

June 9, 2016

Halifax Regional Council

City Hall

1841 Argyle Street, Main Floor

PO Box 1749

Halifax, NS B3J 3A5

Dear Mayor Savage and Councillors of the Halifax Regional Municipality,

It only takes a quick trip around Halifax's Regional Centre to see that the city is changing. Construction cranes dot not just the downtown core, but the Halifax peninsula and Dartmouth as well.

First, let me be clear that this is an enormously positive development for our city. New construction brings new residents to the core, supports local businesses, creates jobs, and contributes to vibrant neighbourhoods. Nevertheless it has also become evident that the zoning by-laws for the Regional Centre have not kept up with the pace of change. The various municipal planning strategies and land-use by-laws that govern the Regional Centre are inconsistent, and often many decades old.

The Regional Centre Plan project is an excellent opportunity to ensure that the Regional Centre has a planning document that supports increased density, creates certainty for residents and developers, and helps build attractive communities. The Plan will also help achieve the growth targets set out in the Halifax's Regional Plan. Focusing growth in the central areas of Halifax will reduce cost pressures on the municipality and help keep Halifax competitive as a place to do business. Achieving the population goals set out in the Regional Plan will save Halifax almost \$700 million in additional costs.

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce has been a strong supporter of the Regional Centre Plan for a number of years, going back to the Municipal Pre-Budget Submission we released in 2014. Helping build a vibrant downtown core is also a critical part of our 2013-2018 Strategic Plan and we have worked to support a balanced approach to development and regional planning. For example, we supported the RP+5 process in 2014 and were heavily involved in supporting HRMbyDesign.

Championing common sense regulations is also a major focus for the Chamber. A complicated and overly long development process creates extra costs for business and discourages investment. We will be looking for the Regional Centre Plan to adhere to the following principles that will make it easier for developers to do business in our city.

- **Predictability:** Businesses in Halifax are looking for clear, modernized rules about what kinds of development are allowed in different parts of the Regional Centre. The Regional Centre Plan needs to establish which parts of the city are best positioned to absorb growth and create clear guidelines.

- Timely: The Plan needs to establish publicly available timelines for processing development applications in the Regional Centre.
- Transparency: The development approval process should be transparent to businesses, developers, and residents. As the City's backgrounder on the Regional Centre Plan noted, "The lack of a standardized approach among the various MPSs and LUBs often results in confusion within the development community, which can lead to potential project delays and added costs."
- Accountability: The Regional Centre Plan needs to create clear lines of accountability so that it is well known who is responsible for what.

So far Regional Council and city staff have done an excellent job engaging stakeholders and the public about the Regional Centre Plan. It is important to remember however, that no plan will please everyone and eventually a decision will have to be made. The Regional Centre Plan has been discussed in one form or another since 2006. Both residents and developers are eager to see greater planning certainty in the Regional Centre and we strongly urge you to complete and approve the Plan without delay.

If there is anything the Chamber can do to help you in your work please do not hesitate to let me know.

Kind Regards,



Patrick Sullivan,
President and CEO

"The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a best-practice, business advocacy organization that continuously strives to make Halifax an even more attractive city in which to live, work, and play. Together, the approximately 1,500 member businesses and their over 63,000 employees, we act as a single powerful voice to promote local business interests."

cc: Bob Bjerke, Chief Planner and Director, Planning and Development
Jacob Ritchie, Urban Design Program Manager