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Our HRM Alliance applauds HRM for “excellent” draft of Halifax Green Network Plan

HALIFAX - The final draft of the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP) was released to the public last Thursday and has been met with applause and relief from many long-time advocates. The Plan, which is a “priorities plan” under the Regional Plan, makes a series of 79 recommendations for implementing recognition and protections for HRM’s most vital natural landscapes.

“The data collected and work completed by HRM and O2 Planning & Design between 2015 and 2018 was excellent,” says Jenny Lugar, the Coordinator for Our HRM Alliance. “Our fear was that the implementation for this massive undertaking would fall short or would recommend waiting until the next review of the Regional Plan for full implementation. We were relieved to find that the draft will allow Council to endorse both immediate and long-term implementation through the 79 actions and the budgeting process.”

The Plan uses datasets ranging from endangered moose habitats to important biodiversity areas to culturally significant travelways to identify and assess the open space network in Halifax Regional Municipality.

“One of the key priorities of Our HRM Alliance, and our 59 member groups, throughout this process, was to have the incredible potential of the green network realized. Access to outdoor recreation close to our communities is a major contributing factor to our quality of life. That’s the sort of thing that attracts tourists, newcomers, and young talent. If we can brand the Green Network under one umbrella, the potential is endless.”

Based on the 79 recommended actions, emphasis will be put on using the “Green Network”, identified in “Map 5” to help guide growth and development decision-making; to better support eco-tourism and rural tourism; to ensure permanent protections for connecting corridors between parks and recreational areas, and; to provide public access to the database.

“Through this project, HRM found that one of our greatest assets is that we still have a ‘remarkably diverse and intact system of green spaces,’” Ms. Lugar says. “It is absolutely crucial now that Regional Council pass this Plan so that we can begin implementation. Let’s not lose any more of this incredible asset to poorly planned growth.”

The Halifax Green Network Plan is a priorities plan under the HRM Regional Municipal Planning Strategy. This multi-year process has invited the public and stakeholders to three public engagement sessions. The final draft was presented to the Community Planning and Economic Development Committee of Council (CPED) on June 21st. CPED voted to defer the discussion and debate about this Plan to their next meeting, on July 19th, to allow Councillors, stakeholders, and the public time to read and review the draft Plan. The motion presented by staff to Councillors on CPED was as follows:

That the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council:

1. Authorize the direction contained in the Halifax Green Network Plan, as contained in Attachment A of the June 12, 2018 staff report, as a framework for amending the existing Regional Plan and Secondary Planning Strategies, and developing new planning documents as may be necessary to implement the Halifax Green Network Plan direction;
2. Direct staff to carry out the actions contained in the Halifax Green Network Plan as part of the multi-year budgeting and business planning process.
3. Request that the Province amend the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, as set out in Actions 18 and 61 of the Halifax Green Network Plan, to:
 - a. enable the Municipality to acquire sensitive environmental lands (e.g. riparian areas, wetlands, steep slopes, etc.) as an environmental reserve through the land development and subdivision process, in addition to existing parkland dedication provisions; and
 - b. enable a greater range of legislative abilities, such as the ability to enact parkland dedication requirements based on density to address development that does not include the subdivision of land.
4. Initiate the process to consider amendments to the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS) to support the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGPN) by referencing the HGPN within the conservation design development agreement policy criteria concerning the connectivity of open space; and
5. Adopt, by policy, the Public Participation Program outlined in the Community Engagement section of the staff report dated June 12, 2018.

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