

Creating Our Future

A submission of the Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce on
Regional Planning in Halifax Regional Municipality

The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce is committed to ensuring that there will be a comprehensive regional plan developed to guide the future growth of Halifax. A strong business climate and a healthy, growing community go hand in hand.

Halifax must create its own future. Simply predicting growth and responding to those predictions is not enough. It is necessary to set growth targets, understand what this means in terms of settlement patterns and service requirements and prepare accordingly. The pitfalls of patchwork sprawl must be avoided by making smart growth a self-fulfilling prophecy, by designing how Halifax should grow from this point forward.

An aggressive, ambitious and challenging plan will paint a compelling view of what Halifax can be in the future. It will guide growth. This is an opportunity to create a future Halifax and to make the region an even better place to live, work and play.

Vision:

A strong and compelling vision for Halifax that stakeholders can align toward is required. The vision must paint a picture of what a highly desirable set of community characteristics looks like. All stakeholders must then all behave in such a manner that this vision becomes a reality.

Principles:

In addition to the principles already articulated by the HRM planning team, there are other principles that should be explicitly stated and respected.

The plan must be **flexible** and efficient. Any plan, to be truly functional must be flexible and scalable to keep pace in a changing environment. If growth assumptions change, the plan must be able to change in concert. All assumptions used for planning purposes should be reviewed regularly and modified when necessary. The plan must encourage the efficient undertaking of new development and the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities.

Sustainability is key. The plan must respect the principles of economic and environmental sustainability; providing for tactical decisions to be made in the context of a long-term vision.

An effective regional plan will serve as a **decision-making framework** against which intelligent choices and decisions can be made quickly. A framework that allows for predictability is needed so that businesses can plan for growth within defined

parameters. There should be no surprises. For example, it should become relatively easy for stakeholders, such as private developers, to predict whether opportunities they are pursuing will be considered as consistent or inconsistent with planning directives.

An effective plan is **easily accessible, transparent, simple** and easily understood by all stakeholders. Openness and simplicity are key to a living breathing document.

The plan must be **timely**. The current timeline to see a regional plan approved in 2005 underscores the need to proceed as expeditiously as possible. A sense of urgency is encouraged. Above all, the committed timeframes must be met and slippage avoided.

The plan must foster **competitiveness** and enhance the region's ability to attract, retain and enable the growth of business. It is important to recognize that Halifax is in competition regionally, nationally and internationally. Local competitive advantages must be recognized and exploited.

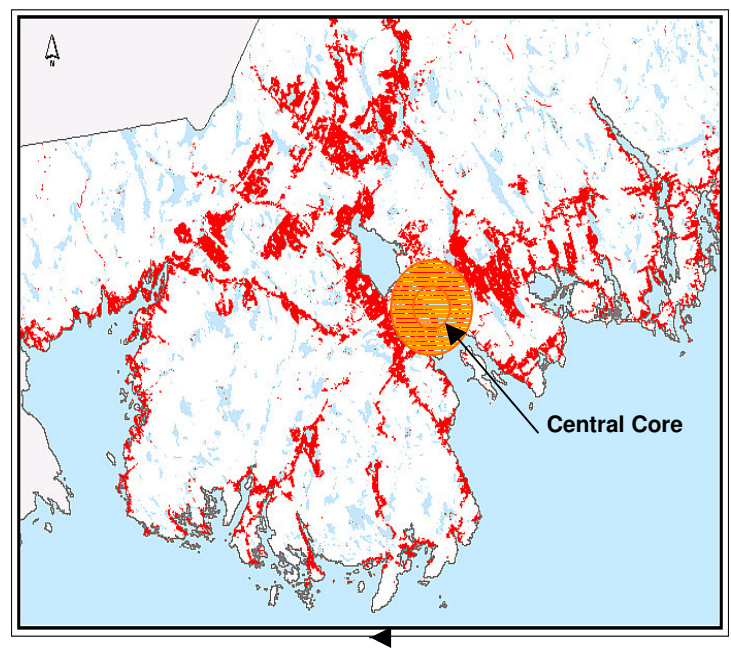
The plan needs to recognize the differences and similarities between the residential and business communities. **Balance and integration** between the needs and demands of residential and business communities is necessary.

Measurement and accountability are key to the on-going success of a plan once it is developed. Clear metrics and targets need to be established and HRM must be held accountable for attaining them.

These components are all key to a successful regional plan.

Capital District:

The Chamber agrees with the need to single out the Capital District as an area for emphasis as it serves as a commercial, cultural and recreational focal point for the broader community. In many ways, a municipality is defined to the outside world by the characteristics of its central core; a core that should project itself as a vibrant, healthy and safe place where commerce, recreation, culture and government are 'headquartered'. It is important to emphasize a strong central core as it is the economic generator of the region. Rather than define this central core with strict boundaries, the Chamber believes that should be generally defined by the areas including and surrounding the downtown harbour front core.



Regional Planning Themes:

The HRM planning process has been divided into five key theme areas:

- Economy
- Environment
- Settlement
- Transportation
- Halifax Harbour

Economy:

Creating a strong economy requires ensuring a strong business environment that attracts, retains and helps grow business. It requires competitive tax conditions and a favourable business environment.

Halifax's current and future competitive advantages must be identified and exploited. It is important to be clear about what Halifax is to become and how it is to be perceived relative to competing municipalities regionally, nationally and globally.

The current publicly-issued planning material states that "HRM has the opportunity to remain competitive". The Chamber recommends that the bar be raised to a more aggressive height:

- Define measures of competitiveness.
- Establish competitiveness goals.
- Develop plans to achieve those goals.

For Halifax to put itself on the same economic playing field as competing municipalities, the role of a stronger, entrepreneurial immigrant community must be considered. Halifax's immigrant community is very small relative to the population of the region, therefore the community is not benefiting as much as it could from this economic driver. Overall net migration from *outside* Nova Scotia must increase. The city's growth and success will be stifled if immigration is not recognized as an important economic driver.

In simplest terms, Halifax must be better positioned to attract and retain people who are entrepreneurially inclined. It must be seen as a good career move to live in Halifax. To attract people, they must believe that all facets of their lives will be well served here. For example, the public education system in HRM must be seen as superior and communications infrastructure in HRM should be enhanced.

Finally, Halifax must be seen as business-friendly and the municipality's leadership must articulate this message. The perception among existing and new businesses must be that it is very easy to establish and conduct business in Halifax. Reality must live up to the perception. A potential area to consider is that of cooperation and coordination across the Atlantic region. For example, "one set of rules", and regulations governing the whole region could make it easier to attract business. This could more efficiently

serve the whole region and Halifax could be positioned as the natural hub of this part of the world.

Environment:

Halifax is blessed with natural assets. Focus should be on preserving and improving what exists as opposed to creating new environmental assets. For example, to help ensure Halifax is viewed as a good place to live, work and play, the Harbour, lakes, ocean fronts and other waterways needed to be clean such that people can live near them, play in/on them and commercial activity can still be enabled.

Beyond simply the natural environmental assets Halifax possesses, the overall aesthetics of the community should be considered. The blend of natural and man-made characteristics should present Halifax as an aesthetically attractive and healthy place.

Development should occur in such a way as to encourage and enable ready access to areas for active or passive recreational activity. Halifax's environmental assets, of which there are many, must be preserved and improved.

Settlement:

Development should occur by design, not by default. The plan must define and influence where development occurs, and for what purpose.

The plan must 'get out ahead' of development and natural sprawl so that growth can be encouraged and accommodated. However, it must be done in such a way as to enable efficient and effective deployment of infrastructure and services. The plan needs to consider the sustainability of both commercial and residential developments. For example, the pitfalls associated with permitting residential development to occur in such a manner that it threatens the sustainability of key commercial activity must be avoided.

The plan must recognize that different communities within have different needs, and that it is not essential that all areas of HRM be serviced in exactly the same way. Each community should receive the type and level of service that is appropriate for the needs of that community.

The broad concept of "Live, Work and Play" should be reflected in the design of the municipality. Overall, people must have their need to live, work and play addressed. As settlement patterns become more predetermined, they must be designed with these three dimensions of citizens' lives in mind.

Transportation:

Halifax is a true intermodal link to the world. This strategic advantage must be exploited and enhanced. Halifax is uniquely positioned to be an inter-modal transportation hub

and should take an integrated approach encompassing roads, rail, air and sea. To reach full potential intermodal transportation must be strategically improved.

Development plans must contemplate the need to efficiently and effectively transport people to and from where they live, work and play. Transportation cannot be an afterthought to development. Alternative modes of transportation must be introduced to decrease disproportionate reliance on roadways.

Focus should extend beyond intra-HRM travel. People generally settle in concentric circles around the urban core, and the municipality draws strength and energy from people who work and play in HRM, but may live beyond its jurisdictional boundaries. Transportation plans must therefore contemplate settlement patterns beyond HRM proper.

The plan should explicitly recognize the distinction between:

- Commuting within HRM
- Commuting from outside HRM (but within Nova Scotia) to HRM
- Transportation for commercial and recreational purposes to and from HRM by road, rail, sea and air.

Transportation plans must accommodate the need for people and goods to move with ease between where they work, live and play.

Halifax Harbour:

The full potential of the Harbour should be exploited. The harbour is a critical asset from commercial, recreational and residential perspectives and special emphasis on it is warranted.

This environmental asset must be improved. This should be the primary environmental concern in the regional planning process. If the Harbour was cleaned-up then it could be truly multi-faceted (like Sydney Harbour in Australia) – live near it, work on it and play in it.

As an important source of economic value, the Harbour's ability to facilitate commerce must not be sacrificed. A balance between commercial and recreational purposes must be, and can be, achieved. The Harbour must remain a "working port".

Other Issues:

To ensure the region continues to grow as the plan is being developed through 2005, there should be a bias toward action where it is obvious that such action is directionally correct. An example of this is the clean up of Halifax Harbour. We know a clean Harbour is the right answer, and we do not need wait for a final regional plan to confirm this.

In the Plan, disproportionate emphasis must not be given purely to guiding physical development; the “softer” issues related to information technology, people and ‘smart community’ concepts must also be addressed. All these together make Halifax a more attractive place to live, work and play.

Across all themes contemplated in this regional plan, the concept of developing a truly healthy community should be apparent. Development should occur in a way that acknowledges the long term benefits associated with healthy living. Clean air, clean water, fitness and recreation opportunities and healthy transportation alternatives can all contribute.

The success of the regional plan requires strong visionary leadership from elected officials, municipal staff, the business community, community groups and other stakeholders. Each has a part to play.

Regional planning should be less about predicting what will happen and more about what the community wants to make happen. This must be viewed as an opportunity to create a future Halifax, rather than simply an exercise in positioning ourselves against economic predictions. We must create our future, not predict it.

The Chamber is excited and committed to ensuring the prosperous growth of Halifax by contributing to the regional planning initiative. Halifax is experiencing a growth phase and the business community is pleased to contribute to developing a strong foundation on which to build a vibrant and healthy community. Regional planning is of utmost importance to the business community and the region overall, to maintain the long-term health and strength of our community.

The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a best-practice business organization that continuously strives to make Halifax an even more attractive city in which to live, work and play. The almost 2,000 Chamber members employ more than one half of Metro Halifax’s labour force.