

This summary was prepared by Backlands Coalition (Ilona Inman) for use by our members. It highlights the parts of the draft of the HRM Regional Plan that appear most relevant to our coalition.

[Phase 4 Draft Regional Plan Release - June 20, 2023 Committee of the Whole | Halifax.ca](#)

(pg 4-6)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Municipality has been undertaking a comprehensive review of the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (Regional Plan) since 2020. A Draft Regional Plan is being released with this report. Pending Council's approval of the updated Public Participation Program, this release will begin a four-month public engagement period during which staff will seek feedback on the draft Plan.

While the growth management framework is largely the same, the Draft Regional Plan is a comprehensive update to the entire Plan. The Plan is responding to increased population growth and housing demand, the need to act on climate, and the actions in the Priority Plans (Integrated Mobility Plan, Halifax Green Network Plan, HalifACT, Sharing Our Stories¹, and People Planet Prosperity).

The Draft Regional Plan being released includes only the proposed policy document and does not include the supporting regulatory documents at this time. Engagement materials will be posted on the project website to provide further detail on proposed regulations. Staff will gather feedback from Council, the public and internal/external stakeholders on the policy concepts contained in the Draft before detailed implementation policies are finalized. Amendments to secondary plans, land use by-laws and the Regional Subdivision By-law will be developed over the coming months and finalized after the engagement period, then brought forward as part of the full amendment package.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Present the Draft Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (Draft Regional Plan), to be used for public engagement purposes;
- Receive Council's approval for the updated Public Participation Program, which will guide the public engagement activities on the Draft Regional Plan;
- Provide an update on staff's progress on the overall Regional Plan Review work plan; and
- Identify new and outstanding site-specific requests for amendments to the Regional Plan and receive direction on how to proceed based on staff's initial analysis

BACKGROUND

Regional Council initiated the second review of the Regional Plan on February 25, 2020.² Following release of the first deliverable, the Themes & Directions Report and the follow-up What We Heard Report, Regional Council endorsed a phased work plan, generally summarized as follows:

- **Phase 3: Quick Adjustments** – consideration of amendments to the Regional Plan that align with Regional Council's goals, as a rapid response to current housing conditions;
- **Phase 4: Draft Regional Plan** – return to Regional Council with the remaining policy framework; and
- **Phase 5: Future Growth Planning** – create a work plan and begin analysis of additional lands to be considered for expansion in anticipation of continued growth.

Phase 3 was completed with Regional Council's approval of a set of amendments in October 2022 and work on Phase 4 began immediately following. This report marks the release of the Draft Regional Plan and the launch of the public engagement program for Phase 4 of the overall Regional Plan Review work program.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement process for Phase 4 is consistent with the intent of the HRM Community Engagement Strategy, the HRM Charter, and the Regional Plan Review Engagement Plan approved by Regional Council on January 25, 2022...

... public engagement on the Draft Regional Plan will take place from June 21 to October 27, 2023. The Revised Engagement Plan for Phase 4 focuses on sharing the Draft Regional Plan, explaining how public input from previous engagement phases has been used to inform these recommendations, and providing opportunities to collect meaningful feedback. A variety of in-person and online engagement opportunities have been proposed to reach as many people as possible. In-person engagement activities will include ‘pop-ups’ where planners visit public locations across the region such as libraries, farmers’ markets, and shopping malls; public open houses in several communities; and meetings with internal and external stakeholders. Online engagement will use the [Shape Your City Project Webpage](#) as a central hub where the public can access the Draft Regional Plan, read fact sheets summarizing key topics of interest, review site-specific requests, and watch recorded informational webinars at any time. Public feedback will be accepted through email, telephone, and in writing. In-person and online engagement opportunities will be publicized through HRM social media platforms in collaboration with Corporate Communications, and Regional Planning staff will publicize these events through the Regional Plan Review E-Mailing List and the Shape Your City Project Webpage. Amendments to the Regional Plan, secondary municipal planning strategies and land use by-laws may potentially impact residents, business owners, other HRM Business Units, and stakeholders including other levels of government, community groups, and the development industry.

(pg 7 of attachment B)

Phase 4 – Detailed Engagement Program					
2023	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT
Key Milestones	Draft Plan Released June 20				Engagement Closes October 27
Online Engagement	[Yellow bar spanning JUN to OCT]				
Stakeholder Meetings	[Yellow bar spanning JUN to JUL]			[Yellow bar spanning SEPT to OCT]	
Pop-Ups		[Yellow bar spanning JUL to SEPT]			
Public Open Houses				[Yellow bar spanning SEPT to OCT]	
Inquiries	[Yellow bar spanning JUN to OCT]				

2.5.3 SERVICE AREAS

Widespread residential development throughout the Rural Area is inconsistent with the Plan's goals and objectives of creating compact mixed-use communities and protecting rural character, natural environment and natural resources. New roads can fragment open space, affecting important environmental features and leaving islands of natural habitat that may not be large enough to sustain biodiversity. Further, extensive residential development strains existing community services and adds pressure for the development of costly infrastructure in unplanned areas.

RP-14 It is the intent of this Plan to direct housing and employment growth to the Urban Area, which is serviced with municipal water, wastewater and stormwater services and conventional transit services.

(pg 27-31)

2.7 REGIONAL LAND USE STRUCTURE

This Plan provides direction for what type of development should occur in different geographic areas of the region, using six general land use designations to manage growth. These are illustrated on Map 2: The Regional Land Use Structure Map with the intent and policy direction for each explained in this chapter, as summarized below:

- The **Open Space and Natural Resource** designation applies to the region's natural network of open spaces, typically on government-owned and private resource sector lands.
- The Urban Settlement and **Urban Reserve designations** are applied to areas where development serviced with municipal water, wastewater, stormwater and conventional transit service exists or is planned.
- The **Rural Commuter**, Rural Resource, and Agricultural designations apply to areas of rural settlement.

2.7.1 OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCE DESIGNATION

Growth and development throughout the municipality has been shaped by a natural network of open space, covering the interior of the Municipality, which is generally inaccessible by public road. It consists mainly of provincial Crown lands as well as lands owned by private companies for forest production and harvesting.

The open space network consists of parks, natural corridors and trail systems that have been developed by government agencies, non-governmental organizations and private land owners. The trail systems have become the backbone of a system of interconnected open space and provide opportunity for activities such as back country hiking, biking, portaging and nature appreciation. The natural corridors interconnect natural areas and provide opportunity for wildlife to migrate between habitat patches and maintain natural ecological functions.

The open space network serves many important functions for the region. Open spaces shape the settlement form and character of the Region's communities. Protecting open spaces helps to direct urban development to appropriate locations and creates clear neighbourhood edges. Residents can access nature for outdoor recreation and aesthetic enjoyment, which improves mental and physical health. As a system, these open spaces perform important environmental services such as connecting natural areas for critical wildlife migration, retaining stormwater, mitigating flooding, preventing erosion, uptake of nutrients, abatement of pollution and moderation of climate. Therefore, it is the intent of this Plan to recognize the importance of the open space network and direct development in a way that protects valuable natural and cultural places.

RP-21 The Open Space and Natural Resource Designation shall be established on the Regional Land Use Structure Map (Map 2), as the area encompassing a natural network of

open space in the interior of the Municipality. The Open Space and Natural Resource Designation shall apply to public and private lands identified for their role in the open space network, and shall generally include: parks (federal, provincial and municipal); trails and greenways; wilderness areas and nature reserves, including private conservation lands; areas of protected habitat; resource lands (including Crown lands, and commercial forestry, agriculture and fishery lands); coastal lands (including salt marshes, beaches and estuaries); areas of environmental sensitivity; natural and wildlife corridors; and cultural landscapes.

2.7.3 URBAN RESERVE DESIGNATION

The Urban Reserve Designation is applied to lands that may be suitable for serviced urban development in the longer-term horizon. These lands must be studied to determine if they are still appropriate places for serviced development. An assessment of these lands is required before they may be redesignated as Urban Settlement or any comprehensive planning process is undertaken.

In 2006, the Urban Reserve designation included several areas to be considered as potential future serviced communities to accommodate housing and employment growth beyond 2031. One area, the Purcell's Cove Backlands, was removed from the designation following the acquisition of the Shaw Wilderness Park. Two other areas, the interior lands bounded by Highway 7, Ross Road, Highway 207 and Broom Road in Cole Harbour/Westphal, and the Ragged Lake Lands, have been advanced by Regional Council for further study. The remaining land areas, known generally as Kidston Lake Lands, Andersen Lake Lands, Governor Lake Lands and Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lands, will be studied for the potential for future growth in alignment with the Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Priority Plan. This study will determine where and how the municipality should grow, to accommodate future population growth beyond the Urban Settlement Areas identified in this Plan, aligned with Regional Council's priorities.

RP-23 The Urban Reserve Designation shall be established on the Regional Land Use Structure Map (Map 2) to identify lands that may be required for future serviced development after lands in the Urban Settlement Designation have been developed.

RP-24 The Municipality shall, through the applicable land use by-law, establish an Urban Reserve Zone to regulate development of lands within the Urban Reserve Designation. This Zone shall permit open space uses and limit residential development to existing lots.

RP-25 Amendments to the Regional Land Use Structure Map (Map 2) to change the Urban Reserve designation to Urban Settlement shall only be considered once the Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Priority Plan as identified under RP-19 and RP-20 is completed and shall be guided by long-term scenarios for future growth and the criteria set out by that process.

RP-26 Notwithstanding Policy RP-25, the Municipality shall complete background studies for the interior lands bounded by Highway 7, Ross Road, Highway 207 and Broom Road in Cole Harbour/Westphal in support of the African Nova Scotia Road to Economic Prosperity objective to support the Akoma-led planning process for the restoration of the historic Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children. This process will determine the Regional Plan designation that would best support the future development of the site, in alignment with Policy HC-7 and the policies of this Plan.

RP-27 Notwithstanding Policy RP-25, the Municipality shall complete background studies for the Ragged Lake lands to determine if these lands are appropriate for industrial use, in alignment with Policy HC-7 and the policies of this Plan.

2.7.4 RURAL COMMUTER DESIGNATION

The intent of the Rural Commuter Designation is to direct development and services to centres within commuting distance to the Regional Centre while protecting the natural resource base, preserving the open space network, and continuing to foster traditional rural community character. While residential development within this designation has historically been

characterized by large lot residential developments, more development will be encouraged through clustered development.

RP-28 The Rural Commuter Designation shall be established on the Regional Land Use Structure Map (Map 2) to encompass those areas within commuting distance of the Regional Centre that are heavily influenced by low-density residential development. The intent of this designation is to: a) protect the character of rural communities and conserve open space and natural resources by focusing growth within a series of centres, as shown on the Rural Centres Map (Map 4); b) support the delivery of convenience services to the surrounding settlement area; c) control the amount and form of development between centres; d) support compatible resource-based uses such as agriculture, forestry and renewable energy; and e) protect the natural resource base and preserve the natural features that foster the traditional rural community character.

(pg 54-56)

4.2.1 NATURE PARKS

The municipality is home to municipally, provincially, federally and non-profit owned parks and open spaces that provide wilderness protection and recreation opportunities. The Municipality currently has direct involvement in land ownership and park management for three areas that are being developed as Nature Parks. The primary goal of park planning for these publicly held lands is to retain them in a natural state, offering passive access to nature. An overview of these areas is provided in Table CI-1 below. Lands that the Municipality currently owns, or provincially or federally owned lands will be subject to future park planning processes. As development proceeds in close proximity to park areas, attention should be placed on ensuring land use is of a suitable use and scale.

Table CI-1: Description of Nature Parks (*excerpt*)

<p>Shaw Wilderness & McIntosh Run</p> <p>Portions of the Purcell's Cove Backlands, located on the Chebucto Peninsula, are nature parks that include lakes, hills with scenic views, and popular hiking and biking trails. This area is characterized by its glaciated landscape and unique ecology. In addition to being home to a variety of local plants and animal species, the Backlands have a Jack Pine/Broom Crowberry Barrens ecosystem that is naturally unique and globally rare. The Municipality is working in partnership with other provincial and not for profit agencies to establish programming for these lands and actively considers opportunities to acquire additional lands that could further support development of this Nature Park.</p>
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Once underway, park planning may recognize that additional lands could be beneficial to the park purpose and objectives, and should be considered for acquisition. Any lands that are held in private ownership are subject to other land uses, and unless they are zoned for park, are subject to existing development rights as enabled under a land use by-law, or subdivision approvals or development agreements currently in effect.

CI- 3 As park planning proceeds for the nature parks generally known as Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes, Sandy Lake and Shaw Wilderness and McIntosh Run, the Municipality shall give consideration to:

- a) the goals and objectives of this Plan, the Halifax Green Network Plan and any future Regional Parks and Open Spaces Strategy as outlined in Policy CI-2;
- b) the relationship to adjacent lands and community;
- c) applying best practices and an equity lens to acquisition models, park planning, and design processes;
- d) determining safe and environmentally sensitive access points;
- e) using the analysis and findings from ecological features assessments, watershed studies, or land suitability analyses; and,
- f) the findings of the Regional Park Priority Plan as outlined in Policy CI-2.

CI-4 The Municipality shall coordinate with Provincial and Federal governments and conservation groups to help establish a nature park network and use this network to pursue partnerships or changes to legislation or regulation that would help support these important projects.

CI-5 The Municipality shall study lands in close proximity to nature park areas and ensure land use is of a suitable use and scale to support the creation and ongoing use of the nature park.

CI-6 To recognize the unique, fire-prone ecology of the Purcell's Cove Backlands and protect the majority of this area as open space, the Municipality shall establish provisions within the applicable secondary municipal planning strategy and land use by-law to limit development within the interior of the Backlands.

(pg 85-97, not all this section directly relates to the Backlands, but general background)

6.2 PROTECTING AND CONNECTING OUR GREEN SPACES

Halifax Regional Municipality has a full spectrum of open spaces, consisting of lands for natural resources, agriculture, recreation, environmentally sensitive areas, hazard prone lands, cultural landscapes, natural corridors, trails, parks, wilderness areas, and preservation areas for potable water and waste/resource management. This foundation of open spaces forms a Green Network that provides numerous functions such as shaping development, providing ecological services, capturing carbon, retaining lands for agricultural and forestry uses, and providing recreational opportunities. The Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP), approved in 2018 by Regional Council, defines an interconnected open space system for the municipality, highlights ecosystem functions and benefits, and outlines strategies to manage open space. Specifically, the HGNP provides land management and community design direction to:

- maintain ecologically and culturally important land and aquatic systems;
- promote the sustainable use of natural resources and economically important open spaces; and
- identify, define and plan land suited for parks and corridors.

EC-1 The Actions of the Halifax Green Network Plan shall be considered in the business planning, programming and regulatory activities of the Municipality.

6.3.1.1 A REGIONAL GREEN NETWORK

As the region grows and changes, retaining large natural areas is of critical importance to maintaining healthy communities. Natural areas should help shape the municipality's communities, establish community edges, and provide direct connection to nature. Lands of high value to the green network provide critical ecosystem services, important habitats and should be protected from significant human activity, as part of a larger effort to maintain biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and foster increased health and well-being.

Managing these areas will require balancing ecological protection with human activity to ensure that sensitive places are preserved, and the benefits of natural ecosystems are maintained. The development pattern of the region has been shaped by a natural network of open space, consisting of inaccessible Crown lands and privately held lands for natural resource production (such as forest production and harvesting). Equally important to this network is a system of large natural areas, natural corridors, and trail systems which form a backbone of interconnected green space. The Open Space and Natural Resource Designation identifies the primary areas in this network that will be maintained as natural spaces and working landscapes. As a system, these open spaces perform environmental services such as connecting natural areas for critical wildlife migration, retention of stormwater, mitigating flooding and coastal damage, erosion prevention, uptake of nutrients, abatement of pollution and moderation of climate, and capturing carbon. Protecting isolated blocks of habitat will not adequately protect wildlife, habitat, and ecological services. Connectivity allows the uninterrupted movement of species and flow of natural processes that sustain life on earth. By strengthening, maintaining,

and, when feasible, restoring these systems, we are also protecting our environment, our economy, and our quality of life.

EC-2 The Municipality shall use the Green Network Plan to identify areas that are important to maintaining biodiversity and climate change mitigation and shall change land use and subdivision regulations to manage human activity in these areas to protect the benefits of natural ecosystems.

EC-3 To preserve the interconnected system of open space and minimize fragmentation within the Open Space and Natural Resource Designation the Municipality shall, through the Subdivision By-law, prohibit residential development on new roads within the Open Space and Natural Resource Designation.

EC-4 The Municipality shall, through the Subdivision By-law, provide for the creation of one additional lot from any area of land that is within the Open Space and Natural Resources Designation and does not meet the minimum road frontage requirements provided that the area of land was in existence prior to April 29, 2006.

EC-5 The Municipality shall, through the applicable land use by-law, establish a Protected Area Zone. This Zone shall be applied to protect environmentally sensitive areas including wilderness areas which have been designated under the Wilderness Areas Protection Act, nature reserves designated under the Special Places Protection Act, and conservation related properties owned by government, non-profit conservation organizations, private conservation organizations. The Zone shall only permit scientific study and education, trails and similar public, conservation and recreational uses.

EC-6 Further to Policy EC-5, to enable property owners to retain a portion of their property and donate a portion of the property for conservation purposes, the Municipality shall, through the Subdivision By-law, provide for the creation of one additional area of land from any area of land within any designation provided that the additional area of land: a) shall be used only for conservation purposes; and b) may not meet minimum road frontage and lot area requirements.

EC-7 The Municipality may consider accepting or acquiring lands for conservation purposes.

6.3.1.2 PRESERVING NATURAL CORRIDORS

Within the open space network, larger patches of wilderness are connected through undeveloped natural corridors which provide opportunities for wildlife to move, seek shelter, food, water, space and mates; all important components for maintaining healthy, diverse wildlife populations. However, human activity such as new development, natural resource extraction, highway and road construction, and removal of vegetation are increasingly threatening these critical connections. Without intervention, there is a risk of losing and disconnecting these corridors permanently. Therefore, it is critical to identify and implement a clear approach to protect natural corridors as the region grows.

The HGNP was the initial step to begin conceptualizing the relationship between corridors and areas of high environmental value which were then further refined. The HGNP highlighted the connection between mainland Halifax and the Chebucto Peninsula as particularly under threat. By overlaying the HGNP essential corridors with land use and planning data, a high-level understanding of the interplay between wilderness and land use can be seen. Through this analysis, a pattern emerges, and highlights connections at the highest order as shown on Map 6 to identify varying levels of risk and the need for different levels of intervention. Three distinct corridor types are as described below:

1. Corridors At Risk (Essential Corridor Area 1) - Essential corridors present in areas that are not yet developed but are in pressure points and are at high risk of being lost. This is especially true to allow the movement of wildlife between the Chebucto Peninsula and Mainland Halifax. These types of corridors require immediate intervention.

2. Developed Corridors (Essential Corridor Area 2) - Essential corridors in which development has already occurred but there may be opportunities to reduce further impacts to the corridors. This type of corridor would require an intermediate level of intervention and considerations of tools to reduce any further damage as secondary planning documents and land use bylaws are updated.

3. Protected Corridors (Essential Corridor Area 3) - Essential corridors that are already protected through existing tools including Open Space Designation, Agricultural Designation, Growth Control measures, or Conservation Design Development. In these areas, intervention may not be required, but the existing tools must remain in place to continue to protect these corridors.

EC-8 To further the goals of the Halifax Green Network Plan and guide amendments to this Plan, secondary municipal planning strategies and land use by-laws, the Municipality shall consider refining the boundaries of the Essential Corridors and Important Corridors shown on Map 5 of the Halifax Green Network Plan.

EC-9 The Municipality shall coordinate and partner with provincial and federal levels of government, utilities, and other relevant stakeholders with a view to establishing, maintaining, protecting and strengthening wildlife corridors and wildlife crossings, including on major infrastructure like highways, utility corridors and multi-jurisdictional boundaries.

EC-10 The Municipality shall identify Essential Corridor Areas on Map 6 Wildlife Corridors as Essential Corridor Area-1 (ECA-1), Essential Corridor Area-2 (ECA-2), and Essential Corridor Area-3 (ECA-3). Detailed overlays for each Essential Corridor Area shall be included within applicable land use by-laws.

EC-11 Within all Essential Corridor Areas shown on Map 6, the Municipality shall consider: a) naturalization within public spaces and the right of way; b) amending secondary municipal planning strategies and land use bylaws: i. to limit uses or development forms that are incompatible with wildlife connectivity; ii. to increase lot size requirements; iii. to require reinstatement and maintenance of vegetation in riparian buffers; and iv. to include lot coverage and landscaping requirements that promote a high percentage of open space and permeable surfaces.

EC-12 The Municipality shall amend the Regional Subdivision By-Law, applicable secondary municipal planning strategies and land use by-laws to permit subdivision within an Essential Corridor Area-1 (ECA-1) only by development agreement.

EC-13 Further to Policies EC-11 and EC-12, when adopting new or amending existing secondary municipal planning strategies or land use by-laws or the Regional Subdivision By-law, or considering development agreements or amendments to development agreements to permit new development on lands located within an Essential Corridor Area 1 (ECA-1), the Municipality shall: a) require the location and width of an Essential Corridor to be delineated at the site level; b) organize land use or management of land in a way that protects the Essential Corridor 1, and ensures landscape connectivity to Essential Corridors on adjacent lands; c) consider opportunities to dedicate or acquire parkland within or adjacent to Essential Corridors; and d) consider opportunities for wildlife crossings over transportation infrastructure or other major barriers.

EC-14 Further to Policy EC-11, prior to any amendments to this Plan that would result in a change to the Open Space Designation, the Agricultural Designation, or those portions of the Hammonds Plains and Beaver Bank communities that are subject to Policy I-33, the Municipality shall delineate the location and width of the Essential Corridor Area-3 that would be affected by the proposed amendment.

6.3.3 NATURALIZATION AND MUNICIPAL NATURAL ASSETS MANAGEMENT

Natural assets such as wetlands, forests, waterways, and parks can mitigate coastal damage, reduce the heat island effect, provide shade and areas for reprieve, manage stormwater, clean

the air and water, provide buffers and protection to inland properties, sequester carbon, and offer aesthetic and recreational opportunities and mental and physical health benefits. Natural systems have traditionally been undervalued as they are perceived to provide these services for free. The services that these natural assets provide often cannot be replicated by human-made systems or can only be replicated at a tremendous cost. Keeping natural assets intact and seeking opportunities to increase natural assets through programming effort can provide numerous benefits as these systems are self-renewing and resilient, which reduces the maintenance requirements and costs of landscape management and ecosystem restoration. Keeping natural assets in their natural state is ideal; however, this is not always possible, and the Municipality will seek opportunities to further expand on the health, biodiversity, and resiliency of natural assets through priorities plans, naturalization programming, and natural asset management. Approaches such as green infrastructure provide natural and semi-natural engineered landscape elements designed to provide services such as stormwater management, adaptation to the effects of climate change, water filtration and improved air quality.

Since 2019, the Municipality has been working towards a naturalization initiative, beginning with a pilot program. Various community and corporate projects have been implemented, and in 2022, Regional Council approved the expansion of the naturalization pilot into a region-wide program. Currently, 31 sites have been identified for naturalization, ranging from riparian to pollinator meadows.

EC-15 The Municipality shall support a region-wide naturalization program and promote naturalization through projects, public education and awareness.

Municipal Natural Assets refer to natural resources or ecosystems that provide local, sustainable municipal services. These services provide a variety of core services such as stormwater management, water infiltration, protection from flooding and erosion, and other services. Not only do these services provide service delivery, but they also support adaptation and mitigation for climate change, enhanced biodiversity, and ecosystem health. The location of natural assets can also inform decisions related to appropriate locations for future developments as it relates to flooding and wilderness areas. In 2020-2021, the Municipality began the first step in natural assets management, a natural assets management inventory.

EC-16 The Municipality shall develop a Municipal Natural Assets framework to measure and value natural assets and make decisions on the delivery of services that natural assets provide.

6.3.4 URBAN FORESTS

The Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP), first adopted in 2012 and under review in 2023, provides a comprehensive neighbourhood approach to ensure a sustainable urban forest in the Urban Settlement Designation. To modernize the language and approach to urban forestry in the Municipality, the UFMP shall be renamed the “Urban Forest Management Plan” in future versions of the document.

EC-17 The recommendations of the Urban Forest Management Plan, adopted in principle by the Municipality in September 2012 as amended or readopted, shall be considered in planning, programming and regulatory activities related to managing and enhancing the urban forest cover in the Municipality.

6.4 PROTECTING OUR WATER

Water is a limited and precious resource. Water not only sustains life through providing potable water supplies, wildlife habitats and aquatic corridors; it also has historic and cultural value and provides a tremendous range of ecosystem services and recreational and aesthetic values to its citizens. Watersheds are the fundamental unit to understand the environmental, social, and cultural values of water and must be protected through land-use control and retention, enhancement, and restoration of those features that regulate water flow, mitigate flooding, reduce water pollution and protect ecological functions.

The municipality is home to over 1,000 lakes, more than 20 rivers, innumerable streams, and 23 major shorelines. These interconnected systems are vulnerable and require careful management and consideration to address complex issues such as management of surface and groundwater quantity and quality, ecosystem conservation, competing interests or users, public safety, and differing mandates from various agencies. Environmental features such as water, soils, vegetation, and habitat are all interconnected, and land use activities in one area of a watershed can adversely affect the quality and quantity of water and aquatic habitat in another, with the most impact downstream from activities occurring upstream.

6.4.1. THE UMBRELLA - WATERSHED PLANNING

As the Municipality undergoes community planning to modernize our community plans, there is an opportunity to be innovative and restructure planning that integrates ecology with land use to strive toward a healthier ecosystem and communities through comprehensive community and neighbourhood planning. Land suitability studies and watershed studies will inform how development interacts within an ecological system to minimize land use impacts on the natural system.

It's important to recognize that watersheds and sub-watersheds at different scales face different pressures and that a blanket, one-size fits all watershed management approach will not appropriately address the stresses a given watershed is facing. Watershed planning in a developed urban setting where watersheds may be degraded and require restoration require different approaches than rural contexts where there is opportunity to influence how settlement can be best arranged to maximize ecosystem health. Further, there may be urban, suburban and rural settings all located within the same watershed, adding to the complexity of watershed planning and management.

6.4.2 WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Watershed Management acknowledges uncertainties, considers interconnections within the system, and recognizes cumulative effects and impacts on the watershed.²⁰ Fundamentally, a Watershed Management Framework is a mechanism to organize and address the complex interactions between land-based activities and water resources using watersheds as a unit of management through a coordinated approach. The development of a Watershed Management Framework promotes a coordinated approach to balancing equitable use of water resources with the sustainability of these vital ecosystems.

Not all watersheds are the same –urban, suburban, and rural watersheds can face different stressors and may require tailored approaches depending on various impacts. For example, an urban watershed may face higher volumes of runoff and pollutants due to impervious surfaces whereas rural areas may face issues of arsenic or lack of groundwater recharge. Therefore, although there may be common components of a Watershed Management Framework, there must be flexibility and adaptability built within the Watershed Management Framework to customize local conditions. Critical to the success of Watershed Management is genuine community-level stakeholder involvement and buy-in. Without community stewardship, a Watershed Management approach will not succeed.

EC-18 The Municipality shall consider developing community-based Watershed Management Frameworks to provide recommendations for amendments to this Plan, and new or amended secondary municipal planning strategies, using watersheds as a defined unit of management. The Watershed Management Frameworks shall consider: a) Utilizing a holistic, adaptive approach to managing all water resources, improving the health of the watershed, and adjusting to changing circumstances; b) Determining and mitigating the impact of water pollution; c) Infrastructure investments, land use changes, and growth servicing; d) The impacts of climate change and measures to reduce those impacts; e) Restoring and maintaining water quality and natural floodplains; f) The impacts of flooding on water quality and ecosystem resiliency; g) Supporting, enhancing and/or restoring habitat connectivity in both aquatic and riparian zones; h) Developing strategies to determine and implement best practices to reduce the impact of land uses adjacent to watercourses and identifying the cumulative impact of development within a

watershed; i) Developing strategies to increase the naturalization of riparian buffers where they are degraded, and prevent the destruction of habitat where riparian buffer remains in a natural state; j) Improving the integration of publicly available and scientifically sound principles and available community water quality data into policy and decision-making; k) Building genuine, inclusive, collaborative relationships with community stakeholders and municipal programs; and l) Developing strategies for implementation and enforcement of watershed management strategies.

6.4.3 WATERSHED STUDIES

The goal of a watershed study is to determine the potential impact of development on all watercourses, including wetlands, riparian zones, ground water, and waterbodies. This includes impacts on the site and the watershed(s) where the site is located, both in terms of cumulative impacts of multiple developments in one watershed, and downstream effects of a single development on ecosystems. Findings should present a watershed management plan including mitigation measures to reduce the negative impacts of development on watercourses and identify features or areas where development poses unacceptable risks. Watershed management plans will seek to achieve public health standards for body contact recreation, identify and maintain, enhance or restore ecosystem services provided by riparian and aquatic ecosystems, and to maintain the natural trophic status of our lakes and waterways.

EC-19 When considering requests to develop future serviced communities as outlined in Policy HC-7, the Municipality shall require watershed or sub-watershed studies concerning natural watercourses where new or additional development could adversely affect watercourses within the watershed. The studies shall be designed to: a) establish a reliable and accurate baseline of existing water quality; b) Recommend water quality objectives for key receiving watercourses in the study area; c) evaluate the capacity of any existing control structures in the watershed; d) model potential impacts to water quality as a result of development, and determine the amount of development and maximum inputs that receiving water bodies can assimilate without adversely affecting water quality; e) determine the parameters to be attained or retained to achieve water quality objectives; f) identify sources of contamination within the watershed; g) identify remedial measures to improve water quality; h) identify areas within the watershed where changes in flow patterns from development could result in flood damage to properties or environment; i) evaluate and identify the potential for increased flooding hazards as a result of development, taking into consideration the effects of climate change; j) recommend strategies to achieve the water quality objectives set out under the watershed study; k) recommend methods to reduce and mitigate loss of natural infrastructure, permeable surfaces, native plants and native soils, groundwater recharge areas, and other important environmental functions within the watershed; l) identify appropriate riparian buffer widths for the watershed; m) recommend potential regulatory controls and management strategies to achieve the desired objectives; n) recommend an approach for a successful watershed monitoring program; and o) in areas served by ground water supply, recommend measures to protect and manage quantity and quality of groundwater resources and nutrient inputs.

6.4.5 LAKE MONITORING

Lakes, as a component of the watershed, reflect the health of the surrounding watershed. Water quality monitoring is a shared responsibility between each level of government and is an essential component to successfully manage water resources. The Municipality has a critical role to play in water quality, as it is the level of government that is closest to residents with responsibilities for planning, parks and recreation, community enjoyment and well-being. Water quality monitoring was recommended by the Municipality's Water Resource Management Study in 2003 and water quality monitoring has occurred sporadically over the years. In 2020, a report prepared by AECOM21 made recommendations and identified opportunities for the Municipality to further protect water resources. Through this work, a framework for a water quality monitoring program was chosen: a Municipal staff led approach with community volunteer support. Through this framework 76 lakes were selected for monitoring.

EC-21 The Municipality may consider preparing a water quality monitoring protocol to provide guidance for water quality monitoring plans accepted by the Municipality under policies of this Plan and any other monitoring programs to be undertaken for the Municipality by landowners.

EC-22 For lakes selected for water quality monitoring, the Municipality shall continue to implement a comprehensive water quality monitoring program to provide guidance for water quality monitoring plans and protocols.

EC-23 Further to Policy EC-22, the Municipality shall undertake an adaptive management approach, and based on the data collected, may adjust the water quality monitoring program.

6.4.6 RIPARIAN AREAS AND WETLANDS

Wetlands and other watercourses are vital components of the hydrological cycle and affect the quality and quantity of water and groundwater. They are natural filters for removing sediment, contaminants and excessive nutrients which are drawn up by the vegetation and settle out naturally before entering watercourses or groundwater. They absorb and help regulate peak stormwater flows, reducing the risk of flooding and erosion downstream while offsetting groundwater extraction to reduce the risk of wells running dry.

Retaining riparian buffers is important for the protection of water quality, wildlife and the protection of property and the public from flood hazards. In addition to the functions of flood regulation, the deep-rooted, native plants in riparian buffers protect shorelines by reducing bank erosion and bank failure, reduce the impacts of sedimentation, erosion and nutrient loading on watercourses, regulate the temperature of adjacent watercourses, provide important wildlife habitat, reduce the loss of valuable lands and add aesthetic value to the Municipality. Wetlands also provide a range of ecosystem services including wildlife habitat, opportunities for research and recreation, improved water quality, sediment filtration, water balance regulation, and carbon storage and sequestration. Moreover, while enhancing the overall aesthetics of a community, wetlands are unsuitable for development as they pose a hazard for the stability of structures.

To maximize the protection benefits of riparian buffers and wetlands, the trees, shrubs, ground cover vegetation and soils must be protected. Retaining native vegetation and native soils enhances runoff storage capacity, infiltration, and nutrient recycling. Tree canopy should also be retained over watercourses, soil erosion should be prevented, and activities or land uses which introduce nutrients or contaminants into watercourses need to be excluded.

6.4.6.1 RIPARIAN AREAS

The Green Network Plan recommends a watercourse buffer of 30 metres for stream bank stability, flood mitigation, water temperature regulation, minimal protection of wildlife, partial benefits for sediment removal, and aesthetic value. A general riparian buffer of 30 metres will be applied for protection for the whole of the Municipality until buffers that meet the specific needs of each watershed can be determined through the watershed studies and implemented through amendments to secondary municipal planning strategies.

EC-24 The Municipality shall, through the applicable land use by-law, require the retention of a minimum 30-metre-wide riparian buffer along all watercourses as well as wetlands contiguous with watercourses throughout the Municipality to protect the chemical, physical and biological functions of marine and freshwater resources. No alteration of land levels or the removal of vegetation in relation to development will be permitted within the buffer. Lands within the Halifax Harbour Sub-Designation on the Regional Land Use Structure Map (Map 2), industrial lands within the port of Sheet Harbour and lands within the Waterfront Residential (R-1C) Zone under the Shubenacadie Lakes Secondary Planning Strategy shall be exempted from the buffer requirement.

EC-25 Further to Policy EC-24, provisions may be made to permit certain features within the buffer including public (municipal) water control structures, boardwalks, walkways and trails of limited width and made of a permeable surface, fences, public road crossings, driveway

crossings, public (municipal) wastewater, storm and water infrastructure, marine dependent uses, fisheries uses, boat ramps, wharves, small-scale accessory buildings, conservation uses, parks on public lands and historical sites and monuments within the buffer.

EC-26 Further to Policy EC-24, a special area may be established through the Regional Centre Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law to allow limited recreational uses and commercial uses within a riparian buffer, through development agreement, adjacent to non-coastal watercourses where the riparian buffer has been infilled or altered prior to August 26, 2006. Any development within the special area shall be developed in an environmentally sensitive manner and provide opportunities for natural green space, water quality protection, and public access and enjoyment.

EC-27 Subject to E-29, the Municipality shall, through the applicable land use by-law, relax the riparian buffer requirement for lots in existence on August 26, 2006, where otherwise development would be prohibitive.

EC-28 Subject to E-29, the Municipality shall, through the applicable land use by-law, relax the riparian buffer requirement for lots created or approved after August 26, 2006 and before [date of adoption, 2023], where otherwise development would be prohibitive but shall be no less than as shown on an approved plan of subdivision that was approved prior to [date of adoption].

EC-29 The Municipality shall, through the Eastern Passage/Cow Bay Land Use By-Law, relax the riparian buffer requirement for Cow Bay Lake for lots created or approved after August 26, 2006 and before August 12, 2022.

EC-30 The Municipality shall consider a by-law to protect existing trees and to manage the retention and the removal of existing trees within riparian buffer zones. The Municipality recognizes that development of water lots that have been infilled may result in undesirable impacts on the marine environment and the aesthetic character of the surrounding environment.

EC-31 The Municipality may, through secondary municipal planning strategies and land use bylaws, consider measures to regulate development of water lots, including limiting development and establishing setbacks of buildings and structures from the water.

6.4.6.2 WETLANDS

Protecting wetlands is a shared responsibility. The Nova Scotia Department of Environment regulate wetland alterations and the Municipality regulates development adjacent to wetlands. While the Municipality cannot prevent property owners from applying for a permit to alter wetlands, the Municipality seeks to protect wetland through policy options. Through this Plan, it is the Municipality's intent to discourage the development of wetlands and develop an approach to offer incentives for the protection of wetlands.

EC-32 On all applications for development permit approval, the applicable land use by-law shall require the proponent to verify the existence and extent of any wetland. The applicable land use by-law shall prohibit development within any wetland except as required to allow for existing public infrastructure. The Municipality may consider amending the provisions made under the land use by-laws from time to time to conform to any guidelines or Statement of Provincial Interest adopted by the Province.

EC-33 The Municipality may identify wetlands to be recommended to the Province as a Wetland of Special Significance, including wetlands within all municipal drinking water supply watersheds. In doing so, the Municipality shall consider the Provincial criteria for wetlands with exceptional qualities, as may be amended from time to time.

EC-34 Wetlands designated as Wetlands of Special Significance by the Province of Nova Scotia shall have a minimum 30 metre wide riparian buffer along the edges of the wetland which will be implemented through the applicable land use by-laws.

EC-35 The Municipality may cooperate with the Province of Nova Scotia to develop an approach to protecting wetland areas. Wetland protection strategies may include: a) provisions to permit the creation of additional lots or dwelling units where the design of a development, or the transfer of density proactively protects wetlands; b) identifying, prioritizing, and making recommendations to the Province of Nova Scotia for candidate wetlands to be restored, enhanced, created or expanded by compensation.

(pg 154 - not directly pertaining to the Backlands, but could be of use)

9.3.5 CULTURAL LANDSCAPES & SCENIC VIEWS

Cultural landscapes are defined under the Heritage Property Act as distinct geographical areas or properties uniquely representing the combined work of nature and of people. These landscapes vary dramatically in size and character - from historic settlements to prehistoric rock art sites to designed landscapes such as parks and gardens. Examples may include a burial ground, a historical garden or much larger landscapes reflecting human intervention, such as the pastures of the Musquodoboit Valley, the Shubenacadie Canal, or the Bedford Barrens.

Scenic views, including “scenic entry routes” or “views from the road” are also an important component of cultural landscapes, often providing views of outstanding natural and cultural features. Examples include views of Halifax Harbour, views of the North West Arm, and the Long Hill view over Cole Harbour.

Cultural landscapes provide opportunities for the interpretation and understanding of important historical settings and past patterns of land use. Preserving and promoting these landscapes can also provide opportunities to enhance the sense of a place for both residents and visitors alike.

The Halifax Green Network Plan identifies 17 priority areas throughout HRM as a starting point for a comprehensive inventory of landscapes of cultural significance. Eleven of these sites are listed in the Regional Centre Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy for specific consideration under Urban Structure and Urban Design guidelines.

CH-27 The Municipality shall work with the Province to advance amendments to the Heritage Property Act to allow for the development of regulations for cultural landscapes.

CH-28 The Municipality shall, through the Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan and community planning programs, consider the identification of significant cultural landscapes.

CH-29 The Municipality shall collaborate with Mi'kmaq and Indigenous communities to identify cultural heritage and sites of cultural significance to Indigenous Peoples, and consider how they may best be recognized and preserved.

CH-30 Further to Policy CH-28, when considering any amendments to secondary municipal planning strategies involving lands adjacent to an identified significant cultural landscape, the Municipality shall give consideration to the potential impact of development on its cultural and historic value and environmental resources.

Type	#	Location	Request	Existing Policy	RPR Considerations	Recommendations (Ph 4 Draft Reg. Plan)
Urban Reserve (UR)	Case 22257	Purcell's Cove Backlands UR (All lands in the UR Designation, Purcell's Cove Rd area)	Staff-initiated as a result of HRM's acquisition of Shaw Wilderness Park	Under the Regional Plan these lands are designated Urban Reserve, which envisions future serviced development beyond the life of the Regional Plan (after 2031)	On June 8, 2021, Regional Council passed the following motion: "Consider amendments to the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy, the Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and Halifax Mainland Land Use By-law for lands currently designated and zoned Urban Reserve in the Purcell's Cove Backlands area (as shown on Map 1 of this report), through the ongoing Regional Plan Review (Case 22257) in order to protect environmentally significant features in the area, consistent with the policy directions outlined in this report." ¹	Acknowledge that an urban form of serviced development is no longer envisioned in this location; Re-designate and rezone the Shaw Wilderness Park lands to Open Space and Natural Resources Designation and the Regional Park Zone to reflect its current use;
Urban Reserve (UR)	C025	Lands on Purcell's Cove Rd, Halifax (PID 41342080) (lot on Williams Lake near Hall's Rd)	Request from ZZap Consulting, on behalf of Tony Maskine, to include lands currently within the Urban Reserve designation within the Urban Service Area boundary, to allow for subdivision for serviced development	Halifax Green Network Plan, Action 66: "During the next Regional Plan review amend the Regional Plan to recognize recent land acquisitions [i.e. Shaw Wilderness Park] within the Purcell's Cove Backlands as Regional Park and consider open space planning for the remainder of this area.	Future development should consider the objectives of the Integrated Mobility Plan to support transit oriented development, support the Halifax Green Network Plan's objectives to adequately protect wilderness areas and connections, and follow policy guidance found in HalifACT2050, Sharing Our Stories and Halifax Water's Infrastructure Master Plan.	Re-designate and rezone other publicly-owned lands and private conservation lands to the Open Space and Natural Resource Designation and the Protected Area Zone; Re-designate privately owned Urban Reserve lands to Rural Commuter within 250m of Purcell's Cove Road, and apply the Open Space and Natural Resource Designation to the remainder of the properties; Apply a new Purcell's Cove Backlands Designation and Zone within the Halifax Mainland Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy* and Land Use By-law to the lands which will allow residential development on existing lots, and allow subdivision of existing lots into two lots only.

***Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy** means a community-level plan, subject to the Regional Plan, that provides more detailed land use policy and regulations for a particular area of the Municipality. The term "community plan" is also used in this document to refer to these types of plans.

Note: "**may**" denotes permissive action, and when used in policies, the Municipality is not obliged to undertake future action; "**shall**" denotes mandatory action, and when used in policies, the Municipality must implement the policy through the applicable implementation tools; and "**shall consider**" when used in policies, the Municipality is required to consider, but not obligated to undertake, any action or expend any money. Note: Maps start on **digital** page 255.