

What we heard: Sackville Rivers Floodplains Open Houses:

Thursday, September 20, 2018 & Saturday, 22, 2018

Project outline:

On August 14, 2018, the Municipality published the findings of the Sackville Rivers Floodplains Study (2017). This Study assessed the Sackville River and the Little Sackville River, and their watersheds, to produce updated floodplain maps. Areas at risk of flooding were evaluated using updated information and computer modeling that forecast the impact of rain storms, snow melt, and ice jams on the rivers.

The new floodplain mapping shows a larger flood impact for the 1-in-20 and 1-in-100-year weather events when compared with older (1980s) flood risk mapping. The 1-in-20 flood event refers to floods that have a 5% chance of occurring in any given year, while the 1-in-100 flood event refers to floods that have 1% chance of occurring in any given year. The Municipality is using this new information to update planning documents to regulate the type of new development that may be allowed to take place in the floodplain areas.

Engagement approach:

We sent letters to over 900 residents whose properties were completely or partially within the updated (2017) floodplains, inviting them to our three public open houses. We also contacted 31 organizations and businesses in the area that are affected by the updated floodplains and invited them to the open houses. The first two open houses were held on Thursday, September 20, 2018, from noon-4 pm and 6-8 pm at the Kinsmen Community Centre in Lower Sackville. The third open house was held on Saturday, September 22, 2018, from noon to 5 p.m. at the LeBrun Recreation Centre in Bedford.

We had five poster boards explaining the background of the Sackville and Little Sackville Rivers floodplain mapping, information about the Sackville Rivers Watershed, the methodology used to create the updated floodplain maps, an explanation of what floodplains are and why the floodplain maps are being updated, and an outline of the planning process used to change the relevant regulations and policies. We displayed historic and present-day photographs of flooding along the Sackville and Little Sackville Rivers and projected drone footage of flooding that took place in 2014 in the area. We had four large maps displayed and the interactive map ready on our laptops so people from the area could see how their property is affected by the floodplain mapping.

We used a casual format where residents and stakeholders could look at the posters and ask questions to the several staff around the room. We also had comment forms scattered throughout the room so attendees could leave comments, concerns, and questions with us to consider when writing new regulations and policies.

Attendance:

In total, roughly 100 people attended our three open houses. Approximately 50 people attended our open house on September 20 from noon-4pm and approximately 30 people attended later that evening for our 6-8pm session. On September 22, 2018, 21 people attended our open house. Most attendees were residents from the affected areas. A considerable number were part of or supporters of the Sackville Rivers Association. A few attendees were representatives of developers with properties in the affected areas.

Common themes from comment forms:

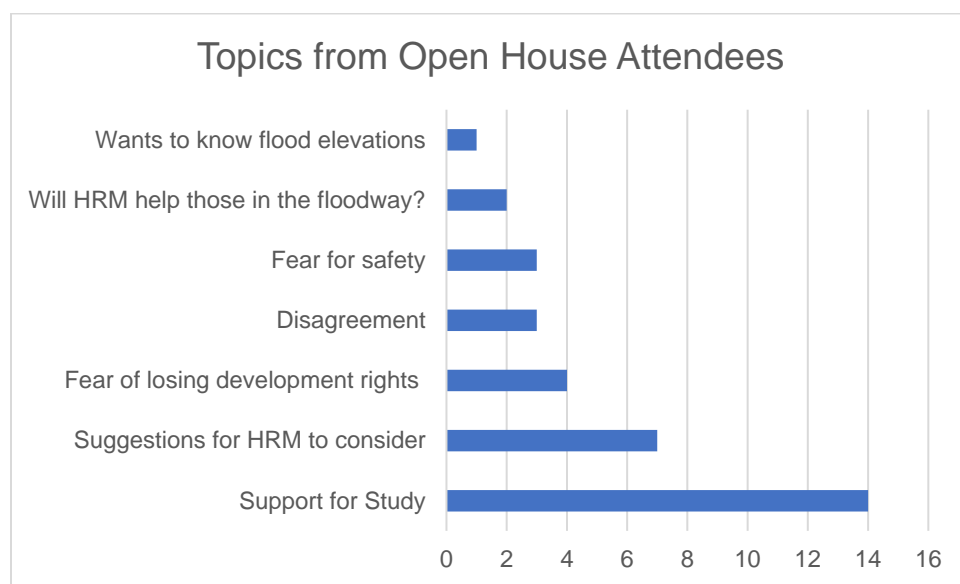
We had comments forms scattered throughout the room that attendees could fill out with questions or comments. Twenty-nine forms were filled-out (two being repeat attendees).

Out of the twenty-nine comments forms filled out, the most common theme is that residents support the updated floodplains and agree something needs to be done to address flooding in the area.

Several residents also gave suggestions of what Staff should consider when writing new policies and regulations based on the updated floodplain mapping. Suggestions for our consideration included the discouragement or restriction of development in the floodplains, infrastructure changes to lessen flood impacts or to increase floodwater storage, the possibility of Halifax purchasing houses most impacted by the floods, sharing the floodplain study with banks and the Insurance Bureau, and more intensive outreach to residents impacted by the updated floodplains.

Less common themes discussed on the comment forms are concerns over the loss of development rights, disagreement with the floodplain maps, fear for public safety, asking for help from Halifax, and wanting more information. Four comment forms address concerns about losing development and land use rights. Three residents believe our floodplain maps are incorrect. Specifically, one resident wants Halifax to formally acknowledge that his house is not within the floodplain. A few residents fear for their own and their neighbour's safety due to actual and possible flooding. The same residents want to know if Halifax will help them if there is flooding or maintain their properties that are damaged by flooding. One resident wants to know the elevation of flooding so they can understand how deep the water would be in the 1-in-20 and 1-in-100-year flood events.

Below is a graph displaying the themes discussed on the comment forms:



What we heard from conversations:

Many attendees did not fill out the comments forms, but Halifax staff and a technical expert had conversations with the attendees. Most attendees wanted to know what was considered when creating the floodplain maps. While some residents were skeptical of the accuracy of the new floodplain mapping, several residents told illuminating stories of flooding that occurred on their properties and in their homes. Many attendees wanted to see how high the floodwaters would be in a 1:20 and 1:100 flood event to get a better idea of the extent of damage that could occur. Some residents expressed fear for their own and their neighbours' safety and wanted to know if the City will be helping them to prevent flooding on their properties. Several residents expressed concerns about how the floodmapping could affect their property insurance and property values. Several residents also raised concerns about losing their development rights.

We learned about the local history of the rivers and surrounding wetlands from long-time residents such as the Barretts (of Barrett Lumber) and the Heflers (of Hefler Forest Products). Both family businesses

run alongside the rivers. The rivers play a large role in their production of lumber products, so the families have thorough understanding of the seasonal changes to the rivers and actually dam the rivers as part of the production of lumber. We also heard stories about how areas with considerable development were once know marshlands only used for cow pastures.

- Firsthand experiences of flooding (McCabe Lake new construction, sewage backup)
- History and information on floods in the area from long-time residents: Barrett Lumber family, Walter Regan, Hefler Forest Products family spoke about private dams that contain flows, culverts, and other development changes in the area
- Skepticism of the updated floodplains from residents who have lived in the area for decades
- Support for the updated floodplains (thought the floodplains were realistic, not from the area but support the protection of floodplains generally)
- Wanting to know the flood elevations
- Fear for safety
- Wanting to know how the floodplain maps were created (technical questions including what was considered and how)
- Worries about insurance and value of property/house
- Worries about development rights
- Wanting to challenge the floodplain maps
- Wanting to know if and when we will update floodplain mapping and zoning for all HRM rivers

What we heard in e-mails:

- Technical questions
- Disputing floodplain mapping

Next: Internal and External stakeholder meetings, draft policies and regulations, public hearing