

What we Heard: Sackville Rivers Floodplains Public Information Meetings August 21 & 28, 2024

Halifax Regional Municipality held six public information meetings on August 21st and August 28th, 2024 to receive public input on the draft proposed regulations for future development along the Sackville River and the Little Sackville River Floodplains.

A detailed presentation outlining the history of the Sackville Rivers Floodplains Project, an update on recent modelling, and the proposed draft regulations was given at each of the six sessions.

Engagement approach:

HRM sent letters to over 900 residents whose properties or residences were completely or partially within the updated (2024) floodplains, inviting them to the public meetings. HRM staff also contacted organizations and businesses in the area that are affected by the updated floodplains and invited them to the meetings. Staff also provided notices of the meetings on social media and sent public service announcements to local radio and television stations.

The first three meetings on August 21st were held at the Bedford United Church in Bedford. The second three meetings on August 28th were held at the Sackville Lions Club in Lower Sackville.

The meetings took place over the course of the day with the first meeting beginning shortly after the doors opened at 1 PM. Each meeting was preceded by an open house where people could view the poster boards displaying information about the Sackville Rivers Watershed, the Sackville Rivers Floodplain Studies, and the proposed draft regulations. This was designed to give people an opportunity to ask questions of staff one on one.

Three presentations were given each day (two during the afternoon sessions, and one during the evening sessions) followed by a question-and-answer session where individuals could ask questions at the podium and receive answers from the project team.

Attendance:

A total of 241 people attended these public meetings with approximately 77 people attending the meetings in Bedford and 164 people attending the meetings in Lower Sackville.

Themed RESPONSE

Below is a summary of what we heard:

- General concern for flooding and the impacts of natural disasters on the community/the longevity of the river – an agreement that it is important to prioritize public safety and mitigate downstream impacts.
- Comments telling HRM to move faster through this process because the floods and flood damage are going to keep happening.
- Concern that development within the floodplain will cause flooding upstream or downstream of a development. If adopted, want to see the regulations followed.

- Property owners and business owners expressed concern about changes to property value and the limited future of their undeveloped properties.
- Some questioned why other recommendations outlined under the CBCL Study and the Sackville Rivers Flood Mitigation Study are not being undertaken first. It was stated that these studies recommended the preparation of development controls as the number one priority, but some felt the priorities should be reordered or that other projects should be undertaken concurrently to mitigate flooding.
- Concern about the impacts of the floodplain modelling on the value of homes.
- Concern about the impacts of the floodplain modelling on the availability of flood insurance.
- Inquiries about how to develop properties under the proposed regulations such as floodproofing.
- Concern for the people who are consistently flooded and need to know when those properties will be bought out by the government.
- One resident suggested that HRM set up a fund for compensation or relieve property owners within the floodplain from paying taxes.
- Questions raised about how property owners who bought property in areas that are now within a floodplain will be compensated if they cannot develop their lot.
- Questions raised about whether the floodplain zones will apply to the whole property if only a portion of the property is within a floodplain. Clarification was provided to confirm that the floodplain zones would only apply to the portion of the property within the floodplain.
- Questions raised about how to contest the results of spot elevations for individual properties.
- Concern about the need for emergency evacuation plans to allow people to leave their homes and neighbourhoods in the event of a flood. This concern was raised by people who live in homes that are flooded and people who live in the surrounding area even if their homes are not flooded (e.g. Sackville River Heights).
- Some feel that the extent of the floodlines were over estimated.
- Some questioned why infrastructure developments such as the new Burnside Connector were not included in the modelling.
- Concern that the increasing amount of development around lakes and the increasing amount of impervious surfaces are increasing the impacts on stormwater systems.
- Desire for Sandy Lake and other nearby waterways to be included in the mapping or looked at next.
- Suggestions included:
 - Need to put a priority on restoration of wetlands;
 - Pursuing other recommended actions before adopting land use regulations (reordering the steps of from the CBCL report);
 - Need to prevent sewers from backing up into basements;
 - Widen and re-channel river in the lower reaches of the watershed in Bedford;
 - Use technology like sponges for water storage in the event of a flood;
 - Look at existing infrastructure (bridges, culverts) and invest in fixing those;
 - Consider the current AND future/proposed impervious surfaces (e.g., road widenings) in the modeling to account for those impacts on water flow;
 - Coordinate more with the Municipality of East Hants;

- Consider private culverts into HRM's understanding of the water system; and
- Evaluate the flood mapping every 5 years, not every 10 years.
- Feedback on the engagement itself:
 - Appreciated the opportunity to ask and address questions in a public forum;
 - Found the presentation very informative and valuable; and
 - Would like at least one representative from Halifax Water present.

WHAT YOU ASKED AND HOW WE ANSWERED

HRM will now start refining the proposed policies and regulations where we can make improvements in response to the suggestions that you gave us. Please stay informed by checking this webpage.

Or by contacting me:

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