



“Healthy Growth for HRM” Project Submission

Submitted to Anne Muecke, Project Manager
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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 has a stake in ensuring a solid regional plan. The Chamber represents over one quarter of the workforce in HRM and our members look to the Chamber to voice their concerns and to support a healthy business climate. It is our belief that a strong business climate and a healthy, growing community go hand in hand. A key goal of the Chamber is to “demonstrate leadership in planning a city by design for HRM”, which has guided our participation in this process. A strong business community helps to ensure economically sustainable and healthy growth in our region.

The Chamber is excited and committed to the opportunity of contributing to the regional planning initiative. HRM 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.

The Chamber has identified the following principles that we strongly recommend be included in the regional plan:

- Competitiveness
- Efficiency
- Sustainability
- Balance and Integration
- Measurement

Now and in the future, as priorities are set, principles governing the regional plan must be at the forefront.

Competitiveness

Ensuring our region is competitive at local, regional, national, and international levels must be a key priority of the regional plan. If our region is going to continue to grow and prosper, in the global economy, the principle of competitiveness is key.

- The regional plan must be developed and implemented in such a way to maintain sound, predictable, fiscal policy to ensure a competitive tax climate.
- Planning initiatives should be developed to attract new businesses to HRM while at the same time recognize the potential of existing business.
- The regional plan must ensure all information with respect to doing business in HRM is easily accessible and transparent.
- Any development decisions must be fairly and consistently applied to all businesses and implemented in a predictable and cost-effective manner with accountability mechanisms clearly outlined.
- The plan should recognize the potential of any offshore activity and where possible leverage offshore activity so that economic development is optimized and sustainable.

Efficiency

As a regional plan is developed, it is important to ensure that all aspects encompass the principle of efficiency. Whether the topic is finance, infrastructure or planning, efficiency must be a top priority.

- Infrastructure must be planned and managed efficiently. Where possible, opportunities should be taken that will maximize the utility and flexibility of all public infrastructure (e.g. consider multi-use facilities).
- The regional plan must highlight the importance of being proactive in taking advantage of opportunities for providing new services when they are readily available (e.g. lay fibre optic cable at the same time as natural gas pipeline).
- The regional plan must include the development of an integrated transportation strategy (with a clear set of objectives) that is capable of transporting people, goods and services to the business community in an effective and efficient manner.
- While efficiency is key, the regional plan must also have an element of flexibility to allow the region to accommodate and maximize the utility of any potential economic development opportunities that may arise (e.g. legacy events such as Commonwealth Games, natural resource development).

Sustainability

The tactics that ultimately become a part of the regional plan must, in all instances, reflect the principles of economic and environmental sustainability.

- A key component of the plan should be to control urban sprawl in support of economically and environmentally sustainable development. For example, it is imperative that service provision is sustainable now and in the future. The short and long term fiscal and environmental costs of servicing new growth areas must be clearly understood. The regional plan should encourage policies that outline means to manage development costs.
- In the long-term, we need to maintain a strategic focus, however, if there are areas that require immediate attention, we suggest implementing solutions in the short-term so as not to hinder the sustainability of current operations.

Balance and Integration

The Chamber believes it is imperative that a regional plan balances the needs of the residential and business communities. Integration and cooperation within and between all levels of government and the private sector must also be encouraged.

- The business community must not only be adequately represented throughout the regional planning process, but also as subsequent decisions affecting business in the municipality are made.
- A communications mechanism should be incorporated into the regional plan that would solicit and receive feedback from the business community so that issues and concerns from the business community can be understood.
- A fundamental premise will be to foster integration between and within the public and private sectors. It will be crucial for all levels of government, along with the business community, to commit to open communications with one another to ensure an effective and sustainable regional development plan. Together, as a group, we can ensure that growth does not occur by default.

Measurement

Monitoring progress and measuring success are key components to future advancements. A new regional plan must contain measurements and accountability. Including a mechanism for measurement will ensure that success can be tracked and further progress can be made.

- An evaluation mechanism should be introduced not only to evaluate the effectiveness of the regional plan, but also to ensure that the principles outlined in the plan are being followed.
- Measures must be introduced to monitor the overall impacts of development and growth, to ensure efficiency.
- Both tangible and intangible costs of development must be measured to ensure sustainability.

The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce appreciates the opportunity to express the interest of the business community. The Chamber is committed to ensuring the prosperous growth of HRM. We look forward to working with you to build a healthy and vibrant 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 2,000-plus Chamber members employ more than 60,000 people, representing over one quarter of Metro Halifax's labour force of 204,000.