

COUNCILLOR PAUL RUSSELL DISTRICT 15 NEWSLETTER

Lower Sackville



HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

SPRING 2022



GREETINGS, FRIENDS & NEIGHBOURS:

COVID has been in our midst for two years. When it arrived we had no idea what would happen, we just saw people - around the world - getting sick and dying. At the time it made sense to lock everything down. Many of us know someone who got sick (or knew someone who died).

As time went on, we saw increases and decreases in the case count and death rate and we saw new variants come and go. We also learned more than we ever wanted to about flattening the curve, epidemiology, N95 masks, variants, and many other things related to the virus. We also saw that a delicate balance had to be maintained between keeping a viable health care system on one hand and supporting our mental, physical, and social well-being and growth on the other.

We are in a far better place, now, than we were in March 2020. Our understanding of the virus continues to grow, and the very real pressures on our health care and other critical systems continues to lessen. This virus, like many others, will be with us forever. People will continue to get sick, some will be hospitalized, and worse. But those numbers are getting lower all the time. I am pleased that the mandates are being lifted.

I look forward to our community coming together again, attending local events, and to seeing you at community suppers. It won't be the same as it was, but it will get better over time.

Paul

311 is the HRM customer service line.

If you have a municipal concern, please call 311 or visit halifax.ca/311. To send an email to 311, please visit the website noted above and click on the "email" link to fill in your contact details for follow-up and the information about your municipal concern.

- You are also able to add pictures or other attachments, which is one of the real benefits.
- Finally, if you copy me, then I'll also be aware of your concern and will be able to help.

hfxALERT is the system that HRM uses to notify residents about significant events that relate to the parking ban, fire, and police.

- You will need to sign up for hfxALERT to receive the notifications. You can receive notifications based on your home and work location. If you also download the app to your smartphone, then you can receive notifications based on your immediate location.
- The biggest benefit to using this app is that you will be notified about the days that the winter parking ban is in effect.
- Sign up for notifications, and learn more by visiting: halifax.ca/hfxalert

CONTACT ME

The best way to connect with me is via email.

Email: paul.russell@halifax.ca

Phone: 902.240.0441

Website and newsletter sign-up: paulrussell.ca

Mailing address: PO Box 1749, Halifax, NS B3J 3A5

HALIFAX



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GROWTH - POPULATION AND HOUSING

We are in the middle of a housing crisis across Canada. That much is **very** clear. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) released a rental market report in February that shows several alarming things.

The vacancy rate, in the rental market in Halifax, is at about 1%. We need it to be at 3-4% for us to be comfortable. The average rent for a two bedroom apartment is \$1,335. For those who want a condo, the vacancy rate is 0%, and the average two bedroom rent is \$1,530.

Halifax is growing, despite the housing crisis. Statistics Canada has shown the population growth of Halifax to be about 2% per year. If this keeps up then over the next 40 years the population of both Halifax and of Nova Scotia will double.

This has created a major housing crisis where we are seeing many more people without a roof over their heads and many more people who are at a high risk of losing the roof that they have.

Many groups have stepped up and are working together to try and provide housing.

As a community, a municipality, and a province, we need to provide more housing soon. That will take a variety of groups doing a variety of things, sometimes working together and sometimes working independently, always with a goal to provide safe and affordable housing. This will be large-scale with no quick solution.

We also need to recognize that, no matter how hard we try, or how hard we want it to happen, we will not be able to get a roof over everyone's head.

I fully support (in word and deed) the efforts of those in my community - Square Roots, the Sackville Area Warming Centre, Freedom Kitchen, Beacon House, the Archdiocese, and others - who are doing their very best to help those who need help.

I also recognize that the low vacancy rate creates other problems. We have seen record-high prices in the housing market. This is because there is so little supply and, with an increasing population, so much demand.

We need to build more housing, both as houses and as multi-unit buildings. That is happening, but it's taking time. There is no question that this problem has been heightened by COVID:

- Many people are working from home and want to build things onto their homes. As a result, the number of development applications and permits, through COVID, doubled. Many of these were for smaller projects, like decks or sheds, but the instant doubling of volume had a big impact.
- With people not being at factories (because of COVID), materials weren't produced, which led to supply issues, and so many materials that were able to make it here were at vastly higher prices.
- This will sort itself out, but it will take time.

The impact of all of this is that housing costs, and the perceived value of housing, have gone up a lot. This has had an impact on our budget, which I'll talk about next.

PROPERTY TAX BILL AND THE BUDGET PROCESS

The HRM budget is a long and public process that runs from the fall through mid-April. This budget started with Council and HRM staff setting a starting point for the change in the average tax bill. Once we have that number, each of the business units prepared their budgets for the year.

Council debates each of them, including additions and deletions to what has been specified, and then we have a final budget. Once we have the final amount for each business unit, we will know what the actual change to the property tax bill will be.

This year we settled on a starting point of a 4.6% increase in the average tax bill. The table below shows what that would look like for a residential tax bill using the average value of a house in HRM:

	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	% change	\$ change
Assessment	\$252,100	\$270,000	+7.1%	+\$17,900
Tax Rate	0.813%	0.794%	-2.3%	
Tax Bill	\$2,050	\$2,144	+4.6%	+\$94

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Property Tax Bill and Budget Process, cont'd

Across the province, we are seeing record increases in home prices. I talked about this in the Growth section. When we look at the housing market, the assessments have risen an average of 7.1%, which is shown in the table on the previous page.

The tax bill is the property assessment multiplied by the tax rate. Since the property assessment has risen by 7.1%, and with an initial tax *bill* increase of 4.6%, many properties will see their tax *rate* drop. In the example above, the rate dropped from 0.813% to 0.794%, which is 2.3%.

In this example, where the assessment is for the average value of a house in HRM, the tax bill would increase by \$94 for the year.

This is only the starting amount. Council has spent two months going through each HRM business unit. For each budget meeting, we have had a public participation section, where anyone could come and speak to Council about their concerns or their interests. We have looked at all the items that the business units have asked for, and all of the extras that they would like.

At the time of this writing, we have not finalized the budget yet, but we expect to do that by mid-April. Only at that time will we be able to determine what the final change to the tax bill will be. I expect that it will be higher than 4.6%.

LOWER SACKVILLE CAPITAL PROJECTS

This year we have several capital projects that are planned for Lower Sackville (work on some of these has already started). The list of capital projects, for Lower Sackville, include:

- **A new field house for Metropolitan Field.** This replaces the one that burned down a couple of years ago.
- **Resurfacing Cobequid Road, from Sucker Brook to First Lake, and adding a wide shoulder.** This gets us far closer to completing the "circle of safety" around First Lake.
- **Rebuilding Phoenix Crescent,** which is where I first saw how much work was needed for our streets.

- **Cobequid Transit Terminal Refresh**
- **Sackville Sports Stadium** (minor upgrades)
- **Cavalier Drive Elementary School Park,** replacing the playground structures
- **First Lake Park,** replacing some of the equipment that was damaged
- **Completion of the First Lake Trail** by Chandler and Johnston.
- **Accessible trailhead for the Sackville Greenway Trail,** by the Lions Hall on Old Beaver Bank Road
- **Rebuilding Walker Service Road,** including adding speed humps
- **Adding speed humps** to Old Sackville Road, McGee Drive, Stokil Drive, and Smokey Drive
- **A marked and signalled crosswalk** on Beaver Bank Road at Boxwood Crescent and on Walker Avenue at Downsview Drive
- **Accessible pedestrian infrastructure** on Glendale Drive at Metropolitan and on Cobequid Road at Zinck Avenue

FUTURE CAPITAL PROJECTS

I am also working on some additional projects for our District. These have not been included in this budget year, but I am working on them for future budget years. Some of these are:

- **Old Beaver Bank Road bridge** - replacing it or adding pedestrian access
- **Old Beaver Bank Road sidewalk** - this is one of my major priorities
- **Stokil Drive sidewalk** - between the two schools
- **Sackville Sports Stadium expansion** - this will be determined by the previous survey and the report that will result from it, which is due in October.
- **A crosswalk** between the Sackville Library and Tim Hortons
- **Rebuilding Bridlewood Lane** - adding more drainage (in conjunction with Halifax Water)

I have made significant progress on the issues that were raised during the last election. Please get in touch with me if you have any concerns or items that would help make Lower Sackville an even better place to live.



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FIRST LAKE TESTING AND RESULTS

Ever since I've lived in Sackville (a little more than 25 years) First Lake has had a problem with the water.

The general health of the lake has improved greatly over the years. That being said, it has also continuously had a problem with E.coli.

One of the reasons that I wanted to become the Councillor was to absolutely identify the problems with the lake, and work to correct them.

I've been working with the Friends of First Lake - Water Stewardship Committee to help get the lake tested. In 2021 I provided funding for them to test the lake for general health (temperature, salinity, clarity, etc.) and also for the amount of E.coli.

Unlike previous testing, these tests were done in various locations around the lake. You can find more information about their results on this website: firstlake.ca/waterstewardship

We've also been moving forward with getting the source of the E.coli analyzed, and that work will be continuing this summer.

I initiated the process for a contract for more in-depth testing to determine what produced the E.coli (e.g. human, pet, waterfowl, or wildlife) and where the problem areas are.

The initial results from the Water Stewardship Committee suggest that the biggest problem is located with storm drains, which suggests runoff from our lawns and streets.

More in-depth testing will confirm or correct that. We hope to get their report back later this year. Once we have the results from the more in-depth testing, we will be able to state, with confidence, what is causing the problem. This will help us work towards a solution for it.

My goal is to protect the health of the lake.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Paul Russell, District 15 Councillor	902-240-0441
Victoria Palmeter, Constituency Coordinator	902-490-2012
Councillors' Office	902-490-4050
Mayor's Office	902-490-4010

Provincial Government Services	211
Municipal Inquiries	311
Directory Assistance	411
Provincial Road Conditions	511
Phone Repair Service	611
Public Health Inquiries	811
Emergency	911
MLA Steve Craig	902-864-6271
MP Darrell Samson	902-861-2311
RCMP, Sackville Detachment	902-244-7208
Police, Non-Emergency	902-490-5020
Fire, Non-Emergency	902-490-5530
Halifax Water	902-420-9287
Sackville Sports Stadium	902-869-4141
Kids Help Phone	902-668-6868
Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team	888-429-8167
Victims of Human Trafficking Helpline	833-900-1010
Red Cross Home Equipment Loan	902-423-3680
Poison Control	800-565-8161
NS Legal Aid	902-420-7921
Access Nova Scotia	902-424-5200
NS Occupational Health & Safety	800-952-2687
NS Power	902-428-6230
NS Power Outage Line	877-428-6004
NS Property Valuation Services Corporation	800-380-7775



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Delivery Note:

Due to the delivery routes followed by Canada Post, it is possible that some of these newsletters may appear in other Districts. If you receive it in error, I apologize for any confusion and hope you find its content useful.