

Open Letter to Mayor Savage and Council

Why It is Important to Play by the Rules

As residents of HRM, we know we must not park on the street when there is a winter parking ban. We know we must separate our recyclables and organics from our garbage. And we know we are not allowed to keep our neighbours awake with loud parties late at night. We know these things because there are rules – rules that were developed by a professional civil service, with considerable input from residents and approved by our elected officials. When everyone knows the rules, and the rules are enforced equitably, residents can feel confident they are being treated fairly and know what to expect. This structured application of laws is one of the hallmarks of a civilized society.

HRM would not arbitrarily change the rules to allow residents on one street to put out more bags of garbage than residents on the neighbouring street; nor would it permit one resident, but not his/her neighbours, to park on the street overnight after a snow storm. Yet, Council routinely approves requests by individual developers to create a special set of rules that apply only to them and their properties. These requests are granted in the form of site-specific amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategies (MPS) and Land Use By-laws (LUB). These two policies govern what one can build in HRM – and how much one can build. In exceptional circumstances, if conditions can be demonstrated to have changed to a considerable degree, Council has the authority to amend the MPS and LUB. However, over the past seven years, Council has amended the MPS and LUB close to 200 times, with little or no demonstration of how

circumstances have changed and why major amendments are warranted.

Developers have argued that the MPS and LUB are outdated. In response, HRM has been engaged for over two years in developing a new Regional Centre Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (the Centre Plan). As part of the Centre Plan process, hundreds of HRM residents have attended open houses, responded to online surveys and shared their views in numerous written submissions. Residents have done so because we believed that our efforts would contribute to a new set of development guidelines that are fair, up-to-date and reflective of our values and aspirations for our city.

In the meantime, some developers who do not like the existing rules and do not want to wait for the new rules, instead continue to request site-specific zoning amendments for their properties and the City continues to accept their applications and consider them. This completely undermines the integrity of the Centre Plan process and the faith that residents have placed in it.

Therefore, we request that you, Mayor Savage and Council:

- **Do not approve any further applications to amend the MPS and LUB in the Regional Centre until the Centre Plan has been completed and approved.**
- **Treat the draft Centre Plan as a draft, not as the basis for making current decisions.**

The draft Centre Plan's recommendations are subject to further public input, revision by staff, and approval by Council. To use the draft as a basis for approving amendments would send a message to residents that the draft plan is a fait accompli, and that any further input on our part would be pointless.

Some may argue that respecting the existing laws would take away the rights of developers and penalize them. On the contrary: Developers have the right to develop their properties according to the laws that are currently in place (the existing MPS and LUB); or they can wait for the new rules in the approved Centre Plan. The only thing that would be taken away from developers is something they did not have in the first place: the "right" to develop their properties according to their own individual desires.

We have heard this developer argument recently in the Annapolis Group's lawsuit against HRM, over the proposed development of the Blue Mountain / Birch Cove Lakes area. Because HRM is contesting the Annapolis Group's legal action, we must assume that the City disagrees with the premise that a party can be harmed if they do not receive a benefit that had never been granted to them in the first place.

All of us want to see HRM grow and prosper. We support the creation of greater density within the Regional Centre. However, this growth and density can be accomplished effectively only within the framework of a well-thought-out, integrated planning strategy.

Therefore, we respectfully ask you to grant the two requests highlighted above.

Sincerely,

Coalition for Responsible Development in HRM:

- Bloomfield Neighbourhood Residents Association
- Friends of Schmidtville
- Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia
- North and Oxford Development Group
- North End Community Health Centre
- Our Chebucto Neighbourhood
- Park to Park Community Association
- Peninsula South Community Association
- Rockwood Community Association
- United Neighbourhood
- Willow Tree Group
- Wyse Society for Sensible Urban Development

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