



A Call for Action in Response to the 2020/21 Municipal Budget Recast

Dear Mayor Savage and Halifax Council,

Our HRM Alliance is a coalition of over 60 diverse groups across Halifax Regional Municipality advocating for a sustainable future through complete communities and greenbelting.

Our HRM Alliance recognizes the challenging position that the Municipality must face in responding to CoVid-19 including adjusting the 2020/21 Municipal Budget. The pandemic has made our values and vulnerabilities clearer than ever. Recent events have highlighted the degree to which our communities value parks, trails, and other opportunities to access nature.

Nature has been recognized to provide significant value to our physical and mental health and it is important that citizens have ready access. The reality is, that many do not have suitable access to nature in their neighbourhood and that these disparities are being compounded in the current crisis. It is imperative that parks and nature become a priority for the municipality now and that delays to parkland acquisition do not endanger our important ecological and recreational spaces. We have the opportunity to re-evaluate where we invest and to find unique solutions to provide equitable access to nature.

The recast budget reduces the already minimal parkland acquisition budget by 80%. While the financial realities are challenging, we know that now is the time to invest in our community's wellbeing. If we reduce investment in parks and nature, we must reflect on what we *are* investing in. The Regional Plan targets for 75% of growth to be outside the Regional Centre – in suburban and rural communities. This sprawling growth is the most expensive to service. As the municipality allows sprawl, all residents take-on these expenses, rather than investing in equitable services and quality of life in our existing and densifying communities.

Instead, the municipality should utilize strong zoning and invest in implementing HRM's priority plans including the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP), Integrated Mobility Plan and HalifACT. Full investment in the recommendations of these plans will result in a municipality that is better prepared for future crises. The HGNP, specifically, highlights actions that should be pursued including:



- requesting changes to the HRM Charter to enable acquisition of sensitive environmental lands, require additional parkland dedication as density increases, and extend the timeframe of purchasing parkland,
- developing citizen service level targets for access to a spectrum of natural spaces which should include an evaluation of current levels of access, and
- further naturalizing parkland and greenspaces within the municipality.

These actions, along with others in the HGNP and priority plans will support community wellbeing with minimal financial investment. In the CoVid-19 crisis, the profound importance of parks and nature to citizens shone a light on our priorities. In order to respond to this, we must take steps to ensure all citizens have sufficient access to nature. It also calls us to ensure we are doing all that we can to protect valuable wilderness spaces like Sandy Lake, Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes, and the Backlands before they are severed or lost.

Collaborating, using nature as a solution, and investing in what we value will allow us to use limited resources to address the vulnerabilities raised by the CoVid-19 crisis to better support the wellbeing of our citizens.

Sincerely,
Our HRM Alliance

Signed by our Steering Committee on behalf of the Our HRM Alliance Membership

Ecology Action Centre

The Village on Main

Downtown Halifax Business Commission

Williams Lake Conservation Company

Sandy Lake Conservation Association

Sackville Rivers Association

See out full list of Our HRM Alliance members.