Specifically, the CPED Committee has asked to:

1. Revisit the original criteria and provide updated rationale for priorities (program framework);
2. Examine options & opportunities for what the next projects could be; and
3. Identify stable funding for the establishment of a long-term program.

They have also asked staff to review a letter from the urban core BIDs (Attachment #1).

DISCUSSION

In addition to providing a ‘home base’ for corporate knowledge, a long-term streetscaping **program** would include overarching **goals & objectives, criteria** for prioritizing certain corridors over others; **plans** for how to invest in priority corridors, and **budgets** to support implementation. A program would also include funding to **maintain** and eventually **recapitalize** the assets; **supporting infrastructure** such as guidelines & standards for different precincts; and **staff** to plan, deliver, and maintain the projects.

A streetscaping program would also benefit from having **partners**. Partners can help **fund** projects (i.e. developer-built assets); and **operate** them – for example Business Improvement Districts can maintain flowers, banner programs, and host special events - activities that maximize the value of the investments.

The following framework and funding model are being recommended. Several opportunities for potential projects in the Regional Centre have also been identified.

1. Program Framework

Informed by the supporting policies described in the Background section of this report, the following framework is proposed to set out the goals and objectives of a streetscaping program and provide rationale for identifying and prioritizing projects (criteria).

I. Goal

Streetscaping aims to improve the public realm of streets to support their role as ‘places’ in addition to being transportation ‘links’.

II. Objectives

- a. Enhance the character and identity of pedestrian oriented commercial, heritage, and institutional districts;
- b. Authentically respond to a street by enhancing its natural or cultural aspects;
- c. Improve economic outcomes by attracting people to invest and visit;

² <http://legacycontent.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/documents/140211ca1121.PDF>

- d. Create quality public spaces that contribute to the social life of the municipality;
- e. Consider inclusivity and the needs of diverse groups of people;
- f. Improve environmental outcomes (reduced emissions & noise; improved air quality & tree canopy; climate resiliency resulting from underground power & telecommunications);
- g. Promote active and healthy lifestyles by improving accessibility and making active transportation options (walking, wheeling, bicycling, etc.) pleasant and attractive;
- h. Foster partnerships to build and maintain improvements to the public realm.

III. Criteria (Rationale for Priorities)

Large streetscaping investments can be costly and disruptive and should only be considered in areas where they will result in the most benefit for the community and the region. They are only one way to invest in a community and will not be appropriate or financially possible on **most** of HRM's main thoroughfares. For these reasons, predictable, fair, and defensible criteria are needed to guide where such projects will have the most impact. A review of the criteria used to prioritize the Argyle/ Grafton and Spring Garden Road projects is contained in Attachment #2. Each criterion was evaluated for its continued validity.

Table 1 below includes new recommended criteria for identifying priority locations for future streetscaping investments in the Regional Centre.

Table 1. Recommended Project Evaluation Criteria

Criterion	Description
Plan Alignment	Project advances municipal priorities described in various Council-approved plans, strategies and reports. This criterion is weighted according to the importance of the plan, with greater weight given to projects aligning with multiple plans.
High Place Value	This criterion ensures that streetscaping will support streets that function as "places". <i>Places</i> can be identified by examining fundamental principles of urban legibility (path, edge, district, node, landmark) and directing streetscaping to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pedestrian oriented 'districts' of a commercial, heritage, or institutional nature, especially on streets that form their spines (i.e. 'main streets') and locations that represent transitions from one place to another ('gateways'); • streets that front regionally significant cultural or natural features (historic sites, waterfronts, major parks); • connections between regionally significant public places (i.e. Sullivan's Pond to Dartmouth Waterfront; Public Gardens to Central Library; streets with prominent views of landmarks or the water); and • streets with high pedestrian volumes (e.g. near major pedestrian generators like transit hubs or event centres, or as determined by counts).
Project Integration	The proposed streetscaping improvements can be carried out at the same time as another project (i.e. street recapitalization or reinstatement by a private developer). This criterion is strongly weighted to maximize cost savings due to economies of scale that result from project bundling, but it should never be the only criterion. The North Park Roundabouts project (2013/14) is an example of a streetscaping project integrated with others.

Capitalizes on Existing Strengths & Assets	The project enhances or builds on a previous streetscaping asset or project, or fills gaps left behind after previous work.
Outside Funding	The project is externally funded. This criterion's weight is related to the proportion of external funding, but it should never be the only criterion.

2. Streetscaping Opportunities

A description of various streetscaping project opportunities can be found in Attachment #3. These have been identified through various past Council reports, plans, studies and policies³, as well as by applying the criteria above. The projects are of various scales (small/medium/ large) and include the development of plans and guidelines. Their relative costs are suggested to inform the program budget, with funding mechanisms discussed in the next section. All estimates should be considered 'Class D' because none of the projects have been scoped in detail.

Furthermore, the list of potential projects is not meant to be inclusive of every opportunity in the Regional Centre. The list should be considered a living document that can be continuously updated as additional opportunities arise and need to be evaluated. While some projects may be carried out as stand-alone endeavours, the scope of streetscaping work would ideally be folded into larger integrated projects.

Should Council decide to proceed with a streetscaping program, near term deliverables would include: a streetscape asset inventory, condition assessment, and spot improvement/ rehabilitation plan; the development of streetscape standards for growth areas in the Centre Plan; investigation of options for a by-law to recoup from others all or some of the municipal portion of the capital cost to bury overhead lines; integration with other road projects to ensure they include streetscaping elements where appropriate; and accelerating the replacement of light poles and fixtures in parts of downtown Halifax that have buried wires and are within the Capital District, but have highway style lighting.

Relationship to Complete Streets Policy of the Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP)

Various interventions to make streets more 'complete' are evaluated and prioritized under other municipal programs and will not be the primary consideration of a streetscaping program. Street changes such as new curb ramps, bump-outs, pedestrian refuges, tactile warnings, bicycle lanes, new sidewalks and more are not considered 'streetscaping' though they may be delivered in conjunction with streetscaping.

The opportunities in Attachment #3 focus more on how a street's role as a destination, social space, or 'place' can be enhanced. This carries out Actions 41, 42, and 43 of the IMP which recommend that such streets be identified, prioritized, and have plans made for their enhancement.

Relationship to Pilot (temporary) Projects

Action 48 of the IMP recommends the use of pilot projects (aka 'Tactical Urbanism') to test new ideas for how streets can function. Pilot projects use a variety of tactics to temporarily transform road spaces, and test ideas before carrying out major capital upgrades. Temporary versions of planned streetscape projects could be considered as pilot projects, but pilots may be related to transit, road safety or active transportation as well, and are not specifically listed as individual opportunities in Attachment #3.

³ Downtown Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy; Downtown Dartmouth Municipal Planning Strategy, Capital District Urban Design Project, City of Halifax/ Nova Scotia Power 1977 Short Term Pole Free Zone Agreement; Spring Garden Area Public Lands Plan; Province House/ City Hall Public Lands Plan; North Park Street Project Report; February 11, 2014 Five Year, \$50M Capital Campaign, etc.

3. Long Term Stable Funding

As noted in the Origin section of this report, the third part of the Standing Committee's request asked for the establishment of "stable long-term funding". This part of the discussion will address both capital and operating budgets, as both are required to run a program.

a) Capital Budgets

Capital projects are identified annually to deliver assets and support municipal service delivery. Capital spending must support the implementation of Council-approved directives. As described in the Background section, strategic Council direction already supports a streetscaping program through the *Urban Forest Masterplan (2013)*, *Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (2014)*, *Halifax Economic Growth Plan (2016)*, *Integrated Mobility Plan (2017)*, and *Centre Plan (2019)*. While these documents provide high level policy support, they do not provide any detail on what a streetscaping program should consist of, or where it should be applied. This staff report recommends that the CAO prepare a Streetscaping Administrative Order for Council's consideration that would fill that gap. Should Council support the recommendations of this report, and direct the CAO to develop a streetscaping program, opportunities such as those described in Attachment #3 would be considered for funding through the annual capital budget cycle.

As noted before and described in Attachment #3, there are several small/medium/large streetscaping opportunities in the Regional Centre. Annual capital funding of \$250,000 up to \$1,000,000, could accomplish several small and medium projects every year. To undertake more signature projects like Argyle & Grafton, or projects which include the undergrounding of overhead utilities, budgets in the order of \$2 million per urban city block (+/- 100m) are required.

To supplement capital funding from general revenue, a discussion of other potential funding mechanisms is contained in Attachment #4. These include:

- a) Funding from other levels of government;
- b) Entering into regulator-approved funding agreements with utilities;
- c) Requiring developer-built streetscapes through new by-laws or standards;
- d) Cost recovery through an undergrounding by-law;
- e) Coordination with other (municipal or utility) projects; and
- f) Parking revenue.

While for the time being, significant funding from provincial or federal governments does not seem likely, it is possible that funds may be established to assist communities with adapting to climate change and that such funds could potentially be applied to the burial of overhead electrical and communication lines in the future. This report recommends continuing to work with representatives of Nova Scotia Power and Bell Aliant to achieve funding agreements with regulatory approval, for undergrounding projects including areas beyond the existing "pole free zone"⁴. It also identifies the need for new municipal standards to support developer-built streetscapes as per c) above.

Further to the idea of cost recovery through infrastructure as noted under d) above, this report is also recommending that HRM explore options for a by-law to recoup all or some of the cost of municipal undergrounding investments. As noted under Legislative Authority, the HRM Charter allows Council to make such a by-law, and as described in Attachment #4, it would require undergrounding in certain areas; identify who would pay and when; and specify a formula for recouping all or some of the cost.

⁴ The 'Pole Free Zone' is an area of downtown Halifax subject to a 1977 agreement with Nova Scotia Power and Bell Aliant to cost share the burial of wires. This agreement was expanded in principal to a broader area in 2005 (the 'Capital District') but this has not been applied to any projects in the expanded area to date.

While bullet e) above is not necessarily a funding mechanism, integrating streetscaping elements with other major capital projects such as road surface rehabilitation or sewer separation has the potential to save money in the delivery of these projects. That is why ‘project integration’ is one of the most strongly weighted criteria in the program framework described earlier in this report.

With respect to funding the program from parking revenues and fines, these funds currently flow into general revenue. While there would be some optical benefits from the idea that “monies generated in an area are spent in the area”, the funding model would still effectively impact general revenue and is not recommended at this time. More analysis of this idea is contained in Attachment #4.

b) Operating Budgets

i. Project Management Costs

While consultants have been engaged to design recent streetscaping projects, internal teams must manage and review these projects. This can put a strain on the delivery of other projects, particularly in the areas of design delivery and construction management. To advance more projects through a formal program, either staff priorities will need to be permanently modified, or additional staff resources may be needed.

ii. Maintenance Costs

Streetscaping adds features to the public realm (e.g. horticultural planting beds, street furniture, feature lighting, waste receptacles, etc.). Asset inventories must be updated, and operating budgets and resources increased when these assets result in additional labour and material requirements for project upkeep. As a rule of thumb, annual operating budget increases of 5% of the capital project value should be allocated to maintain “signature” streetscaping projects. Once a streetscaping project is fully scoped, operational teams should be engaged in project review to confirm service standard expectations and develop cost estimates for maintenance. Those amounts (the operating cost of capital) should be allocated to the appropriate cost centre in the year following project delivery.

If newly streetscaped areas are outside of existing ‘enhanced maintenance areas’, then these will need to be expanded to ensure that the new assets will be maintained and additional staff (or contracted services) are available.

Finally, if the asset requires the purchase of new equipment to support its maintenance, there may be further impacts to the *capital* budget to support maintenance (for example, special plow blades were procured to maintain the Argyle & Grafton streetscapes).

4. Review of Letter Received from the Five Urban Core BIDs (Attachment #1)

In their letter of October 2017 (Attachment #1), the five urban core Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) made three main points summarized below. Further to Council’s direction, staff have reviewed these and offer the following considerations.

Table 2. Staff Response to Letter from Urban Core Business Improvement Districts

BID Comment	Staff Response
The BIDs stated their support for implementing Recommendation #61 of the Halifax Economic Growth Strategy (to create a long-term streetscape program for the Regional Centre).	In agreement with the BIDs, staff are recommending that Council endorse a streetscaping program framework and consider various projects for funding during the annual budget cycle. In addition to the Economic Strategy, there is also policy support for streetscaping in the Regional Plan, UFMP, IMP, and Centre Plan.

<p>The BIDs suggested revisiting the previously used prioritization criteria and striking a committee consisting of HRM staff and BID representatives (at minimum) to review projects.</p>	<p>Staff have revisited the prioritization criteria (Attachment #2) and have recommended new ones (Table 1). The proposed criteria were shared with the BIDs on October 3, 2019.</p> <p>Rather than striking a joint committee to review projects as suggested, staff propose to be solely responsible for prioritizing projects under this framework, with consideration given to engaging BIDs and others about potential future activities.</p>
<p>The BIDs recommended establishment of stable long-term program funding via municipal parking revenues (rather than using a “budget-by-project” approach, or an “annual lump sum allotment”).</p>	<p>Staff advise that a “budget by project” approach is not the best way to proceed with Regional Centre streetscaping. This is essentially how HRM has undertaken streetscaping to date, and it has resulted in various issues described in the Background section of this report. ‘Budget by project’ delivers projects, but it does not make it easy to look after them or plan ahead; it is ad-hoc and not recommended.</p> <p>Attachment #4 includes an analysis of the BID’s recommendation that streetscape program funding be tied to parking revenues. While staff note that this may have some optical benefits, the model still effectively impacts general revenue and is not recommended.</p> <p>Staff are recommending that if Council endorses a streetscaping program, that long-term funding be allocated through annual capital and operating budgets.</p>

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report recommends that Council consider future streetscape projects through the annual capital budget cycle and consider increases to operating budgets to maintain these projects and support staff’s capacity to deliver them. Projects will be included in the proposed 2020/21 capital budget to implement the near-term projects described above in Section 2. The operating costs, if any, will be included in the operating cost of capital (OCC).

The current proposed capital budget includes streetscaping amounts of \$400k in 20/21, \$200K in 21/22, and \$1.5M in 22/23 under capital project number CT190001, for a total 3 -year investment of \$2.1M.

RISK CONSIDERATION

The report recommendations may serve to reduce the risk of continuing to add assets to the municipal inventory (streetscaping projects and their elements) outside of a formal program framework.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Staff have engaged with representatives of Nova Scotia Power and Bell Aliant about matters related to the undergrounding of wires that are discussed in this report.

An overview of the report was also shared at a meeting with HRM’s Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) on October 3, 2019. At this meeting, there was general support for proceeding with the direction of the report, particularly if a streetscaping program would be able to work in partnership with their organizations to deliver some smaller enhancements, and not only focus on signature projects.

There were concerns from BIDs representing areas *outside* the Regional Centre that this program excluded them. Staff confirmed that older streetscaping plans for Main Street, Herring Cove Road, and Sackville Drive are considered complete because all the ideas in those plans that could be implemented, have been (except for one project that remains 'in flight' in the Main Street area). There may be other streets beyond the Regional Centre that meet some or all the program criteria which could be considered for streetscaping with further direction from Council. Before deciding to broaden the program, a review and recommendation of needed staff and funding resources would be required.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Streetscaping projects include the potential to incorporate a variety of 'green infrastructure' components such as rain gardens (to absorb stormwater run-off and mitigate risks of flooding); features that improve microclimates and reduce 'urban heat islands'; and different types of vegetation to add biodiversity. Streetscaping can also improve the experience of using environmentally friendly transportation options like walking, bicycling, and taking the bus. Burying wires could also be considered an adaptation to protect areas from power loss during major storms, which are expected to be more frequent with climate change.

A major component of streetscaping would be planting trees in soil cells or trenches. These involve buried structures designed to carry the load of paved surfaces (roads, sidewalks) while containing large volumes of uncompacted soil needed by trees to thrive. Soil cells are required in urban situations where grass boulevards give way to hard surfaces due to heavy pedestrian volumes and high curbside demand. Normally, these hard surfaces must be placed on highly compacted subsurface materials which are impenetrable to tree roots. While costly, soil cells and other technologies introduce the potential to grow large trees in city cores, which have more overall benefits than small trees including social, economic, aesthetic and environmental benefits, and can also be used to manage stormwater runoff.

ALTERNATIVES

The Community and Economic Development Standing Committee could recommend that Regional Council:

1. Endorse the streetscaping program framework described in the discussion section of this report but direct the CAO to only maintain the state of good repair of past and ongoing streetscaping projects, and not pursue any new projects or initiatives for the time being. This is not recommended for the reasons described in this report.
2. Not endorse the streetscaping program framework described in the discussion section of this report and proceed with the status quo. This option is not recommended for the reasons described in this report.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment #1: Letter from Five Urban Core BIDS, October 2017
- Attachment #2: Review of 2013 Criteria for the Evaluation of Priority Streetscaping Projects
- Attachment #3: Options and Opportunities for a Regional Centre Streetscaping Program
- Attachment #4: Streetscape Program Funding Considerations

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.

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HALIFAX ECONOMIC GROWTH PLAN 2016-21

ACTION 61:

“Develop a long-term streetscaping program for the Regional Centre”

Background

Circa 2008, HRM staff approached the four (previous to NEBA) urban core BIDs, with their intention to create a five-year streetscaping priority list, which would be funded at \$2 million/year. As Portland Street was already underway, the three Halifax-side BIDs each picked a priority street: Barrington, Spring Garden, Quinpool. The funding level proved to be inadequate and none of the streetscape projects were completed.

The 2011-2016 Economic Strategy called for a \$50 million fund over five years, from the three levels of government. HRM contributed \$17m over five years. A committee, consisting of HRM, Strategic Urban Partnership (SUP) and BID representatives was formed to create a prioritization matrix. Twelve projects were prioritized. Streetscape plans for Spring Garden and Argyle are currently underway, to be completed in 2017.

The 2016-21 Halifax Economic Growth Plan, approved by HRM Council, included Action Item 61 to create a long-term streetscape program (pg.20)

Components of a “Program”

Rationale for priorities:

This exists in the broad sense within HRM planning, as well as in the matrix. Essentially, main commercial streets, which connect public investments are the projects to be considered. This focus should be on the urban core (commercial) area of the Regional Centre.

Prioritization of projects:

The current matrix should still be effective and relatively timely. New projects have arisen since it was last used, and would need to be scored. It would be a good idea to form a committee to revisit the matrix, and potentially tweak it. It would also be recommended that the matrix take into account different size projects (ie, large streetscape projects, smaller refreshes of the public realm, and pilot projects). The SUP no longer exists, so the committee structure would need to be amended. At minimum a new committee would consist of HRM staff and BID representation. A schedule of review of projects would need to be implemented.

Funding:

Certainty of long-term funding is key to the program, so as to create stability of investment and harmony between business districts and councillors. HRM could (a) budget by-project, (b) institute an annual lump sum allotment, or (c) tie funding to a specific revenue source.

The recommended option is (c). The revenue source which should be looked at is parking revenues/fines. This has been increasingly used in other jurisdictions, is fairly stable over time, and is a non-tax revenue which is earned in the area in which it would be reinvested (*note: though these funds are only earned in certain areas of the urban core where there is paid parking, the fund would be used for the entire urban core area.*)

This proposal for realizing Action 61 of the Halifax Economic Growth Plan is respectfully submitted by:

Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission
Downtown Halifax Business Commission
Quinpool Road Main Street Association
North End Business Association
Spring Garden Area Business Association

Attachment # 2: Review of 2013 Criteria for the Evaluation of Priority Streetscaping Projects

The decision-making criteria developed by the former 'Strategic Urban Partnership' and approved by Council¹ is reviewed below. Each criterion has been evaluated for its continued validity. Concerns with the old criteria are described and new criteria are proposed to address concerns and better identify priority locations for major streetscaping improvements.

2013 Criterion	Comments/ Concerns	Proposed Change
<p>Aligns with Existing Council Direction</p> <p>(HRMbyDesign, AT Plan, Cultural Plan, Capital Ideas Paper, Public Lands Plan, Economic Strategy, etc.) Y/N</p>	<p>Yes/ No outcome does not identify which plans they align with and how. Does not give extra weight to projects that align with multiple plans. Gives documents with different status same weight (i.e. consultants' reports are equivalent to Municipal Planning Strategies & Council-approved Priorities Plans)</p>	<p>Plan Alignment</p> <p>Project advances municipal priorities described in various Council-approved plans, strategies and reports.</p> <p>This criterion is weighted according to the importance of the plan, with greater weight given to projects aligning with multiple plans.</p>
<p>Public Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improves economic outcomes (retail, commercial, tourism, clustering of economic activity) - Promotes active & healthy lifestyles; improves accessibility & connectivity' - Promotes social cohesion and/ or improves access to public realm for a diverse group of users - Improves environmental outcomes (emissions, improved public buildings, trees, noise levels, air quality) - Makes core safer (reduce accidents, crime reduction, more eyes on the street, reduce broken window effect) - Create a positive identity, pride of place, enhances heritage (natural and cultural) attracts people to visit 	<p>Most of these criteria restate the value of streetscaping in general but do little to assist with prioritizing potential locations for it.</p> <p>These ideas have been folded into objectives in the proposed Program Framework (see Discussion Section of this staff report).</p> <p>Criteria need to help direct the investment to maximize its benefits.</p> <p>The visibility of a project is a valid consideration for major investments expected to raise Halifax's profile: locations of regional significance should be prioritized over locations that are only locally significant.</p> <p>Streetscaping generally improves the area between the curb and the property line, conferring most of its benefits upon pedestrians, so locations with high pedestrian volumes should be prioritized.</p> <p>The IMP recommends that streets that function as 'places' should be prioritized for enhancements (Actions 41, 42, 43): places can include commercial, institutional, or heritage districts, as well as streets beside or leading to regionally significant features (cultural or natural).</p>	<p>High Place Value</p> <p>This criterion ensures that streetscaping will support streets that function as "places". Places can be identified by examining fundamental principles of urban legibility (path, edge, district, node, landmark) and directing streetscaping to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pedestrian oriented 'districts' of a commercial, heritage, or institutional nature, especially on streets that form their spines (i.e. 'main streets') and locations that represent transitions from one place to another ('gateways'); - streets that front regionally significant cultural or natural features (historic sites, waterfronts, major parks); - connections between regionally significant public places (i.e. Sullivan's Pond to Dartmouth Waterfront; Public Gardens to Central Library; streets with prominent views of landmarks or the water); and - streets with high pedestrian volumes (e.g. near major pedestrian generators like transit hubs or event centres, or as determined by counts).

¹ <http://legacycontent.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/documents/140211ca1121.PDF>

<p>Maximizes Impact of New Investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leverages other public or private investment - Makes core relevant/ usable to all residents and visitors - Improves the attractiveness of core 	<p>All streetscaping investments would presumably improve attractiveness, but it makes sense to prioritize projects that integrate streetscape improvements with other private or public investments to leverage cost savings and minimize area disturbance.</p> <p>Clarify that this criterion relates to prioritizing projects that can be carried out at the same time as other investments and give multiple points for multiple integration opportunities.</p>	<p>Project Integration</p> <p>The proposed streetscaping improvements can be carried out at the same time as another project (i.e. street recapitalization or reinstatement by a private developer). This criterion is strongly weighted to maximize cost savings due to economies of scale that result from project bundling, but it should never be the only criterion.</p> <p>The North Park Roundabouts project (2013/14) is an example of a streetscaping project integrated with others.</p>
<p>Capitalizes on Existing Strengths & Assets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inherited assets, improves or builds upon image & brand - Enhances previous strategic asset 	<p>All streetscaping investments would presumably build on image & brand. However, the idea of enhancing a previous asset is a sound reason for favouring one location over another.</p> <p>Clarify that this relates to the notion of building on previous work.</p>	<p>Capitalizes on Existing Strengths & Assets:</p> <p>The project enhances or builds on a previous streetscaping asset or project, or fills gaps left behind after previous work.</p>
<p>Tactical Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Readiness (i.e. idea phase (1) concept design complete (2) Tender Ready (3) Tender complete/ shovel ready (4) 	<p>This is not a useful criterion as virtually all streetscape projects can be considered at the 'idea' phase.</p>	<p>Delete this criterion.</p>
<p>Affordability/ Reach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value for money invested (2) - Magnitude of change/ number of people affected (2) 	<p>Streetscape investments must provide value for money and serve as many people as possible. These factors should already be addressed by the other proposed criteria.</p> <p>However, projects that are recipients or candidates for outside funding should be prioritized, i.e. other levels of government, philanthropists, etc. Outside funding stretches municipal dollars and provides value for money invested.</p>	<p>Outside Funding</p> <p>The project is externally funded. This criterion's weight is related to the proportion of external funding, but it should never be the only criterion.</p>

Attachment # 3: Options and Opportunities for a Regional Centre Streetscaping Program¹

Small Capital Projects (up to \$250,000)

- Undertake streetscape asset condition inventory and develop prioritized rehabilitation plan to address non-hazard related deficiencies such as, but not limited to: damaged, planters, signs, boulevard pavers, non-asphalt surfaces that have been patched with asphalt; etc.)
- Include modest streetscape elements in conjunction with other HRM capital projects on streets in the 'capital district' or within the Centre Plan's 'Pedestrian Oriented Commercial Centres' i.e. unit paver treatments, trees in soil cells, etc.
- Fill gaps in downtown Halifax's decorative lighting scheme by replacing utilitarian lighting and poles with ornamental fixtures on streets with buried power:
 - o Brunswick Street between Duke Street & Doyle Street
 - o Market Street between Sackville Street and Blowers Street
 - o Grafton Street between Sackville Street and Blowers Street
 - o Blowers Street between Market Street and Granville Street
 - o Granville Street between Prince Street and Salter Street
 - o Hollis Street (West Side) between Sackville Street and Salter Street
- Remove 1980s red brick sidewalks in Downtown Dartmouth & Halifax; replace with standard sidewalk plus unit paver edge per 'Capital District' guidelines:
 - o King Street, Dartmouth (E&W sides from Portland to Alderney)
 - o Wentworth Street, Dartmouth (E&W sides from Portland to Alderney)
 - o Sackville Street, Halifax (North side Hollis to Bedford Row)
 - o Lower Water Street, Halifax (E & W sides, Prince to Sackville);
 - o Lower Water Street, Halifax (East side, Sackville to Salter)
- Remove 1980s red brick boulevards and replace with unit paver edge per Capital District guidelines (consider maintaining exposed aggregate sidewalk)
 - o Lower Water Street both sides (Salter Street to Terminal Road)
 - o Portland Street, Dartmouth (both sides from Victoria Road to Prince Albert Road)
- Commercial, Heritage, Institutional District gateway treatments (i.e. curb extensions, special paving, signage and lighting):
- Consider decorative lighting options (that do not increase pole clutter) in districts with wood poles and overhead wires (i.e. bracket mounted fixtures, opposite side of street from poles/ wires, other strategies).

Medium Capital Projects (\$250,000 - \$1,000,000)

- Alderney Drive (Ochterloney Street to Portland Street) – improve pedestrian realm at major transit hub. Improve bus stops, add trees in soil cells, mitigate wind tunnel if possible.
- George/ Carmichael Streets – improve pedestrian realm and enhance visual corridor between clock tower and waterfront with trees in soil cells; consider interpretation elements.
- In conjunction with development, carry out municipal projects to extend undergrounding to logical limits that minimize need for additional poles before reverting to overhead systems.
- Replace North Park light fixtures with same style as South Park Street to reduce the need to stock multiple historic-themed light fixtures and provide continuity of styles bordering Halifax Common.
- Summer Street pedestrian realm improvements to form a stronger link between the North Commons and the Public Gardens per the draft Commons Masterplan.

¹ NB. This is a 'living' list and the scope, boundaries, and projects should not be considered final and are subject to change.

- Add historic lighting and trees in soil cells on Barrington Street between old burial ground and Cornwallis Park to support Old South Suburb Heritage Conservation District.
- Add a treed median to Spring Garden Road (South Park Street to Robie Street) as contemplated in the 2019 functional plan and consider additional streetscaping elements within Spring Garden West Growth Centre.

Large Capital Projects

(\$1,000,000 - \$10,000,000 or more)

- Complete undergrounding of overhead wires in the 1977 Short Term Pole Free Zone (includes parts of Hollis, Barrington, Brunswick, and Grafton Streets; Bishop Street; the streets bounding 1591 Granville Street; and Spring Garden Road east of Brunswick Street.)
- Bury overhead utilities and install decorative lighting around the Citadel Hill National Historic Site.
- Complete the rethinking of Rainnie Drive (traffic modelling for the North Park roundabouts project deemed it 'surplus' to the needs of the road network but it remains well used for parking and as a pedestrian/ bicycle corridor).
- Bi-directional bikeway and streetscape elements on Cogswell Street between Brunswick Street and North Park Street to complete the Cogswell Street Greenway proposed in the Cogswell Redevelopment Project.
- Incorporate streetscaping when upgrading and extending the Brunswick Street bikeway (follow Capital District standards for decorative lighting and sidewalks).
- Consider wider sidewalks, trees in soil cells, furnishings and other streetscaping elements in addition to bicycle facilities through the implementation of the Peninsula South Complete Streets project on University Avenue and Morris Street.
- Explore similar improvements for streets in other major institutional and heritage districts.
- Install pedestrian wayfinding in Downtown Dartmouth and Halifax.
- Recapitalize older streetscaping projects when needed (i.e. Granville Mall, Portland Street Dartmouth).

Program Support

(Up to \$100,000)

- Develop a by-law to recoup all or some of the municipal portion of the capital cost to bury overhead lines and return to Regional Council with a recommendation.
- Update Chapter 7 of the Red Book to clarify where/ when 'Capital District' standards apply (this is under way).
- Develop streetscape improvement standards for the reinstatement of streets expected to see significant redevelopment under the Centre Plan.
- In conjunction with the bullet above, consider mandatory standards for tree planting including the requirement for engineered solutions in hardened boulevards (i.e. soil cells or soil trenches) as well as mandatory requirements for undergrounding specific areas.
- Review and consider implementing some or all of the 2009 Quinpool Road Streetscaping Plan.
- Cultivate partnerships that support 'sticky streets' - could include initiatives to facilitate deployment of simple streetscape elements (i.e. bistro sets, planters, benches, play elements, street art, and more) to nurture the social life of streets; or initiatives that support maintenance activities (like Vancouver's *Green Streets Program* where volunteers maintain gardens on infrastructure delivered through traffic calming and local street bikeway projects).

Attachment # 4: Streetscape Program Funding Considerations

The challenge with funding streetscaping projects has historically been related to their high cost:

- Growing mature trees in hardened boulevards requires the use of engineered solutions like soil cells, which can cost upwards of \$25,000 per tree (compared to trees in grass at \$500/ each). This is less costly in other jurisdictions and it is possible that this cost could go down once the local industry develops more experience with soil cells.
- Special features like unique lighting, pavements, art, and furnishings are important components of streetscaping projects but cost more to install and maintain than standard, utilitarian elements used on other roadways.
- Burying overhead power and communication lines is the item most commonly associated with streetscaping because it addresses unsightly tangles above the street, especially in dense urban areas where trees do not visually block them. However, in HRM's experience, this element is also the costliest: adding about \$1million per block to overall project costs.

Potential Funding Sources

Given the high price tag for such projects, it is worth exploring other funding sources/ delivery mechanisms beyond the municipality's capital & operating budgets.

Other Levels of Government

In 2018 and 2019 the Provincial Department of Municipal Affairs has begun to offer grants for streetscaping and beautification. This program provides up to 50% of the project cost up to \$25,000. Given the above described challenges with funding projects, this pool would support very minor streetscaping enhancements. HRM applied for these funds to replace utilitarian lighting with ornamental poles in Downtown Halifax in 2019 but was not successful.

It is possible that other levels of government could make funds available in the future to assist communities with adapting to climate change and that such funds could potentially be applied to the burial of overhead electrical and communication lines.

Regulator-Approved Funding Agreements with Utilities

HRM has a 1977 agreement in place with Nova Scotia Power and Bell Aliant to share in the cost of undergrounding within a prescribed area of downtown Halifax (the 'pole free zone'). While most of this zone has been 'undergrounded' sections of overhead wire remain. In 2005, HRM and these utilities reached an agreement to explore the expansion of the pole free zone to other locations within the HRM 'Capital District', however this extension has never been finalized. For various reasons, HRM funded the entire cost of undergrounding the 2013 Spring Garden & Queen improvements and the 2013/ 2014 North Park Roundabouts projects. NSP's participation is also subject to regulatory approval by the Nova Scotia Utilities and Review Board and requires significant advance planning. HRM, NSP, and Bell Aliant staff have lately resumed discussions about an expanded pole free zone, and this report recommends continuing this work.

Cost Sharing

With Private Developers (1): The municipality could realize incremental streetscaping improvements through the reinstatement of public streets and sidewalks that often follows infill development. This is done to a certain extent already, within the area identified in the current Municipal Design Guidelines (Red Book) as the 'Capital District'. Developers can be compelled to reinstate the public realm to municipal standards, and they are often willing to do so if that involves appealing materials that reflect well on their projects.

However, HRM has no other areas requiring special reinstatement beyond the 'Capital District' which calls for a unit paver treatment on the boulevard and ornamental streetlights. With the recent adoption of the

Centre Plan, HRM has an opportunity to create new standards for growth areas where significant infill development opportunities now exist.

The Municipality also has no requirements for private developers to supply street trees, other than at the subdivision stage. Municipal standards requiring tree planting (in soil cells if necessary) as component of sidewalk reinstatement are needed. Developing new streetscape standards has been identified in Attachment #3 of this report as a project that could be undertaken through the proposed streetscaping program.

With Private Developers (2): Except for two municipal projects, all recent undergrounding efforts in HRM have been undertaken and funded by private developers on streets immediately fronting their projects. Because these efforts have been entirely voluntary, they are not undertaken by every developer, resulting in a patchwork of overhead and underground systems as well as a need for additional poles at the project boundaries where the new underground infrastructure ties in with the old overhead. Developers have requested municipal cost sharing in the past to address some of these challenges, but HRM has not been a participant to date.

However, the Municipal Charter does have a provision that allows Council to make a by-law to recoup all or some of the municipal portion of the cost of burying wires for a municipally funded project. Such a bylaw could, for example, require undergrounding in certain areas, identify who would pay and when, and specify a formula for recouping all or some of the cost.

Ideally these projects would also be supported by regulator-approved funding agreements with utilities who would receive brand new, storm-proof infrastructure (a potential climate change adaptation) while the developer gains enhanced curb appeal for their project, and the public benefits from improved overall aesthetics in the public realm.

With Other Projects: To the extent that streetscaping improvements can be bundled with other projects, HRM can achieve economies of scale and save money by bundling projects. The criteria described in the Discussion section of this report will strongly favour streetscape projects that can be integrated with other municipal works. This will help the streetscaping program achieve success by working alongside existing projects (i.e. projects stemming from the Integrated Mobility Plan) rather than creating additional projects competing for the same capital dollars.

Parking Revenue

In their October 2017 letter (Attachment #1) the five urban core BIDs asked HRM to consider funding a streetscaping program using municipal parking revenues. Staff reached out to the City of Calgary who direct a portion of the **unbudgeted parking revenue surplus** to BIDs to make local investments in district public realm improvements (Calgary Parking Revenue Reinvestment Program). The city operates 50 municipal parking lots and structures (> 9000 parking spaces), in addition to on-street parking, and directs \$1-2 million annually to this program.

Upon review, it was determined that their program has similar objectives to the grant HRM provides to local BIDs through the general revenue stream (BID Contribution Fund) and appears also to be used for services like HRM's Enhanced Maintenance Program (which HRM currently delivers in BID areas in addition to their grant funding). Furthermore, in Calgary, these moneys are **not** used to fund major streetscaping investments, as these are delivered by Calgary's **Main Street Program**.

According to City of Calgary staff, the main benefit of the Parking Revenue Reinvestment Program is to establish a link between community success and the on-street parking program. While pay parking is a benefit to local business districts because it encourages short term parking availability through turnover of existing spaces, it is often seen as a negative because it draws money out of the district. Keeping a portion of the revenue in the district has overcome this negative perception, helped achieve greater parking availability, and improved district character – which all work together to generate more income in the district.

Summary of the Pros and Cons of Using Parking Revenue for Streetscaping.

Pros	Cons
Overcomes traditional resistance of local business groups to increasing on-street parking rates (which in turn improves on-street parking availability by encouraging turnover).	General revenues would decline (parking currently goes to general revenue in HRM).
Would set clear boundaries and manage pressure to deliver the program in areas without pay parking.	Funding is unstable (in Calgary, surplus unbudgeted parking revenue is used and this varies from year to year).
May also overcome resistance to expanding areas of paid on-street parking.	Increased resistance to the removal of on-street parking for bicycle lanes and bus lanes if parking is tied to district improvements.
Employed in other jurisdictions so there are models HRM can follow.	Smaller BIDs with less or no paid parking would be at a disadvantage.
	Heritage, cultural, and institutional districts without any paid parking would be ineligible.
	Other municipal programs could also be tied to parking revenue, i.e. transit, parks, active transportation, parking facilities, offsetting general tax increases, and more.
	The municipality may want to consider funding existing programs it supports in BID areas through this revenue stream (BID Contribution Fund, Navigator, Enhanced Maintenance Area, etc.)

Potential Economic Benefits of the Streetscaping

In 2016, 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 Projects, confirmed 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 suggested 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.

While increases in assessed value and property tax revenues could offset some of the program's costs, this could only be done in principal. Practically it is very difficult to isolate the economic impacts of streetscape projects (and other local investments) on property value.