



"for the use of the inhabitants of the town of Halifax as Common forever" (1763-2023)

March 10, 2023

Halifax Regional Municipality
 Halifax Common Master Plan Senior Staff
 Nalini Naidoo, Richard Harvey, Carolle Roberts
 P. O. Box 1749
 Halifax, NS B3J 3A5
 By Email

Dear HRM Halifax Common Master Plan Staff:

Re: The 'in principle' Halifax Common Master Plan

Enclosed are more detailed comments on the 'in principle' Halifax Common Master Plan (the "Plan"). We want a Plan not a Guiding Principles so that it carries weight for the protection of the Common. This initial statement is to offer an overview of the chief concerns we have identified.

1. Strong Protections

The Plan was presented to Council with its status identified as an internal policy document only; that is, as planning guidance. This is inadequate protection. What is needed is both legislation (in the form of amendments to the *HRM Charter*, similar to the sections offering protections to the Dartmouth Common) and amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategy (the "MPS") and Land Use By-Laws (the "LUB").

We request that Council, work to adopt a resolution requesting the Province enact appropriate amendments to the *HRM Charter* and to initiate a process to amend the MPS and LUB to incorporate various parts of the draft Plan. This should take place shortly within months.

2. The Whole of the Common to be Included

The Plan recognizes that the Common, as originally granted to the citizenry at large, extends to South Street and includes portions that have been sold to private owners (e.g. along Spring Garden Road and the adjacent area) but it does not include these areas in its proposed policies. Nor does the draft Plan offer policies for the Wanderers Block. The area addressed by this of any Plan must include the whole of the Common. This commitment is made in the 1994 Halifax Common Plan and remains as a goal in the recent consultations

3. Reclaim the Victoria General Hospital Parking Lot

A significant portion of the Common has been given over to public uses, such as for hospitals, a high school, and university facilities. One outstanding planning item is the parking lot adjacent to the Victoria General Hospital facing on to South Park Street and which is the former site of the School for the Blind. Decades ago, the public was shown and **promised** that this would become largely green space. Such a change is significant. It would tie in with the largely open and green space connecting North Park Street, South Park Street and Young Avenue through to Point Pleasant Park. The Plan must include a design for the V.G. Hospital parking lot that is significantly green space as promised to the public almost forty years ago.

Furthermore, as structured under the Master Plan the Halifax Common is to be placed under a cultural landscape heritage designation. Unfortunately, at this moment the Heritage Property Act does not have the correct regulations in place to allow the formation of a cultural landscape to be created. It is recommended that HRM work with the province to make the necessary amendments to the Heritage Property Act to create cultural landscape. Here is the link to the past HRM report to cultural landscapes:

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/about-the-city/regional-community-planning/Cultural_Landscape_Framework_Study_160317.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwi4k_zK-7b9AhVOk4kEHeyUC50QFnoECA4QAQ&usg=AOvVaw1yhSzUX7QuSAfW-EZcp86T

4. Maintain the Wanderers Block for Public Use

As noted, the Wanderers Block was not included in the Plan, except for the observation that further planning is needed. There are various non-profit and public (municipal) uses located there. The main current deviation from continuity of public use has to do with the soccer stadium and lease for the Wanderers Grounds. This is **not** an appropriate location for a permanent or long-term professional or semi-professional sport, as HRM staff emphasized to Council when the short-term lease was first proposed. This privatizes critically important public space, exactly what the original grant to the citizenry at large was designed to avoid. This is also counter to the 1994 Halifax Common Plan and to what the public expressed in the more recent round of public consultations. The lease must not be renewed and the Grounds must be returned to amateur players.

5. Reclaim Land

Another serious omission from the Plan is a recognition that the Common as a whole has been eroded over the years as parcels have been sold to private owners, or been built on even for public purposes. It is necessary to fully pursue all opportunities to increase open green space on the Halifax Peninsula. This was committed to in the 1994 Halifax Common Plan and this was the main public comment expressed in the 2018 public consultations that led to this Plan. There should be a specific commitment to purchase any part of the original Common that becomes available and to consider taking into public ownership any adjacent land that becomes available, such as land bordering the Citadel.

6. Effective Public Consultation

In this submission we have written below in *Detailed Areas of Concern*, under section 5 entitled “Effective Public Consultation” about several inadequate areas to consult the public about the draft Plan. Concerning the current public

consultation, we feel that online consultation for a lengthy document is inadequate. The Halifax Common remains one of the defining physical features of HRM: it is valued by HRM's residents and experience has shown that there is a high degree of public interest in how the Common is planned for. Therefore, public meetings are needed to set out the main aspects of the Plan, for staff to answer questions and to receive commentary.

7. A Clear and Comprehensive Executive Summary

Most significantly, the Introduction section does not include any 'executive summary'.

For so extensive a document, the interested public should be offered an executive summary as a guide to the contents of the full Plan.

Many readers will not be able to take the time to absorb all of the document or readily understand the main recommendations without such a summary. The notes on 'how to use this document' (p.6) are useful but not a substitute for a full summary of the contents of the Plan.

8. A Plan which is a Plan

The Plan is not currently a plan. It leads to no outcomes. It has good observations, Consultation Core Outcomes, Key Considerations and Policy Directions, but its Actions frequently overlook earlier material or simply are a call to 'study' or 'review.' Further, there is little commitment, no direction, no timeline, no specific plan. This should be called the Halifax Common Guiding Document rather than the Master Plan. This is unacceptable. At the very least, it must set a deadline by which the numerous points of "study and review" will be completed and lead to policies for recommendations to Council. Until that time, a moratorium for substantive new direction or decisions on the Halifax Common must be made.

FHC was formed in 2006 to help protect the Halifax Common and to ensure that the 1994 Halifax Common Plan was respected. We regularly update about 3,000 supporters with our newsletters. The attached document contains our

detailed comments on the Halifax Common Master Plan arranged to follow the Plan, identifying our concerns. Because of its relevance we also include our 2018 Centre Plan submission.

Collectively, our volunteer executive has devoted thousands of hours to reviewing this document in order to have the best possible outcome for the Halifax Common.

We hope you will consider the comments in the light that they are offered and make your best efforts to have the best possible protection for the 240-acre grant “to and for the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax as Common forever.”

In conclusion, we would like to remind you that when we met with you in June 2022 you offered to meet again with us, after we had an opportunity to review forthcoming materials (the Plan). If that offer is still open we would greatly appreciate to meet with you after you have had an opportunity to review this document.

Yours truly,

Friends of the Halifax Common Board of Directors

Peggy Cameron	William Breckenridge	Janet Stevenson
Beverly Miller	David Garrett	Howard Epstein
Lawrence McEachern	Judith Fingard	Peggy Smith

CC HRM Mayor and Council

FRIENDS OF HALIFAX COMMON
Submission for HALIFAX COMMON MASTER PLAN (IN PRINCIPLE)

	Page
OVERVIEW RESPONSE TO THE PLAN	7
A. Response to Staff Report to CPED on Halifax Common Master Plan...	7
B. Response to the Five Sections of the Plan	9
1. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	9
2. <u>BACKGROUND</u>	9
3. <u>APPROACH</u>	11
4. <u>DISTRICT-WIDE POLICY DIRECTIONS</u>	11
4.1: The Halifax Common District and Land Use Character Areas.....	11
4.2: Identity and Integrity.....	14
4.3: Open Space Character.....	14
4.4: Cultural Heritage.....	15
4.5: Mobility and Linkages.....	17
4.6: Recreation, Programming and Events.....	18
4.7: Environmental Design.....	19
4.8: Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Amenities.....	19
4.9: Governance and Partnerships.....	20
5. <u>MUNICIPAL LAND STRATEGIES</u>	21
5.1: North & Central Common.....	21
5.2: Summer Street and University Avenues.....	21
5.3: The Promenade.....	22
5.4: Wanderers [Block] Grounds.....	22
5.5: Camp Hill Cemetery.....	22
5.6: Halifax Public Gardens.....	23
5.7: Victoria Park.....	23
5.8: Indoor Community Spaces.....	23
Detailed areas of Concern.....	23
1. Protection.....	24
2. Stewardship	25
3. Effective Public Consultation and Communication.....	27
3.1. Participatory.....	27
3.2 Privatization.....	29
3.3 Commercialization.....	29
4 Wanderers [Block] Grounds.....	30
5 Reclaim the Victoria General Hospital Parking Lot: Recapturing the School for the Blind Property.....	37

OVERVIEW RESPONSE TO THE PLAN

A. Response to Staff Report to CPED on Halifax Common Master Plan

An HRM staff report to the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee from Richard Harvey and Carolle Koziak Roberts dated November 21, 2021 is the first document in the Halifax Common Master Plan file. [Attachment 1 of item No.15.3.1 Halifax Regional Council, 8 February 2022, submitted to the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee meeting, 8 December 2021, and then on to the HRM Council] The 8-page document establishes the status of the Plan as perceived by those at the policy and planning level of Parks and Recreation.

The attitude of Staff is instructive. They define the Plan in their November 2021 report to the HRM standing committee on Community Planning and Economic Development on p.2 as a ‘guiding document’, ‘not a “planning document” within the meaning of Part VIII of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter.’ On pp.3-4 in the **Discussion** section (Master Plan Contents and Approach) Staff assert with respect to the Plan that the consultants’ suggested ‘Actions are not mandatory’, and that ‘illustrative site plans...are conceptual and subject to change’. This telling assessment means that nothing presented in the Plan can be considered a goal towards which Staff will definitely work.

The Report does set out the Staff priorities in the form of the **Plan Highlights** on pp.4-6. On p.4 an appreciation of the Common itself focuses on the defining characteristics of generous street setbacks, wide sidewalks, mature street trees, features which the Plan promotes. Approaches endorsed include the *Need for Joint Planning* by means of the MOU with the Province to realize HRM’s priority to establish new public open space along South Park Street between University and South, and *Mobility Planning* with Active Transportation to produce better walking and cycling opportunities on the Common. On p.5 the section *Movement toward Less Structured Recreation* acknowledges that a major lesson of the pandemic was the realization that more green space is needed for unstructured recreation and that it must be supplied through the reduction of ball diamonds on the North Common.

The two remaining **Highlights** on p.5 are *Detailed Planning for the Wanderers Block* and *Heritage Planning*. We note in the discussion of the Wanderers block the unfortunate use of the misleading term ‘high level’ sports which has the effect of appearing to favour professional sports over amateur, whereas only amateur sports should be permitted on the Common in order to honour its mission, dating from 1763. The statement that the Plan, once approved, provides the context for determining ‘the future of each of the uses within the Wanderers block’ is singularly vague. But there is no doubt Staff see the consideration of the Wanderers block as a priority.

The comments on *Heritage Planning* are restricted to a mention of support for designation, though perhaps not for the Common as a whole, which is detailed in the Centre Plan, the ‘forthcoming Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan’, and the Common Master Plan.

Two other sections of the Report on pp.6-7 complete the noteworthy aspects of the Report. The first is **Public Engagement**, which is an apt description of the feedback provided by the public before the pandemic. The Report highlights only the opposition to the reduction of ball diamonds on the North Common and the concerns of the Halifax Lancers with respect to, their space and the misunderstanding of their needs.

The other section is entitled **Implementation**. Here the emphasis is on the projects, identified by the Plan, that require capital investment over the next 20 years. The needed intervention is described in three categories: Protect, Improve, Reposition. What follows is a brief discussion of the next plan that is required: ‘a multi-year business plan’. This plan [which we suggest could be labelled the management plan] will, among other elements, ‘develop a framework for periodic reviews of the Plan. These reviews will give the public and stakeholder groups an opportunity to identify any issues that may not have been addressed during the creation of the Plan, highlight issues that may have arisen since 2019 and consider any required changes which come to light as the Plan is implemented’. The Friends suggest that a management

committee such as the type we suggest later in this submission should be considered for this purpose.

B. Response to the Five Sections of the Plan:

1. INTRODUCTION

The Introduction to the Plan is an excellent appreciation of the history of the Halifax Common. Its Figure 1.1.1 shows the full extent of the Common. If any criticism is to be made, it is that immediately the focus (p.4) shifts to "municipal and other publicly owned lands"; no explanation is offered for excluding the rest of the Common from the Plan even though there are statements elsewhere that refer to the Common as belonging "to one cohesive place, within the original boundary" (p.43). In addition, where reference is made to "points of view from a wide range of disciplines " (p.5) there is no listing of 'environment and climate', factors that should enter into any contemporary policy analysis; indeed in the subsequent Background section (p.15) there is appropriate though passing mention of 'ecosystem services'.

Most significantly, the Introduction section does not include any 'executive summary'.

For so extensive a document, the interested public should be offered an executive summary as a guide to the contents of the full Draft Plan.

Many readers will not be able to take the time to absorb all of the document or readily understand the main recommendations without such a summary. The notes on 'how to use this document' (p.6) are useful but not a substitute for a full summary of the contents of the Plan.

2. BACKGROUND

This section continues the appreciation of the Common. It is descriptive for the most part, offering few conclusions. We note that the subsection on 'Active Recreation Areas' does not mention the Halifax Lancers. The subsection on 'Passive Recreation' does not mention the popular activity of dog walking, thereby calling into question the assertion that 'the windswept openness of

the North Common limits the opportunity for interactions at a human scale and discourages lingering' (p.15).

The subsection on 'Ownership' rightly sets out various municipal/Provincial transactions, but might have highlighted the general point that 'The recapturing of land by the municipality envisioned in the 1994 Halifax Common Plan did not materialize" (p.16), an important contextual fact as it includes many significant parcels such as the former Grace Maternity Hospital, Civic Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Highschool, CBC-TV.

In the same subsection, there is reference to "the parking lot of the hospital" but it is not clear whether this refers to the Victoria General Hospital parking or the QEII site; for the former there was a plan put before the public in the mid-1980s that showed significant green space as part of that lot, forming a link with Victoria Park to the north and South Park Street and Young Avenue to the south. This should be noted. And although there is reference to Federal ownership of adjacent land (The Citadel) there is no explicit mention of the importance of compatible land uses generally on adjacent land, Federal, municipally or privately-owned; this means vistas as well as wind and shadow effects.

In the 'Recreation Needs' portion, we note the reference to "equitable access to recreational activities" (p.18) and "free or nominal user fees". This is quite crucial given that the Common is near to a considerable population with very modest economic resources, as well as being consistent with the original Crown Grant "to the people of Halifax forever". The observation that "On the Halifax peninsula, 75% of residents are renters. A significant number of these are in apartments of five or more storeys" (p.20) is also important. A consequence of the 'corridors' designations and the increased as-of-right height limits in the Centre Plan means a greater proportion of the population will need access to nearby recreation facilities. This point is implied, though not so explicitly as the facts warrant.

In the 'Physical Attributes' portion there is discussion of "repositioning" the North and Central Common (p.26). It is not clear whether this is a proposal

that changes in the elevation and/or slopes of those areas is contemplated. This needs to be clarified. Further, there is reference to how the shadow effects of "taller buildings along the western edge" of the North Common "*only* cast shadows on the North Common in the late afternoon" (p.28, emphasis added); this is an unwarranted statement: the effect of shadows depends on the time of year as well as the time of day; late afternoon is the time of day most working people would wish to use the Common; overall the subsection on 'solar exposure' is weak. This will become more evident as more high rises fill the southern and western edges of the Common.

In the 'Consultation' portion, there is a good summary of the Consultation Core Outcomes (p.31) with public open space a highly valued use (p.34). Unfortunately, these Outcomes are little referenced in the Plan nor used as a benchmark for the Plan. This is another example of the lack of follow through on incorporating findings from the public consultation within the development of the Plan.

3. APPROACH

This is a useful section of the Plan. Still, the overall 'Vision Statement' refers to the Common as 'public space' with no acknowledgement that significant portions have migrated into private ownership, nor any statement that bringing such lands back into public ownership is desirable. Reference to the Common as something that strengthens Halifax's identity seems weak: the Common is one of the defining physical features of Halifax, along with the Harbour, the Citadel, and the various historic buildings. The statement could be adjusted.

4. DISTRICT-WIDE POLICY DIRECTIONS

4.1: The Halifax Common District and Land Use Character Areas

This section serves as an example of both much that is good about the document and much that is, unfortunately, seriously lacking.

It begins with an admirable, but over-generalized goal, mentioning "integrated" and "coordinated open space management" and then lists five

excellent “key considerations” regarding: (1) Land Use Character Areas (2) Municipal Open Space Areas, (3) Preserving and Reclaiming the Halifax Common; (4) Municipal Open Space Management; and (5) District-Wide Open Space Management.

Most of these Key Considerations could be highlighted here as laudable, particularly #3, Preserving and Reclaiming the Halifax Common, which states “the 1994 Halifax Common Plan directed the City of Halifax to preserve the Halifax Common and reclaim lands for public ownership wherever and whenever possible. The most recent round of public conversations revealed a continued desire to preserve and reclaim land within the Halifax Common, with ‘public open space’ ranked as the highest valued use of the Halifax Common among participants.”

This need for public open space is also identified in Key Consideration #2: “The municipality-owned areas are most in keeping with the original intent that the Halifax Commons remains as underdeveloped land.”

Key Consideration #4, which states, although questionably: “Retention and enhancement of public open space within the municipal open space character areas is a key focus of this plan.

Key Consideration #5, which states, again questionably: “The municipality has taken steps to ensure land outside of its authority is planned to support a cohesive Halifax Common District, including the Memorandum of Understanding with the Capital District Health Authorities and through land use planning regulations, policies, and design guidance.”

These significant aspirations are carried through in the Policy Directions section of 4.1 which includes 4.1.1: “Recognize and plan the Halifax Common as a cohesive district established from the original land grant and defined by the bounding streets...” Section 4.1.2 which calls for a recognition of: “associated area” outside the Halifax Common. Section 4.1.5: “Retain the Municipal open space character areas for municipal open space, “parks and recreation uses.” And Section 4.1.6, “Retain lands in the municipal open space

character space in municipal ownership and acquire additional land for open space, park, and recreation uses as opportunities may arise.”

However, the actions of this section in two brief directives are exceedingly thin and composed of largely passive and obscurely worded directives to “review the municipality’s enduring documents...” There is no clear language leading to policies which would protect existing open space, reclaiming lands for public open space use, a policy toward “associated areas,” or acquiring additional land for open space, park and recreational use. The importance of these considerations for the future of the Halifax Common cannot be overstated.

The Centre Plan is an example of the outcome of lack of clear language or directives for planning where streetscapes that could have created a sense of integrated space along the boundary of the Common are now subject to redevelopment that obliterates this with the swap out of historic buildings and trees for high-rises, wind and shadow.

It is the position of the Friends of the Halifax Common that unless this plan includes a clear path to the protection of the existing municipal open space on the Halifax Common and clear policies toward regulating private and institutional lands on the Common, including the reclamation of these lands for public use, the Friends of the Halifax Common cannot support this document. It is understood that the development of such policies may be difficult and require time. These also must be approved by council. We only require that a clear process be called for and outlined leading to these policies.

Unfortunately, this pattern of strong Key Considerations and Policy Directions followed by weak or overly-detailed Actions is repeated through the following sections. It could be inferred by this pattern of strong identification of needs followed by weak Actions that the document was written in two stages, each led by differing directives. While a “guiding document” may seem advantageous to some, the FHC fear that this will be a plan which is not a plan, will be of little use in clear planning for a meaningful and vibrant future

Halifax Common-as was the outcome for the 1994 Halifax Common Master Plan.

4.2: Identity and Integrity

The Goal states: “The collective memory of one unified entity will be reinforced by a cohesive design language.” This is true, but given the topic, one would expect a more broad, pointed and inclusive ambition, particularly with the current issues and pressures by public and private bodies facing the Halifax Common. Design language and elements will certainly help, but the need for “identity and integrity” requires a stronger goal and directions than those outlined in the following Key Considerations and Policy Directions. As in Section 4.1, this diminishment of focus becomes even more apparent in the Actions, which simply call for a review of the municipality’s planning documents and administrative orders. Given the historic, on-going and current demand for use of the Common and loss of public open space, the Actions of this section need to call for specific measures to address this loss of land and character, beyond those dealing with the “edges”, “wayfinding”, “branding”, “streetscapes” and “intersections” recommended in the Actions.

4.3: Open Space Character

The Goal of this section begins with a call to “...preserve and enhance public access to open spaces...” The following Introduction expands this consideration to “...recognize the importance of preserving and enhancing open space and access to the Halifax Common...” but the essential message of protection remains lost. The Introduction is followed by three very good Key Considerations: “Benefits of Green Space”, “Naturalizing the Landscape” and “Balance of Active and Passive Recreation Areas.” The Policy Directions begin with five generally good directions and then a very good direction: “Categorize and plan municipal open space on the Halifax Common as ‘Culture and Heritage Parkland’ and ‘Recreational’ areas as outlined in this plan.” However, the Actions of this section over-emphasize “access” in the sense of getting to the Common, rather than maintaining the Common itself, through emphasis on streets (4 of the Actions) and not a single reference to “Open Space Character” or “Preserve and Enhance.” Again, a call for measures to preserve public open space of the Common is avoided. There is also no Action

associated with the Key Consideration of “Naturalizing the Landscape,” a direction long-supported by the Friends of the Halifax Common.

4.4: Cultural Heritage

The Goal of this section begins with a commendable ambition noting “...its rich cultural and natural heritage... creating a sense of connection with the past and a contemporary sense of place for new generations... safeguarding significant heritage resources... enhancing the sense of place and community embodied in the Halifax Common.” This is further supported in the Introduction of the section. Noticing the areas of the Halifax Common “...that remain essentially intact, with their early form, materials and use generally unchanged.”

These themes continue in the following Key Considerations, in particular Key Consideration #5, “Formal Recognition, which states that “...formal recognition of the Halifax Common as a “cultural landscape” would provide a meaningful lens for review and approval of proposed renovations, alterations, and additions.” The Key Consideration goes on to say, “Designation at the national or municipal level allows for the full range of heritage resources of the historic places to be considered, including not only the structures but their relationships with each other, the adjacent lands, and their overall setting or context. The formal processes to designate elements, properties or portions of the Halifax Common under the Heritage Property domain is another of our priorities (our emphasis) ...” This is an extremely meaningful direction and one which the FHC fully supports.

Key Consideration #3 also needs to be highlighted. This consideration notes that “...for thousands of years this landscape was inhabited by the Mi’kmaq people and composed of woodland, small streams and wetland habitat rich with fish, water fowl, moose and other wildlife. This original state and the labor of transforming it into open pasture lands and fields, all layers of natural history that can be made visible.” Again, these are significant directions and ones which the FHC fully support.

Unfortunately, these bold directions are watered down in Key Consideration #6 A Cultural Landscape Approach, which states that this safeguarding of significant heritage resources “...can be achieved through commemorative public art, event spaces, and heritage interpretation.” These are certainly to be included, but are no substitute for meaningful initiatives. Policy Directions, particularly 4.4.3, 4.4.6, 4.4.10, and 4.4.13 further diminish earlier bold directions and speak in general, non-specific and very limited terms. Only one of the 14 Directions, 4.4.11, significantly calls us to: “Safeguard the character of the Halifax Common through the conservation of significant heritage resources and identified character-defining elements.” The term “character-defining elements” is substantially and precisely used in the heritage designation of buildings, districts and places. Unfortunately, there is no articulation in the Plan what types of elements these might be. This could be limited to a few buildings and sites, but could be applied to the Common as a whole with varying degrees of policy to the areas of diverse uses on the Common. This is an exercise that needs to be called for in the Plan.

Sadly, the significant Actions of section 4.4, particularly A4.4.1 only call for an investigation of the designation of the Halifax Common geographic area as a cultural landscape under the Heritage Property Act. While this is a necessary start, the Plan could needs to fully articulate the need, the process, and even outline of how this designation might be achieved. HRM staff has taken the position that the Plan cannot “tie the hands of Council,” as was expressed by a senior member of the Master Plan planning team. This is, we believe, a narrow interpretation of the role of Staff with respect to Council. It is the role of Staff to make recommendations to Council, and it regularly does this. To make a recommendation with an outline of what that recommendation might be does not “tie the hands of Council.” It is performing the role of Staff. The process of creating a cultural district, under the Heritage Property Act is wholly supported by the FHC. It is understood that this process could take considerable time, as does the establishment of a heritage district anywhere but now is the time to start. The Master Plan repeatedly calls for us to preserve and protect the Common, and the second of the six listed Consultation Core Outcomes states: “...a desire to maintain and enhance green open space was a dominant theme. This included minimizing built

infrastructure, planting more trees where appropriate, and protecting the vast openness of lawn of the North and Central Common.”

The Friends of the Halifax Common believe the only way the preservation of the Halifax Common can be achieved is through the designation of the Common under the Heritage Property Act, and without a clear statement of this need and a clear path to attain it in the Master Plan, the FHC cannot support it. This is the clear desire of the public, the stated aim of many of the Key Considerations and Policy Directions in the Plan and needs to be clearly and fully articulated in the Actions of the Plan. It should also be clear that this will not “tie the hands of Council.” The FHC understands that Staff and Council have a role to play in managing the requirements of multiple institutions, the Province, and numerous other interests, but the FHC also feels that the general public in its desire for public open space needs to be more fully represented in balancing these interests. The designation of the Common as a cultural or other district under the Heritage Property Act will address that needed balance.

4.5: Mobility and Linkages

The Goal, Introduction, and Key Considerations of this section are generally commendable and present few difficulties. Among these difficulties is item 5. Parking, which seems to simply see off-street lots on the Common as “...lots for particular destinations...” but is hard to see the QEII Infirmary parking structure and the expanse of VG parking on the old School for the Blind site on South Park Street in this way.

A general concern about the extensive use of Common land should be expressed in this Key Consideration. Also of concern is Key Consideration #12, “Pedestrian Night Time Experience” along with Figure 4.5.3 present an over simplified view of lighting possibilities and importance of lighting in outdoor public space.

Similarly the Policy Directions concerning these two issues do not fully address the problems and possibilities in these two areas of concern. Again, the Actions, A4.5.6 (Parking), A4.5.7 (Parking), and A4.5.8 (Lighting), are written in passive language, to review and assess. Many examples of planning

documents on landscaping for parking and lighting guidelines from other cities exist. These should be researched and adapted for the purposes of the Halifax Common's Plan now rather than be deferred.

4.6: Recreation, Programming and Events

The Goal of this section, "The Halifax Common will provide a diverse mix of recreation and leisure opportunities with flexible and accessible spaces that invite a wide range of community uses and public events," is excellent. Of note, a neighbourhood survey that FHC conducted several years ago found that the adjacent community loves the Common and the many ways it is used. That said, they do hope to have more consideration as to impact of these uses on their lives, for example lighting, noise, parking and construction. Being near the public realm, this may be expected but should not be overly disruptive. A solution beyond more than a respectful limitation to the degree of impact permitted should be to develop a better notification of what the neighbourhood might be having to deal with i.e. parking ban.

The Introduction and Key Considerations go on to articulately support this goal. The 14 Policy Directions are generally good to very good, in particular 4.6.2: "...as emphasis on unstructured recreation activities...", 4.6.4: "...the intent of the Halifax Common is being 'for the people'... and minimize pay-to-play activities", 4.6.8: "...concerts... that they are open to the public, free to attend, and have minimal impact on the condition of the facilities...", 4.6.10: "...communal gardening...", and 4.6.11: "...the importance and tradition of the Wanderers Lawn Bowling Club and Halifax Lancers..."

However, 4.6.13 about the Wanderers Field is of great concern as the wording states "...as a premier sport use and as spectator revenue..." seems to leave open the use of the field for the development of a stadium for a privately-owned professional team. Even if occasional use of the field for other activities is offered, this essentially private use contradicts many of the previously expressed Directions and would bring substantial impact to the Wanderer's Block, the Public Gardens, the Camp Hill Cemetery, and the Common as a whole. While a segment of our municipality supports this use, it is a major private venture and goes against the previously stated precept of

“for the people.” It is also counter to the HRM 2017 HRM staff report on the Temporary Stadium on the Wanderers Grounds.

The Actions of this section are again limited to “review” and “evaluate” (5 of 6). The single use of the term “develop” is used in relation to events/concerts. Again, of concern is the open attitude to “evaluate” the need for longer term permanent infrastructure to support the Wanderers sport field revenue.” It is disappointing that the authors of this Plan cannot understand the over-riding nature of the “for the people forever...” entitlement of the Halifax Common even if a segment supports it. Public use is paramount. Should a stadium be supported by Staff and/or Halifax Council, the Friends of the Halifax Common will fight it vigorously.

4.7: Environmental Design

The Goal and Key Considerations of this section are all good, perhaps excellent. Of particular interest is Key Consideration #4, Naturalization and Biodiversity. The interests expressed here are considerations long-supported by the FHC. The following Policy Directions also are good.

Unfortunately, none mention “naturalization and biodiversity.” Why is this suddenly dropped? The following Actions do mention biodiversity and naturalization along with a number of other substantive directions, but again the language is passive and open-ended with the two Actions of the section both limited by the faint imperative to review the municipality’s documents.

4.8: Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Amenities

The Goal, Introduction and Key Considerations of this section are again all good, in particular

Key Consideration #3, North and Central Common Building, is important. It reads: “...special care must be taken when planning recreation support buildings to ensure any structure honors the original intent of the Halifax Common to be unencumbered open land. This is of particular importance on the North and Central Common, where the significant remaining open

spaces **must be protected** (our emphasis). Unfortunately, this Key Consideration was ignored by staff and council with the placement of a substantial enlargement of buildings on the Common for the development of the expanded Aquatic Centre. This can also be said regarding the massive new parking structure, the permanence of the temporary pop-up stadium or any newly sought stadium on the nearby Wanderers Block.

Again, the two Actions of this section are faint imperatives to “access opportunities...” A4.8.1 regarding wifi services and A4.8.2 regarding drinking fountains. The diminishment of Key Considerations and Policy Directions is incredible.

4.9: Governance and Partnerships

Again, the Goal, Introduction, and Key Considerations of this section are all commendable. The Policy Directions are also generally good, although the emphasis is on “...levels of government, institutional and other landowners, and stakeholders, generally bodies...”, rather than “public,” as is the expressed aim of the Common. This is an interesting and telling difference. The responsibility, focus and purpose of the Halifax Common over the years has subtly but definitely and overwhelmingly shifted from the public to institutional uses and private ownership. This has happened under the long-term assumption that these uses are quasi-public in use and/or serve the public good.

But the reality of the situation is that true public use of the Halifax Common is close to disappearing.

Similarly, the Actions of this important section point in positive directions regarding the expansion and reclamation of public space but say little about engaging the public input beyond a bi-annual information meeting. The importance of public input into the management of the Halifax Common cannot be over-emphasized. Yet this management role has itself almost become fully institutionalized under the Municipality through Staff and Council.

5. MUNICIPAL LAND STRATEGIES

5.1: North & Central Common

The Goal of this section is good stating that, “The North and Central Common are welcoming accessible, free, and flexible open spaces that offer a balanced diversity of landscapes and recreational options serving the needs of local neighbourhoods and the region.” The Introduction stresses “...its openness- over 17 hectares of public open space in the heart of the peninsula...” but overlooks the diminishment of this openness of the North Common with the substantially expanded Aquatic Centre. The Introduction also notes that this is where “...broad-reaching revitalization concepts touch on most of the Master Plan guiding principles.” These principles presumably are the nine principles identified in section 3.4 Guiding Principles. But are these actually accomplished in this Plan? Do these admirable principles, particularly those related to “diverse”, inclusive”, versatile”, “green” and “participatory”, carry through to Actions? The following 15 Key Considerations begin by addressing an “active/passive balance” and “diversity” but go on largely to address organized activity areas and general design considerations. “Passive” areas are not mentioned. An extensive “Design and Programming Guidelines” section follows which addresses these largely organized-activity areas and facilities. This continued emphasis on active spaces is carried through to the Actions, the majority of which address active considerations. Of the 8 Actions, only two address the need to diversify the Common- A5.1.3 which calls for a “...phased reduction of ball diamonds...” and A5.1.6 which calls for “...more greenspace and informal areas.” This imbalance is carried through to the following graphics which show approximately three-quarters of the North and Central Common to be areas for organized activity. There is also no mention of how these spaces will address neighbourhood needs, nor any mention of the previously introduced benefit of naturalization and biodiversity.

5.2: Summer Street and University Avenues

The Goal of this section aims for “...high quality pedestrian-oriented streetscapes...” Whether this is achievable to a significant degree more than they already are such streetscapes seems questionable. At the same time the degradation of Summer Street through the recent addition of the QEII parking

structure, the pedestrian bridge and the intrusion and visual mess of the “pop-up” soccer stadium needs to be highlighted and remembered in considering future options for this street. The Key Considerations of this section are limited, and interestingly there are no Key Considerations, only Design and Programming Guidance. The Actions are only two and very brief, including the directive to “collaborate with institutional stakeholders...”

5.3: The Promenade

The Goal, Introductions, and Key Considerations are interesting in that they choose to focus on eastern edge of the Common, the length of North park Street between Cunard Street and Bell Road which area already is successful as an edge without considering at all whether the western edge might be important also.

5.4: Wanderers [Block] Grounds

It is shocking that this Plan could be finalized and presented to Council in late 2021 without a single reference to the impact on the Common of the enormous, poorly conceived, poorly executed, and extremely intrusive QEII parking structure approved by HRM Council almost two years earlier. It is also shocking that the possibility of a large permanent stadium on the site of the “pop-up” stadium is discussed in the Plan without a single reference to the many large issues associated with such a stadium or the 2017 staff report. The only comment is that “the current stadium... is considered for an interim period under which the municipality can assess the desirability of such a large permanent facility in this location.” Should this “assessment” not be part of the purpose of this Plan? That was definitely indicated to be the case in HRM’s 2017 staff report on the Temporary Stadium on the Wanderers Grounds. It is unacceptable that a detailed planning of this block is currently being undertaken by HRM Staff entirely without input from the general public.

5.5: Camp Hill Cemetery

It is commendable that an upgrading of Camp Hill Cemetery is being pursued. It is also interesting that the Actions in this section are largely focused and directive, rather than the non-specific passive Actions of other sections of the Plan.

5.6: Halifax Public Gardens

The Goal of this section is to “strengthen the physical and programmatic links between the Halifax Public Gardens and the rest of the Halifax Common. This is admirable and fully supported by the FHC. It is also interesting that the seven Actions of this section are also focused and directive, rather than passive as in most other sections.

5.7: Victoria Park

The Goals, Introduction, Key Considerations and Actions of this section are all admirable. It is again concerning that the Actions are active not passive. What is shocking is that there is no discussion in this section considering extending Victoria Park south onto the VG parking lot, with the general assumption that the VG Hospital will be moved by the Health Authority and the building demolished. Again, as previously pointed out the Plan withdraws from consideration of substantive issues. This is the result likely of a politically-driven process, rather than being driven primarily by planning and public interest.

5.8: Indoor Community Spaces

The Goal, Introduction and Key Considerations of this section are all brief. It is good but concerning that “Public Engagement Findings” (#4) are brought into the Key Considerations for the first time in the Plan. It is also very disappointing that the potentially magnificent indoor use of the Armory Building at North Park and Cunard Streets is not considered as a possible expansion of public benefit. The public uses to which this building could be put to use are immense and definitely worth consideration.

DETAILED AREAS OF CONCERN

This section’s overarching purpose is to ensure that HRM upholds the commitment made by the city of Halifax to its citizens with the adoption of the 1994 Halifax Common Master Plan.

The three primary commitments of the 1994 Plan were to keep the land on the Halifax Common, not give up Halifax Common land and to re-capture Halifax Common land.

While the city and subsequently HRM have not honoured these commitments, FHC believes the recent public consultations maintain the expectation from the public that HRM keep these goals.

These detailed areas of concern are three ‘meta’ topics including Protection, Conservation, Stewardship and Effective Public Consultation and Communication. These are followed with two ‘micro’ themes which offer specific examples where HRM needs to demonstrate stronger leadership to retain and recapture Halifax Common lands. These specifically refer to the Wanderers Block and the Victoria General Parking Lot and provide many details, suggestions and actions.

1. PROTECTION

Adoption of a Conservation Strategy under the *Nova Scotia Heritage Property Act* is discussed in the Plan, Appendix D: Halifax Common Conservation Strategy. Like other elements of the Plan, some aspects of the document are already outdated, especially the references to Carlton Street as a heritage streetscape, one now lost to us.

The most relevant section of the proposed conservation strategy relates to conserving the whole Common as a Cultural Heritage Landscape. Application for this designation has been submitted by William Breckenridge to both HRM and the Province and the process is likely to take years. Unfortunately, the Province has yet to approve amendments to the *Heritage Property Act*, submitted in 2015, that would include the necessary provisions to designate a cultural heritage landscape. Surely HRM can place some urgency on prodding the Province to make the necessary amendments to the *Heritage Property Act*.

In the Plan, Appendix A, the consultants state that at the third public engagement “In general, participants were supportive of the idea that the entire Common be designated as a cultural heritage landscape, with clarity around the pieces that hold the most heritage value, and the pieces that have become contemporary.” The Plan itself, at p.69, item 5 suggests that “formal registration triggers an elevated standard of care”. On p.77 the Plan proposed Actions relating to the *Heritage Property Act*, especially A4.4.1—4.4.4. These recommendations need

strengthening, although the cooperation of the Province cannot, apparently, be assumed.

2. STEWARDSHIP

In addition to our comments regarding the need for urgent changes in the governing legislation, we submit that by providing a means of having stewardship, the whole Halifax Common can be protected.

Stewardship is an approach favoured, to some extent, in the Plan. The consultants have suggested a policy role for stakeholders, including 'community' ones [p.75: 4.4.7].

In the Governance and Partnerships chapter, p.101, the consultants advocate for the involvement of diverse stakeholder groups, including local residents and on p.102, item 3, favour 'Friends of...' as an existing beneficial model. However, we propose that what is required is a comprehensive Friends' organization for the **whole** Common, not an area by area.

Policy directions in Chapter 4.9 recognize the important continuing role of stewardship organizations: e.g. 4.9.1, 4.9.4---4.9.6. Disappointingly, no Actions flowing from these policy directions are recommended on p. 102. As noted in our opening comments, this must be meaningful Actions if there is going to be any positive movement on protecting the whole Common.

In addition to changes to the governing legislation, stewardship and Friends of model, we strongly urge the implementation of a management plan. HRM can look to other jurisdictions for examples but one we suggest could greatly assist HRM in creating an appropriate management plan is the ten-year one currently in place for Clapham Common, located in London, UK.

There, a 50-year master plan for Clapham Common, which at about 202 acres is only slightly smaller than ours, was adopted in 2007. That plan was later followed by a Clapham Common Management Plan, 2017-2027, which can be easily accessed online at the URL, **claphamcommon.net** by scrolling down to Resources, CC Management Plan 2017-2027, on the fourth line.

It is an amazing, accessible document of 190 pages “written to cover not only maintenance of the Common’s physical infrastructure but also protection, improvement and promotion of its heritage, ecology, cultural and social value” (p.7). The Friends of Clapham Common have one representative on the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee, a committee which predates that Common’s 2007 Masterplan and which clearly drew on citizens for **advice as partners**, not observers.

As noted in our Plan, HRM citizens have strongly shown their “continued desire to preserve and reclaim land within the Halifax Common” (chapter 4, page 50). There is ample interest and willingness by HRM citizens to participate on any management advisory committee for our Common.

The staff involved in the production of the Plan see it as a 20-year plan that now requires “implementation” but they say nothing about involving a committee with a stewardship role: see Staff Report by Carolle Koziak Roberts and Richard Harvey, in the letter Jacques Dubé, CAO, to CPED Standing Committee, 4 November 2021, pp.6-7).

A committee including the representatives of seven categories of stakeholder should be represented on such a management committee: activities, advocacy, business, diversity, heritage, institutions, and neighbourhood. A management committee would further public engagement - see the recommendations of CPED, 20 January 2022). If this requires an act of the Legislature, communications should immediately begin with the Province to implement this process.

The community representatives should be involved in:

- 1) approving unusual or one-time programming and significant changes to existing routines;
- 2) monitoring and objecting to the loss of green space;
- 3) exploring opportunities for acquisition of alienated Common land as well as substitute land for land irretrievably lost;
- 4) arbitrating conflicts over use of the Common;

5) proposing and promoting ways of integrating the various types of land use on the Common into a coherent “whole” Common.

In order to involve the community stakeholders in this stewardship role, the committee should be a standing one which meets at least quarterly. Membership features must be transparent.

3. EFFECTIVE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

It is imperative that we address the scale of the report and HRM’s interaction with its citizens.

We are a group of individuals with various areas of expertise: civil engineering, Masters in Business Administration, law, architecture, academia to name just some of our backgrounds. Several are used to large complex projects and documents and should have found reviewing the draft Plan straightforward.

However, we found it confusing and not user friendly. The full Plan and appendices total 521 pages. If we had difficulty reviewing and making sense of the document, what does the average resident of HRM comprehend in reviewing the Plan?

It is unfair and unrealistic for HRM staff and councilors to think the citizens of HRM:

- 1) will read it;
- 2) understand it; and
- 3) make meaningful comments on it.

An Executive Summary must be included that is at least 1% of the total document. With 521 pages that translates to an Executive Summary of 5 pages.

3.1 Participatory:

In Appendix A of the Plan it states that “The first of five public engagement meetings for the Halifax Common master plan was held on December 11, 2017

from 7:00-9:00, at the Atlantica Hotel.” However, the information included in Appendix A only includes notes from 4 public engagement meetings. Where is the fifth? COVID interfered with things but as this is a document for review, comment and implementation it should be accurate.

The six vision goals state:

- 1) To strengthen the shared sense of place, protect the unique character and foster a cohesive identity throughout the Halifax Common.
- 2) To broaden the range of leisure and recreation spaces and activities, to ensure more people can enjoy experiences on the Halifax Common.
- 3) To improve the mobility network with accessible, comfortable and convenient connections that encourages active transportation throughout the Halifax Common.
- 4) To enrich public life, in the way people use public spaces, and in how those spaces are planned, implemented and maintained.
- 5) To support human health and wellbeing with an open space system that minimizes environmental impacts and improves resilience to climate change.
- 6) To protect and celebrate significant cultural and historic elements of the Halifax Common. (3.3)

Under the six guiding principles it states:

Coherent: Halifax Common is understood as one distinct place by being integrated, legible and orderly.

Enduring: The heritage of the Halifax Common is safeguarded for future generations to enjoy.

Connected: The Halifax Common links people and places through active mobility choices.

Versatile: Public spaces are efficient, adaptable and multi-functional.

Green: Park and open spaces are supported by infrastructure that incorporates sustainable and resilient living systems and processes.

Participatory: The community is engaged in the planning, care and animation of the public spaces on the Halifax Common. (3.4)

Furthermore, under Participatory it states “The community is engaged in the planning, care and animation of the public spaces on the Halifax Common....Through innovative new relationships and partnerships, stewardship groups and other citizens can play a vital role in the planning, care and animation of the open spaces on the Halifax Common.”

- 1) How and when have the consultants and city staff engaged with the Friends of the Halifax Common, a non-profit community group founded in 2006 to advocate and to be a voice for the Halifax Common?
- 2) How can the consultants and city staff think that the average citizen of Halifax can go through and understand a 521-page document?

3.2 Privatization

Privatization is a transfer from public to private ownership and control:

- (a) This goes against three of the stated vision goals of the Plan [1. To strengthen the shared sense of place, protect the unique character and foster a cohesive identity throughout the Halifax Common.; 2. To broaden the range of leisure and recreation spaces and activities, to ensure more people can enjoy experiences on the Halifax Common.; and 4. To enrich public life, in the way people use public spaces, and in how those spaces are planned, implemented and maintained.]

And yet the use of the Wanderers Grounds is being negotiated and committed to secretly behind closed doors!

3.3 Commercialization

Commercialization is the process of managing or running something principally for financial gain.

- i. Selling off the naming rights to the Oval also secretly behind closed doors;

- ii. For-profit businesses set up on the Common as opposed to non-profit, community groups for fund-raising; and
- iii. Selling off the naming rights to the new “unapproved” aquatic center.

4. WANDERERS [BLOCK] GROUNDS

The Plan itself makes many aspirational statements about the Wanderers Block and/or Grounds which the FHC believe need to become more firmly stated as action items. Below we have extracted statements from the Plan and then suggested specific actions.

○ Statements from the Plan

“The Halifax Common will be a vital public space.....” “Its open spaces, public uses and special character are to be protected.....” (P. 41, 3.2 Vision Statement)

“Broaden the range of leisure and recreational spaces to ensure more people can enjoy.....the Halifax Common and enrich public life and support human health and well-being” (P. 42, 3.3 Vision Goals). ... “And maximizing the useable green spaces”. (P.43, 3.4 Guiding Principles>>Connected).

“The Wanderers Grounds is in need of preservation and rehabilitation...” (P.72, Cultural Heritage 7. Interpreting the Landscape).

“Evaluate Wanderers Grounds property to identify further cultural and heritage significance for designation”. (P.77, Actions A.4.4.4)

“Respect the intent of the Halifax Common in being ‘for the people’ with regard to access and inclusion....” (P.92, 4.6.4 Policy Directions)

Action to be taken:

HRM must pursue provincial legislation to protect the Wanderers Field specifically and the Wanderers Block as a whole from private for profit incursions. The lease between HRM and the privately-owned SEA organization is contrary to the history and intended use of the Common. SEA shall be

informed immediately that the lease shall not be renewed and their equipment and structures will be removed from the Wanderers Field when the lease expires.

○ Statements from the Plan

“Special effort is required to encourage children from low income and new immigrant families to participate in sports and recreational activities”. (P.18 Recreation Needs). “activities in the Halifax Common municipal open spaces are not reflective of typical recreational trends and would benefit from a shift toward additional unstructured and casual uses.”) P. 20 Recreational Needs Assessment: Pattern of Use Structured vs Unstructured Activities).

““Ensure the Halifax Common is great for everyone.” “Key themes were importance of green spaces, openness and diverse and unstructured recreational activities”. (P.30 Public Consultation) “The Halifax Lancers expressed their desire to expand....” “Halifax Lawn Bowling Club expressed their need for improved parking, room for spectators and an upgraded structure”. (P.31 Public Consultation)

“Review impacts of buildings on and near the Halifax Common”. (P.97 Actions A4.7.2)

“The agreement with SEA is contingent upon providing access to community sports groups”. (P.145 Key Considerations - 2. Sports Field)

“Provide more efficient use of the Wanderers Ground site by relocating club parking areas.....” (P.147 Design and Programming Guidance 5.4.12)

“....relocating parking lots...” (P.147, 5.4.13) “Rationalize the amount of club parking required....” (P.147, 5.4.14)

Action to be taken:

There will be no built permanent structures on the Wanderers Field specifically and the Wanderers Block as a whole. This includes parking lots.

- Statements from the Plan

“The planning implication is to rebalance the scales for active vs passive recreation, single vs multi-use and controlled vs open access”. (P.33, Key Findings, Active vs Passive Recreational Areas). “Broaden the range of leisure and recreation spaces and activities to ensure more people can enjoy experiences on the Halifax Common”. (P.42 Vision Goals 3.3)

“Plan for broad recreation needs.....including family programming, lifelong physical activity, small-scale sports and games...” (P.92 Policy Directions 4.6.5)

Action to be taken:

Recognize, document and ensure that the Wanderers Field is first and foremost a venue for the use of amateur athletics and inclusive public events.

- Statements from the Plan

“Limit the use of public programming spaces for the sole purpose of equipment storage and investigate off-site options for this use.” (P. 117 Design and Programming Guidance – Building and Park Infrastructure 5.1.119).

“In its current configuration, the Wanderers Grounds are not perceived as a publicly accessible open space”. There are “fenced off areas that aren’t open to the general public.” ...utilitarian buildings and maintenance lay-down areas.....and non-translucent fences limit visual access.....and contribute to the sense of isolation of the Wanderers’ Grounds....”(P.145 Key Considerations 1. Public Use and Access)

“Retain smaller operations footprint to service the Halifax Common. Relocate the park operations to McIntosh Depot”. (P.148 Design and Programming Guidance: Parks Work Depot and Greenhouses 5.4.26)

“Consider repurposing and space made available foremost as public parkland”. (P.148 5.4.28)

Action to be taken:

The Wanderers Grounds should be open and accessible. The vehicles and machinery on the depot site of the Wanderers Block will be removed from Common land to another location. Parking should be removed.

○ Statements from the Plan

This section of the Plan (P. 148 Halifax Lancers' Equestrian Facility) acknowledges that the Lancers' facility requires reconfiguring and realignment. "Much of the Halifax Lancers' concerns are concentrated on parking, loading areas and paddock. The Halifax Lancers also expressed their desire to expand to accommodate more programming." (P.30-31 Public Consultation). This "not-for-profit equestrian club....is currently at capacity". (P.145 Key Considerations 4. Equestrian facility)

"The Public Gardens is deeply valued by the community as a place of respite and enjoyment of beauty. The public would like to see new ways to animate the space". (P.160 Key Considerations 4. Public engagement findings)

"Develop opportunities to engage and educate the public about Victorian plant collection and production within the gardens. Consider whether a historically appropriate conservatory or structure would satisfy this purpose". (P.161 Design and Programming Guidance 5.6.23)

Actions to be taken

The Lancers and Public Gardens will share the space vacated by the depot vehicles and machinery between the horses and the greenhouses. Designate space for the Lancers to expand through use of the parking lot south of the Natural History Museum, parts of a newly repurposed depot area and/or parts of the soon-to-be reclaimed Wanderers Field.

○ Statements from the Plan

"Recognize the importance and tradition of the Wanderers Lawn Bowling Club". (P.92 Policy Directions 4.6.11)

“Club membership has been rising in recent years....” “.....creating inviting pedestrian routes and gathering places....would dramatically increase the club’s presence”. (P. 145 Wanderers Grounds Site Key Considerations 3 Halifax Lawn Bowling Club)

Actions to be taken

Upgrade the clubhouse of the historic Lawn Bowlers Club and ensure that their space regains public visibility through decluttering of their surrounding space.

○ Statements from the Plan

“....recognize and conserve Registered Heritage Properties including the Power House”. (P.75 Policy Directions 4.4.13) “Respect the historical significance, landscape setting and traditional use of the Power House...” (P.76 Policy Directions 4.4.18) “The Richard Power House....is a landmark dominating the intersection of Sackville and South Park Streets”. “....the Power House could further be enhanced as a significant location on the Halifax Common”. (P.146 Key Considerations 6. Power House) “Recognize the heritage value of the Power House....” (P. 147 Design and Programming Guidance 5.4.9)

“Develop more park space around the building (Power House) as more space becomes available through the consolidation of the works depot”. (P.148 Design and Programming Guidance 5.4.30) “Protect and preserve registered heritage structures such as the Power House”. (P.161 Design and Programming Guidance 5.6.9)

Action to be Taken

Designate the Power House a publically accessible museum and archive for the entire Halifax Common. It will serve as an educational and interpretive centre.

- Statements from the Plan

...the Halifax Common holds a special designation that differentiates it from other parklands – one that infers a greater degree of public stewardship and a stronger sense of community ownership”. The planning implication is to focus on collaborative partnerships”. (P. 37 Key Findings: Programming)

“Through innovative new relationships and partnerships, stewardship groups and other citizens can play a vital role..” (P.45 Guiding Principles >>Participatory)

“Connected open spaces with public access....can be achieved through joint stewardship and integrated planning among institutional stakeholders”. (P.52 Halifax Common District and Land Use Character Areas 5. District-Wide Open Space Management)

Figure 4.3.6 on Page 67 illustrates the overview of the Common which designates the possibility of open space ownership and stewardship.

“....to become a more egalitarian public space can best be achieved if the decision-making process is open and collaborative”. (P. 101 Governance and Partnerships Introduction).

“...the ‘Friends of...’ model may be a good fit” ... “Building and maintaining stakeholder relationships requires ongoing transparency and accountability around decision-making”. “When stakeholders and advisors are selected, and public engagement events are conducted, striving for equity should be top of mind...”.

“Plan collaboratively with institutional stakeholders....”. “Value stewardship organizations....” “Engage with broad representations of stakeholders, organizations and individuals.....to obtain fulsome input in undertaking major decisions on the Halifax Common”.(P.102 Governance and Partnerships: 3. Stewardship Groups 4. Transparency and Accountability 5. Equity 6. Public Participation and Policy Directions 4.9.3, 4.9.4, 4.9.5, 4.5.6)

Action to be Taken

A Halifax Common Stewardship Board or Association will be convened for the purpose of managing and protecting the Common as a whole with headquarters in the Power House. It will be comprised of volunteer members acting as public advocates representing the various groups already actively advocating for the Common.

○ Statements from the Plan

“Discourage commemorations that involve assigning naming rights to existing or new facilities to retain the principles of the Halifax Common belonging equally to the entire community of Halifax”. (P.142 Design and Programming Guidance 5.3.4)

Action to be Taken

Develop policies specific to the Halifax Common to disallow private companies to pay to advertise their product. Transparent contributions from all public and private interested parties could be accepted under a Foundation model where contributor names and organizations can be discreetly acknowledged on a sign or plaque. It is very disappointing that HRM has recently agreed to brand the Halifax Common Oval and the new Central Common swimming pool without consulting with the public and developing specific policies and criteria on this despite the stated Design and Programming Guidance aspirations.

5. Reclaim the Victoria General Hospital Parking Lot: Recapturing the School for the Blind Property

The area on South Park Street between University Avenue and South Street has long been a matter of concern to the citizens of Halifax.

In 1868 the members of the Society for the Preservation of the Common reluctantly agreed that the block should become the site of a school for children with sight problems because it was a ‘most benevolent and necessary undertaking’ (*British Colonist*, 7 April 1868, 2a). Over a century later, that same ‘public good’ frame of mind supported the use of the former institutional lot for Victoria General Hospital parking.

Then we were still in the age of the almighty automobile. However, that concession was abused when the proposed 'Park within a Park', designed by Peter Klynstra and promised to the public, was not honoured. The mixed features, 200 trees amidst 200 vehicles plus a landscaped public park in exchange for the closure of the block between University and South Streets did not materialize.

The only features promised by the Province: a playground and scented garden commemorating the former School for the Blind were bulldozed without warning in the 1990s in order to add 12 more parking spaces. The lot is currently the standard ugly parking lot and the 'landscaped' path a remarkable obstacle course for hospital patients and visitors alike.

Sadly, the Halifax Common Master Plan has little to say about this area. In the main body of the Plan the only acknowledgments of the lost space are Figures 4.3.6 and 4.5.1 which highlight a narrow strip of the illegitimate parking lot.

The same 'narrow' vision determines Action A4.5.3 (b) which refers to the establishment of linear open space along South Park between University Avenue and South Street.

The consultants defer to the 2010 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between HRM and the provincial government (Appendix F) in which the future of this area is raised and the rights of the city to that land as open space is reiterated in quite strong language, referring to a green corridor 'through the Halifax Common by promoting the extension of Victoria Park via the former School for the Blind (currently the VG parking lot)' (MOU 1.4).

Clause 1.9 indicates 'That both parties will work to respect the policies outlined in the [1994] Halifax Common Plan' and clause 2.1 sets out some measurements that may need rethinking. We suggest that it would be outrageous for HRM to secure this open space through another land swap.

The problem of jurisdiction is raised in the MPS (**p.103, 7.10**) which declares that such misuse of public spaces should 'be designated temporary'. The Friends of Halifax Common understand that the MOU of 2010 is currently up for review.

The little contribution to the issue contained in the new Common Master Plan is simply inadequate (see Figure 5.3.1 which suggests substituting one tree for one car on the east periphery of the lot, a confirmation of the narrow vision for this area). Actions 4.9.2-4.9.4 provide no guidance.

Admittedly, the staff report of 8 Dec. 2021 p.4 *Need for Joint Planning* reaffirms HRM's desire to establish 'new public open space along South Park Street, between University Avenue and South Street'.

FHC recommends that HRM must recapture the whole area which would not only position it in the proposed 'green corridor' but also give it features to be found on other parts of the Halifax Common, including a children's playground and public, year-round toilets, as well perhaps as adult exercise equipment and plenty of wooden benches and picnic tables.

In Conclusion

We must provide more open space for an expanding population by reclaiming this portion of the people's Common.

HRM's pattern of failing to keep or recapture Halifax Common lands is on-going. Since the School for the Blind land was lost, others we can add to the list include lands formerly occupied by the Civic Hospital, the Grace Maternity Hospital, the Anglican diocese, Queen Elizabeth High School, and CBC TV and more.

This June 23 will mark the 260th anniversary of the 240-acre Halifax Common grant by King George III "to and for the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax as Common forever."