FONDATION SIERRA CLUB CANADA FOUNDATION

3384 Albert St.,
Halifax, NS, CANADA B3K 3N2
Tel: (902) 444-7096
email: gretchenf@sierraclub.ca
Website: www.sierraclub.ca
Twitter: @SierraClubACC

May 30th, 2016

Submission to Centre Plan from Sierra Club Canada Foundation – Atlantic Chapter

Introduction

In Halifax, the naïve discourse about sustainability seems to be rooted in the notion that there is the need to counter to "bad" sprawl. The discourse around solutions is just as naïve and seems largely limited to densification by way of building tall massive high-rises. There is no huge increase in population projected for HRM. The 2013 Stantec Report indicates 35,000 housing units could be constructed within the regional centre *without changes in zoning rules.* Developers are pushing HRM's present densification agenda, but the fact is we can accommodate growth in our population without violating existing rules.

For an alternative perspective on Urbanism please find below "AN URBAN FUTURE?" an edited extract from Herbert Girardet's book *Creating Regenerative Cities* (Routledge, 2014):

> "Most futurists take for granted that large cities will be the primary human habitat. Large modern cities are a remarkable achievement, but we forget that the fossil-fuel-powered urban revolution sweeping the planet is subject to entropy: modern cities continually degrade the resources required for their existence. Thus we face a central contradiction: humanity is building an urban future, yet urbanization in its current form is threatening the very future of humanity and the natural world.
>
> In developing countries, villagers who become urban dwellers typically quadruple their resource consumption, yet we barely consider how this affects the global environment. We need a global debate on these issues. Could human settlements exist and even thrive with a high degree of regional self-reliance? Could they be designed to

continually regenerate the living systems on which they depend? We owe it to future generations to have answers to these existential questions."

Centre Plan - Sustainability

The Centre Plan needs to set clear goals, targets and measures for environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability. Cities around the world are basing all development decisions on established principles and best practices for addressing climate change and energy, the most pressing issues of our time. Technical, management and planning solutions already exist. These should be applied in an integrated manner, not one building or roundabout at a time and they should be the framework for reviewing the Regional Municipal Plan, the Urban Forestry Plan, LUB, Secondary Municipal Planning Strategies etc. and improving them to form the Centre Plan. Please respect and improve the existing rules rather than throw them out.

Some examples, (this is not a comprehensive list) for achieving environmental sustainability we recommend include:

1. Set targets for reducing community-based greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency, energy conservation, promotion of passive solar and incorporation of or production of renewable energy, grey-water systems, maximum use of natural daylight etc. These can be for retrofits of existing buildings or new construction.

2. Work with organizations such as Efficiency Nova Scotia and Solar Nova Scotia to create incentives and retrofit existing buildings to reduce GHG emissions. ~35% of a building's energy is embodied. Not only is targeting existing buildings the sustainable environmental and economic choice it is the sustainable social choice as it usually provides support for affordable housing.

3. Amend the City Charter to assume responsibility over issuing demolition permits and develop independent criteria for determining when buildings can be demolished.

4. Require all buildings constructed be carbon neutral or include integrated energy production.

5. Promote solar energy by protecting unobstructed sunlight for all planning and development. Incorporating passive solar gain into new buildings is free and essential where possible. Passive solar homes can cost 10% more to construct but reduce energy consumption by 80-90%. Solar systems (thermal, hot water & PV) are increasingly cost-effective. Building large buildings that shade neighbouring properties is counter-productive and harmful –moreover most high-rises being constructed in Halifax have walls of windows that lose heat in winter and require cooling in summer. Frieburg, Germany has a solar regime similar to Halifax and is known as the solar capital of Germany. By contrast in Halifax there is almost no solar thermal, PV or photovoltaic, passive solar design and relatively few solar hot water systems.

6. Ensure that existing neighbourhoods and public spaces are protected from new developments by keeping the height of the adjacent new structures low, ensuring appropriate setbacks or buffer zones and requirements for public open space.

7. Protecting and enhancing our urban forest is key to livable, healthy and resilient neighbourhoods. Trees in urban settings provide so many benefits, from reducing energy costs to slowing down stormwater flow to health and healing to increasing property values. Our Urban Forest Master Plan is key to making sure we maximize on these benefits, and the Urban Forest Master Plan and existing green spaces must be protected. Any outcomes from the new Centre Plan must not supersede the Urban Forest Master Plan or reduce existing green spaces.

8. "Older, Smaller, Better" a 2014 report by The Preservation Green Lab provides the most complete empirical validation to date that neighbourhoods with a mix of older, smaller buildings of diverse age support greater levels of economic and social activity than areas dominated by newer, larger buildings. The mixed-style, small-scale, multipurpose character that much of Halifax has is exactly what keeps it interesting, livable and economically viable. The city should be keeping any regulations that protect existing built structures and increasing any disincentive for the demolition of buildings as demolition

adds to greenhouse gas emissions through demolition materials and disposal, new materials production and composition and other associated infrastructure; energy efficiency. Building reuse almost always offers environmental savings over demolition and new construction. Moreover, it can take between 10 and 80 years for a new, energy-efficient building to overcome, through more efficient operations, the negative climate change impacts that were created during the construction process." (http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/greenlab/oldersmallerbetter/report/NTHP_PGL_OlderSmallerBetter_ExecSummary.pdf)

9. Independent third-party wind study and shadow study and analyses paid for by the developer but commissioned by HRM should be completed before considering new developments over 5 stories.

10. Prioritize public transportation and pedestrians over cars in all decisions.

11. Prioritize commuter rail from the Via Rail station to Windsor Junction and use this route to support transportation oriented planning. For the price of the Washmill Overpass, the Mount Hope Exchange, and a couple of roundabouts or the cost of widening Chebucto Road, the city could have funded a commuter rail service to Windsor Junction in 2011 at the estimated capital cost of $30 million plus $6 million for operating. Citizens will continue to live in all of the communities serviced by this route for generations to come. The city must support better transportation options such as rail and link it to present and new development.

12. Promote walkability: ie. do not widen streets, instead create large-scale pedestrian zones without cars, add more crosswalks, especially in major shopping districts areas such as Quinpool Road.

13. Ensure that new developments are not large, massive super blocks that are impermeable to pedestrians. Keep small-scale street grids, don’t sell or close streets (Grafton St,

Garrick Lane are examples of giveaways of public right of ways) and retain public right of ways ie. former Ben's Bakery, Acadian Lines bus station, Shoppers Drugmart next to Piercy's etc.

14. Create strong regulations around when lots can be consolidated as a disincentive to speculative land gaming or accumulation.

15. Do not allow new surface parking lots. Parking should be underground or multi-story parking garages on the edge of residential and commercial areas and at major transit junctures.

16. Create disincentives for parking lots by keeping costs high through property tax rates etc.

17. Require that existing surface parking lots be landscaped. See 2013 Toronto's guidelines for greening surface parking lots: https://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_planning/urban_design/files/pdf/greening_p-lot_guidelines_jan2013.pdf

18. Promote car sharing and bike sharing as a way for commercial districts, residential neighbourhoods and developers to reduce the number of parking spaces required.

19. Tighten up the use of Development Agreements as loopholes to get rid of the "anything goes planning" HRM has in 2016. Respect the rules.

20. Develop conflict of interest guidelines for consultants and city staff who work for the city and for private firms or who transition between the private and public sector or volunteer on HRM boards and committees.

21. In reviewing the up-coming Centre Plan or in future reviews of plans, proposals or developments, ensure that citizens have a real role in public consultations that they receive required material with enough time to review it and that questions are answered.

Do not rely on inadequate on-line surveys or on inadequate on-line questionnaires for input. Do not leave final decisions to a Design Review Committee or its equivalent. Citizens' expression of their informed opinion deserves better consideration.

22. For real comments from the public and understanding on the part of HRM staff about the outcome of the Centre Plan draft there should be much better, more sophisticated and informative models/modelling that convey something meaningful with respect to heights, set backs, views etc. These should be made available to the public for comment before proceeding to the next step.