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Item No. 8
Halifax Regional Council
December 15, 2020

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by 
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: August 13, 2020

SUBJECT: Lower Water Street Sidewalk Improvements

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On April 28, 2020, the following motion of Regional Council was put and passed:

“THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report regarding costs and opportunities for bringing the sidewalk on Lower Water Street west side between Prince and Sackville to current standards for accessibility.”

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter:

section **318 (2)**

In so far as is consistent with their use by the public, the Council has full control over the streets in the Municipality.

section **322 (1)**

The Council may design, lay out, open, expand, construct, maintain, improve, alter, repair, light, water, clean, and clear streets in the Municipality.

Part VIII, Planning & Development

BACKGROUND

Upper / Lower Water Street is among Halifax's most prominent and historic streets. In addition to playing a key role in the regional roadway network, it is also a focal point for civic events, culture, and tourism. An important multimodal transportation corridor, Lower Water Street currently accommodates over 12,000 vehicles and 5,000 pedestrians per day. It also serves multiple Halifax Transit bus routes, is a designated bicycle route, and serves as the primary northbound route for trucks departing the South End Container

Terminal. Like many streets in the historic downtown core, Lower Water Street has sections with a very narrow right-of-way. The lack of available space has a direct impact on the street's cross section elements including sidewalks, bicycle facilities, traffic lanes, boulevards, street trees, and street furnishings. In the most constrained areas on Lower Water Street, some of these features are either narrower than ideal or are not present.

Water Street has been envisioned to play a key role in HRM's multimodal network into the future. It was identified in the *Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP)* and *Moving Forward Together Plan (MFTP)* as a transit priority corridor, and as a bicycle route in the *Active Transportation Priorities Plan* [it was subsequently approved by Regional Council in 2019 as an 'All Ages and Abilities' (AAA) bicycle route]. It also remains a key component of the regional roadway network and is a major truck route, accommodating trucks (including oversize loads) exiting the South End Container Terminal.

Given the many demands being placed on Lower Water Street and the width constraints along the corridor, the ability to accommodate all of these priorities will be a challenge and will require trade-offs. In spring 2020, staff initiated a functional planning and design process for the Upper / Lower Water Street corridor that will provide the Municipality with a corridor-wide vision that is aligned with municipal priorities from an operational and fiscal perspective. It will identify potential configuration options for the corridor that address active transportation and transit gaps and improve the quality of transportation infrastructure for all users. Ultimately, the plan will inform how Water Street is renewed as part of routine capital works, and how it gets integrated with future developments. It will also establish design guidelines for the pedestrian realm that aim to harmonize the numerous types of finishes in use on the corridor today. It is anticipated that the *Water Street Functional Plan* will be completed by spring 2021.

DISCUSSION

The right-of-way on Lower Water Street is most constrained between Sackville Street and Prince Street. This segment, approximately 120m in length, has multiple locations where the pedestrian realm is limited, with narrow abutting sidewalks and physical obstructions that further restrict pedestrian space including raised tree planters and streetlights. The red brick surface materials are showing signs of deterioration and wear in several areas, and differential settlement has created an uneven surface.

The narrowest section of Lower Water Street is located just south of Prince Street, where the right-of-way narrows to a minimum of 11.8m. At this pinch point, the clear width between the existing street light standard and adjacent building face on the west side of the street is 0.7m.

Along most of the southern half of this block, the west side of Lower Water Street includes 4m wide brick sidewalks, with large raised tree planters (2m wide) located adjacent to the traveled way. The trees provide an attractive feature that effectively buffer pedestrians from vehicles; however, they reduce the effective clear width for pedestrians on the sidewalk to between 1.5 - 1.9m.

On the east side of the street, recent upgrades completed in coordination with the construction of the Queens Marque development in spring 2020 have increased the sidewalk width from a previous minimum of 1.2m (which was further constrained by bollards) to 1.7 - 2.3m as well as added a new 1.8m raised bike lane. These changes required a reduction of the previous two-lane cross section on Lower Water Street to a single lane on the approach to Prince Street.

REVISED (Figure 1 only)

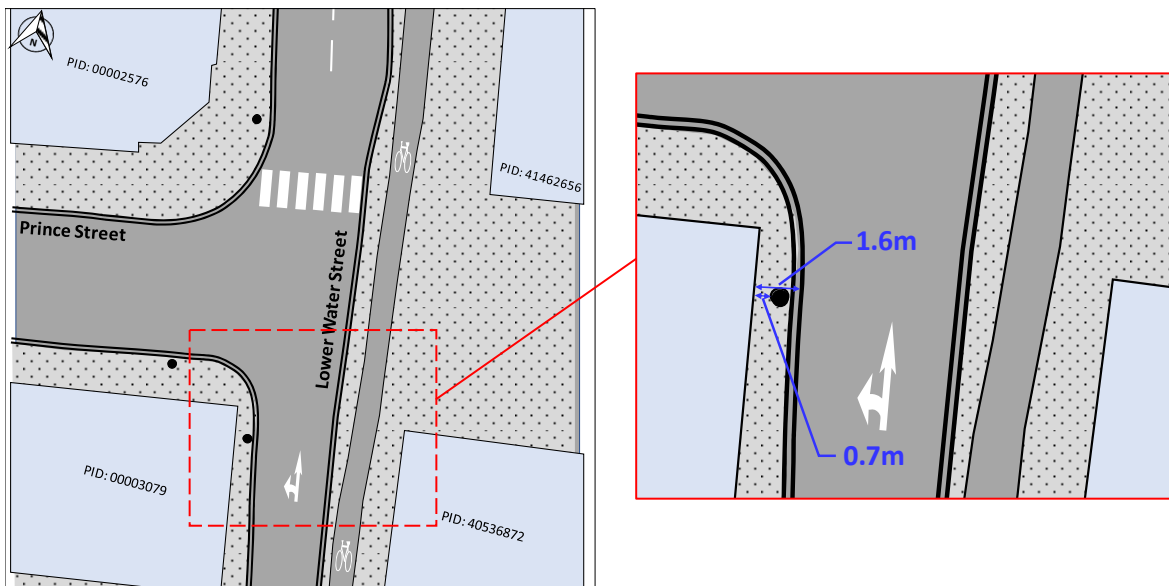


Figure 1: Lower Water Street - Prince Street Intersection



Photo 2: Looking north on Lower Water Street toward Prince Street. The street light pole at the intersection reduces the pedestrian clear width to 0.7m.



Photo 1: Looking north on Lower Water Street from Civic 1668. Raised planters reduce the pedestrian clear width to 1.5 – 1.9m.

Access by Design 2030: Nova Scotia’s Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Public Spaces

The province of Nova Scotia has released a set of interim accessibility guidelines for indoor and outdoor spaces as part of the *Access by Design 2030* plan. The guidelines, which have been identified as “interim”, will eventually be replaced by new provincial accessibility standards for the built environment (currently under development). The guidelines are not mandatory but provide a sense of the requirements that will be in place when the new standards are enacted.

Criteria from the interim accessibility guidelines that are relevant to sidewalks include sidewalk clear width (clear of signposts, fixtures, or other vertical elements), slope (running slope and cross slope), surface characteristics (stability, slip resistance, glare, patterning), and the size and orientation of utility grates. A review of the west side of Lower Water Street between Sackville Street and Prince Street based on the accessibility guidelines identified the following:

- **Sidewalk Clear Width:** The minimum clear width of 1.5m is met throughout, except for the area just south of Prince Street, where the clear width is reduced to 0.7m due to a street light pole. For “high traffic areas”, the interim accessibility guidelines recommend a minimum clear width of 2.0m – this guideline is met on only a small portion of the sidewalk on this block. Although “high traffic areas” are not explicitly defined in the guidelines, it is expected that this section would likely qualify.
- **Sidewalk Surface:** The existing surface has mixed results from the perspective of accessibility. Its brick surface, which is uneven in many areas and includes gaps caused by shifted or damaged bricks, could create challenges for visually impaired persons.

Potential Improvement Options

Potential improvement options aimed at addressing the deficiencies identified based on the accessibility guidelines are summarized below:

- **Remove / Relocate Street Light Pole at Prince Street Intersection:** Removal or relocation of the street light pole is the most effective opportunity to improve accessibility on this section of Lower Water Street. With the pole removed from its current location, the clear width would increase from 0.7m to 1.6m, meeting minimum width guidelines and removing a significant barrier for people walking and rolling. Based on a street lighting review, it has been determined that in order to meet lighting requirements at the intersection, the street light cannot be removed without being replaced at a nearby location. Potential lighting modification options that have been considered include:
 - **Pole Relocation:** Relocation of the street light pole across the street to the east side would meet lighting requirements. However, the feasibility of installing a street light post base in this location would depend on the location of any conflicting underground utility infrastructure in the area. Also, adding a pole in this location would reduce the horizontal clear width for oversized loads, and would increase the frequency with which temporary removal of the street light post is required to accommodate oversized load moves. (Preliminary cost estimate = \$35 - 45K)
 - **Building Mounted Lighting:** It is anticipated that mounting of street light(s) on adjacent building(s) could be done in a manner that would meet lighting requirements. However, this would require permission from building owners, and given that all adjacent buildings are registered heritage properties, any proposal to alter their façade through the mounting of street lights would need to be assessed in accordance with the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (2010), which encourages the preservation of character defining elements and the gentle means of intervention (when rehabilitation is required). If a proposal is inconsistent with these guidelines, a longer substantial alteration process may be triggered, which would include review by the Heritage Advisory Committee and approval by Regional Council. (Preliminary cost estimate: \$10 - 20K)
- **Increase Clear Width in Areas Constrained by Raised Planters:** Although the sidewalk in areas adjacent to raised planters meets *Access by Design 2030* guidelines, further widening of pedestrian clear space would be beneficial and warrants consideration. Removal of the raised planters would significantly increase the sidewalk clear width (from current 1.5m minimum to up to 4m wide) but would impact four healthy street trees. HRM Urban Forestry has expressed concern with the potential removal of these trees. It is not anticipated that the raised planters can be narrowed without necessitating the removal of the four trees. If the planters were removed, the sidewalk surface would be reinstated to match the current design standard and new at-grade trees would be planted (with protective guards and soil cells) to replace those that were removed. (Preliminary cost estimate: \$200 - 250K)
- **Sidewalk Surface Rehabilitation:** Though the brick sidewalk includes several areas with visible deterioration and a few localized areas of more serious deterioration (where gaps have created

potential trip hazards), its overall condition assessment in HRM's asset management database is categorized as "Good" (4 out of 5 rating points). HRM's process to deal with localized deterioration dictates that damaged areas are marked with paint and reported for repair. Major upgrades to brick sidewalk are typically carried out as part of street recapitalization projects.

Lower Water Street is due for street recapitalization within the next five years, at which time it will likely undergo major upgrades as a strategic multi-modal corridor including street recapitalization (asphalt and curb replacement), active transportation / transit upgrades, and streetscaping. The design elements will be informed by the ongoing *Water Street Functional Plan*. Delaying major rehabilitation work to coincide with street recapitalization is considered prudent in order to ensure that any changes are consistent with the ultimate street configuration and that the sidewalk materials match the revised design guidelines that are being developed as part of the functional plan.

Next Steps

The potential improvement options presented above have a range of costs and other related trade-offs that must be considered. The process of balancing design trade-offs on a portion of a corridor would benefit from the additional context provided by a holistic, corridor-wide perspective. The ongoing *Water Street Functional Plan*, which is anticipated to be complete by spring 2021, will provide this additional context. The plan will consider the issues discussed in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications at this time. It is estimated that removal and relocation of the streetlight at the Prince St. intersection will cost approximately \$35 - 45K. The design solution and the cost estimate will be further refined as part of the *Water Street Functional Plan*. The forthcoming 2021/22 capital budget process shows anticipated costs to complete this work in the 'Major Strategic Multi Modal Corridor: Lower Water Street' account. In the current proposed capital budget, which will be presented to Budget Committee in the upcoming weeks, there will be a request for \$100K in 21/22 for preliminary design, \$250K in 22/23 for detailed design and \$3.5M in 24/25 for construction in the Major Strategic Multi Modal Corridor: Lower Water Street account.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Though community and stakeholder engagement were not completed as part of this report, they are being completed as part of the ongoing *Water Street Functional Plan* project.

ATTACHMENTS

None

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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