



"for the use of the inhabitants of the town of Halifax as Common forever" (1763-2013)

June 19, 2017

Mayor Savage, Councilors and CAO Jacques Dubé
Box 1749, Halifax. NS B3J 2A5

Dear Mayor Savage, Councilors and M. Dubé:

Re: Proposal for a Private Stadium at the Public Wanderer's Grounds

Friends of Halifax Common write once again to express concerns about the proposed for-profit, private Stadium on the public's Halifax Common. FHC has not opposed HRM engaging with the private presenter Sports Entertainment Atlantic to pursue a private stadium but it does oppose locating it on the Halifax Common. We recommended that a more measured engagement be undertaken than simply following the SEA lead. It is therefore disappointing that the HRM staff report glosses over legitimate concerns and shows a disturbing bias towards favouring the needs and interests of the private developer ahead of the interests of the broader citizenry or the Halifax Common. Although the proponent's slides and letters of support are included in the HRM report, no letters of concern seem to be attached.

We remind you that twenty-three years ago the public consultation and development of the 1994 Halifax Common Plan occurred as a result of the collision between the for-profit, private use of the Halifax Common for the Moosehead Grand Prix and a groundswell of steadfast public unwillingness to endure that private use and its inconveniences.

The 1994 Plan mentions in a few places how dissatisfied the public was about the Grand Prix and the public comment summary references *"one person suggesting that Bill 195, in which the City Charter was amended to allow auto racing on the Common and charging admission, should be rescinded and the question on whether to have the race or not should be on the next municipal ballot."* **Comments also mention that the public was fed up with how ad hoc the city was in its decisions about the common and a lack of process.**

Concerts on the Common are a more recent example of the failure of HRM Mayor and Council to balance the interests of the public over private profit-seeking ventures or to negotiate, manage and regulate such contractual agreements and their obligations.

Specific concerns on the staff report include:

Process:

The recommendation that the HRM staff report supporting the Stadium be fast-tracked to Regional Council for consideration rather than the usual return to the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) because of the proponent's short timeframe confirms the one-sided nature of the staff position. Why is the fallback position that HRM allow the unsolicited private use of a public place for private profit because of the imperative of SEA's timeframe? What's the rush?

Current Use:

The report confirms that the Wanderers' Grounds are heavily used to the near limit. This participatory use by amateur sports players of all ages must not be curtailed or redirected elsewhere due to a private venture favouring a professional team with an objective to make profit from passive spectators. At a minimum this private use of the field will take up 20% of the ~325 hr/yr of present public use. Suggesting, "*HRM would need to work with various user groups to consider appropriate use and alternative field locations,*" (p5) is not credible given HRM's track record with players and teams that have been displaced from the North Common. The highest and best use is public use.

\$1 million in Public Money:

The proponent is viewed favourably because he wants no money but the report makes no mention of the 'market' value of the public nor of recent and on-going upgrades paid for by citizens' tax dollars nor why a private user should be the beneficiary. For example: A lighting contract awarded in April 2014 cost **\$305,975.00**. And although FHC has not found the contract awarded for work being presently undertaken the January 2017 HRM staff report requested **\$1.1 million** for improvements, irrigation and turf improvements, including players benches, a new scoreboard, sod and fencing.

Not a temporary use:

The HRM Staff Report does not address that a three- or six-year stadium is not a temporary use, that the team as part of a national soccer league is an ongoing not a temporary commitment towards a future bid for the 2025 FIFA or that the proponent has stated that: "*By two years of that three-year cycle, I think we'll have a great idea on whether or not that site works and is there a desire for something more permanent on that site.*" <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/wanderers-ground-halifax-pop-up-stadium-pro-soccer-1.4037963>

The promoter has identified potential uses as an outdoor concert venue for 2,500 to 3,000 seats as well as a stadium for International Women's Rugby, Lacrosse, and Ultimate Frisbee. There is a clear plan for an intensive, long-term use of the site.

There are many examples of why HRM's own notion of temporary is not credible. The 5-year "temporary" use by Dalhousie University of the former Grace Maternity Hospital (Summer, College and University) became 12-years by the time the city improperly gave the property over to Dal. Recently HRM kept an unattractive "temporary" garage at the Oval for 5-years in the centre of the North Common; the site is still not remediated.

Impact on the General Area:

The detailed concerns about the impact from 6,000 – 7,000 attendees on the area (parking, noise, lighting, transportation and the proximity to neighbouring residents, the Public Gardens, Hospitals and other institutions) are not dealt with in any real or credible way. For example *“there is no concern with traffic that would be generated by a temporary stadium on the site”*. Or assurances that noise will be over by 11pm. And comparing the impact of soccer to other professional teams in the downtown doesn't work. Hockey and basketball seasons occur when the majority of the public are indoors whereas the soccer season is when citizens are enjoying outdoors, the Public Gardens and surrounding green space, sitting on balconies or have windows opened.

Spring Garden Road District:

HRM Staff conflate or inappropriately unite the downtown Halifax district with the Spring Garden Road district- these are different business districts with different composition, cultures and party habits; that is the Spring Garden Road area is not an entertainment district or destination in the same way as the downtown.

On-site Services:

HRM Staff does not mention the proponent intends to have **60 port-a-potties on site**. The reference to the use of on-site converted shipping containers or other temporary structures on the property for concessions or food-trucks does not give any indication of how many of each would be used or what they'll look like. On-site catering, food, alcohol or other beverages sold on site do not add economic value to the Spring Garden Road Business district. The Report states *“there is no intention at this time to construct any permanent facility for the purpose of changing rooms, washroom or food and beverage service,”* however HRM's past record on these sorts of commitments is not credible.

Site Design and Visual Integration:

Food trucks, shipping containers and port-a-potties are not addressed in this section. For visual integration of the stadium seating HRM Staff suggestion does not offer reassurance: *“Some measures to help integrate the seating into the site may be possible, such as murals or some form of screen to be mounted on the rear of the stands facing streets. These design considerations will be addressed as part of the negotiation of an agreement with SEA.”* (p. 8)

Heritage: A written report from HRM Heritage Staff must be included to support the Report's claim that the Heritage Officer supports this proposal without a review by the Heritage Advisory Committee. The Wanderers Grounds, the Bengal Lancers, the Power House have Municipal Heritage designation and the Public Gardens and the Citadel have National Heritage Designation. The draft Centre Plan proposes the Halifax Common in its entirety be a designated cultural landscape. The Report's statement that *“The two heritage buildings and the paddock are well separated from the proposed stadium site by the Wanderers Lawn Bowls Club and municipal greenhouses,”* (p. 8) considers only the Municipal designations but ignores the impact of the proposed stadium on the National Heritage designated sites and all other cultural, institutional or educational neighbors such as the NS Museum of Natural History, CBC, Citadel High,

Sacred Heart and three adjacent hospitals, (two others are close by) as well as several high-density towers. It also ignores the line up of 60 port-a-potties by the paddock.

HRM Sale of Naming Rights Policy:

HRM Staff should revisit the controversy that naming the Oval after the parent company of one of Canada's top ten polluters (at that time) caused before suggesting sale of naming rights. Staff's suggestion that private sponsorship associated with individual events is a way in which sponsorship can be addressed to effectively brand Wanderers Grounds events is duplicitous.

Key Terms and Conditions:

The rush to "seal the deal" is reflected in the meager list of Key Terms and Conditions relative to the serious nature of the agreement the HRM staff is recommending the city enter into. The report essentially suggests that the ultimate responsibility rests with the CAO or whoever gets appointed to negotiate the lease for this public asset that taxpayers have just spent ~\$1 million on and that is fully and enjoyably used by the common citizens. The suggestion that a new schedule for facility rental rates be developed because of availability of seating shows that HRM staff either presupposes other large events at this location or intends to penalize regular users of the Grounds because they have a place to be seated.

FHC asks that you do not support this proposal. We ask that you do not make any more such decisions about the Halifax Common before completing a comprehensive masterplan for the Common as committed to when Halifax adopted the 1994 Halifax Common Plan. We are concerned that numerous decisions by HRM continue the privatization of public space on the Halifax Common in an ad hoc manner. Staff's suggestion that questions regarding the eventual desired use of the Wanderers Grounds be included as part of any upcoming public consultation process for the Halifax Common Plan indicates that Mayor and Council need better information before proceeding into the long-term private use of public property on this or any other site on the Halifax Common.

Regards,

Peggy Cameron
Co-Chair Friends of Halifax Common

EC, Friends of Halifax Common