

HRM's Planning Culture Needs to Change

Response to the Licensed Professional Planners of Nova Scotia's Request for Input on the Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality Act

Urban planning in Halifax Regional Municipality is inordinately focused on development form and what planners think buildings are supposed to look like. Less emphasis on those parameters and more emphasis on housing needs would be welcome.

The 10 points listed below define, in part, a culture of planning in Halifax Regional Municipality that housing suppliers and advocates are trying to work within.

- 1) HRM has not updated its 2015 Housing Needs Assessment. The data in that document is now 10 years old, so quite clearly planning in HRM is not focused on housing needs.
- 2) Urban design rules, particularly those regulating the design of buildings, are un-costed and have an impact on the cost of housing.
- 3) Regional development charges impact feasibility and the ability to finance non-profit housing projects.
- 4) Cluster housing design - using small scale wastewater management systems - would provide important housing options, however, that is all but ruled out. HRM commissioned a study on this important subject in 2005, accepted the study, but didn't implement its recommendations. Instead, the planning department prefers growth management policies based on an outdated model that didn't include the cost of upgrading infrastructure in the regional centre in its analysis.
- 5) If Regional Council directs that a municipal planning strategy be amended to address housing for a vulnerable population, then that's what should be done. Under what circumstances would that motion give the planning department carte blanche to impose its theories about managing growth?
- 6) Plan amendments in HRM take a ridiculous amount of time.
- 7) People have a right to age in their communities and that includes higher density living.
- 8) The Regional Plan is failing HRM's rural communities.
- 9) HRM's Affordable Housing Work Plan isn't working.
- 10) HRM is behind many other municipalities in Atlantic Canada who are making more concerted policy and investment efforts to address their housing needs.

In short, I support the Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality Act and look forward to some of the above issues being addressed and hopefully resolved.