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Item No. 15.1

Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee June 21, 2018

TO: Chair and Members of the Community Planning & Economic Development

Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Kelly Denty, Acting Director of Planning & Development

Original Signed

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: June 12, 2018

SUBJECT: Halifax Green Network Plan

<u>ORIGIN</u>

- Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy, October 2014:
 - Policy E-12: HRM shall prepare a Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan to protect and preserve connectivity between natural areas and open space lands, to enable their integration into sustainable community design, to help define communities, to benefit the Municipality's economy and the physical health of its people, and to reflect and support the overall purposes of this Plan.
- On April 25, 2017 Regional Council the following motion was put and passed:
 - That Halifax Regional Council direct that staff use the Halifax Green Network Plan Primer December 2016, attached as Attachment A of this report, as the framework for the final phase of public engagement, and for the development of the full consolidated Halifax Green Network Plan, and that staff return to Council for its consideration of the resulting Plan.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, clauses 79(1)(k)(ai):

- (1) The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for
 - (k) recreational programs;

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, clauses 229(1)(c)(d)(g)(j)(q):

- (1) A municipal planning strategy may include statements of policy with respect to any or all of the following...
 - (c) the protection, use and development of lands within the Municipality, including the identification, protection, use and development of lands subject to flooding, steep slopes, lands susceptible to subsidence, erosion or other geological hazards, swamps, marshes or other environmentally sensitive areas;
 - (d) stormwater management and erosion control;
 - (g) studies to be carried out prior to undertaking specified developments or developments in specified areas;
 - municipal investment for public and private development and the coordination of public programs relating to the economic, social and physical development of the Municipality; and
 - (q) any other matter relating to the physical, social or economic environment of the Municipality.

Administrative Order One, the *Procedures of the Council Administrative Order*, Schedule 3, Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee Terms of Reference, clauses 3 (a)(e)

- 3. The Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee shall provide oversight of the Municipality's Regional Plan and Regional Planning Initiatives, as follows:
 - (a) overseeing the Municipality's Regional Plan and Regional Planning Initiatives;
 - (e) overseeing the priority setting relative to the Community Visioning Program, Functional Plan Implementation and major planning projects.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council:

 Authorize the direction contained in the Halifax Green Network Plan, as contained in Attachment A, as a framework for amending the existing Regional Plan and Secondary Planning Strategies, and developing new planning documents as may be necessary to implement the Halifax Green Network Plan direction;

- 2. Direct staff to carry out the actions contained in the Halifax Green Network Plan as part of the multi-year budgeting and business planning process.
- 3. Request that the Province amend the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, as set out in Actions 18 and 61 of the Halifax Green Network Plan, to:
 - (a) enable the Municipality to acquire sensitive environmental lands (e.g. riparian areas, wetlands, steep slopes, etc.) as an environmental reserve through the land development and subdivision process, in addition to existing parkland dedication provisions; and
 - (b) enable a greater range of legislative abilities, such as the ability to enact parkland dedication requirements based on density to address development that does not include the subdivision of land.
- 4. Initiate the process to consider amendments to the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS) to support the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP) by referencing the HGNP within the conservation design development agreement policy criteria concerning the connectivity of open space; and
- 5. Adopt, by policy, the Public Participation Program outlined in the Community Engagement section of this report.

BACKGROUND

The Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP) was initiated in 2015 shortly after the adoption of the 2014 Regional Municipality Planning Strategy (Regional Plan). The 2014 Regional Plan directs the creation of the priorities plan to:

"...protect and preserve connectivity between natural areas and open space lands, to enable their integration into sustainable community design, to help define communities, to benefit the Municipality's economy and the physical health of its people, and to reflect and support the overall purposes of this Plan."

Originally entitled the "Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan", the plan was renamed in 2015 to the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP) to better reflect the comprehensive scope of the initiative and its review of all forms of green space in the region.

The HGNP planning process consisted of the following three phases.

Phase 1: Foundations (completed in Winter 2016)

Objective: To understand what we have, what we value, and where we want to go Outcomes:

- <u>State of the Landscape Report</u>, which reviewed the Region's current open space assets, strengths and challenges;
- Phase 1 "What We Heard" Engagement Report, which summarized all public feedback received during Phase 1; and

Region's cultural landscapes.

Cultural Landscapes Framework Report, which conducted a preliminary assessment of the

Phase 2: Planning Directions (completed in Winter 2017)

Objective: To understand landscape impacts and detailed ecological assessment, refine open space network scenarios and options, and develop planning and implementation directions.

Outcomes:

- <u>Halifax Green Network Plan Primer</u>, which provides preliminary policy direction for the final plan for public and stakeholder discussion and feedback; and
- Phase 2 "What We Heard" Engagement Report, which summarized all public feedback received during Phase 2.

Phase 3: Final Plan (Completed with this report)

Objective: To adopt a final priorities plan that guides Municipal decisions and actions related to land use planning, park network management, project work and partnerships, among other initiatives.

Outcomes:

- <u>Final Halifax Green Network Plan</u>, (Attachment A) which contains detailed objectives and actions; and
- <u>Phase 3 "What We Heard" Engagement Report</u>, which summarizes the feedback received on the primer report.

All completed HGNP studies and reports are found on the project website at the following link www.halifax.ca/HalifaxGreenNetwork

DISCUSSION

After extensive research and public engagement, the development of the HGNP is now complete and provides the detailed direction needed to help guide municipal decisions related to the sustainable management of the Region's network of parks and natural open spaces. The following sections review the Plan's key highlights, response to Regional Plan direction, and implementation.

Key Highlights

Overall, the HGNP shows that the Region has a remarkably diverse and intact system of green spaces. While the HGNP identifies areas for improvement, fortunately, the direction contained in the HGNP is able to build on HRM's existing assets and policy context. The following highlights key objectives and actions contained in the final HGNP according the plan's five theme areas: 1) Ecology; 2) Working Landscapes; 3) Community Shaping; 4) Outdoor Recreation; and 5) Cultural Landscapes.

Ecology

The landscape of the Region contains a diverse range of ecosystems including Acadian forests, rock barrens, wetlands and coastal areas. These ecosystems provide important habitats and critical ecosystem services, such as providing a reliable supply of fresh drinking water and managing stormwater runoff. Managing these areas requires balancing ecological integrity with human activity to ensure that key areas are protected and the benefits of natural ecosystems are maintained.

Goal: To support a healthy and sustainable natural ecosystem.

Key Highlights:

- adopt the HGNP Ecology Map (Map 5) in the Regional Plan;
- consolidate and apply environmental protection zones to large wetland complexes and vulnerable land forms;
- refine and strengthen existing variable watercourse buffering requirements;
- support naturalized approaches to storm water management; and
- request an amendment to the HRM Charter to enable the Municipality to acquire environmental reserves through the subdivision and development process, in addition to parkland dedication requirements.

Working Landscapes

Working landscapes are open spaces that support economic activity, such as resource extraction (e.g., mining, forestry), agriculture and tourism. These industries are important components of the Region's economy, especially in rural areas, and provide local resources for the Region's food, construction and manufacturing sectors. Well-managed working landscapes enable private land owners to benefit from their land holdings while contributing to natural landscape connectivity.

Goal: To support the sustainable use and management of the Region's natural resources.

Key Highlights:

- provide greater as-of-right opportunities for primary resource industries;
- limit or prohibit conservation design developments in the Regional Plan's Agricultural Designation; and
- relax restrictions on tourism related home-based businesses in rural areas and consider large scale rural based tourism proposals by rezoning or development agreement, where not already permitted.

Community Shaping

Open spaces shape communities and contribute to a sense of place. By considering the Green Network, valued open spaces can help establish clear community edges, natural connections and focal points, while contributing to the health and sustainability of neighbourhoods.

Goal: Use the Green Network to guide the growth and development of communities.

Key Highlights:

- consider the Green Network when reviewing and considering changes to the Urban Service Area, the Urban Settlement Designation and Urban Reserve Designation;
- prioritize the development of brownfield and infill sites over greenfield development areas;
- prioritize the preservation and creation of natural connections to the Chebucto Peninsula; and
- streamline development approval processes within clearly defined rural centres, while carefully
 controlling the scale and design of conservation design development proposals in areas located
 between these rural centres.

Outdoor Recreation

Much of the Municipality's outdoor recreation service delivery takes place on our diverse network of public parks. These parks can be described as important parcels of land, defined by natural and human

influences, that welcome people of all ages and abilities into its public realm to play, reflect and share their experiences.

Goal: Manage a municipal park network that meets the outdoor recreation needs of residents and visitors, supports ecological and cultural conservation, and shapes community form and identity. Key Highlights:

- promote the importance of parks for community health and well-being through improved communications and engagement and by accommodating all ages and abilities;
- establish a Park Spectrum that captures the range of user experiences and supports both recreation and natural systems and includes Federal and Provincial parks and school grounds;
- evaluate service delivery gaps and overlap;
- use the land capability tool, included in the HGNP, to evaluate existing and proposed parks;
- establish an Open Space Network in cooperation with provincial and federal governments and conservation groups;
- continue to place emphasis on establishing the Regional Parks identified in the Regional Plan, while recognize new nature parks and open space areas; and
- request an amendment to the *HRM Charter* to enable the Municipality to establish parkland dedication requirements based on density.

Cultural Landscapes

The landscape of the Halifax Region is characterized by a complex history of human habitation dating back over 10,000 years. Cultural Landscapes reflect the interaction between people and nature over time and include landscapes that have been created, used, modified or protected - from historic gardens to heritage conservation districts, from streetscapes to scenic views.

Goal: Identify, preserve and celebrate cultural landscapes and their value in connecting people to the land and telling their stories.

Key Highlights:

- develop a cultural landscape program through the Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan (CHPP);
- · clarify the scope and role of cultural landscapes studies as part of master planning exercises; and
- proactively engage underrepresented groups to identify valued cultural landscapes.

Regional Plan

Regional Plan Policy E-11 directs the development of the HGNP and outlines the items that the Plan may consider. The following table reviews these considerations in terms of the direction contained in the HGNP.

Table 1: Regional Plan Policy E-11

E-11 A Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan may consider:

| Regional Plan Considerations | HGNP Response |
|--|---|
| (a) coordinating and managing a program to | Chapter 4.1, Ecology, contains the HGNP ecology |
| research, identify and designate potential natural | Map (Map 5) that identifies core natural areas and |
| areas, systems and distinct landscapes, natural | wildlife corridors and recommends that the map be |
| corridors and critical ecosystem linkages, and | incorporated into the Regional Plan to guide policy |

| significant natural habitats to guide future development (see Map 5, Significant Habitats and Endangered Species and Appendix C: Species at Risk in HRM 2013); | decisions related to urban boundaries, regional parks and conservation design development agreements. This map may replace the existing Significant Habitats and Endangered Species map contained in the Regional Plan which is noted for context, but does not currently guide any policy decisions. |
|---|---|
| (b) coordinating and managing a program to research and identify potential public open space parks and corridors for the provision of quality open space for recreational and social development, restoration of natural corridor and urban ecosystem function, greenway networks to connect communities and provide mobility options and significant natural habitats to guide considerations of future development; | Chapter 4.3, Community Shaping, contains several objectives and actions to guide future development in relation to the Green Network. HGNP Chapter 4.4, Outdoor Recreation, provides direction for managing public open space, and assisting with fostering mental, physical and social well-being. |
| (c) establishing selection criteria, investment and management guidelines for public open space lands, infrastructure and sustainable natural open space management strategies; | Chapter 4.4, Outdoor Recreation, contains a number of objectives and actions to guide parkland acquisition, investment and management strategies, including a Land Capability Analysis Tool (Appendix B). |
| (d) examining criteria for classifying and developing HRM parks including comprehensive criteria for designating Regional Parks; | Chapter 4.4, Outdoor Recreation, recommends the adoption of a Park Spectrum approach that supports both recreation services delivery and natural systems protection and which includes Federal and Provincial parks and school grounds. |
| (e) assessing opportunities to further the development and establishment of management plans for the 1975 Regional Park System, the new Regional Parks proposed under this Plan, and other areas identified for their potential as regional parks; | Chapter 4.4, Outdoor Recreation, outlines specific direction for the Regional Parks identified in the Regional Plan. New Nature Regional Parks and open space areas are also identified. |
| (f) developing an evaluation methodology and criteria for determining land capability and functionality in meeting standards for the delivery of public open space services, open space conservation, community development and growth management; | Appendix B establishes a Land Capability Analysis Tool that is intended to be used to evaluate existing and proposed parklands in order to assist the municipality in acquisition and disposal decisions |
| (g) developing a system of interconnected public and natural undisturbed open spaces throughout HRM to include HRM parks, coastal areas and | The HGNP provides direction for maintaining a Regional Green Network consisting of ecological sensitive areas, working landscapes, public |

| watercourse shorelines, water route and land- based greenways as illustrated on the Trails and Natural Network Map (Map 3), multi-functional streets, environmental and cultural conservation areas, schools, natural corridors, habitats as well as other public and community facilities; | parklands and cultural landscapes. This direction includes considering and cooperating with other levels of government. |
|--|---|
| (h) establishing a greenway network that includes a variety of corridors such as linear parks, hiking trails, nature trails and scenic loops; | Chapter 4.4, Outdoor Recreation, provides direction for connections between parks and open space areas, that may include trails and ecological corridors. Direction concerning broader AT and mobility objectives are outline the Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP) and Active Transportation (AT) Priorities Plan. |
| (i) including a comprehensive planning approach for the retention of coastal and freshwater lake access and incentives for the protection of watercourse buffers; | Chapter 4.1, Ecology, provides direction to improve the protection of watercourse buffers. This chapter also recommends an <i>HRM Charter</i> amendment to enable the Municipality to acquire environmental reserves through the subdivision and development process. Chapter 4.4, Outdoor Recreation, has direction pertaining to connectivity to water bodies for recreation. |
| (j) developing an operational framework to include community partners, Federal and Provincial departments, non-profit groups and private sector companies; and | The Municipality engaged a wide variety of government and non-government stakeholders in preparing the HGNP. In addition, the HGNP emphasizes the importance of fostering partnerships to manage a sustainable Green Network and identifies several partnership opportunities. |
| (k) identifying, in cooperation with the Federal and Provincial government, species-at-risk habitats and annually review the Significant Habitats and Endangered Species Map (Map 5) and Appendix C: Species at Risk in HRM, 2013 contained in this Plan. | Federal and Provincial governments were consulted in preparing the HGNP and species at risk information contributed to the creation of the HGNP Ecology Map (Map 5). In addition, the HGNP provides direction for establishing partnership with the Federal and Provincial governments for monitoring the Region's biodiversity. |

Implementation Tools

The HGNP recommends a total of 79 actions needed to effectively support the Plan's vision, goals and objectives. The following sections describe the HGNP implementation tools.

Land Use Planning

The Municipality has adopted a number of land use policy and regulatory documents, including the Regional Plan, the Regional Subdivision By-law, secondary plans and land use by-laws, that control development on privately owned land. Together, these documents, among many other matters, regulate the location, shape and form of development including if and where new public roads can be constructed, the design and density of new development, parkland dedication requirements and watercourse setbacks. The HGNG recommends 27 actions that provide guidance and specific instructions on how to amend these planning documents through future project work.

Park Network Management

As the Municipality moves forward, there are a number of action items specific to the management of municipal parkland that support the goals and objectives set out in the HGNP. Initiatives range from changing policies regarding parkland dedication and how recreation service is delivered to promoting parks and open space for health and wellness, and having a formalized public engagement program. The HGNP recommends 22 actions related to park network management.

Current and Future Project Work

The Municipality is continually carrying out project work on a wide variety of items, from considering the development of new municipal business parks to reviewing corporate policies and by-laws. A number of the actions contained in this Plan guide current and future project work. Some projects may lead to strategic investments, programs, policies or regulations. The HGNP recommends 16 actions that guide current and future project work.

Partnerships

While the Municipality is a key government body in the Region, responsibility for managing the environment is shared between multiple levels of government, including Nova Scotia Environment and the Provincial Department of Natural Resources. Universities, non-profits and community groups also bring valuable expertise, information and resources to conservation efforts. Private landowners play an integral role in stewarding natural resources and investing in sustainable development approaches. The cultivation of partnerships, therefore, is important to carrying out many of the objectives identified in this Plan. The HGNP identifies 14 partnership opportunities.

Timeframe and Resource Implications

The HGNP discusses timeframes as well as the budget and resource implications associated with the recommended actions. In general, the HGNP direction is intended to be carried out with existing resources as part of the business plans for individual business units. For example, actions related to amending official planning documents guide the scope of the next Regional Plan review and plan and bylaw simplification program. Similarly, actions related to managing the Municipality's park network guide the preparation of the Parks & Recreation business unit's annual business plans. However, the HGNP also recognizes that some recommended actions, such as partnership opportunities, may lead to the development of new programs or identify strategic investments. Any resulting resource implications associated with the HGNP actions will be considered through the business planning cycle or project specific Council reports.

The timeframes outlined in the HGNP include items that provide immediate and on-going guidance to municipal activities and decisions, as well as actions that are expected to be implemented in a short (1-2 year), medium (2-4) or long (4-7 year) timeframe. These timeframes assume no additional resources are

dedicated to implementing the HGNP. Should Council decide that actions should be implemented within a shorter timeframe, staff advise that consideration would need to be given to resource needs through the regular budget and business planning cycle.

Immediate Regional Plan Amendment

Since 2006, the Regional Plan has permitted new large-scale rural housing developments only through the conservation design development agreement process. The conservation design approach is a creative form of subdivision designed to conserve open space and significant environmental features, such as wetlands, while clustering development in suitable areas. The existing conservation design development policies effectively conserve open space within proposed developments and support many of the HGNP objectives. However, there is little policy direction to consider broader regional landscape patterns and connectivity, which may inadvertently allow development within important wildlife corridors. Specifically, Regional Plan Policy S-17 states:

S-17: For any conservation design development application made pursuant to policies S-14, S- 15 or S-16, HRM shall consider the following criteria:

(k) connectivity is maintained with any open space on adjacent parcels and trails and natural networks, as generally shown on Map 3;

While the above policy criteria are helpful, it is limited due to it's specific reference to Map 3 of the Regional Plan. Map 3 does not map the important and essential wildlife corridors shown on the HGNP Map 5. Consequently, to avoid potential conflicts in the near term, staff recommend that Council initiate a narrowly focused amendment to the Regional Plan's conservation design development agreement policies to reference the HGNP. As the HGNP explains, broader Regional Plan policy changes will be implemented through the next Regional Plan review and plan and by-law simplification program.

Conclusion

As envisioned by the 2014 Regional Plan, the HGNP provides the coordinated and clear direction needed to help guide municipal decisions and support a sustainable network of green spaces. The specific actions set out in the HGNP build on the Region's assets and policy context and will continue to promote the Municipality's leadership role in stewarding the Region's environment. While further works lays ahead, the HGNP focuses municipal actions and promotes the key partnerships that are essential to the sustainable management of the Region's rich and diverse Green Network.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All actions contained in the HGNP are expected to be able to be carried out as part the business plans for individual business units. No new staff or budget items specific to the HGNP actions are anticipated at this time. However, project work and partnership opportunities may lead to the development of new programs or identify strategic investments. Any resulting budget implications will be considered through the business planning cycle or project specific Council reports.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Regional Plan Amendment

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendation to initiate a process to amend the Regional Plan to reference the HGNP within the conservation design development agreement polices. This direction involves proposed RMPS amendments. Such amendments are at the discretion of Regional Council and are not subject to appeal to the N.S. Utility and Review Board. Information concerning risks and other implications of adopting the proposed amendments are contained within the Discussion section of this report.

HGNP

There are risks associated both with adopting or rejecting the HGNP. The HGNP contains a number of actions that will be reviewed as part of future Council reports. Any risks associated with future changes to policies or by-laws will be identified as part of these future staff reports.

In identifying proposed actions aimed at better protecting the natural environment, there is a risk that land owners and developers will advance development proposals in the short term to avoid potential new regulations. However, these risks are mitigated by existing controls and planning processes that provide the opportunity to consider the HGNP. The proposed immediate Regional Plan amendment concerning conservation design development agreements is further intended to mitigate this risk.

Should the HGNP not be adopted, there is a risk that the direction contained within the Plan is not implemented and for municipal land management decisions to not support a connected Green Network and the Region's long-term sustainability.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

HGNP

Three phases of region-wide community and stakeholder engagement were conducted between May 2015 and June 2017. Engagement efforts included a total of 26 open houses, 11 stakeholder workshops, surveys, and the use of an interactive mapping tool. In total, participants provided over 10,000 comments as well as 1,051 'push pins' on the interactive map.

The final phase of public engagement, based on the direction outlined the HGNP Primer report, included six public meetings held in May and June 2017. While preparing the final HGNP, staff also consulted key stakeholders on items related to their area of expertise including consultations with Halifax Water, Our HRM Alliance, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Nova Scotia Environment, the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resource, and the Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

The input received from residents, community and industry groups, and provincial government departments through all phases of the project meaningfully contributed to the development of the HGNP. For more information, please see the "What We Heard" reports posted on the HGNP webpage. www.halifax.ca/HalifaxGreenNetwork

Regional Plan Amendment

Should Regional Council choose to initiate the RMPS amendment process related to the Regional Plan

conservation design development agreement policies, the *HRM Charter* requires that Regional Council approve a public participation program. In February of 1997, Regional Council approved a public participation resolution which provides broad discretion on the consultation process required for MPS amendments that are regional in nature. The 1997 policy provides that, for amendments that are regional in nature, staff would recommend an appropriate public participation program. Accordingly, staff recommends that Regional Council obtain stakeholder and public feedback through the Municipal website given the extensive public consultations carried out through the HGNP.

In addition to this public participation, the *HRM Charter* requires a public hearing to be held before Regional Council can consider approval of any amendments.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The HGNP directly addresses a number of environmental objectives in the Regional Plan and outlines many strategic actions for addressing multiple environmental issues. These include water resource management, landscape fragmentation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, stormwater management and flood mitigation, food security, and habitat protection.

ALTERNATIVES

The Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee may choose to recommend that Regional Council:

- 1. Modify the proposed HGNP. If this alternative is chosen, specific direction regarding the requested modifications is required. In addition, a supplementary report may be required depending on the extent of the changes.
- 2. Refuse to adopt the HGNP. This alternative is not recommended as it could result in poorly coordinated Municipal land management decisions that do not support a connected Green Network and the Region's long-term sustainability.
- 3. Not request that the Province amend the HRM Charter, as set out in Actions 18 and 61 of the Halifax Green Network Plan, to enable the Municipality to acquire sensitive environmental lands as an environmental reserve through the land development and subdivision process, in addition to existing parkland dedication provisions; and enable a greater range of legislative abilities, to enact parkland dedication requirements based on density to address development that does not include the subdivision of land.
- 4. Initiate the consideration of potential policy that would differ from those outlined in this report. This may require a supplementary report from staff.
- 5. Refuse to initiate the RMPS amendment process. A decision of Council not to initiate a process to consider amending the Regional Plan is not appealable to the NS Utility and Review Board as per Section 262 of the *HRM Charter*.

June 21, 2018

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP)

A copy of this report can be obtained online at $\underline{\text{halifax.ca}}$ or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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