



HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Introduction

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a best practice business advocacy organization that represents over 1,700 members and strives to make Halifax an even better place to live, work and play. It is the oldest Chamber in North America with roots dating to 1750 and was the first Chamber in North America to become ISO certified. The Chamber is an active voice for business at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

Over the summer, the Chamber underwent an extensive review and consultation, and produced its 2013-2018 Strategic Plan. It's a comprehensive plan with ambitious goals and defined targets. Key in the Strategic Plan is an overarching aspirational statement:

“The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is committed to enhancing the prosperity of its members and to realizing Halifax's potential to be among the top 3 highest growth city economies in Canada by 2018.”

To achieve this bold measure, it will be critical for the City, Province and community at large to collaborate and work towards common goals.

This submission will advise the City on the Chamber's direction for the next five years and seek the City's engagement on behalf of 1700 strong Chamber members, who represent 60,000 employees, and almost 1/3 of Halifax's workforce.

The Chamber Strategic Plan for 2013-18 is comprised of two external and an internal goal focused around our membership. Attached is a graphic description of the Chamber goals and focus areas for the next five years.

Of particular importance to our City is ***Goal 1- Create a Positive Business Environment***, in which each key element which will look to have the City partner with the Chamber and its task forces to reach the overarching aspirational statement. The focus of this submission will be on Goal 1 and its key elements.

ON PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Although Halifax is seeing an increase in entrepreneurs, particularly young entrepreneurs, such as Jevon MacDonald and Saeed El-Darahali, Halifax still ranks in the bottom of the pack when it comes to top entrepreneurial cities in Canada.

According to CFIB's Communities in Boom 2012 Report, which ranks cities of 25,000 and over on 14 indicators grouped in 3 main categories: *presence, perspective and policy*, Halifax ranks 55th out of 103 cities. What is more enlightening, is smaller cities in Nova Scotia scored better than Halifax. We should be asking ourselves, what can we learn from them?

The qualifying Atlantic Canadian municipalities appeared in the following order, beginning with those most business-friendly:

Municipality	Rank (out of 103)	Overall Score (0-100)
St. John's (N.L.)	10	57
Miramichi (N.B.)	26	52
Charlottetown (P.E.I.)	33	51
Corner Brook (N.L.)	35	51
Kentville (N.S.)	38	50
Fredericton (N.B.)	40	50
Moncton (N.B.)	45	50
Bathurst (N.B.)	54	48
Halifax (N.S.)	55	48
New Glasgow (N.S.)	75	45
Truro (N.S.)	77	45
Saint John (N.B.)	78	45
Cape Breton (N.S.)	93	41

Source: [CFIB Communities in Boom](#)

Chamber members ask:

- What strategies will our City implement to ensure that entrepreneurs are welcomed to our City and provided with the resources to prosper?
- Will the City commit to collaborating with the Chamber in an effort to reach its aspirational statement during the mandate of the Strategic Plan - 2013-2018?
- Will the City encourage economic development authorities to place special emphasis on entrepreneurs and the importance on being innovative?

ON CAPITALIZING ON MAJOR PROJECTS

The Halifax Chamber is delighted to see that our Mayor is committed to selling Halifax's brand not only nationally but globally. For example, in September, Halifax and the city of Aberdeen, Scotland signed a renewed agreement to pursue opportunities in the energy, education and tourism sectors. Agreements like this are crucial in ensuring Halifax has global recognition.

The Chamber, through its All Ships Rise program, has seen members take advantage of educational, networking and mentorship opportunities in an effort to grow their businesses and have a stake in the major projects on the horizon.

Chamber members ask:

- How will the Mayor and City Council continue to promote Halifax as a global player in an effort to give Halifax a global brand?

ON TAX AND REGULATION

Advocating for fair commercial taxes and common sense regulations is at the core the Chamber's advocacy work. In recent times, the Chamber has seen results through its efforts. For example, in the 2013-2014 Budget, commercial tax rates were reduced by 0.5% in addition to the phase out of the Business Occupancy Tax. These are positive steps in making our City more competitive, prosperous and attractive for businesses, local and abroad.

Although positive steps have been taken, more work lies ahead. According to the Real Property Association of Canada and Altus Group's 2012 Report, Halifax has the second highest commercial tax rates in the country among eight major cities. With commercial taxes that average \$37.87 per \$1,000 of commercial assessment, the national average was \$27.56 per \$1,000 of assessment.

In addition to taxes being a burden for Chamber members, members in the development industry are indicating that site plan approval times are also cumbersome and slowing growth. According to the Greater Halifax Partnership (GHP), site plan approval times are not hitting service standards. With the exception of Downtown Halifax, Site Plan Approvals did not hit service standards, and many timelines were longer than they were in 2011. This is a concerning trend as development activity (particularly urban and suburban projects which are more complex) has increased. Expediting approval times is one factor in supporting a healthier business climate.

Chamber members ask:

- Will the City commit to reducing commercial tax rates to competitive rates over the next five years?
- How will the City ensure that site plan approvals are dealt with in an efficient and timely manner so developers can commence and spur economic growth?

- Will the City commit to working with the Chamber's task force to review and improve commercial taxes and regulations?

ON CREATING A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN CORE

Our downtown is currently witnessing positive change. There are numerous cranes in the sky, many new restaurants opening and the Convention Centre has the potential to attract thousands of people to our downtown annually. Some of this success can be attributed to the HRM Regional Plan and HRMbyDesign; some can also be attributed to Halifax's driven entrepreneurs who recognize that our City has an enormous amount of potential.

The Regional Plan has also seen success in reaching its growth targets. For instance, the growth target for rural growth was 25% and as of 2013 the number stood at 23.6%. The target for suburban is 50% and the most recent number surpassed this goal which currently stands at 59.5%. We have been unsuccessful as a City though in attracting citizens to urban areas, particularly downtown. The growth target was 25% and most recent numbers stand at 16.9%.

Clearly, more work is needed to attract more citizens to our City's urban centre. However, we must first understand why citizens are not already moving there. Is it too expensive purchase a home? Is crime too high? Is it unattractive for young families? Is transit the problem? These are questions that need to be answered, and the Chamber is willing to collaborate with the City to find answers in an effort to make our downtown as vibrant as it can be.

Chamber members ask:

- What does the City plan to do to increase density in the downtown?
- How will the City support major projects in our City?
- Is a review of the effectiveness of HRMbyDesign planned?

In conclusion, the Chamber's Strategic Plan will be in place during this Council's mandate. Although the Chamber's Strategic Plan is ambitious, the Chamber believes that the goals set out are achievable through collaboration between the business community, City and Province.

The Chamber has launched new task forces to focus on each goal, and its members expect that the City will collaborate with these task forces to share and exchange knowledge and action, to make our City business-friendly and vibrant.