

HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
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Item No. 11.1.9
Halifax Regional Council
August 31, 2021

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

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

DATE: July 1, 2021

SUBJECT: Halifax Forum Building Analysis - Potential Partnerships

ORIGIN

July 29, 2014 Regional Council meeting motion:

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Deputy Mayor Fisher that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Direct staff to commence planning for the renovation of the Halifax Forum in as a multiyear planned strategic project based on the Forum Community Association submission and developed to ensure best design, plan, and possible on site partnerships for the forum site including possible mixed use opportunities, targeted for completion in 2019. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED**

June 20, 2017 Regional Council meeting motion:

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Nicoll that Halifax Regional Council:

6. Direct staff to return to Regional Council with usage and other related statistics following the 2017/18 season to confirm the future of the Lebrun Arena; and
7. Direct staff to complete additional analysis on the Halifax Forum project including further building condition assessment and related renovation feasibility, as well as the potential for a future Dalhousie University arena, and report back to Regional Council prior to undertaking the project. **MAIN MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

August 14, 2018 Regional Council meeting motion:

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Deputy Mayor Mason that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to:

1. Consider a building program of two ice surfaces at the Halifax Forum complex as per the discussion section of the report dated August 3, 2018 and undertake the cost/benefit analysis of replacing or renovating the Civic, as well as adding other appropriate recreation uses, community space and an ice plant that can be expanded to support an additional, third ice surface should conditions change to justify further expansion;
2. Prepare a class D estimate for inclusion in the 2020/21 capital budget process;
3. Undertake a heritage impact analysis; and

RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2

4. Prepare an estimate for inclusion in the upcoming capital budget for HRM to undertake necessary repairs and maintenance to ensure the facility is able to be maintained while the analysis is undertaken. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED**

November 26, 2019 Regional Council meeting motions:

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Streach [motions grouped into three parts]

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the redevelopment approach for the Halifax Forum complex as outlined in the staff report dated November 12, 2019, including the restoration of the Halifax Forum in accordance with the Heritage Property Act, for the development of a second arena, multi-purpose/event space, parking, and greenspace;
3. Subsequent to exploring partnership opportunities, direct the Chief Administrative Officer to include funds in the 2021/2022 capital budget. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED**
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:
 - a) engage with the Halifax Forum Community Association to determine the size and composition of the multi-purpose space on the basis of it being primarily for community events and uses as outlined in the staff report dated November 12, 2019;
 - b) determine the potential for partnerships on the Halifax Forum complex lands for private mixed use development, as outlined in the staff report dated November 12, 2019; and report back to Regional Council. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**; and
4. Engage the public in partnership with the HFCA to receive feedback on the proposed design during the time of investigation of potential partnerships. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter

79A (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if
(a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality;

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the updated building program for the Halifax Forum complex as outlined in the discussion section of this report, including:
 - (a) the freehold development site;
 - (b) the increase to the multipurpose program space from approximately 7,800 square feet to 14,500 square feet to accommodate the program needs of the Halifax Forum Community Association; and
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to engage the public, in partnership with the Halifax Forum Community Association on the parking and parkland proposals, and return to Regional Council with the results of the engagement and recommendations on a final design and redevelopment approach for the Halifax Forum.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 26, 2019, Regional Council considered a supplemental staff report on the redevelopment of the Halifax Forum complex located in the north end of Halifax. To date, the project program has included two ice pads, concourse between ice pads, multipurpose space, parking, outdoor recreation space, and the preservation of heritage characteristics.

The staff report included conceptual architectural site and building plans, engineering assessments, as well as cost estimates. Regional Council subsequently directed further updates and information, to include an exploration of partnerships on the site to offset project costs, further engagement with the Halifax Forum Community Association (HFCA), and additional public consultation.

Following the commissioning of a study to understand the private development interests in the Halifax Forum complex, it has been found that the best approach would be dispose of the north portion of the site (corner of Young and Windsor Streets) to off-set project costs. Through further engagement with the HCFA, the multipurpose space is proposed to be enlarged by approximately 6,700 square feet, which would have an estimated increase of \$2.5 million to total project cost.

The potential disposal of the Windsor and Young Street lands has implications to on-site and on-street parking and the intended parkland, that has warranted this update to Regional Council in advance of public consultation. The public consultation will help understand community values as it relates to the project and the updated approach to the proposed disposal. Therefore, it is important to confirm the position of Regional Council on the potential disposal and changes to the redevelopment program prior to undertaking public consultation. Following this consultation, staff would report back to Regional Council with the results of the engagement and recommendations on a final design and redevelopment approach.

BACKGROUND

The Halifax Forum complex is in the north end of Halifax Peninsula along Windsor Street, between Almon and Young Streets (Attachment A). The Halifax Forum has been an indoor arena since 1927, having previously been the site of the Nova Scotia Exhibition Grounds. Over its history, several facilities evolved into the current configuration of the Halifax Forum complex, that include:

- the Halifax Forum, a single ice surface built in 1927, which is a registered heritage building;
- the Civic, a single ice surface constructed in 1994;
- the 1,672 square metre (18,000 square foot) Multi-purpose Centre (MPC), which is used for events such as large meetings, retail warehouse sales, and concerts, constructed in 1988;
- the 418 square metre (4,500 square foot) Maritime Hall, a general space used for meetings and events, and the 18,000 square foot Bingo Gaming Centre that is primarily used for bingo, with some events including regular weekend flea markets and farmers markets; and
- parking lots on the north and south with a total of approximately 500 spaces.

In considering the overall provision of arenas in the municipality, the Halifax Forum complex has been the subject of several proposals and Regional Council deliberations. In 2014, as part of the Long-Term Arena Strategy (LTAS), it was recommended to dispose of the property and enter into agreement with the Department of National Defense for a new shared arena and recreation facility at another site. Simultaneously, the Halifax Forum Community Association (HFCA), which manages the facility on behalf of the municipality, submitted a proposal for a reinvestment at the existing site. Since then, and with subsequent updates to Regional Council on the need for ice surfaces and prospective anticipated construction costs with a redevelopment program, Regional Council has confirmed a direction to reinvest in the Halifax Forum complex.

In 2019, a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), redevelopment approach, and associated costing was developed by the Ventin Group (+VG) and Capital Management Engineering Limited (CMEL) respectively (Attachments B and C). The scope of this redevelopment approach included:

- two ice pads;
- concourse between two ice pads;
- 7,800 Square foot multipurpose space;
- parking for approximately 350 vehicles (including two storey structure at north of site);
- a park and plaza area; and
- the preservation of the Forum and its key heritage character defining features including the shape and composition of its roof and the retention of the southern façade and parts of the Windsor Street façade along other important elements.

The Forum Redevelopment had a costing range of \$70,969,226 to \$89,645,338, with a best estimate of \$74,704,448 for the redevelopment approach. In response to the proposed redevelopment approach, Regional Council's latest direction for updates and information through its November 26, 2019 motion included:

- a determination of the potential for partnerships for mixed use development on the Halifax Forum complex lands to help offset project costs;
- engagement with the HFCA to determine the size and composition of the multipurpose space; and
- public consultation with the HFCA to receive feedback on the proposed redevelopment approach.

DISCUSSION

This report addresses the November 26, 2019 direction from Regional Council, including the potential for private development and the determination about the size of the multipurpose space. It provides updates to the overall site plan for consideration, including the implications to parking and the parkland, and updates to the capital budget. This information is being presented as an update to the overall project in advance of intended public consultation.

Private Partnerships

The capital costs of the redevelopment approach are relatively high, which is in part due to the complexity of the site, the preservation of the Halifax Forum, current market due to COVID-19, and the overall building program. On this basis, the market interests for partnership opportunities to offset the overall capital costs was explored through a consultant study that was undertaken by Colliers. A *market sounding* was conducted to determine the interest level of local and national developers in partnering on the Forum site received for a variety of mixed-use development options. Questions were asked about:

- interest in a collaborative process with HRM;
- market demand for multi-family residential high-rise development;
- impacts of COVID-19 on development market;
- experience in partnership with public sector; and
- overall project concerns or constraints.

The responses were predominantly from local developers, although 20 developers from across the country were contacted during the process. The market sounding found that there is moderate private development interest in the Halifax Forum complex site. While various operating partnership possibilities were probed, there was little interest in actual partnership models and greater support for more straight-forward land sale options. As a result, the best approach for HRM to be able to benefit from potential partnerships for the Halifax Forum project would be through a sale of part of the lands, without complex partnership

arrangements.

Considering the configuration of the site and the presence the Halifax Forum as a heritage building, the best option for private investment on the site is the freehold sale of lands at the corner of Windsor and Young, Streets, based on attributes such as the following:

- these lands can be physically separated from the remainder of the Halifax Forum complex site into a distinct parcel with frontage on Windsor and Young Streets;
- the lands at Windsor and Young Streets are in an area that has been identified under the Regional Centre Plan project for high-density mixed-use development, with a strong emphasis on the urban design benefits of development at the intersection and are therefore of high value;
- private partnerships with the remaining Halifax Forum complex buildings, which may require complex arrangements and possibly limit future municipal opportunities, would not need to be considered; and
- the development of this area of the site was viewed more favourably when compared to the lands to the south, where buildings would need to be smaller in scale, given proposed planning regulations, and sufficiently setback from the southern façade of the Halifax Forum to retain its prominence from a heritage perspective.

The size and extent of these lands would be delineated by an existing driveway aligned with Cork Street. The prior +VG plan proposed a new driveway that would have been offset from Cork Street. However, with more recent detailed traffic reviews it was determined that the existing driveway should be retained for alignment, resulting in a reduced land sale area.

Under the Regional Centre Plan Package B, the lands at the corner of Windsor and Young are proposed to be included in the CEN-2 Zone with a Floor Area Ratio of 8. On this basis, the value of the proposed site could be significant.

An important consideration to the possible disposal of the lands at the corner of Windsor and Young Streets would be the reduction of on-site parking. The site configuration reviewed by Regional Council in November 2019 showed a two-level parking structure at the corner of Windsor and Young, which is now the identified site for development. Some parking spaces were accommodated elsewhere on the Forum site, but not the same scale as was noted in the November 2019 staff report. The impact on parking is more fully discussed in the Site Plan Updates section.

Multipurpose Space

The multipurpose space has been used for a range of events and programs over the last 30 years. The current dedicated programmable spaces include the Multipurpose Centre (MPC), Maritime Hall, and Bingo Hall, totaling approximately 40,000 square feet. The conceptual plan developed by +VG reduced the designated multipurpose space to approximately 7,800 square feet but included additional possible open multipurpose space in concourse areas. However, the HFCA identified that the multipurpose space should be a minimum of 12,000 square feet, citing the potential loss in being able to host a number of community events. This led to Regional Council's November 26, 2019 direction to engage with the HFCA to discuss the size and composition of the multipurpose space.

Through an iterative process, the HFCA Redevelopment Committee outlined its need for an increased multipurpose space, specifying a need for approximately:

- 4,000 additional square feet for programmable space; and
- 3,200 additional square feet for ancillary space such as storage.

These increased space requirements are to accommodate a range of regular events, including concerts, cultural programming, combat sport events, and meetings. The HFCA envision these types of programs

will operate Thursday through Sunday, comparable to the existing scheduled events held in the MPC. Bingo is the most consistent event the HFCA intends to offer within the 12,000 feet, with potentially 150 to 200 bingo events annually.

Based on the understanding that Regional Council has continued support for the HFCA's programming, and the feedback received from HFCA, there is rationale for the multipurpose space to be increased. With some interior space reconfiguration and an expansion of the building to the north, which can be achieved with the reconfigured Cork Street driveway, the multipurpose area can be enlarged by approximately 6,700 square feet, to a total of 14,500 square feet, which meets the identified needs of the HFCA Redevelopment Committee. The actual configuration and size of the multipurpose space, which is to include storage, concessions, and ancillary areas will be confirmed through the development of detailed plans. The larger space would increase the capital cost of the project by approximately \$2.5 million.

Site Plan Updates

With the proposed disposal of the lands at the corner of Young and Windsor Streets, the site plan developed by +VG has been updated by staff as follows:

- the circulation driveway remains, but as noted, the Windsor Street entrance/exit is now proposed to be aligned with Cork Street;
- the proposed parking structure on the north side of the Halifax Forum complex is removed and consequently there is a reduction in the amount of on-site parking to a total of approximately 150 spaces;
- the entrances to the facility at the ends of the central concourse are reinforced as the main entrances to the facility;
- the area that extends to the east that was envisioned as parkland has been reconceived as parking, providing direct access to the concourse main entrance; and
- changes have been made to the parkland to the south of Halifax Forum (Attachment D).

Of these changes, the reduction in the on-site parking and the parkland warrant additional discussion.

Parking

Currently, the Halifax Forum complex has over 500 parking spaces for the two ice pads, MPC, Maritime Hall and Bingo Hall. This parking is fully used when there are large scale events at the Halifax Forum complex along with parking along the surrounding streets. However, these are not normal occurrences and there is excess parking during regular activity. Further, these larger events, including but not limited to; Christmas at the Forum, graduations, and concerts will not be accommodated to the same extent with the proposed redevelopment program. However, the redevelopment provides an opportunity for users of the site to explore alternate methods of accessing the Halifax Forum. These include the future Bus Rapid Transit service that will pass by the site, as well as the bike lane along Windsor Street. Additionally, due to the Forum's central location on the peninsula the area is accessible to many pedestrians in the area.

The +VG concept had approximately 350 parking spaces, predominantly located at the north of the site within a two-story structure. The updated site plan would reduce the on-site parking to approximately 150 spaces. The most substantial implication would be that adjoining streets will be more regularly used for parking. An internal review was conducted by Parking Services of the local on-street parking supply, this demonstrated that spaces are regularly occupied by vehicles and there are various restrictions that significantly reduce the parking capacity of these streets which could be reviewed.

While there would be increased challenges to parking, they are not to such an extent that parking would be unavailable, as is the case with many facilities within urban settings. The remaining on-site parking would

need to be managed to ensure ample accessible parking spaces and off-street loading for equipment are accommodated.

The HFCA has expressed concern with the prospect of a more limited amount of on-site parking, but not necessarily at the expense of the proposed parkland. The HFCA envision roughly 180 parking spaces are required for the two ice pads and 90 parking spaces for the multipurpose space, totalling 270 parking spaces on site. To get near their desired total of parking spaces, the HFCA has raised the possibility of adding a two-level parking garage to the east of the service driveway. Conceptually, such a structure could increase the total number of on-site parking spaces to 240 while retaining the parkland. The addition of a parking structure has been not considered due to the fact that it would;

- increase the capital costs of the project when the direction has been to lower them;
- require detailed design work to determine viability based on the size and limited increase in number of spaces;
- continues emphasis on car dependency; and
- be located adjacent to lands that ultimately may be redeveloped in the future

A straight-forward alternative would be to forgo or reduce the intended parkland to increase the size of surface parking to the south of the Halifax Forum. Completely eliminating the parkland could increase the total number of on-site spaces to approximately 280. However, the elimination of a valued community asset, such as public parkland, has other consequences, as detailed below.

Parkland

Throughout the conceptual design phase of this project, it was recognized that areas adjacent to the Halifax Forum are underserved from a parkland perspective. The surrounding area is currently experiencing further densification, creating additional demands for local parkland. The concept developed by +VG included parkland to the south of the Halifax Forum which would also serve to feature its preserved façade. The changes to parking could enable an updated site plan to include the following parkland components:

- a plaza adjoining the Halifax Forum which could be used for outdoor events;
- greenspace for passive usage;
- a play structure and other play features; and
- sports court.

The parkland would be available for community use as well as accommodating programming at the Halifax Forum complex, which is also supported by the HFCA.

Public Consultation

This report is being presented for Regional Council's consideration of the changes proposed prior to public consultation. There are several aspects for public engagement, including the trade-offs and values associated with development of proposed parkland versus the retention of more surface parking.

Capital Budget

Though some of the increases of the multipurpose space can be accommodated into the existing building identified in the concept drawings, there will still need to be an increase to the overall building envelope. This, along with the other capital costs, are as follows:

| Building Program | Cost |
|---|---------------------|
| Updated Building Costs Estimate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> including updated estimates associated with demolition, siteworks, maintaining heritage designation, net zero ready energy standard, cost escalation for commencement in 24/25 reflects the reduced costs of developing the north parking structure (Windsor and Young) | \$78,500,000 |
| Increased multipurpose space (approximately 7,000 sq. ft) | \$2,500,000 |
| Subtotal | \$81,000,000 |
| Estimated Building Savings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sale of Windsor and Young lands | TBD |
| Net Project Cost | TBD |

Conclusions and Next Steps

Should Regional Council support the recommendation to proceed with the sale of the identified lands and increased size of the multipurpose space to accommodate the program needs of the HFCA, the next step would be community consultation. As outlined, the consultation will be taken in partnership with the HFCA to receive feedback on the site plan, particularly the relationship between parking and parkland development. After the public engagement, staff would return to Regional Council with recommendations on a final design and redevelopment approach, including consideration of declaring the north site as surplus for disposal

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The updated estimated building cost inclusive of the additional multipurpose space is \$81,000,000. This would be offset by the sale of the north development parcel. Initial funding has been approved in the capital budget for the redevelopment of the Halifax Forum complex. Current estimated funding in the 10-year plan for project CB190013 – Halifax Forum Redevelopment is \$26,000,000. \$1,000,000 was previously approved and \$25,000,000 is planned over the 2023/24 – 2025/26 time frame. With this, there remains a gap in funding which would need to be considered and prioritized in future capital budgets. The amount of that gap will be dependent on revenue received from the sale of the Windsor Street site, should Regional Council approve that disposal. It is recognized that outside agencies and foundations may have funding programs to support heritage projects. Outside of the capital budget allocations above, as part of the subsequent redevelopment planning, the opportunities for funding through other sources will be explored.

RISK CONSIDERATION

The primary risk consideration is the existing building condition of the Halifax Forum complex. The Halifax Forum has building condition risks that have been mitigated to date through means such as wall reinforcements and other measures. Other building issues, such as building accessibility and modern code issues can only be addressed through a substantial building reinvestment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The HFCA was engaged regarding their building program needs for multipurpose space, input into approach for the market sounding, and the overall site plan options for the Forum complex. Additional community consultation would occur in partnership with the HFCA to finalize the site plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications at this time. Environmental impact studies will be completed prior to construction should Regional Council direct the CAO to proceed with the redevelopment.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Regional Council could choose to retain the Windsor and Young Streets lands to continue to use it for parking and not sell it for capital cost savings outlined in this report.
2. Regional Council could choose not to accommodate the program needs of the HFCA by increasing the building envelope. This would result in some capital savings but would constrain HFCA programming and may result in subsidies to operate the Halifax Forum complex.

ATTACHMENTS

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Attachment A | Halifax Forum and Surrounding Area Map |
| Attachment B | Project Renderings |
| Attachment C | +VG Drawings |
| Attachment D | Updated Site Plan |

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 FORUM AND SURROUNDING AREA

HALIFAX

Parks & Recreation
Strategic Planning & Design





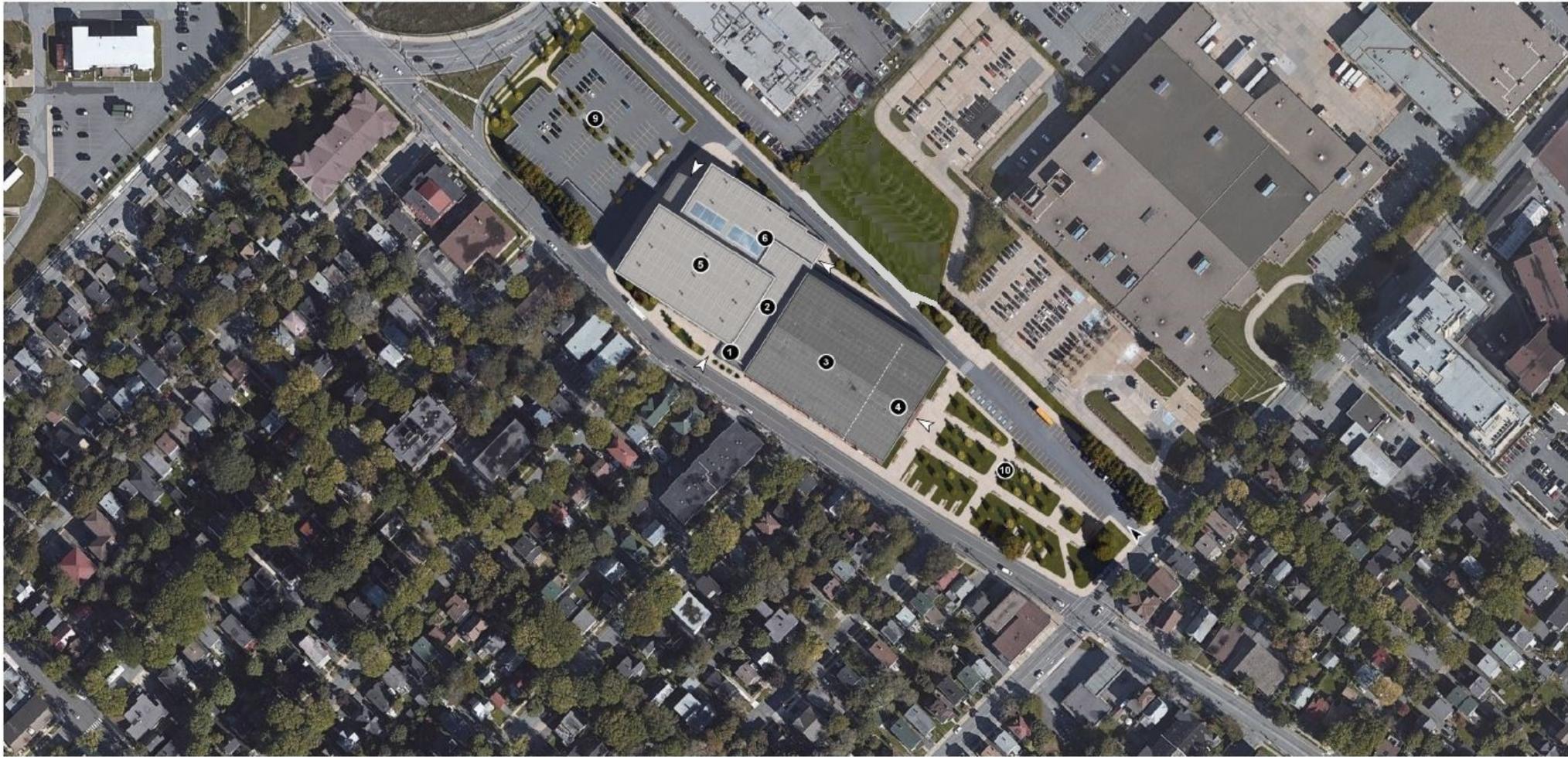
Attachment B
Renderings

2019 +VG









Halifax Forum Redevelopment

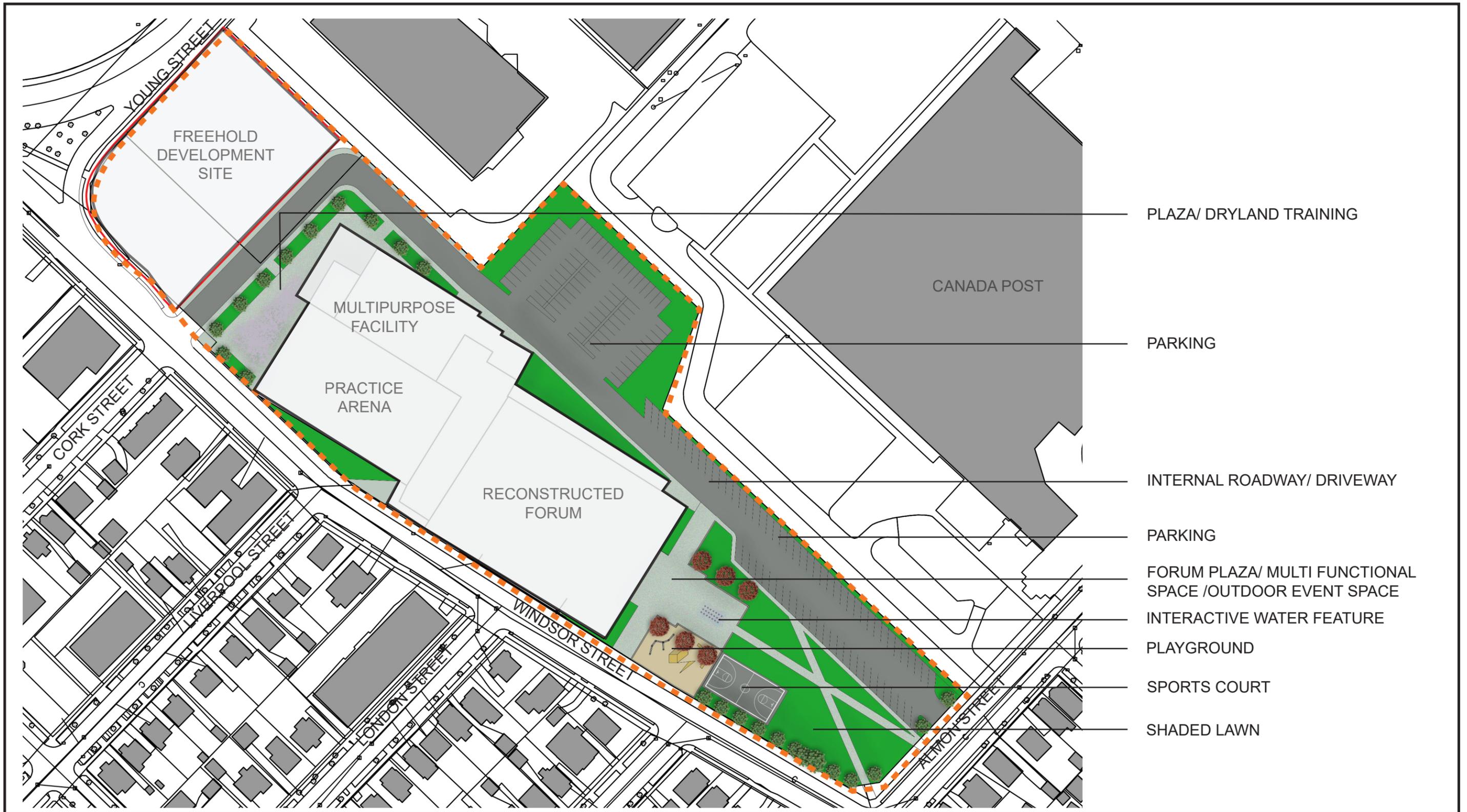
Aerial Plan

- 1. Entrance
- 2. Community Corridor
- 3. The Forum Revitalized
- 4. The Forum Preserved

- 5. New Arena
- 6. Multipurpose Space
- 7. Public Outdoor Amphitheatre
- 8. Public Outdoor Recreation Space

- 9. New Parking
- 10. Public Green Space

➤ Building Access



HALIFAX FORUM SITE OPPORTUNITIES - PARKING & PARK LAYOUT OPTION 1

PARKS & RECREATION
POLICY & PLANNING
MAY 12, 2021

