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Item No. 13.1.3
Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee
July 18, 2024

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

FROM: Brad Anguish, Commissioner of Operations

DATE: July 9, 2024

SUBJECT: Supporting the Hubbards Community Plan

ORIGIN

November 17, 2022, Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee motion (Item No. 10.3.1):

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Outhit

THAT the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee refer the Hubbards Streetscape Project Placemaking Plan presentation to the Chief Administrative Officer for a staff report on how to support the Hubbards Streetscape Project.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report responds to the 2021 Hubbards Community Plan, a visioning document prepared by community members and submitted to HRM for consideration. This plan includes requests and recommendations for infrastructure and policy changes in Hubbards, a small rural community at the western boundary of HRM. This staff report summarizes these requests and responds to each in turn, commenting on their feasibility under current municipal policy and further to discussion with multiple stakeholders.

Some requests in the Plan could be addressed through the Rural Active Transportation Program and others could be considered through the Rural Community Planning Program. These programs would enable the allocation of funds for the requested active transportation infrastructure and consider new policy to shape land use development in the area.

Recommendations on next page

RECOMMENDATION

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

1. Consider the proposed active transportation facilities in the Hubbards Community Plan when:
 - (a) implementing the Rural Active Transportation Program, and
 - (b) identifying potential projects in the multi-year Capital Plan; and
2. Review and consider the Hubbards Community Plan recommendations pertaining to land use and development when scoping and undertaking the future Rural Community Planning program.

BACKGROUND

Hubbards is a coastal community located on St. Margaret's Bay Road at the western edge of HRM. Although small in terms of population (under 2000 people according to the 2021 Census), it is a vibrant community with many amenities. The community of Hubbards is split by the border between the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Municipality of the District of Chester.

In 2020, a group of residents formed the Hubbards Streetscape Project Committee and in 2021 hired Upland Consulting to create the [*Hubbards Community Plan \(Community Plan\)*](#).¹ This work lays out a series of desired interventions and policies to guide land development as well as investment in infrastructure for active transportation, road safety, and placemaking.

Through the various forms of public engagement undertaken to support this report (online comments as well as in person engagement), the themes of road safety and placemaking were identified as priorities for residents of the community. The Community Plan acknowledges that Hubbards residents wish to maintain the character and rural charm of their community while improving infrastructure for active transportation and creating community gathering places.

This staff report includes a summary of the community's recommendations taken from the Community Plan and describes what actions HRM could take to support the implementation of the Plan, as requested by the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) on November 17, 2022.

DISCUSSION

Through the originating motion, CPED asked staff how the recommendations in the Community Plan could be supported by HRM. In response, this section describes each of the proposed design interventions and policies suggested in the Community Plan, followed by the actions HRM is taking or could take to support them.

Community Plan Recommendation: Active Transportation (AT)

A priority in the Community Plan is the establishment of safe and connected AT infrastructure, focusing on pedestrians but also considering cyclists (i.e. with multi-use paths). This is especially desired along St. Margaret's Bay Road, which is the main spine of the community for walking but has traffic speeds and volumes that can be uncomfortable for pedestrians. The Community Plan proposed the following AT upgrades:

¹ <https://onehubbards.org/sites/default/files/210103-HubbardsCommunityPlan-FINAL.pdf>

1. 440m of sidewalk on the south side of St. Margaret's Bay Road from Fox Point Front Road to the Hubbards Waterfront.
2. 1.1km of multi-use path (MUP) on the north side of St. Margaret's Bay Road from Fox Point Front Road to JD Shattford Elementary School.
3. Concrete curb and gutter on both sides of St. Margaret's Bay Road to support pedestrian infrastructure, totaling 1.5 km.
4. A cantilevered, widened shoulder for pedestrians on Shankel Road bridge.
5. 405m waterfront boardwalk on Shore Club Road (as a tourist attraction as well as pedestrian safety feature).
6. 765m of sidewalk completing the connection along Shore Club Road from Shankel Road bridge to Beach Road.
7. A new pedestrian bridge over the Hubbards River to the west of Shankel Road.



Figure: Map showing requested active transportation infrastructure

Staff Response

The proposed AT infrastructure is on provincially owned roadways and provincial policy maintains that sidewalks are considered the responsibility of municipal government. HRM does not currently fund sidewalks in rural communities by general tax rate unlike the urban and suburban general tax rates.

Presently, the *Rural Sidewalk Area Rates Administrative Order* ([AO 2022-008-ADM](#)) enables HRM Regional Council to consider approving sidewalks in rural communities by applying an area rate equal to the urban sidewalk tax rate in 17 candidate rural areas identified in the Active Transportation Priorities Plan. Of these candidates, there are five priority communities, including Hubbards. The catchment area for

Hubbards would apply to the regions of Hubbards, Queensland, and Block Point. If residents are supportive and Regional Council approves the implementation of the area rate, the planning, design, and construction process for sidewalks could begin in 2025.

Nova Scotia Public Works would need to review and approve the design of any pedestrian infrastructure proposed by HRM and would require an agreement with HRM. The province is responsible for everything within the traveled way, and the municipality would be responsible for everything outside the traveled way including lighting, stormwater, crosswalk infrastructure (light, pole, pushbutton), and winter sidewalk maintenance. These would need to be considered in any future cost estimates.

While the consultant provides 2021 class D cost estimates for the above infrastructure, these values do not align with HRM's current cost estimates for sidewalks and related infrastructure. Based on recent cost estimates for a sidewalk on a rural road, the cost estimate for the multi-use path and sidewalk on St. Margaret's Bay Road, complete with curb, gutter, and any necessary features, (points 1, 2, and 3 above) is between \$4.5-5 million. Design is estimated to cost an additional \$100,000. This cost has a 45% contingency. Because of the volatility of construction prices, these numbers are subject to change. These costs do not include any potential land acquisition.

Provincial officials have advised that Shankel Bridge is in very good condition and not slated for any upcoming capital works. The bridge does not have space for a sidewalk. Instead, HRM could potentially fund a separate pedestrian bridge over the Hubbards River as recommended in the Community Plan. This would require property acquisition which would add to the cost and complexity of this endeavour.

Regarding Shore Club Road, provincial officials advised they have received multiple concerns about the high demand for on-street parking here and recognize a need for some site-specific road widening to support this. While this would be a provincial responsibility to address, it is not under consideration in the provincial capital budget at this time. The provision of sidewalks here would be a municipal responsibility. Property acquisition was not included in the Community Plan, but a desktop review suggests it may be necessary to accommodate a sidewalk, especially if widening to accommodate on-street parking is also undertaken. The proposed boardwalk may also impede access to privately owned docks which may also need to be acquired or accommodated. Because of this, a feasibility study would need to be done prior to serious consideration of sidewalks on Shore Club Road.

Community Plan Recommendation: Modify St. Margaret's Bay Road Street Infrastructure

Many of the infrastructure recommendations in the Community Plan centre around St. Margaret's Bay Road which is a two-to-three lane provincially owned highway that forms the community's main thoroughfare. The road has a predominantly 'rural' cross section (ditch and gravel shoulders) and a posted speed limit of 50km/hr through the community. There is a 320-metre segment of curb, gutter, and sidewalk on the south side of St. Margaret's Bay Road between Highway 329 and Fox Point Road, which is within the boundary of the Municipality of the District of Chester. The Community Plan recommends a series of interventions on St. Margaret's Bay Road. Each one is described below followed by a description of what HRM is currently doing and could do to support implementation.

- **Roadway Cross Section and Intersection Changes:** The Community Plan proposes changes to the cross section of St. Margaret's Bay Road, including the addition of a center turning lane, medians, and pedestrian refuge islands for traffic calming. The Plan also recommends normalizing sharp angle intersections at Old Port Road, Shankel Road (both ends), and the shopping mall driveway to improve sightlines and reduce pedestrian crossing distances. It identifies that these changes could be made either permanently or tactically, and that the resulting available space could be used for placemaking features.

Staff Response

While provincial agency staff expressed concern that the addition of left turn lanes might have the opposite of a traffic calming effect, they were in general support of 'gateway treatments' such as

medians, roundabouts, or other features at either end of a community that help cue drivers of reduced speed limits within communities.

Agency staff were briefed on the community's suggestions for intersection realignment and confirmed that such proposals could be considered in association with future provincial roadworks. These could also be considered during potential future sidewalk construction through the Rural AT Program.

- Crosswalks: The plan proposes crosswalks with painted lines, button-activated flashing lights, medians, and bump-outs (either tactically or permanently) at every intersection along St. Margaret's Bay Road including at Canada Post, Scotia Cycle, and JD Shatford Elementary School.

Staff Response

Under [Provincial policy](#), crosswalks that are requested, paid for, and maintained by a municipality can be installed by the province on provincial roads, if they are deemed safe (meet minimum sight distance requirement, have a safe place to stand on each side, etc.) and necessary (established by meeting minimum thresholds in a warrant analysis). Presently, HRM has a request under consideration to upgrade the crosswalk at the Shatford Elementary School. Provincial agency staff communicated that there may not be any other locations in this community that meet the criteria currently. Proposed crosswalk locations could be reconsidered during/ after the sidewalk construction process. Providing lighting for these crosswalks would need to be considered in future sidewalk design and accounted for in future budgets. The crosswalks and lighting suggested here could be considered when implementing the Rural AT Program.

- Access Management in Parking Lots: The Community Plan recommends undertaking access management, either tactically or permanently, for the parking lots of the Irving Gas Station, Tony's Buy and Sell, 10426 and 10409 St Margaret's Bay Road, and Canada Post. These are locations where the entire parking lot opens onto the main road rather than with a defined driveway entrance. Lack of access management means that vehicles enter and exit from any point along the opening instead of in a predictable manner from the same point each time.

Staff Response

Access management on Provincial roads is typically incorporated into larger road projects and could be incorporated into sidewalk construction along St. Margaret's Bay Road. Consideration could also be given to approaching the particular property owners to undertake changes on their property to better define access points and formalize driveways. Parking lot access management could be considered during the implementation of the sidewalk or multi-use pathway through the Rural AT Program.

- Placemaking/ Streetscaping: The Community Plan recommends placemaking features such as benches, vegetation, street murals, little free libraries, art, and other features aimed at making the community more vibrant and social. The Plan suggests installing these features within bump outs on the street, on the private vacant lot at 10426 St. Margaret's Bay Road, and the Hubbards Community Waterfront Park which is owned by HRM.

Staff Response

Community-accessed grants may be the best way to fund local placemaking projects. Multiple government-funded programs exist, providing different focuses and levels of funding. HRM offers the [Neighbourhood Placemaking Grant](#) which provides funding for community-led art and placemaking initiatives. The projects can be located on or off HRM property, accommodating the multiple forms of placemaking that the Hubbards Community proposes. Applications are received

annually and grant funding of up to \$1,500 and staff support are available to help communities realize their placemaking aims.

[Community Area Rates](#) are property taxes imposed by Council within a specific community. A community organization (a registered not-for-profit society) may spend the funds collected on localized community initiatives. Local recreational infrastructure on municipal land can be funded this way including streetscaping, trails, and community events. Community Area Rates have also been used in the past to fund sidewalk construction and maintenance.

Community Plan Recommendation: Approach to Land Acquisition

The Community Plan suggests that, when for sale, HRM purchase plots of land that could form a connected trail network as a lower cost option than on-street sidewalks to reach some destinations. The Plan suggests this could be done by reselling the land and retaining easements for public access. There are four corridors that the Plan suggests for this action, which create connections through the woods between roads or key destinations:

- Between Queensland Beach and Rum Runners Trail (260m)
- Between Hubbards Beach and Schwartz Road (311m)
- Between Schwartz Road and Conrads Road (216m)
- Between the Wight Nature Preserve and the Recreation Centre (750m)



Staff Response

There are currently no policies or Council direction for funding supporting land acquisition for trail connections in these areas. There would remain a level of risk on the timing and amount of any sale proceeds from residual lands.

Informal and formal gravel roads already connect Rum Runners Trail and Queensland Beach, although a crosswalk across St Margaret's Bay Road at this location might formalize the connection. Council could investigate directing funding for land acquisition for pedestrian connections.

Community Plan Recommendation: Land Use & Development

The Community Plan suggests the creation of various development policies to govern the design of commercial and residential structures to create a cohesive and inviting feel. They suggest the establishment of various land use designations (Community Centre, Rural Main Street, Community Facilities, Waterfront, Standard Residential, Trailfront Residential, Medium Density Residential, and Natural Space). The Plan recommends establishing clear regulations around setbacks, building height, roof shape, and signage in the commercial areas, while in the residential areas section, it proposes mixed-density areas and zones for more intensive development. This section of the Plan includes a map of recommended areas for growth for reference.

Staff Response

HRM Regional Planning - Rural Community Planning is currently scoping the development of an updated rural land use framework that will support the overall growth management of the Municipality and the sustainable development of rural communities. This framework will build on existing community plans and aim to provide an updated Municipal Planning Strategy and simplified land use by-laws.

The current Regional Plan has identified Hubbards as a rural growth centre, however, intensification is challenged by a lack of central water and sewer service. While some intensification is possible with on-site systems, it is necessarily more dispersed than urban growth due to the space requirements of these systems. Rural Community Planning will be undertaking a region-wide groundwater study that will influence the future rural settlement pattern. The Hubbards Community Plan development policies could be considered in the creation of the rural planning framework.

Increases in rural density may trigger the transfer of roads from the province to HRM under *Conveyance of Road Responsibilities from NSTAT to HRM Agreement* (July 2021), the precedent for which comes from the 1997 Agreement HRM-01. At present, the boundary for this exchange is close to Hubbards (6.8 kilometres west). An increase in density in Hubbards could result in its roads being transferred to HRM and it is possible that this might take place during the next service transfer. Agreement HRM-01 sets transfers to take place every three years, however negotiations between HRM and the Provincial Government are ongoing and no date for the next transfer is set. While a transfer of Hubbards road maintenance to HRM may provide an opportunity for HRM to implement some road changes directly, it also represents a significant added financial responsibility for the municipality.

Conclusion

The Hubbards Community Plan provides valuable insights into the needs and wants of this vibrant rural community. The class D (concept level) estimate provided in the Community Plan (\$21 million) for all these elements is considered very low by HRM staff as considerations have not been made for piped drainage, property acquisition, or lighting. Given the current volatility of construction prices, the cost could be orders of magnitude higher than the estimate given.

With few infrastructure capital programs in place to support all the requests identified in the Plan, it is likely infeasible to allot such funds to one community; however, some aspects of the Community Plan may be achievable. Adding the rural sidewalk area rate to the property tax in the area could support some of the sidewalk and crosswalk infrastructure, providing it complies with AO 2022-008-ADM.

The Rural AT Program, if approved in Hubbards, will be a key resource to implement some of the largest Community Plan recommendations. While the focus of the Rural AT Program is sidewalks, it is also an opportunity to consider the crosswalks, multi-use path, lighting, and access management proposed in the Hubbards community plan. The Rural Community Planning program is another appropriate avenue for staff to consider the proposed development policies, however, the time frame for this has not yet been established. The Community Plan will be a valuable resource to HRM's rural planners as they embark on this project. Beyond this, there are some funding sources that the community can pursue on their own to support placemaking initiatives.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Any financial implications of the Rural AT Program to HRM would be in the future. The potential cost of the Plan's requests will be identified in a future staff report if the Rural AT program (i.e. sidewalk on St. Margaret's Bay Road) is implemented in Hubbards. If the requested infrastructure is built, associated costs will include staff time, and ongoing maintenance. Currently, the cost estimate for the requested active transportation infrastructure on St. Margaret's Bay Road alone is \$4.5-5 million, with a 45% contingency. More accurate cost estimates would be established if the construction of a sidewalk in Hubbards is initiated, through the Rural AT Program.

The Hubbards Community Plan additionally recommends land acquisition for informal trails, a pedestrian bridge, and a boardwalk. A program could be set up to accommodate these requests, but this would be a significant additional cost to HRM and will require funding for staff time and operations, as well as capital project delivery. This report does not recommend proceeding with these elements.

RISK CONSIDERATION

No risk considerations were identified.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement was completed by Upland during the creation of the Hubbards Community Plan. Engagement was undertaken with HRM departments and provincial agencies related to the various subject areas brought forward in the Community Plan. The Hubbards Streetscaping Project board members were advised by email and in person that this report was being drafted and had no additional comments. No community engagement was undertaken directly related to this report, however, public engagement regarding the implementation of AO 2022-008 in Hubbards was undertaken on March 4th, 2024. At these meetings community members showed strong interest in a sidewalk along St. Margaret's Bay Road in Hubbards.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Active transportation infrastructure supports people to use sustainable modes of transportation and reduces carbon emissions from cars. Creating a community that is safe to walk and bike supports emissions reductions and active living.

Hubbard's is a coastal community and has roads along the shore, including St Margaret's Bay Road and Shore Club Road, which are vulnerable to the effects of storms and coastal erosion. This may impact the longevity of any added infrastructure.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Regional Council could choose to receive the Hubbards Community Plan and take no further action. This alternative is not recommended for the reasons described in this report.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, clauses 228(a)(b), 229(1)(d), and subsection 322(1), as follows:
228 The purpose of a municipal planning strategy is to provide statements of policy consistent with the minimum planning requirements to guide the development and management of the Municipality and, to further this purpose, to establish:

- (a) policies that address problems and opportunities concerning the development of land and the effects of the development;

(b) policies to provide a framework for the environmental, social and economic development within the Municipality;

229 (1) A municipal planning strategy must include statements of policy respecting:

(d) the engagement by the Municipality with abutting municipalities when amending the municipal planning strategy or adopting a new municipal planning strategy to replace the existing one;

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

Public Highways Act, section 28 as follows:

28 (1) A municipality shall not effect improvements of a permanent character on any highway, unless it

(a) submits to the Minister plans, specifications, estimates and other particulars respecting the proposed improvements;

(b) satisfies the Minister that suitable provision will be made for the future maintenance of such highway after it has been so improved; and

(c) obtains the Minister's written consent.

(2) The municipality may, after compliance with the conditions set out in subsection (1), enter into an agreement with the Minister for the carrying out of such improvement by the municipality, the Minister or some other person upon such terms and subject to such conditions as the Minister prescribes and the Governor in Council approves.

(3) The costs of any such improvements shall be apportioned between the municipality and the Province in the manner agreed upon by them.

(4) Any sum payable by the Province shall not exceed one half of the whole cost of the improvement.

ATTACHMENTS

No attachments.

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