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**Item No. Info 2**  
**Executive Standing Committee**  
**August 26, 2024**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Executive Standing Committee

**FROM:** Brad Anguish, Commissioner of Operations

**DATE:** August 26, 2024

**SUBJECT:** **Gendered Approach to Zoning By-Laws**

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**INFORMATION REPORT**

**ORIGIN**

On November 28, 2022 the Executive Standing Committee passed the following motion:

Moved by Councillor Blackburn, seconded by Councillor Mason

THAT the Executive Standing Committee request a staff report and recommendations for ultimate consideration by Regional Council:

1. Examining how proposed by-law changes may be consistently reviewed from a gendered lens; and
2. Reviewing how existing zoning by-laws may adversely impact the safety of women and gender-diverse individuals in the HRM area.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an intersectional, analytical, and evidence-based process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and non-binary people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives. It is one lens that Halifax Planning and Development currently uses as part of developing policies, programs, and public engagement initiatives. This report explains the GBA+ approach used in developing policies and regulations, shares ongoing work to update existing plans and strategies, and discusses how Planning and Development can support gender equity work being led by other departments and community partners.

## **BACKGROUND**

On November 26, 2019, Halifax Regional Council approved the creation of the Women's Advisory Committee to support efforts toward a gender inclusive Municipality and provide advice to Council on matters relevant to the municipal mandate. While developing their 2022 Work Plan, the Women's Advisory Committee expressed interest in forming a recommendation related to the consistent application of gender-based analysis in the development and review of By-Laws.

Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an intersectional, analytical, and evidence-based process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and non-binary people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives. While it is often used with the intention of advancing gender equality, it can help in understanding and responding to the needs of residents with diverse identities beyond gender. GBA+ encourages questioning what voices are at the table and what perspectives may be missing when developing programs and policies.<sup>1</sup>

At the April 4, 2024 meeting of the Women's Advisory Committee, Regional Planning staff gave a [presentation](#) explaining the planning framework in HRM and how the planning department incorporates a GBA+ lens in its work. The perspective offered by GBA+ analysis is one lens planners consider when drafting policy and regulations. This report further explains how proposed policy and regulatory changes are reviewed from a gendered lens, and how existing By-Laws are being reviewed for greater inclusivity.

## **DISCUSSION**

A central objective of GBA+ analysis is to advance gender equity and create more inclusive economic and social opportunities. Planning with a GBA+ lens includes women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities of all ages and abilities in decision-making processes and works to combat the gendered imbalances in the built environment that prevent their full social and economic inclusion.<sup>2</sup>

Planning with communities and considering the experiences and concerns of women and gender-diverse individuals is an important part of developing policies and regulations. A GBA+ lens can help to address historical imbalances in representation and agency by empowering and informing all members of a community. Using inclusive engagement to help shape policies and regulations is a central part of GBA+ informed planning.

The [2024 Community Engagement Strategy](#) similarly highlights that inclusive, meaningful, and equitable community engagement is a necessary avenue to ensure municipal decisions, programs and services respond to and serve the municipality's diverse residents. Rooting an approach to community engagement in values of equity, diversity, and inclusion means ensuring all residents have the opportunity to participate. Approaching community engagement this way also means considering these values at all stages of community engagement and relationship building.

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<sup>1</sup> "An Overview of Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), Presentation to the Women's Advisory Council of Halifax. Nov 2020. Accessed at: <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/201105wach611presentation.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Terraza, Horacio; Orlando, Maria Beatriz; Lakovits, Carina; Lopes Janik, Vanessa; Kalashyan, Anna. 2020. Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design. World Bank, Washington, DC. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/publication/handbook-for-gender-inclusive-urban-planning-and-design>.

## **GBA+ Approaches in HRM Policy and By-Law Development**

Public participation is legislatively required by the *HRM Charter* to form part of policy and By-Law development in HRM. In 2023, Regional Council approved [Administrative Order 2023-002-ADM](#) and the accompanying [Planning and Development Public Engagement Guidebook](#).

### *Public Engagement Approach*

The [Public Engagement Guidebook](#) ('the Guidebook') was created specifically by Planning and Development (P&D) staff to ensure a consistent and inclusive approach to developing engagement. The Guidebook is intended to assist staff in developing an approach to engagement for policies, programs, and services that reflects the needs of the project and the community it impacts. The Guidebook provides key steps and considerations for different engagements to ensure they are effective, accessible, and inclusive.

Staff use the Guidebook to determine the appropriate level of public engagement and identify resources that provide community context such as existing plans, stakeholders and community organizations, and [Community Safety Assessments](#). Community Safety Assessments are a community-based, intersectional and participatory tool used to build safer neighbourhoods, schools, campuses, workplaces, transit systems, and other public spaces. Other questions for consideration in the Guidebook include the socioeconomic characteristics of the area, languages spoken, access to technology, and level of understanding of the issues being engaged on. Thinking about these factors assists staff in determining how to best engage with communities.

The format and location of engagement can significantly impact the feedback received. As such, GBA+ analysis is one lens that planners consider when developing engagement plans and ensuring all members of a community can share their thoughts. Other lenses used in creating engagement plans may include strategies to engage African Nova Scotian, Acadian and Francophone, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities.

The Guidebook engagement process is divided into eight steps with associated key questions for staff to consider. A GBA+ lens can be applied at every step of this process to critically evaluate whether the voices and experiences of equity-deserving individuals and groups are being heard as part of the policy-making process.

### *GBA+ Toolkit*

As part of the Municipality's ongoing efforts to promote gender equality, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO) has created a Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Toolkit and an associated Training Course. Several staff in Planning and Development have taken this training to enhance their engagement with diverse communities, and Managers continue to promote this training. The Toolkit outlines how to apply a GBA+ lens to work by asking staff to question assumptions, consider who is included or excluded, critically assess what data sources are used, and examine whether outcomes are equitable. This GBA+ analysis supports policy, program, and project design to consider the various factors that impact diverse groups of women, men, and gender-diverse people, and ensures policies and programs apply to and are reflective of a more significant portion of the population.

## **Existing Policies and By-Laws**

A GBA+ lens is one of the approaches utilized by planners in developing policies, regulations, and their associated engagement strategies. Public engagement can also help staff to identify opportunities to improve existing policies and regulations as plans are reviewed. This section outlines several key projects within Planning and Development that are updating existing policies and By-Laws.

### *Regional Plan Review*

The Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (the Regional Plan) sets out a common vision, principles and long-range, region-wide planning policies outlining where, when, and how future growth and development should take place. The ongoing [Regional Plan Review](#) will update the Municipality's region-wide planning framework with a forward-looking view to supporting population growth over the long term,

by strategically directing housing, jobs, and community infrastructure in a way that supports the Municipality's goals for healthy, connected, and inclusive communities.

#### *Priorities Plans*

There is considerable alignment between the objectives of the Regional Plan and HRM's four approved priorities plans – *The Integrated Mobility Plan*, *the Halifax Green Network Plan*, *HalifACT*, and *Sharing Our Stories: Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan*. *Sharing Our Stories* encompasses the vision, principles and priorities for the Municipality to more effectively guide investments and decisions related to culture and heritage. It is particularly aligned with GBA+ issues, as one of the main objectives of the Plan is to expand and improve the representation of equity-deserving groups across the municipality, such as Indigenous communities, African Nova Scotian communities, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and newcomers, among many others.

The Regional Plan and priorities plans highlight the importance of building healthy and complete communities. Complete communities are where people of all ages, abilities, incomes, and backgrounds can live, work, learn, shop, and play near one another, with access to transportation, food, and a variety of housing options. Complete communities provide residents with the services and resources they need, foster strong social connections, and support community mental health. Inclusive and healthy community design has a positive impact on health and overall well-being. Working towards the objectives identified in the Regional Plan and the priorities plans will continue to promote more inclusive communities.

#### *Community Planning*

The Municipality is currently undergoing a major project to update HRM's community planning framework aligned with the strategic vision set out in the Regional Plan and priorities plans. The ongoing [Regional Plan Review](#) will study existing and planned transit, parks, facilities and other public amenities, and their relationship to potential locations for growth. This will identify the areas that can best support growth as well as any gaps that should be addressed to better support complete communities. Subsequently, the Suburban and Rural Community Planning processes will use this strategic direction to prepare more detailed and area-specific policies and built form regulations.

While most of HRM's Secondary Municipal Planning Strategies and corresponding Land Use By-laws were developed before amalgamation in 1996, the [Regional Centre Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy](#) (Regional Centre Plan) represents recent policy direction. The Regional Centre Plan provides land use regulations for the Halifax Peninsula and Dartmouth within the Circumferential Highway and is based on the core concepts of Complete Communities, Human-Scale Design, and Pedestrians First. Accordingly, the guidance contained in the plan promotes development that contributes to safe, active, and walkable communities. The Regional Centre Plan highlights the importance of diversity, inclusion, and equity, and "considers the needs of diverse and underrepresented communities through inclusive and meaningful ways of engagement, and a greater integration of land use, housing, and transportation policies."

There are similar opportunities to better reflect HRM's commitment to diverse and inclusive communities as part of updating plans for the Suburban and Rural areas. Community input and participation in this process will be critical, providing a primary source of guiding knowledge for the plans. The Planning and Development Public Engagement Guidebook will be used to develop the engagement program. As such, the engagement strategies developed by staff will incorporate a variety of perspectives, including a GBA+ lens.

#### **Partnerships and Collaboration**

While there is ongoing work within Planning and Development to update plans and continue to create inclusive engagement that reflects a GBA+ lens, there are also opportunities to support and collaborate on plans, programs, and initiatives led by other departments and community partners. Relevant ongoing work includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- The Municipality's Community Safety Office leads the [Public Safety Strategy](#) and has developed a series of tools to reduce barriers for women, gender-diverse people, and other underrepresented

residents, to equitably access quality-of-life services. The Public Safety Office has developed a robust site evaluation process through Community Safety Assessments. The information gathered in these assessments can be used to help inform policy and engagement approaches, as highlighted in the P&D Public Engagement Guidebook.

- Community Safety also leads the Municipality's [approach to address homelessness](#). Women and gender-diverse people experiencing homelessness can face unique risks to safety and well-being. Planning and Development can support initiatives related to affordable housing and emergency shelters through the Regional Plan, zoning By-Law and Secondary Plan amendments, and administration of programs such as the Affordable Housing Grant Program.
- The [Road Safety Strategy](#) acknowledges that road safety is an issue that can disproportionately affect low-income and marginalized communities. These neighbourhoods are disproportionately burdened with poor land use planning, such as major roads cutting through neighbourhoods and a lack of pedestrian infrastructure.
- Parks & Recreation is leading ongoing work to develop a [park lighting strategy](#). Adequate public lighting in areas such as parks can help promote greater safety for women and gender-diverse individuals. Land Use By-Law regulations can complement this approach by requiring new developments to include lighting plans as part of buildings and sites.
- The Office of Diversity and Inclusion & African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO) has developed strategies to centre the voices, interests, values and experiences of underrepresented identities and cultural groups in the engagement process. Work is underway by Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO to develop The [Women and Gender Equity Strategy](#) (WGES), a document in alignment with the Diversity & Inclusion Framework that will help the Municipality to advance gender equality. The WGES Strategy will provide guidance on reducing barriers to municipal services that may be created due to a person's gender identity and expression and factors such as ability, race, age, immigration status, language, income, etc. The recommendations put forward by this Strategy may further inform Planning and Development's approach to public engagement and a GBA+ lens in creating policies and regulations.

HRM Planning also collaborates with external agencies and community partners including other levels of government, local service providers, non-profit organizations, the development community, neighbourhood organizers, environmental activists, and community groups. Feedback from these groups can help identify whether policies and regulations are working as intended and whether amendments are necessary to better achieve desired outcomes. Community partners can also play a key role in identifying community-specific needs, new research, best practices, and changes in the regulatory environment that can impact existing or proposed policies and regulations.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

As outlined in the 'Discussion' section of this report, public and stakeholder engagement is an important part of Planning and Development's approach to developing policies and regulations. Where applicable, staff use the P&D Public Engagement Guidebook to incorporate a GBA+ lens in developing policies, regulations, and engagement plans to reflect the needs and perspectives of diverse groups of residents across the municipality.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter (HRM Charter), Part VIII, Planning & Development.*

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