

A Sustainable Vision for Our Community

Alternative Municipal Budget for the
Halifax Regional Municipality





CCPA
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ISBN 978-1-77125-024-5

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CCPA 2017

This document was prepared thanks to the generous volunteer contributions of many people (including those listed below).

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Preamble

Goals for the Alternative Municipal Budget

FOR 10 YEARS, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia has published an alternative analysis of the fiscal situation facing our provincial government. This is our first review of a municipal budget in Nova Scotia. The goal of an alternative budget is to make a persuasive case for how we can reallocate or/and raise additional public funds to create a community that is socially and economically just, as well as environmentally sustainable.

The alternative budget process is an exercise in economic literacy, which strives to provide an analysis of the full implications of budgetary choices for communities, families and different groups of individuals depending on their sex, gender, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, gender identity expression and geographic location, among other factors. Presented not just as global numbers, budget numbers are put in context. What do the budget numbers mean for our daily lives? Current budgetary choices are compared with other feasible alternatives that mean more for the residents of a community.

Ultimately, this Alternative Municipal Budget for the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) seeks to spark public policy debate, and provide organizations and individuals (including elected councillors and HRM staff) with tools to advocate for social, economic, and political alternatives.

We are publishing this budget well in advance of the normal cycle for budget discussion and debate in the HRM. We want to bring a discussion of

municipal finances to the residents of the HRM, and not just leave it in the Council Chambers. We want residents of HRM to have a basic understanding of how much money HRM Council administers, and what services are currently provided. We need to know this to determine how we might provide different services.

We also want this budget document to inform debates and discussion leading up to this year's municipal elections. This election is a critical one for the HRM; On October 20, 2012, we are faced with restructured district boundaries, with sixteen Council positions instead of twenty-three. This is an opportunity for an alternative vision of municipal services and their financing. This is an opportunity for candidates to declare themselves in favour of a municipal government that provides services that respond to the needs of the residents of the HRM.

We welcome your comments.

Budget for the Halifax Regional Municipality 2012–13

Background and Overview

THE HALIFAX REGIONAL Municipality is the largest municipality in Nova Scotia, with 408,000 people or 43% of the population (in 2011). With a land area of 5,577 square kilometers, HRM is slightly larger than the Province of Prince Edward Island.¹ The Halifax Regional Municipality was created by an act of the provincial government to merge approximately 200 suburban, rural and urban communities including the local governments for the City of Dartmouth, the City of Halifax, the Town of Bedford and the Halifax County Municipality through the *Act to incorporate the Halifax Regional Municipality* effective April 1, 1996. Governing the HRM is the Halifax Regional Council.

The key services provided by the municipality are:

- Transit
- Recreation & Cultural Programs
- Police
- Regulatory & Compliance Services
- Library

- Environmental Stewardship
- Streets and Roads Construction & Maintenance
- Community Planning
- Economic Development
- Fire & Emergency Services
- Compost, Recycling, and Solid Waste Collection

These services are primarily funded via property taxes. In 2003, Halifax Regional Council approved various “area” tax rates, as well as three general property tax rates – urban, suburban and rural. The Base Rate is paid by residents of all three areas and includes most of the basic services available across HRM, including fire, policing, compost, recycling and solid waste collection, recreation programming, planning, libraries, streetlights, sports fields and playgrounds. Also included are internal and fiscal costs. Municipal Water service is paid for through the water bill, not the property tax system. Sewer service is paid by a charge on the water bill and is only levied on sewer users. The “urban” rate includes payment for several services, such as cross-walk guards and sidewalk maintenance, which are not paid by “suburban” or “rural” taxpayers, unless they have access to them in their local area. In those instances, the costs are paid through a local area rate based on local costs.

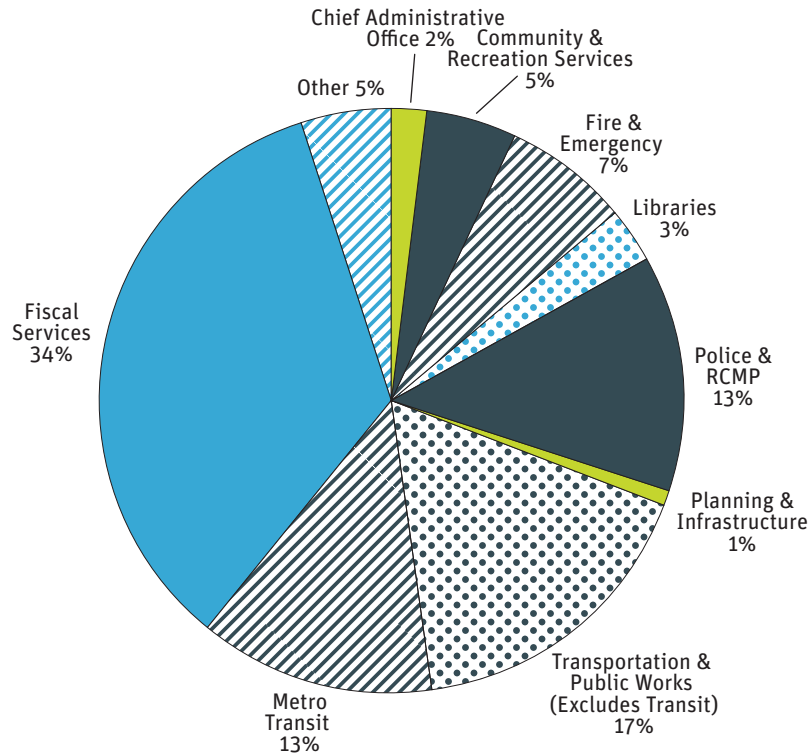
In February 2012, Halifax Regional Council directed HRM staff to prepare a budget that would maintain existing municipal services, increase transit services and find efficiencies. On the revenue side, Halifax Regional Council directed HRM staff to not increase the average tax bill for residential or commercial taxpayers.²

Halifax Regional Council passed a budget that decreased municipal services by increasing user fees for various community programs, and closing some recreational ice programs. While it increased some bus services including adding a new airport route, it decreased other transit services. In the name of efficiency, it cut 50 vacant staff positions. It also decreased average tax rates for residential property owners (by 5.5%) and commercial property owners (by 5.8%) to offset increases in property assessments (which would have increased tax bills).³

Expenses

HRM has three budgets: Operating Budget, Project Budget and Reserve Budget, we will briefly examine each.

FIGURE 1 HRM Budget: Expenses Per Business Unit (Gross)⁴ 2012–13



Operating Budget

The annual “Operating Budget” includes ongoing items such as salaries, wages and other recurring costs. The *Municipal Government Act* prohibits municipal governments in Nova Scotia from having an annual Operating Budget that runs at a deficit.

The final 2012–13 Operating Budget includes expenses totalling is \$790 million, which included a net increase of \$31.3 million or 4%, mostly to cover inflationary and annual cost increases such as for construction costs. The budget also allocates increases in funding for items that have been historically underfunded (and thus over budget). Line items for overtime, snow removal, fuel and utilities should now more accurately reflect actual expected costs.

The Fiscal Services unit’s \$212.5 million operating gross budget includes debt servicing (\$48.2 million), as well as revenue payments made to the provincial government for education (which accounts for 14% of the HRM budget),

FIGURE 2 Operating Budget Changes: Highlights (\$millions)⁶

2011–12 Expense Budget	758.7
Increase Compensation & Benefits	9.4
Increase Debt Service	10.3
Transfer to Other Governments	9.4
Increase Vehicle (Fuel)	4.7
Decrease in Miscellaneous expenses	-2.5
2012–13 Expense Budget	790.0

corrections services and others (see our later discussion in the AMB revenue section about flow-through). The 2012–13 Operating Budget increases fees for room rentals, arena rentals and some recreation programs, which was done “in an effort to keep pace with the increased costs of delivering services.”⁵

Project Budget

The HRM Project Budget is \$131.6 million.⁷ This is a decrease of \$13.2 million from the 2011–12 budget. The Project Budget consists of capital investment plans for construction projects.

The AMB does not examine this portion of the budget in great detail. We encourage future public debate on how Halifax Regional Council determines its capital projects. For example, we would not undertake the project to widen Highway 102/Bayers Road; At a cost of at least \$292 million if and perhaps as much as \$1 billion,⁸ this stands out as an example of a project that lacks evidence and vision as to how it will improve the HRM.

Reserve Budget⁹

The third HRM budget — the Reserve Budget — is funded through HRM’s general tax rate, with additional contributions from independent revenue sources (e.g. Gas Tax revenue, sale of land revenue, permit fees, etc.) It is separated into reserves for equipment, operating expenses and capital spending. The 2012–13 Reserve Budget has a significant increase from \$69.6 million to \$85.8 million. This is due in part to a surplus from the previous year budget at the end of March 31, 2012 with a reduced number of projects which were funded by the reserve in 2011–12.

We do not explore in detail the Debt Servicing Plan in this document. However, HRM spends only 7.6% of its gross operating budget on debt charges, far less than the provincial or federal governments currently spend. In 2009, Regional Council reviewed the Debt Servicing Plan and the objective was to increase the Project Budget while reducing reliance on debt, and, increasing capital costs covered from the Operating Budget.¹⁰ The timing and necessity of this objective is unclear especially given the infrastructure needs that have been neglected due to a lack of federal government investment. Debt charges for HRM are \$46.1 million principal and \$14.2 million interest and other charges for a total cost of \$60.3 million. We have not examined the nature of the debt, and the interest paid. However, it is possible some of the debts might have been consolidated and reduced using some of the 2011–12 surplus. If more money is required, it might have could be “borrowed” at a time of historic low interest rates, much lower than the rates now being paid.

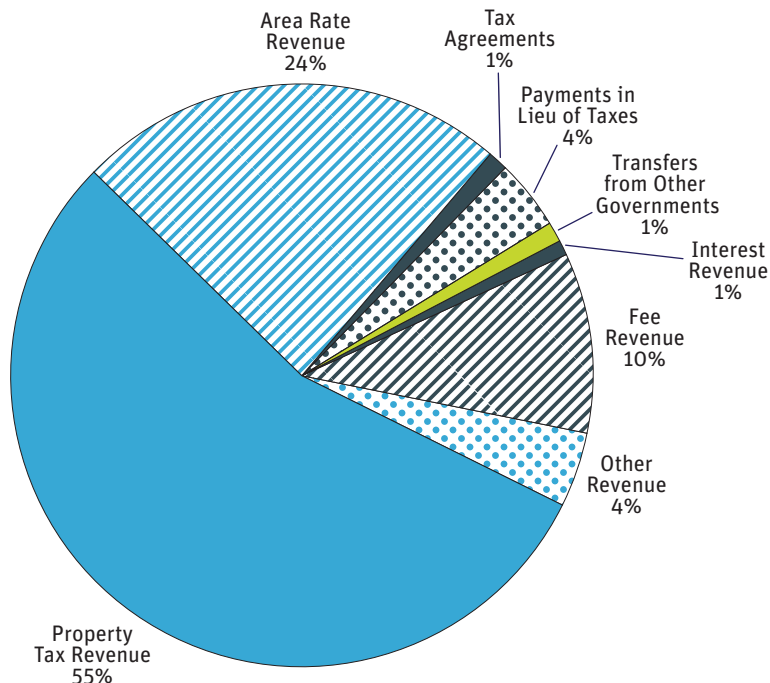
Alternatively, Halifax Regional Council could have invested in bike lanes and reduced user fees for community programming with this surplus. Instead it failed to spend the money on services for residents. While municipal governments are not permitted to run operating deficits, nothing requires them to have annual surpluses instead of spending money on services for residents.

Revenues

Net property tax revenues (commercial and residential combined) are estimated at \$387.6 million, an increase of approximately \$1.2 million or 0.3%.¹¹ Property tax revenue accounts for 79% of the estimated gross revenue. The budget decreases HRM’s net general property taxes, both residential and commercial, while holding the line on transit area taxes and net deed transfer taxes. The residential property ‘CAP’ system limits the increase in taxable assessments despite larger increases in property sale prices”. For 2012–13, this CAP is set at 3.9%. Aside from the area tax revenues, property tax revenues (because of increased value and new development) are expected to rise by approximately 1.2%; area rate revenue is estimated to increase by 6.8%.¹²

In summary, the 2012–13 budget provides for a decrease in tax rates, but it also increases “user fees” for some of the most important parts of our community development like room rentals, arena rentals and recreation programs. In addition, the Halifax Public Library received only a slight increase despite a tremendous increase in use by residents of HRM. Transit saw some growth in bus service, while the Ferry service was reduced mid-week and on week-

FIGURE 3 HRM Budget: Revenues 2012–13



Reference Halifax Regional Municipality, Approved Budget 2012–13 (Halifax: HRM), p. c19. www.halifax.ca/budget/documents/12-13V4ApprovedBook.pdf

ends. Halifax Regional Council also provided for an increase to capital expenditures to attempt to maintain municipal infrastructure in ‘good repair’.

With the same resources, Halifax Regional Council could seriously respond to the demands of its residents to provide increased and improved services. Yet, Halifax Regional Council did not take up the challenge. We need a new Council vision to guide the allocation of our financial resources in a manner more in keeping with the demands of its residents and in a socially, environmentally sustainable way.

Further, a review of the 2012–13 budget confirms Halifax Regional Council is in the enviable position of having sufficient financial resources to provide services to its residents.

Whatever one thinks of the Convention Centre, any municipality that can afford to pay over \$6 million annually for the construction, maintenance and operation of a new centre without any solid evidence that it will have the results that are hoped,¹³ can certainly afford the actions proposed in this document.

Alternative Municipal Budget

THIS IS THE first time CCPA-NS publishes an Alternative Municipal Budget (AMB). The AMB's baseline year is 2012–13; its strategic investments and actions are designed to be implemented over the next four years, with some investments phased in over a slightly longer time period. Some of the actions can be implemented fairly easily, with little or no additional spending required, while others will require additional revenue.

As per the *Municipal Government Act*, the AMB does not run a deficit. We do recommend how additional revenue can be raised to cover the new investments required in this budget, which are not currently covered by the HRM budget. Other investments could be covered by a re-allocation of funds, as indicated when possible. Throughout the AMB, we highlight implementable actions, and where possible estimate how much they might raise in revenue or require for investment.

This Alternative Municipal Budget provides food for thought for residents of HRM, and candidates who seek to represent our interests over the next four years. We do so in the hope that election campaigns are marked by serious policy discussions, rather than focussed on personalities. We offer alternative ways of allocating the HRM resources that should be seriously debated. We also suggest alternative ways to increase revenue that to ensure an effective and more equitable tax base. The Alternative Muni-

pal Budget offers fuel for a real conversation about taxes and how we pay for the services we want for ourselves and our community.

Jurisdictional Challenges

In the *Municipal Governments Act*,¹⁴ the functions of the municipality are to: (i) provide good government, (ii) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the municipality, and (iii) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

The Canadian constitutional structure of government has formal roles for the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments, but not for municipal governments. Municipalities are ‘creatures’ of provincial governments. Despite this, municipalities have significant often unclear jurisdictional responsibilities, with limited authority and often unclear jurisdictional financing capacity. Municipal governments have significant challenges:

The provincial government essentially has complete control over municipal programs, services, revenue and expenditure, regardless of the delegation of certain items through legislation.

Municipalities have relatively limited revenue-raising tools. They are currently limited to a form of a “property” tax (residential and commercial) and various “marginal” revenue generators like the deed transfer tax, tourist/hotel room tax, license fees, parking fees, and building permits and the like. Since at least 2006, the Province of Nova Scotia has restricted the ability of HRM to increase residential property assessment beyond the Consumer Price Index (CPI), even when the assessments increases have vastly exceeded the CPI. Municipalities are also not permitted to run a deficit in the operating budget, and the amount they can borrow for capital investment is strictly limited by provincial governments.

The infrastructure deficits of Canadian municipalities are significant and very problematic. Municipalities are responsible for 53 per cent of Canada’s infrastructure—up from 34 per cent in the 1960s.¹⁵ Municipalities need to fund both maintenance of deteriorating infrastructure and acquisition and construction of new infrastructure. They must also deal with mandated infrastructure upgrades to meet national or provincial standards, increasingly without the provision of funding to do so. The estimated infrastructure deficit in Canada is more than \$123 billion (2007).¹⁶ The total value of the list of infrastructure projects for HRM, which was enumerated in 2009, was \$2.25 billion.¹⁷

Public policy decisions made at both the federal and provincial level affect municipalities' ability to set their own priorities. Municipalities often have to react to decisions made without their input despite the impact these decisions have on their local communities. These decisions include direct downloading of responsibilities, with or without some allocation of funds. Increasingly, government transfers come in the form of very targeted funding for specific priorities that which may or may not respond to local community needs. Indirect policy decisions are made when another level of government decreases funding for specific programs thus leaving gaps in services. For example, between 2000–09, municipal revenue to public libraries in Canada increased 48%, provincial revenue increased just 18%, and federal revenue, which accounts for just *one-third of one percent* of all library funding, declined by 22%.¹⁸ For example, municipalities now pay more than 60 per cent of total policing costs, which results in less money to be spent on other priorities including community recreation programs that could reduce the need for police.¹⁹

Most of our recommendations fall within the financial and jurisdictional powers of the HRM. However, some of our recommendations require the HRM to advocate for changes to its relationships with the provincial government and others. Municipal governments do not **currently** have the appropriate taxation powers, infrastructure or capacity to effectively deliver the services required for and demanded by their residents.²⁰ *We strongly contend that it is possible, however, to move forward and begin implementing a vision for change. This Alternative Municipal Budget provides concrete ways to do so.*

Vision

A budget is about more than money, i.e. more than financial considerations and fiscal questions. It is about meeting needs and establishing priorities. Budgeting is also conducted within the framework of our social, natural and built environment. The HRM alternative budget supports strong and sustainable economic and social development, ensuring that more of our residents enjoy in the wealth that exists here. It maintains that *public services are for the common good and must be fully accessible to all*. It underlines the importance of *protecting the natural resource base and the environment, while seeking to achieve economic and social well-being for current and future generations*. **This is a sustainable vision for HRM.**

Budget Planning for Community Sustainability: Defining Principles for Key Directions

In 1987, the Brundtland Commission first defined sustainable development, as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.²¹ While some have criticized the definition for its vagueness, this also allows it to be an inclusive and malleable guide for actions to address local manifestations of social, economic and environmental concerns that are often global in nature.²²

Climate change is one example; it is a critical global issue and demands priority for local policies to reduce carbon emissions, conserve precious resources (in particular water and energy) and avoid waste production. Financial considerations should not compromise environmental or social considerations, and should give priority to the precautionary principle. The precautionary principle is used to guide decision-making so that “where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, the lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.”²³ The burden of proof that it is *not* harmful falls on those proposing the action.²⁴

This Alternative Municipal Budget is framed by six key sustainability principles, which are used to shape strategic directions based on the precautionary principle.

AMB for the HRM’s Key Sustainability Principles:

1. Provide good governance through open, transparent decision-making, and meaningful public involvement;
2. Create safe, inclusive environments that ensure security and affordability of services;
3. Foster authentic, attractive communities with a strong sense of stewardship of place;
4. Ensure people, goods and services are well connected locally, regionally and globally;
5. Reclaim self-sustaining neighbourhoods to support compact mixed land-use development within a framework of nodes, and enable a range of housing opportunities, employment choices, and integrated supports for fostering healthy families.
6. Preserve open space, agricultural land, natural beauty and critical environmental areas.

TABLE 1 Alternative Municipal Budget Summary 2013–14 (\$millions)

Revenue (Additional Revenue)	
ReMIt (Net)	30.0
End Flow-Through to the Province	114.9
Energy Efficiency Commercial Tax	10.0
Disposable Cup Levy	3.6
Empty Lot Fee, Commercial Parking Lot Tax, & Infrastructure Charge	unable to estimate
Total New Revenue	158.5
Expenditure (Strategic Investments)	
Democracy, Sustainability and Transparency	4.05
Strengthening Inclusiveness	0.55
Family Policy & Early Years Support	10.10
Public Safety	6.25
Arts and Culture	2.20
Public Libraries	2.30
Recreation & Community Centres	12.10
Active Transportation	23.35
Public Transportation	51.00
Co-Operative Funding	3.30
Housing	15.0
Greenbelting	5.0
Halifax Atmospheric Fund	20.00
Food Security	1.9
Reserve Fund	1.40
Total Strategic Investments	158.50

Principle 1: Strengthening the Roots of Good Governance

Sustainable development requires the enforcement of *the common interest*. Decisions made in the common interest are based on community knowledge and support. This requires greater public participation in decisions to allow communities effective say and even management over the use of resources (such as public spaces). We should promote initiatives from citizens. We should enable community organizations to facilitate, and strengthen local democracy. We should make good governance a priority. We should meas-

ure good governance by how Halifax Regional Council exercises its ability to provide for the public good. Good governance requires open, transparent decision-making with effective monitoring and review mechanisms including meaningful public consultation.

Election Finance Reform

As an initial contribution to the basis of good governance would be a ban on all organizational contributions to candidates for municipal office by unions and corporations. Contributions should be restricted to individual donations, and restricted to \$5000 per calendar year and mirror the restrictions requirements for provincial elections in Nova Scotia.²⁵

This recommendation requires provincial amendment of the *Municipal Elections Act*. Currently, it only requires a candidate to disclose the names of the donors of more than \$50.00 to his/her campaign, and the amount of the contributions. No upper restriction on total contributions is in place. The amendment should also allow municipal donations to be tax deductible as they are for Federal or Provincial elections.²⁶

Further, candidates should be required to publish a complete list of all contributions PRIOR to the commencement of voting. This also requires an amendment to the *Municipal Elections Act*, which currently requires publication within 60 days of polling day. Candidates will should be required to publish a final list of all contributions within 60 days of polling day.

ACTION 1: *Amend the Municipal Elections Act to include a ban on all contributions to candidates for municipal office by unions and corporations. Further, implement a \$5000 annual restriction for individual donations. Require candidates to publish a complete list of all contributions prior to the commencement of voting, with a final list within 60 days after polling day. Municipal donations will also become tax deductible. No Cost.*

Budget Process

Our second action relates to the HRM budget process. The AMB is a collaborative endeavour on a very small scale, but impressive in the diversity of experience and insights that were brought to the table (see Alternative Municipal Budget Working Group on inside cover).

The HRM budget is prepared by the staff beginning in the Fall. Last year's budget process consisted of:

- Councillor’s individual Detailed Review (6 days)
- Project (capital) Budget Consultation (staff available for “one on one” Q&A; one day)
- Business Unit Overview Presentations Council Chamber (3 days)
- Budget distributed in Council Package (a few days prior to Budget Debate)
- Budget Debate in Council Chamber (approximately 1–2 days)

While this appears to be a very “efficient” process, we are concerned it does not give appropriate opportunity for the residents of HRM to participate in the process of budget development. Many countries in the world provide for direct resident participation in municipal budgets.²⁷

Other cities in Canada have at least some participatory elements integrated into their budget process, with two days of public hearings in Toronto.²⁸ The City of Vancouver has a more involved and lengthy process with multiple opportunities to provide input.²⁹

ACTION 2: *Move the HRM budget process to a more participatory one in which elected Halifax Regional Councillors engage local individuals, community organizations and businesses in the process. Estimated Investment: \$100,000*

To further enhance the municipal democratic process, residents must have access to their Councillors. Councillors also need to be well-supported so they may carry out their duties. Currently, the HRM Operating Budget provides \$2.38 million for the “Councillors’ Support Office” to coordinate “resident relations, communications and administrative support for members of Regional Council. The office liaises with residents, HRM staff and other levels of government to investigate issues or concerns and shares information to assist Councillors in carrying out their role as elected officials.”³⁰ The amount allocated is a ten percent (10%) decrease from the previous year. This recognizes the reduction of councillors from 23 to 16. However, these staff members do not report to the elected councillors, but rather to the Office of the Chief Administrator of the HRM. A new model of providing staff support should be undertaken to recognize the increased responsibilities for democratic oversight of HRM administration by a fewer number of councillors.

ACTION 3: *Provide all Halifax Regional Councillors with resources for physical office space in their districts, and for staff who report directly to them. Estimated Investment: \$1.6 million (\$100,000 per councillor)*

Time for Significant Change

Municipal elections will be held all across the Province of Nova Scotia on October 20, 2012.³¹ An election ideally offers an opportunity to change the direction and substance of decision-making.

Significant change is needed in HRM. Indeed, HRM Council has reached a level of dysfunction over the last few years, which defies our ability to comprehend who is running the city, as well as how and why decisions are being made. Whether it is failing to account for hundreds of thousands of dollars for “concert gate”³² or the transfer of “Ticket Atlantic”³³ to the World Trade and Convention Centre, or the decision to proceed with a new money-losing convention centre, residents are increasingly concerned about the effectiveness of decision-making by Regional Council. It is nearly impossible to figure out ‘where the buck stops.’

There is an opportunity to influence the direction of Council by offering some implementable actions to support a reinvigorated vision for the HRM. With fewer councillors representing more constituents each,³⁴ it will be even more critical for voters to understand the views of the candidates and how these views will impact their everyday lives.

Develop a Community Sustainability Plan

Integral to good governance is transparency and accountability. HRM needs a clear accountability framework that lays out its expectations for suppliers around wages, working conditions, environmental impact, fair trade, local sourcing, and reporting mechanisms for reviewing and ensuring compliance. This framework would be part of a Community Sustainability Plan and would apply to third parties that provide services on HRM’s behalf, and would apply to arm’s-lengths boards, which are responsible to HRM including the Greater Halifax Partnership, Trade Centre Limited, and Cole Harbour Place.

As outlined below, this Plan should include a ‘buy-local’ procurement policy, as well as a living wage policy.

ACTION 4: *Develop a Community Sustainability Plan, which outlines a strong vision, identifies principles and priorities, and outlines implementable actions with targets to reach its goals.³⁵ Estimated Investment: \$100,000 of staff time to prepare a Community Sustainability Plan with opportunities for public consultation and participation.*

‘Buy-Local’ Public Procurement Policy

In January, 2012, HRM chose a Spanish company, Scytl Secure Electronic Voting to provide telephone and electronic voting services in the upcoming municipal election. In doing so, HRM bypassed a local Dartmouth-based firm (Intelivote), which had won the contract for the previous two municipal elections. While the Spanish company’s bid was \$300,000 under that of its Canadian competitor, there were suspicions that the winner low-balled its price precisely to gain a foothold in the Canadian market.³⁶

In response, Halifax Regional Council considered a resolution to ask staff to prepare a report on the development of a “buy local” procurement policy. The motion was defeated after a mere 15 minutes of debate on January 24, 2012.³⁷

In March 2012, mishaps with the electronic voting during the NDP federal leadership race (conducted by Scytl) brought the Spanish company under the spotlight and prompted Mayor Kelly to suggest a second look at the procurement process³⁸. In July, Nova Scotia Business Inc. announced it was making an \$800,000 venture capital investment in Intelivote.³⁹ Yet, HRM will continue to use Scytl for the municipal voting this October.

In Nova Scotia, Cape Breton Regional Municipality awards up to five percent of its procurement score for local businesses.⁴⁰ The Province of Nova Scotia also has a sustainable procurement policy, which has some language on this issue but not specific recommendations for targeting.⁴¹ The Town of Truro’s sustainable procurement plan includes provisions to award up to fifteen percent for things like local sourcing, fair trade, and environmental sustainability.⁴² Other cities around Canada and the world have targeted procurement policies.

The HRM should adopt a sustainable procurement policy as an integral part of a Community Sustainability Plan.

The HRM will have to move fast if it wants to do so. Canada and the European Union are currently negotiating the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA.) This agreement would severely limit the right of municipalities to pursue targeted procurement policies, unlike NAFTA and the WTO, which largely ignore the activities of sub-national units.

Whether the attack on procurement policies comes from CETA or from short-sighted politicians, the result is the same. In his review of the CETA’s implications for procurement, lawyer Shrybman points out, “The large amount of public money involved is one reason why government procurement is an important issue. Another is the degree of public authority involved. Deciding what type of goods or services to purchase, under what conditions and

from whom, are all important aspects of what many citizens understand as democratic governance. These types of purchasing decisions can directly affect how much democratic control citizens have at the local level.”⁴³

Using municipal procurement policies to further social and economic goals is a time-honoured tradition. A contract will not be awarded to a company just because it is local, or green. A policy will give local and environmental considerations some weight in the final decision.

ACTION 5: *Approve a Sustainable Procurement Policy within its first six months allowing an opportunity for public consultation. Estimated Investment: \$100,000 for research, public consultation and writing*

While implementing this procurement policy, HRM council should also end the contracting out of public services to private, for-profit companies, which generally find their “savings” in lower wages paid to workers, and but higher fees paid to owners of the private companies. Occasionally retaining the services of external consultants makes sense, but this is not the same as contracting out ongoing public services. We support the proposal to review solid waste operations in HRM, but an integral part of this review must include an examination of the various delivery models in use in the HRM to determine whether “contracting back in” the various facets of a solid waste management strategy actually allows the HRM to develop a comprehensive and integrated policy. Reviews in other jurisdictions have concluded that not only are in-house waste disposal services more cost-effective when they are provided in-house, they allow for more flexibility in service delivery.⁴⁴ A review does provides an opportunity to find innovative ways to achieve environmentally sustainable policies within a living wage strategy (which is discussed in greater detail below). Whether \$400,000 is required for an external consultant to undertake this review is debatable, however. We share the concern of the HRM Auditor General about the \$16.7 million spent on consulting fees in four years by HRM.⁴⁵

ACTION 6: *Bring back “in house” those previously contracted-out services including for solid waste and snow removal, and institute a policy to not contract out any new services. Cost: Savings.*

Living Wage Policy

Municipalities are adopting “living wage” policies; New Westminster, BC was the first municipality in Canada to adopt a living wage policy in 2010. Its policy states that it must pay all its employees a living wage (at a min-

imum) and also requires this of businesses that are contracted directly or subcontracted by the City to provide services on City premises.⁴⁶

Other cities, such as Hamilton, Ontario, are working to develop and adopt living wage policies in their communities.⁴⁷ More than 140 municipal living wage policies/bylaws have been passed in the U.S. since 1994.⁴⁸ The living wage campaign message in BC sums up the intent of such a campaign: *work should lift you out of poverty, not keep you there.*⁴⁹ Living Wage campaigns moved private sector employers to follow the municipal example and also sign onto providing a living wage; in BC the VanCity Credit Union is one of the leaders in the campaign.⁵⁰

A living wage refers to the income earners need to take home to cover the costs of living within their community.⁵¹ The living wage goes beyond the minimum wage and provides working families with a vital sense of economic security. The living wage baseline is calculated based on the living expenses of family of four with two parents working 35 hours per week. In British Columbia and Ontario, the living wage is calculated to cover basic expenses including food, shelter, clothing, transportation, childcare, a small contingency fund and other expenses like furniture and school supplies.⁵² The calculated living wage does not include debt payments, savings, owning a home, anything beyond minimal recreation costs or caring for a disabled or ill family member. It is calculated to be a conservative estimate, but aims to ensure that it is high enough so that families can withstand a temporary crisis without falling into poverty. The estimated cost of instituting New Westminister's Living Wage Policy was 0.25 % (that's a quarter of 1%) of the city's annual budget.⁵³

The living wage does not assume that employment income alone can solve all of the problems associated with poverty. Social programs such as affordable housing, subsidized childcare, and affordable transportation are all essential in helping to alleviate poverty. Improving such programs through policy change can help reduce the living wage rate.

The living wage is based on principles that value families, individuals, communities and the economy. Thus, implementing a living wage policy can help to:

- Promote the healthy development of children in the household. Children of parents who are receiving a living wage are able to achieve higher levels of education and are more likely to complete high school.
- Support local economies as workers will spend their additional income within their local community.^{54, 55}

- Increase worker productivity for employers who implement a living wage. It also helps to recruit and keep qualified workers, increase morale, and decrease turnover and absenteeism.⁵⁶

ACTION 7: *The HRM becomes a certified living wage employer, paying all its employees a living wage⁵⁷ (at a minimum) and requiring businesses that are contracted directly or subcontracted by the City to provide services on City premises to also pay employees a living wage. HRM will also investigate the application of this living wage policy to employers whose property is exempt from property tax. Estimated Investment: \$1.98 million (0.25% of the HRM operating budget)*

Monitoring and Measuring

The HRM's Community Sustainability Plan must include on-going monitoring of clearly defined indicators and ways of measuring progress on stated objectives. The Halifax Index developed by the Greater Halifax Partnership is a good start, but it encompasses only a portion of the indicators necessary.⁵⁸ We need to develop a broader range of economic, social and environmental indicators such as those included in the Genuine Progress Index Atlantic.⁵⁹ These would measure income inequality and poverty, financial security, household debt, and the gender and race wage gaps.

This is made more challenging by the recent decreases in federal government funding for research projects and data base information historically available from Statistics Canada such as the SLID (Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics) and the long-form Census voluntary. Our ability to monitor progress without these data sources will be limited. These limitations are particularly pronounced when looking at subpopulations of visible minorities, including Aboriginal people, and understanding the dynamics of income and factors such as unpaid work.⁶⁰ Without these data, we cannot make good program recommendations and fully implement and monitor a Community Sustainability Plan. It will be more difficult to hold government accountable for the effects of their decisions. It will limit the ability of our governments to govern responsively. Making data available to citizens is a key component of transparent and accountable government. The federal government must be urged to reverse its decisions with respect to data collection and to increase funding to ensure that high-quality, comparable, cross-jurisdictional data are available across our country. Further, data currently collected by the HRM should be made available in one place

to its citizens (perhaps on Community Counts)⁶¹ by undertaking an Open Data initiative such as that of the City of Toronto has done.

ACTION 8: *Ensure that a range of clearly defined indicators for the ongoing monitoring of Community Sustainability Plan are developed, fill data gaps in partnership with university and community-based researchers, and establish an open-data initiative for the HRM. Estimated Investment: \$150,000*

Revenue

Paying For Services Fairly and Equitably

Municipalities (villages, towns, and even big cities) across Canada have major financial problems — their tax base is inadequate for their responsibilities or for the needs of their citizens, and is almost entirely dependent on the revenues from property taxes. Each of us has a list of municipal services that needs to be expanded, improved, or introduced such as transit, sidewalk reconstruction, and libraries. Taxes support these services. If we want good services, we have to be willing to pay for them. Fairness, however, and the perception of fairness, is a potent political factor. Further, people have different views of “tax fairness”, based, in part, on their political and economic beliefs.

Tax revenues allow the creation of a community able to provide its citizens with a basket of public goods — police, fire, water, streets, sidewalks, parks, libraries, bike paths, etc. A critical component of a sustainable tax revenue system is progressive income tax, i.e. where those who can afford to pay more, because they earn more, do pay more. In contrast, a property tax system encourages some residents of municipalities to see municipal taxes as a direct levy in exchange for services. People think “I pay property taxes and I “get” sidewalks, and snow clearance, garbage removal, police or fire protection, for my property.” This latter view of municipal taxes results in reluctance on the part of some residents to pay anything towards services that the resident might not use at all or use only irregularly, or see as peripheral. This view of municipal taxes does not take into account the benefits of a common good to everyone even if indirectly. For example, the existence of fewer cars on the road because more people are taking public transit is good for everyone because of the reduction of congestion and pollution even if you continue to drive your car every day.

Municipal Property Taxes: Current Issues and Challenges

Although the proper title for this introductory overview should be ‘municipal revenues’, the basic fact is property taxes are the main source of revenues in the HRM, as in most Canadian municipalities. Other relatively minor revenue sources exist such as fines, deed transfer tax, parking fees.

The property tax is highly problematic. It is controversial and at its core it is not based on principles. Residents of municipalities want local governments to provide leadership for other matters that do not manifest as direct services to property, such as economic development or environmental sustainability measures. Such mandates have a statutory basis. In addition, there are inequities associated with the property tax itself. As outlined here, a fundamental shift to a more equitable municipal revenue system is desirable.

The following illustrate some of the inherent problems with the structure of the existing property tax system:

Property taxes are inequitable: Property taxes are based on a capital asset, not on income. Because there is often no strong match between the worth of the capital asset and the ability of its owner to pay, property taxes are generally inequitable.

The property assessment system’s reliability is in doubt. Any fairness within the property tax system depends on a reliable system of marketplace assessments, but the assessment system allows for serious doubts. Informal reviews suggest that many properties are either over or under assessed. Tinkering with the assessment system has resulted in the “CAP” system introduced in Nova Scotia in 2006 but this has itself become a sore point between the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM) and the Province. The UNSM asserts that the “CAP” system has made property taxes even more inequitable.⁶²

Multiple tax exemptions are confusing and without overarching goals. Provincial laws allow for extensive exemptions from the property tax – e.g., for houses of worship, and for payments at reduced rates – e.g. for agriculture or forest lands, or for seniors. These reduce municipal revenues or shift the tax to the other municipal taxpayers. The principled basis for these exemptions in place now needs a thorough re-examination. The social goals intended need to be re-thought.

Property tax rates are divisive, varying between classes of property owners – such as residential, commercial, and industrial; and within a class, e.g., single residences, apartments, and condominiums.

The rationales for these variations are not clear. If there are to be different rates, what is the correct ratio? The Supreme Court of Canada recently made it clear that municipalities have wide discretion in setting Residential and Commercial tax rates, but a rational basis should be stated and this often does not happen.⁶³ Owners of Commercial property in the Halifax downtown are seeking special lower property tax rates compared with Commercial properties located elsewhere.

There is always a question of what municipal services the basic property tax is meant to cover. The property tax cannot reflect user costs because many local expenditures are for shared services, such as public transit, roads, or schools, and the benefits cannot be identified with any particular class or type of property owner. Not all infrastructure or services are covered either. Individual owners are usually assessed extra to install sidewalks or paved roads, and some services such as public transit have fees. There is constant pressure to shift more to reliance on user fees (local area rates). This is highly contentious.

Revenue remittance to the Province is a historical hangover. As an historical matter, some portion of municipal property taxes must flow through to the province to pay for services that the municipality no longer has any authority over, e.g. schools and correctional services. These matters, completely within Provincial jurisdiction, should be paid for out of the broader tax base available to the Province. This proposal will be discussed in greater detail below.

These points illustrate some of the inherent problems with the property tax. This short list is meant to raise questions about the fundamental fairness of the existing system. A major problem with municipal finance is the reliance on the property tax, which is expensive to administer⁶⁴ and regressive, bearing more heavily on people with low incomes. To move municipal taxation to a progressive base, we need a municipal income tax.

Municipal Income Tax: A Progressive Alternative to Property Taxes

Reliance on property taxes is not inevitable. In Northern Europe, local governments receive less than 11% of their funds from property taxes; in Sweden, it is only 2.4%. Manitoba shares provincial income (and other) taxes with local governments. In the HRM, property taxes make up almost 80% of the revenue, which is one of the highest proportions in the country.

A **Refunded Municipal Income Tax (REMIT)** is a surcharge on your provincial income tax that goes directly to municipalities. It would have minimal administrative cost and could dramatically reduce local governments' reliance on property taxes. It would require minor changes to the personal and corporate income tax forms and need not involve changes to the Municipalities Act.

The municipal income tax would be part of income taxes paid to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). The CRA would send all of these new revenues directly to the relevant local government, based on the postal codes of the tax filers. These income tax revenues would allow local governments to reduce property taxes or to improve services. The local income tax is easy for the taxpayer to calculate, easy for government to administer, and makes the tax system increasingly progressive as more funds are raised this way from people with the most ability to pay.

The impact of a REMIT depends on the money raised, relative to property tax revenues — currently about \$700 million in Nova Scotia. Provincial corporate and personal income taxes are roughly \$400 million and \$2 billion, respectively. A 10% REMIT surcharge would generate \$240 million — about five times current Provincial grants-in-lieu-of-taxes. Property taxes could be reduced by one third! Economic growth over time would increase the amount raised by the REMIT, further reducing reliance on property taxes. Eventually property taxes could be eliminated and local revenues would be primarily income taxes and user fees. As a surcharge on income taxes, it shifts the tax burden from the regressive property tax to the income tax, which means about 45% of the population would not be liable for the surcharge.

ACTION 9: *Work with the provincial government to implement a municipal income tax system (across the province). Estimated Additional Revenue REMIT surcharge minus a concomitant decrease of \$20 million in property taxes: \$30 million*

Additional Ways to Raise Revenue

Energy Efficiency Commercial Tax: Of the three major usages of energy (for electricity, for transportation, and for buildings) municipalities have a significant measure of control over two. Tax measures can be tied to promoting energy efficiency for those usages under HRM control. For buildings, we propose that property taxes be tied to some extent, for commercial buildings, to energy efficiency. That is, the less energy efficient the building, the greater the tax rate applicable. HRM already has jurisdiction over

applying the National Building Code, and has authority to adopt codes of other sorts.⁶⁵ Owners of commercial properties should be required to file an assessment of the energy efficiency standards achieved by levels of their buildings, and property taxes could be set accordingly, so as to create incentives for investment in energy efficiency measures. This would likely require Provincial legislation to authorize.

ACTION 10: *Impose an Energy Efficiency Tax for Commercial Building. Estimate of Additional Revenue: \$10 million*

End Flow-Through to the Provincial Government: It is an historical anomaly that all municipalities in Nova Scotia pass on a portion of their property tax revenues to the Province. These amounts are designated as contributions to the costs of public education, of social housing, and of correctional facilities. At one time, these were matters that municipalities had power over, but rationalization has taken place to allow province-wide standards to prevail, and to allow the bulk of the costs to be borne through the progressive income tax base available to the province. Municipalities no longer have any legal authority over these matters. In fairness, the entire costs should have been taken over by the Province, but provincial governments have been reluctant to absorb all of these expenditure responsibilities, and looked to the municipalities for ongoing contributions. For HRM, the amount of these payments remitted to the Provincial Government is \$117 million per year.⁶⁶

The HRM should stop the flow-through with a few exceptions. The HRM should continue to remit money to the province to pay its share of administering the arm's length property valuation system (i.e. assessments) of \$6.6 million. In effect, this is a service to HRM and all municipalities and so long as the property tax remains in place a reliable assessment system is necessary. The other exception is the Supplementary Education Funding which some HRM residents that the HRM also pay (\$18.1 million). Unlike the Mandatory Education flow through, which we think should end, this is a voluntary contribution designed to improve the quality and range of offerings in HRM schools. Currently, 14% of the HRM budget is allocated to Education; this stands out as a substantive amount far exceeding any other municipality's contribution in this area in Canada.⁶⁷ The AMB reallocates the flow-through for correctional services (\$6.4 million — a 30% increase from the previous year), for the Mandatory Education Funding (\$106.2 million) and for the Metro Regional Housing Authority (\$2.3 million). We are not calling for a decrease in taxes, nor for a decrease in funding to any of these en-

tities; rather, we expect the provincial government to ensure that the same level of funding is provided as needed, which may require an increase in provincial income taxes to residents to make up for this money. This is the appropriate mechanism by which these expenses should be paid.

ACTION 11: *Negotiate the end of revenue transfer to the provincial government for corrections, housing authority, and mandatory education funding. Estimate of Additional Revenue: \$114.9 million*

Empty Lot Fee: When existing buildings have been torn down and a property is vacant, its assessment will be set at its previous level or as a parking lot, whichever is higher. If a development permit has been obtained and the property remains effectively undeveloped two years after the issuance of the permit, the assessment will be as if the construction had been completed. This would both increase the city's tax revenue and provide an incentive for landowners not to leave property vacant and unsightly. HRM should also require empty lot owners to sod the empty lot, which has a positive effect on the streetscape and building cohesive neighbourhoods where otherwise empty lots (concrete holes) may exist for years.

ACTION 12: *Institute an Empty Lot Fee on assessed property value. Estimated Additional Revenue: Needs to be determined.*

Commercial Parking Space Tax: Significant growth is happening in HRM's peripheral business parks, such as Dartmouth Crossing and Bayer's Lake. These areas are almost exclusively accessible by automobile and the businesses here provide "free" parking to customers. Consumers are therefore encouraged to drive, rather than take public transit or active transport.

Properties in these peripheral locations are assessed and sold at a much lower level than similar downtown properties. For example, a square foot of space in Burnside sells for about \$5, while a similar square foot size parking lot on Clyde Street (downtown) recently sold for \$185 per square foot.⁶⁸ Peripheral properties are also assessed at significantly lower value than those in the downtown core. So, despite paying a similar rate of property tax, low assessments mean peripheral businesses pay significantly less in total property taxes, allowing them to benefit from the convenience that excess ample parking offers to customers. This creates an incentive for businesses to expand parking in peripheral regions. Yet this "free" parking is effectively subsidized by HRM residents and businesses.

The HRM should impose a tax on commercial parking space. This tax would be levied on a per spot basis, and could be equal to HRM's average

revenue generated per parking meter or the municipality's estimated value of a typical urban parking space, about \$1,000 to \$2,000 annually⁶⁹. The tax would be paid directly by parking lot owners, who would pass the costs on to tenants and customers.

In the long-term, this tax would contribute to creating a disincentive to paving massive lots for parking, making driving a less convenient option than public transit in many cases. Further, it would no longer allow commercial property owners to benefit from the current effective subsidization of parking lots in peripheral commercial centres that result from low property assessments. The tax's revenue could be determined only after its specific boundaries, rates, and other details are determined by city transportation officials. This tax does not really address the root of the problems that need to be addressed regarding planning and development in the HRM. It would be preferable to provide incentives to develop the core. However, the revenue raised by this tax will be targetted to encourage active transportation in the regional centre.

ACTION 13: *Implement a Commercial Parking Space Tax. Estimated Additional Revenue: Needs to be studied.*

Disposable Cup Levy: The use of disposable cups to carry coffee, soft drinks and other beverages has become a natural part of life for Haligonians. Unfortunately, these cups present environmental problems throughout their entire life-cycles, from production to disposal. For this reason, we propose a minor tax that would help curb the use of disposable cups.

If we assume that one-quarter of HRM's more than 400,000 residents use one disposable cup daily, that amounts to more than 36,400,000 cups used every year. By adding a \$.10 levy on disposable cups, the municipality would, based on the above estimates, generate about \$3,640,000. This number would gradually fall as businesses and consumers adapted to avoid the levy.

ACTION 14: *Impose a disposable cup tax. Estimate of Additional Revenue: \$3.64 million*

Infrastructure Charge: It costs money to constantly expand municipal services like water, transit, waste collection, etc. to an ever increasing geographic zone around the existing communities. In order to limit this expansion of built services, some advocate an Infrastructure Charge of \$30,000 for any single detached unit (or equivalent) built anywhere else but downtown where services currently exist. "An infrastructure Charge is a specific

dollar value per lot or per acre that a municipality imposes on a developer to finance the offsite capital costs associated with new development.”⁷⁰ In Ontario, the norm is to impose a uniform charge that includes local charges, regional charges and education. Currently in HRM, the cost to a developer of “developing” land for residential home development is less than the cost to the HRM to provide municipal services to the development including water, sewer, and solid waste disposal.

ACTION 15: *Institute an Infrastructure Charge. Estimated Additional Revenue: needs to be determined.*

Total New Revenue: \$158.5 million (plus an unknown amount from empty lot fee, commercial parking space tax and infrastructure charge)

Expenditures (Strategic Investments)

Principle 2: Create Safe, Inclusive Environments

Our second sustainability principle, which guides our strategic investment decisions, is *to create safe, inclusive environments that ensure security and affordability of services.*

Cities require explicit policies to ensure they are reflective of the diversity of their citizens within their boundaries. We should include the unique and diverse voices of our city and allow those who are currently marginalized to have full access to the range of services and resources provided in the HRM and have opportunities to fully participate in the political, economic, cultural and social life of HRM. We can learn from policies introduced in other municipalities. We do not have to re-invent the wheel. There are many different initiatives around that world that can be emulated in HRM, which provide for policies and, mechanisms, to create spaces and supports that build a more inclusive city. We have long standing residents of HRM who feel excluded from decision-making and marginalized.

We should specifically examine policies to engage youth residents of HRM, so they can build their own capacity to meaningfully participate in our communities. Our youth require safe, adequate spaces to play and engage with peers, undertake recreation and cultural activities.

We have immigrant communities who feel isolated and removed from HRM policies. We commend the Halifax Public Libraries for committing to

engage in community-led planning specifically focusing on immigrant and First nations communities.⁷¹ However, given their critical budget constraints (see Library section), their ability to respond to the needs of these communities is doubtful. Ensuring resources are available to prioritize such actions is a Regional Council decision that is linked to the amount of funding provided to business units expressly for these purposes.

The HRM has a **Diversity Works office** and some initiatives to address issues of diversity in human resources. More needs to be done. If HRM staff and services are to reflect the cultural and social diversity of our city, the capacity of the Diversity Works office needs to be increased and its effectiveness subject to review.

ACTION 16: *Increase the scope and the authority of the Diversity Works office to ensure that the HRM budget, as well as service delivery and policies, including employment and sale of public properties, are developed with anti-discrimination and diversity objectives in mind. Estimated Investment: \$100,000*

Equity-based committees are effective tools to support the diversity work that needs to happen in the HRM. These committees help broker more involvement of diverse and marginalized populations in Regional government including during the budget process. These equity-based committees need sufficient resources including staff support, and resources to engage in meaningful community consultations, as well as action plans or strategies.

The HRM also has an **Accessibility Advisory Committee** to address issues for persons with disabilities.⁷² It is an active committee that meets monthly. However, given recent discussion around the inaccessibility of a new business opening in a historic building in downtown Halifax, there is a need to do a thorough review of how to make more buildings barrier free in the HRM.⁷³

ACTION 17: *The HRM must strictly enforce building codes (and work with the provincial government to ensure the codes are up-to-date and clear) to ensure that buildings (both public and private) are fully accessible to customers and employees. Estimated Investment: not included in operating budget (capital investment)*

The HRM's **Community & Race Relations Advisory Committee**, which "is currently inactive and the committee structure is under review."⁷⁴ Its mandate is to address race relations and in particular racism faced by African Nova Scotians, and broader human rights issues. A review of the committee appears to have been underway for quite a while. It is time to revisit

this issue, establish a new committee based on the above recommendations whose mandate also includes issues faced by Aboriginal people living in the HRM, and link it to an action plan to address racism and improve race relations in the HRM. The HRM does have a Community and Race Relations policy,⁷⁵ but *it needs an action plan with targets and timelines.*

ACTION 18: *Establish a new committee on Race Relations that will develop an action plan with targets and timelines, in consultation with community partners. Estimated Investment: \$100,000*

The HRM should strive to become a more **Women-Friendly City**⁷⁶ by seeking to advance gender equality recognizing that women are still under-represented in our Regional Council, as well as implementing, and enforcing policies on equal access to HRM staff positions (especially managerial ranks), pay equity, and encouraging more women in non-traditional jobs. An all-women advisory council should be set up that includes Councillors, delegates from women's groups, staff and citizens, which would:

- Serve to help determine priorities for a women's equality policy and action plan.
- Address issues of violence against women including domestic violence, sexual assault as well as have a mandate to make recommendations to prevent more women from going missing and becoming murdered in the HRM.
- Develop a plan that lays out actions and goals, and comes with allocated budgets and resources, identifies partners, and includes a timeline for expected results.

ACTION 19: *Establish an women's advisory council to develop an equality policy and action plan with allocated resources, which identifies partners, and includes a timeline for expected results including related to employment equity, pay equity and issues of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual assault as well as have a mandate to make recommendations to prevent any more women from going missing and being murdered. Estimated Investment: \$250,000*

Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered and queer residents of our community need particular engagement strategies including their own community centre as will be discussed below. An **LGBTQ Advisory Committee**

should be set up for this community. Actions can already happen to support priorities in this community, including the following:

- Increase diversity training for all HRM staff, particularly front-line service providers in police, fire, and transit; including explicit training in dealing with members of the transgender/transsexual community.
- Building codes strictly enforced (and if need be, changed) on all properties designated for public use (including commercial) to ensure accessibility and gender-neutral washrooms.

ACTION 17: *Set up an LGBTQ Advisory Committee and develop an action plan that will ensuring staff receive adequate diversity training, particularly front-line service providers in police, fire, and transit; including explicit training in dealing with members of the transgender/transsexual community; as well as ensuring that building codes are strictly enforced (and if need be, changed) on all properties designated for public use (including commercial) to ensure gender-neutral washrooms. Estimated Investment: \$100,000*

Social Infrastructure

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has consistently and conclusively demonstrated the transition of Canada from a predominantly rural country to an urban and municipal community. Despite this transition, financial resources have not kept up with the demands placed on municipal governments. In 2012, FCM concluded, in its review of “The State of Canada’s Cities and Communities 2012,” that municipal government costs have increased at a far greater rate than other level of governments, while the capacity to pay for these costs has decreased.⁷⁷

Canadian municipalities have been involved in numerous distinct social policy areas including social housing, education, community development, social welfare and anti-poverty measures, child care, as well as more traditional municipal responsibilities with a social component such as parks and recreation, libraries, public transit. In the modern context, these areas are often characterized as *social infrastructure*.

In 1968, Halifax and Vancouver were the first Canadian cities to formalize social policy considerations into Social Planning divisions within their municipal governments. Prior to the 1995 exchange agreement, the former City of Halifax played an extensive role in social service provision, includ-

ing administration of social welfare (financial assistance) in cooperation with the provincial government.

Since 1996 onward, the elimination of Social Planning from HRM's core business activities has created an environment in which it is difficult to mount an effective local response to social problems. The knowledge and expertise gained because of the proximity of local government to the electorate is partially squandered in the absence of a clearly articulated municipal social policy framework and corresponding staff dedicated to social planning. This lack of internal capacity also hinders HRM's ability to advocate for social service funding to other levels of governments.

Current Social Policy Activity by HRM

In an arrangement unique within Canada, HRM provides continued financial support (from property tax revenues) to the local school boards (English and French language) responsible for primary and secondary education, but is not directly involved in service planning or provision.

In recent years, HRM has performed research and outreach activities around the issues of homelessness and affordable housing. Recognizing the importance of these issues, HRM has considered options for increasing its involvement in the creation/facilitation of affordable housing stock through municipal planning. It has had limited success in its efforts.

This AMB shows how we can use the financial and structural resources of HRM to provide support for social policy activities to our residents. This includes a housing strategy discussed in greater detail and a family policy framework. This work is in addition to the critical vital programs and services the HRM already provides that have a distinct social component (libraries, parks and recreation, public transit).

Supporting Families: Early Learning and Child Care

Support for the early years builds capacity in a community. It is also integral to other goals in our sustainability approach. It helps build inclusive communities and it levels the playing field by offering equal opportunities for children. It also involves valuing a wide range of employment choices at fair wages. The issues and benefits of an integrated system that includes comprehensive programs to support families goes well beyond ensuring there is accessible, affordable child care, but it is an integral part.

At present, HRM makes no significant expenditures in the area of child-care. There is a chronic shortage of affordable, high quality child care in the HRM. In HRM alone, the population of children aged 0–9 is 39,120.⁷⁸ In all of

Nova Scotia, there are only 15,245 regulated childcare spaces (aggregate of full-time and part-time spaces).⁷⁹ In addition to anecdotal evidence of long waitlists at local childcare centres, these figures suggest a large unmet demand for child care services in HRM.

Child care shortage and lack of affordability directly impact parental labour force attachment, especially for mothers. Many women choose to be unemployed or underemployed primarily because of the child care issue. Downstream effects include issues of reliance on social welfare (especially for single parents), expansion of the working poor/hollowing of middle income families, sub-optimal developmental and educational outcomes for children, as well as suboptimal local economic performance both now and especially in the future.

In Nova Scotia, investment in the child care sector is estimated to have the greatest short-run economic impact among all the major sectors of the provincial economy.⁸⁰ The combined direct, indirect and induced GDP multiplier is 2.23, meaning that \$1 of investment in the child care sector creates \$2.23 in economic output. In Quebec, it is estimated that each dollar on subsidised daycare generated an increase of \$1.05 in provincial tax revenue and another \$ 0.45 in federal revenues.⁸¹ While these estimates apply to aggregate provincial GDP, the economic benefits largely accrue to the individuals and businesses in the HRM. Investment in child care is, therefore, a direct investment in the strength of HRM's local economy.

Other Canadian municipalities have long recognized the importance of child care to the economic and social fabric of their communities. As an example, the City of Toronto has made substantial commitments to child care policy.

Toronto's involvement with child care dates to the Second World War, when program delivery was 50/50 cost shared between federal and provincial governments. After the War, Ottawa withdrew funding and in 1946, under the *Day Nurseries Act*, the programs became a shared cost program (50/50) between Ontario's provincial and municipal governments.

Today, the City of Toronto undertakes major child care policy activity by not only providing some child care but by managing the finances and administration of all local child care on behalf of the provincial government, conducting research and advocacy, and integrating child care considerations into municipal planning and development activities (e.g. density bonusing, developer-funded amenity and cash contributions). Through cost-sharing arrangements with government of Ontario, the City covers 20% of its

own program costs, fee subsidies, wage grants, family resource programs, and special needs resources; it also covers 50% of administration costs⁸².

A comprehensive early learning and child care system is impossible without the federal and provincial governments. However, in the absence of a broader system, municipalities can help to improve access, and they can support advocacy.

The HRM needs to recognize the importance of building inclusive communities which are family-women-youth –friendly. The HRM should create a comprehensive Family Policy framework to guide the development of programs and services aimed at supporting children and families, as well as an Early Years Committee, which must include those from the early learning advocacy community and parents. The Early Years Committee would negotiate and partner with the provincial government, to support the development of a public/non profit “system” of early learning and child care and to add a “child and family” perspective to any/all HRM policy issues. In addition to actual child care spaces, HRM needs to support family resource centres, and programs like “head start” which provide concrete tools and supports for parents and their children.

Part of this EYC’s mandate will be to:

- Conduct a review of current policy regarding public services as well as taxation rules for existing non profit and community based early learning and care centres, demonstrating consistency and support, and thus adding stability to these programs.
- Develop and utilize zoning powers and by-laws with targets to ensure that community planning and development practices facilitate the utilization/development of physical structures that could offer space for early learning and care programming (e.g. existing schools, new developments).
- Integrate specific targets for planning decisions and/or direct investments in early learning and care infrastructure to respond to community need.
- Institute policies for the divesture of public buildings that support development proposals which can demonstrate the inclusion of an integrated and responsive community network approach to program and service delivery with specific targets for families and/or early years.

ACTION 18: *Develop a Family Policy framework, and establish a specific Early Years Committee. Estimated Cost: \$100,000*

ACTION 19: *Establish a grant fund of \$7 million to allow non-profit child care centres and family resource centres to apply for money to pay for retrofitting for energy efficiency, physical alteration of space and development of playground structures. Cost: \$7 million*

ACTION 20: *Establish a grant fund of \$3 million to provide support for parenting and related programming targeted to families with children under the age of 9. Cost: \$3 million*

Public Safety

In 2006, the Mayor engaged internationally recognized criminologist Dr. Don Clairmont to set up a series of participatory roundtables and focus groups “to identify, and discuss in context, the patterns of violence and public safety concerns in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), to provide an in-depth analysis of the correlates of these patterns, and to suggest future directions that could improve the situation”⁸³. Concerns identified included gang-related violence, youth crime, and alcohol-related violence in the bar/entertainment area of downtown Halifax.

There are concerns within immigrant and racialized communities, as well as the LGBT community, about violence and property crimes that may be motivated by bias or hate. Domestic violence, elder, and child abuse often prove difficult to disclose for individuals within these communities. HRM should be assisting community stakeholders to liaise with police and social service agencies to ensure that such crimes are being reported and that ensure police respond in culturally competent ways.

The priorities identified by this Alternative Municipal Budget seek to:

- Position the municipal government to play a leadership role by addressing the “root causes” or social factors associated with crime and to shifting police and judicial culture away from punitive justice and towards restorative and rehabilitative justice, through strategic planning, collaboration and training.
- Bridge the gaps between the police and the communities of individuals they are sworn to protect and serve, which includes victims and offenders of crime.

Restorative and Rehabilitative: An Alternative To Punitive-Style Justice

An alternative to a punitive-style of justice is a system that emphasizes restorative and rehabilitative practices. Restorative justice (RJ) has been a tool used for youth offenders; it takes minor and first-time offences out of the court system, and brings together offenders, victims, community people and police officers to talk about the offence and mutually decide on an appropriate way to make up for the offence. RJ aims to evoke empathy, from both the victim and offender, as a mechanism for rehabilitation. Agreements range from direct restitution to the victims, to donations of money or time to community organizations. An alternative justice measure for adults along the same lines as restorative justice is a program called Adult Diversion, which can be used for first time adult offenders in crimes which do not involve victims.

As of 2010, the Restorative Justice Program (RJ) was institutionalized in Nova Scotia:

- handles about 30% of all youth offending in Nova Scotia
- has solid support structures in the youth Criminal Justice Association
- has been accepted and used effectively, collaborated with by police and crown prosecutors
- was interwoven in many respects in the adversarial relations between prosecutors and defense counsel
- provides a well-defined service with trained full-time staff throughout the province and well-monitored standards of operation.

In addition, Dr. Clairmont noted, several assessments had found “high levels of satisfaction among its participants (offenders, victims, other session attendees such as police officers) and grounds for optimism about reduced recidivism.”⁸⁴

Currently, the Adult Restorative Justice Program is operating as a pilot project outside of Halifax, but the Province is considering its expansion. A new pilot program involving Dalhousie University, the Province, and the Halifax Police Department will apply a system of restorative justice for incidents involving Dalhousie University students in minor criminal cases has started.

In addition to these Restorative Justice programs, the Provincial Government now has a Mental Health Court in Halifax, and Halifax may be the potential site of a Drug Treatment Court. The presence of these rehabilitative and restorative structures creates a solid institutional baseline for a shift in judicial culture.

- Create positions of support for the community and police force in their efforts to make HRM a safe and secure community.

The social factors associated with criminal cultures (gang, street and night-time cultures) are complex and multi-faceted. As recommended in 2006, we should form a multi-stakeholder committee should be formed to create a coordinated and responsive social development strategy, complete with specific rehabilitation and crime-reduction goals and programs

to support those goals and mechanisms to evaluate progress, to target offenders and would-be offenders. In addition to representatives from high-crime districts on council, the committee should consist of members of the police force; representatives from the provincial and federal justice departments, the provincial education, health and community services departments; non-profit workers in the areas of housing, addiction, and mental health services; academics; private citizens; and rehabilitated offenders. Facilitating this committee should be a key activity of the Public Safety Office, as recommended by Dr. Clairmont in the Mayor's Roundtable.

ACTION 21: *Form a multi-stakeholder committee to work with the Public safety office. Estimated Investment: \$150,000*

HRM should support the programs and initiatives of non-profit agencies, which provide services to enable reduce harm reduction in our community such as those offered by Mobile Outreach Street Health, Leave Out Violence or LOVE, Stepping Stone, Mainline, and Direction 180). This would also help enable them to do work on and with this multi-stakeholder committee.

ACTION 22: *Establish a grant fund to support effective harm reduction strategies through existing non-profit agencies. Estimated Investment: \$5 million*

ACTION 23: *Create a funding program to support LGBTQ, immigrant, and other cultural organizations to work with police to develop culturally competent response to crimes of bias and domestic violence in marginalized communities. Estimated Investment: \$100,000*

The HRM should ensure its policies and budget priorities directly address the “root causes” of crime — the social and economic determinants. For example, the HRM should support the ‘housing first’ approach, Direct support and advocacy for the ‘housing first’ approach, which makes it a priority to get getting homeless people, ex-inmates and others into supportive housing. Partnerships with organizations such as the Community Action on Homelessness, E-Fry society or others will be important. Such housing first initiatives are usually considered the building block for the rehabilitation process (See Housing Section for specific investments). In addition, as outlined in other sections, the HRM should ensure that appropriate funding is provided for other public services including transit and recreational programs, which are critical components of a crime prevention strategy.

Policing

In many ways, Canada's existing policing system is in crisis. It may not withstand the additional pressures from the federal government's crime agenda. As the Federation of Municipalities has warned, "During the past 30 years, an unsustainable share of Canada's policing duties has been shifted onto municipalities, either through direct downloading or the inability of an overburdened RCMP to fulfill its full responsibilities. This puts a strain on the limited fiscal capacity of municipalities. As more money is spent on policing, there are fewer resources available to address other services that contribute to safe and healthy communities. This is not sustainable for municipalities or for property taxpayers."⁸⁵ In the HRM, policing currently consumes 13% of the operating budget (almost \$100 million), and the municipality also remits another \$6 million (another 5% of the HRM budget) to the province for correctional services.

Through collaboration and training, HRM has made efforts to bridge the gaps between law enforcement and the community. The HRM Policing Community Response Model has affected crime rates. Yet gaps still exist between the police and the public. Sometimes people perceive the police as ineffective in fighting crime. People perceive police presence at public meetings and protests as intimidation more than protection. Statements by police following the shooting of transgender performer Chris Cochrane and the eviction of the Occupy demonstrators reinforced these negative attitudes.

ACTION 24: *The Halifax Regional Police need to increase diversity and empathy training, and non-confrontational crowd control training as well as more extensive training on citizens' rights and respecting the limits of police powers. Estimate Cost: use existing training budget.*

The Community Response model shows that empathy and diversity training for police officers can bridge gaps between the police and the community. In this way, police officers are seen as role models for communication and community engagement. It is commendable that the Halifax Regional Police have a designated Diversity Officer; however one person cannot begin to address the range of issues required.

The HRM should implement a Community Support Officer Project. Community Support Officers are full-time civilian officers hired and trained by the police, who work under their supervision. Community Support Officers are not arresting officers; they do not carry guns or work as agents of law enforcement. They are prevalent used in the provinces and territories such as are used in New Brunswick and British Columbia and extensively in Europe.

ACTION 25: *Implement a Community Support Officer Pilot Project by hiring 10 Community Support Officers. Review the project to be re-evaluated after one year. Estimated Investment: \$1 million*

Principle 3: Foster Authentic, Attractive Communities

Our third sustainability principle is to allocate funding that fosters authentic, attractive communities with a strong sense of stewardship of place.

Arts and Culture

The HRM has a history of making grand statements about the importance of arts, but provides little funding to actually support the creative sector's ability to thrive and grow. HRM's funding for the arts has decreased dramatically in 2012–13. The administrative budget for the Cultural Affairs office was eliminated, and the business plan for the department does not identify a single priority, objective or program for culture and arts beyond continued event funding and public art projects.

In 2006, HRM's Cultural Plan became part of the municipal functional plan processes. The 2006 document identified 'Arts' was identified as one of the seven pillars of the plan. The plan was accepted but never adopted as binding policy. At the time, the plan was considered by many both inside and outside the cultural community as grandiose and unachievable. Unfortunately, these critics were right. In the seven years since the plan was written, only Public Art has been clearly identified as a priority and resources put behind it. Nevertheless the Cultural Plan's Policy contains the laudable goal that "*HRM will strive to maintain a competitive level of per capita spending on Culture to position the Region in the top tier of comparable municipal investment across Canada*".⁸⁶

In reality, HRM provides the worst per-capita arts funding in the country for a municipality of its comparable size. A recent study for the City of Hamilton found Halifax provided only \$0.53 compared to the national average of \$5.35.⁸⁷

HRM Council and staff point to community grants (funding for community capacity building, such as sand castle competitions) and the Special Event fund (funding from a hotel room tax designed to support tourism initiatives) as examples of types of funding for arts. Yet, most all other municipalities offer comparable programs as well as offering dedicated arts funding.

HRM has, effectively, no existing professional arts programming that can be compared with any other medium-sized municipality in Canada. It is time to remedy this.

Current Programs

Current programs offered by the HRM range from specific grants to facilitative programming and, organizing public events and providing other kinds of supports. All these initiatives are marked by their insignificant funding base or ambiguity for what is included or excluded in support of art and culture. These programs are:

- **Open Projects:** HRM invites artists, designers, musicians, performers, curators and members of the public to submit temporary public art proposals.
- **Residency Initiatives:** HRM both provides grants to artist residencies or qualified arts organizations, and also hosts a 10 week residency in the Gatekeeper’s Lodge of Point Pleasant Park with a \$5000 artist fee.
- **Public Art:** HRM supports qualified professional artists and artist-led collaborative groups to participate in a design process for the inclusion of public art in public spaces, such as the Thomas Raddall and new central Library.
- **Tunes at Noon:** Each summer Tunes at Noon features Nova Scotian performers from a wide range of musical genres for a free, summer lunchtime concert series in Grand Parade.
- **Community Grants:** This program is a centralized program that provides annual cash grants to registered non-profit organizations and charities. Two types of grants exist: project grants of up to \$5,000 and capital grants of up to \$25,000. The program does not provide for annual operating assistance.

Moving Forward

ACTION 26: *Increase per capita arts funding to at least the national average (\$5.71) to reach a competitive level of per capita spending on culture in Canada. Estimated Investment: \$2.2 million for the first year, raising that to a target of \$3 million by year three, in order to achieve “top tier” investment in arts.*

ACTION 27: *To assist in attaining this funding level, the HRM should impose a mandatory Public Art Project Tax of 1% on every public capital development and HRM will continue to encourage private developers to do the same. Estimated Revenue: Unknown.*

The \$2.2 million will be used to implement the following actions:

Independent Arts Council: The HRM needs an independent Council to determine funding to arts and cultural organizations, and to provide advice on cultural policy development following other municipalities' best practices. The Council would be composed of artists, producers, curators, and promoters.

ACTION 28: *Immediately create an Arts Advisory Committee, with a goal to create an independent Arts Council in a year, which will include artists, producers, curators and promoters.*

Re-establish the Cultural Affairs Division for the HRM: Cultural Affairs division staff will engage and work in partnership with arts organizations and community groups to achieve their goals, rather than impose a vision and process from the top down. Current programs for open projects & public art, would be administered by this Cultural Affairs division. Cultural Affairs would also administer future, peer-reviewed arts-funding programs. The Cultural Affairs division will take over HRM's responsibility for cultural venues, both current and future, and directly owned or operated by partners. This would include venues such as Alderney Landing, Bicentennial Theatre, and Neptune Theatre, and possible future projects.

ACTION 29: *Re-establish the Cultural Affairs division for the HRM.*

Peer-Reviewed Project Grants: Funding needs to be made available to not-for-profit arts organizations and individual artists and arts administrators working in all artistic disciplines. All funding applications will be peer assessed, and the existence of high professional standards, community and audience support, and financial viability are key considerations in arriving at grant recommendations.

ACTION 30: *Develop additional peer-reviewed grant programs to makers, presenters, and organizations.*

Operational Grants: In addition to project grants, operating funding will be the most significant component of the Cultural Affairs budget.

ACTION 31: *Fund multi-year operating to institutional presenters and annual events intended to increase funding to national averages.*

Re-subscribe to the Creative City Network of Canada: Being a member of the Creative City Network of Canada⁸⁸ is an integral part of ensuring municipal staff learn and adopt best practices from the successes and failures experienced by other municipalities. Artists and municipal cultural staff will also be encouraged to suggest opportunities wherein other departments might incorporate art in their projects or procedures: design of clever advertising, performances or artworks in unusual or unexpected spaces (Metro Transit Ferry Service has successfully commissioned and produced live, on-site, theatre performances).

ACTION 32: *Re-subscribe to the Creative City Network of Canada.*

Create new purpose built performance venues: HRM has almost no purpose-built performance venues. The Rebecca Cohn is aging and by modern acoustical standards is woefully inadequate for symphonic and opera performance. Its location on the Dalhousie campus severely limits any economic benefits that might be generated for other businesses by a performing arts centre, were it located in the downtown. The Spatz Theatre (designed with almost no input from the arts community) is equally disconnected from local businesses, and its floor is unusable by professional dancers. The Dunn and the Neptune Studio come with exorbitant administrative and rental costs that make them largely unavailable to independent theatre artists.

ACTION 33: *Partner with federal and provincial governments to create purpose-built, acoustically designed performance venues, including a symphony/opera/ballet house with a proper floor for dancers; and a fully adaptable black-box theatre space of 300 seats.*

ACTION 34: *Make investment in community-owned and based cultural infrastructure a priority. The Bloomfield Centre is a good example where in revenue generated by the sales or rental of this space will be reinvested into the redevelopment, to enable arts and other community non-profits to create appropriate and affordable spaces.*

It is also important to encourage local businesses or community groups to adopt a public art work, enabling them to learn about and participate in its maintenance. This would save maintenance dollars and create pride of place. Better interpretation of public art and art institutions and practices

would encourage the public to engage and participate; generating an engaged, active and safe community.

ACTION 35: *Encourage ownership of local cultural assets.*

Public Libraries

The Halifax Public Library system is very impressive in many ways. The Halifax Regional Library (HPL) Board supervises a system of 14 branches, a website, books by mail and home delivery services, provided by 403 employees. HPL has 2.3 million in-person annual visits and 1.4 million on-line annual visits. In 2011–12, library users logged over 250,000 hours on outlet computers and logged into the wifi network 90,000 times. The HPL website has more than 5000 hits per day. HPL meeting spaces are available in many library outlets and provide a popular community resource, with 4,145 bookings by non-profit and for-profit groups. Currently 46% of HRM residents have a library card; this compares favourably to the national average of 44%.⁸⁹

HPL has very successful community and volunteer involvement. Over 20,500 volunteer hours are donated by adults and youth annually. Following a community-led model, the library has formed partnerships with over 300 community groups fostering learning, community development and engagement. Programs for all ages are delivered, including children’s story times, school visits, teen programs, computer learning, book clubs, heritage events, public lectures, income tax clinics, and seniors and family drop-ins. Over 125,000 residents attended more than 5,300 programs in 2011–12.⁹⁰

The people of Halifax strongly approve of the role of the Library “as a cultural hub, community meeting place and resource for culture and learning”. Over the last five years circulation has increased by 4.75%, program attendance by 16% and overall transaction volume by 13%. Residents of HRM want more hours of service at existing locations and system expansion and new services.⁹¹

Despite these wonderful statistics, the approved HRM 2012–13 budget provides only for a minimal 0.4% increase in funding for the regional library system.⁹²

The Library continues to experience consistent demand for increased open hours in its rural branches. For example, the rural communities of Musquodoboit Harbour, Sheet Harbour and Hubbards continue to request expanded hours to match demand. Currently, the rural branches are only open half of the hours of service of suburban and urban branches. Yet, HRM

Council approved the discontinuance of the library mobile service causing the loss of 4 positions, and reduced access to residents of HRM without transportation to a physical branch.

The budgeted expenditures on library materials make up only 8.51% of the total HPL budget, due to higher overhead costs and overall budget reductions. This means the HPL falls below the national average of per capita spending on library materials — \$4.87 versus \$5.31.⁹³ It is critical to underline that public library funding trends in Canada indicated that — not surprisingly — that the amount being spent on materials strongly influences the number of people using the library. According to the Canadian Urban Library Council, “**Libraries whose per capita spending on materials is in the top third register nearly twice the number of usage transactions as do libraries whose materials spending is in the bottom third.**”⁹⁴

HPL only spent 2.58% of its budget on technological infrastructure and public service delivery. Reductions to the technology budget over the last 3 years have created a challenging environment for technology renewal, which have been exacerbated by the elimination of funding of the Community Access Program by the federal government in this year’s federal budget.

Part of the funding problem for HPL rests with the Provincial Government, which has not implemented changes recommended in the provincial funding formula review to increase dollars based on per capita funding. The provincial grant for 2012–13 is frozen at the previous year’s level without adjustment for the 4.7% population growth in HRM. (The amount of additional funding provided by the provincial government for the Community Access Program doesn’t entirely fill the gap left by the federal government.) The HRM needs to continue to advocate for an increase in funding from the provincial government (and the federal government). The Regional Council must also continue to prioritize funding its libraries and should indeed increase its own funding to the system. It currently spends 3% of its budget or \$22.93 million on HPL. The AMB provides the HPL with a 10% increase of \$2.3 million allocated for:

- additional books (both e-books and print material)
- improved technological infrastructure and to fill the gap left by the loss of funds for the Community Access Program
- additional delivery of public services including expansion of programs for literacy training and English as a Second Language training (and staff training to provide these programs)

ACTION 36: *Increase funds to the Halifax Public Libraries to enable it to better fulfill its potential and respond to the needs in the community. Estimated Investment: \$2.3 million*

Recreation & Community Centres

Community and Recreation services in the HRM aim to create “safe, healthy, vibrant communities” through property development, recreation, facility partnerships and municipal compliance programs”. They provide diverse recreation and cultural choices, and deliver inclusive civic events.

The “Major Achievements” of Community and Recreation services shows that approximately 130,000 people enjoyed the skating Oval on the Commons in 2011/12. Twenty-six Youth Live participants completed the 28 week Youth LIVE program. The Youth Advocate Program final evaluation concluded that the Program is an innovative and successful community based crime prevention model. Twenty-nine (29) youth were diverted away from criminal activity/gang activity. More than 18,000 people attended the Alderney Landing Canada Day Show in 2011.⁹⁵

Despite these laudable goals and successful events, the Halifax Regional Council expressly increased “user fees” by 4% for the Spring and Summer programs. Room rentals increased by 5% within Community Recreation Centres. Hourly rate increases of between 8 and 16 dollars were imposed for dry-floor and ice rentals at the Bowles, Gray, Lebrun and Devonshire arenas.⁹⁶

Ultimately, Halifax Regional Council decreased the annual budget unit for this business unit by 10% to \$38.68 million. However, the amount of money solely for Community Recreation & Culture was only \$ 9.59 million.⁹⁷

Previous budgets over-estimated the amount of money from user fees. In 2010–11 the revenue was \$6.03 million. In 2011–12, the fees actual revenue fell to \$5.22 million. The 2012–13 budget predicts revenue of \$5.29 million. The number of program registrants decreased from 60,426 in 2010–11 to 50,169 in 2011–12⁹⁸ despite an increase in the population of HRM? This significant drop in participation rates indicates that increasing fees is the wrong policy.

ACTION 37: *HRM staff undertake a review of existing Recreation and Community Centre programs with a view to better meeting the needs of its residents, which will include community consultation of users and nonusers. Estimated Investment: \$100,000*

The approved budget states its belief in an “expectation” of “maintained or reduced” municipal taxes and fees. Yet, it also recognizes, “Public ex-

pectations related to municipal programs and services are continuing to grow.⁹⁹ Despite this demand for increased services, the Operating Budget states “Rationalization of fees, programs, and facilities will continue for the next few years.” Within this context, the “deliverables” expected by Halifax Regional Council are as follows: “Plan, promote, and deliver unstructured, drop in, low and no-cost initiatives **including passive, art, cultural, leisure based programs, services and community based events**, in addition to the ongoing slate of fee based programs.”¹⁰⁰

Community and recreation centres should not be required to justify their existence on a cost recovery basis. The focus should be on demonstrating how many residents use the facilities, as the Public Library measures itself.

The Alternative Budget cuts user fees in half to increase access to more programs. The current fees are projected to total \$5.29 million. The increase in participation will likely increase the need for funding in future years.

Equal access to sports and recreation facilities is essential for an equitable society where everyone has a fair chance regardless of their social class, race, gender, or ability. HRM should ensure all children have the opportunity to realize their full potential and fully participate in community life. Studies show that active children who achieve higher grades, are healthier, and are less likely to smoke and to abuse drugs and alcohol. Access to community recreation programs has been linked to reduced crime rates.

ACTION 38: *Institute a fee cut of 50% across the board and increase funding for more programs, effectively doubling the budget for Recreation and Community Centre programming. Estimated Investment: \$10 million.*

Community centres often provide space for adult learning programs, arts education for children and adults, job training and transition employment for people trying to break a cycle of street-involvement or those with mental health or addiction issues. Arts education, cultural programming, transition employment, community youth services and skill building for African Nova Scotian and Mi’kmaq young people, along with community health and street health initiatives, were among the uses envisioned for the former St. Pat’s-Alexandra School in North End Halifax by the consortium of non-profits who sought to transform that space and the neighbourhood they serve. This historically marginalized community was betrayed again by HRM’s refusal to follow its own policy regarding the sale of surplus schools.¹⁰¹ If this area is to be developed, it must be done with resident communities’ involvement and leadership. If this debacle is not to be, as local pastor Rev. Britton rightly named it, “Africville all over again,” this dis-

trict and its traditional communities deserve the full attention of HRM's incoming Mayor and Council.

Another under-represented and under-served population, the LGBT community is looking for a physical centre in the central core. Models exist in Toronto and other Canadian cities. HRM should be working to support existing facilities and foster others. The Youth Project is a support and service for organization for LGBT youth. They offer (among many other programs) peer-support, drop-ins, counselling, a resource library, as well as outreach to LGBT youth throughout HRM by hosting drop-ins at regional public libraries. However their building, a modified century home on Brunswick St. has serious upkeep costs and accessibility issues.

The Youth Project serves LGBT youth to the age of 25. After that, they are on their own. There is an urgent need for space and services to meet the needs of LGBT elders, many of whom are living in isolation and poverty. Mental health and addiction services are needed as well, in spaces that the community knows are safe and supportive, HRM should be looking to partner with the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project and other LGBT organizations to assist in the realization of this project. The 519 Community Centre in Toronto offers a successful model of partnership between the municipal government and the LGBT Community. The 519's services are world-renowned and while GTA owns the facility and provides core funding for key staff, they just completed a multi-million dollar addition that was funded almost entirely through the community.

ACTION 39: *Of the increased funding proposed for Recreation and Culture, earmark \$300,000 for a new LGBTQ community centre, as well as \$500,000 for the Youth Project. The LGBTQ Centre will also require \$2 million for the building. Estimated Investment: \$2 million as one-time support to set-up the LGBTQ centre*

It is essential that Halifax Regional Council determine the “appropriate service delivery and funding model for municipally owned community facilities.” This is particularly required because of “significant financial issues, aging infrastructure, inconsistent management/governance practices and a lack of program alignment.”¹⁰² It is also important because of the complete lack of acceptable controls of “third party” operators found by the HRM Office of the Auditor General.¹⁰³

ACTION 40: *Discontinue all private-public partnerships for financing Community and Recreation programming and infrastructure.*

Auditors General from Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec have blasted the poor financial returns for governments involved in a variety of “P3” arrangements in addition to lack of accountability and control.¹⁰⁴ The profit based nature of the “public private partnerships” can influence a project to the point it no longer reflects community needs. To promote access, municipalities typically subsidize the cost of ice time in public recreation facilities, for example; the private-profit motive drives operators to charge the highest price the market will bear. Moreover, contracts are often negotiated in secret with limited public oversight and accountability. When P3 business ventures fail, the taxpayer absorbs any additional costs because the public partner is ultimately responsible for providing a public service. Municipalities are left carrying the debt incurred at private sector borrowing rates. A for-profit developer cannot access funds as cheaply as HRM can. The higher borrowing costs are passed on to the municipality. A for-profit developer desires, obviously, to make a profit from the service. This is incompatible with a non-user fee based system of community culture and recreation. Already, the services provided by HRM operate at a “loss” if viewed as “cost centre” rather than a “community centre”.

This alternative budget would give back Molson and Emera’ money used to “buy” the naming rights for the Plaza and the Oval- it should be called the People’s Oval. Our tax dollars for maintenance and programming will far exceed the small donation made by Emera. We support the FREE “learn to skate” programs, and suggest it should be the way to provide recreation programs to the residents of HRM.¹⁰⁵

ACTION 41: *Return Molson and Emera contribution to the People’s Oval.*
Cost: \$350,000

Principle 4: Building Strong Connections

Strong connections signify a commitment to ensuring people, goods and services, are reasonably well connected, through communication and transportation, locally, regionally and globally.

These strong connections must be enabled in all of the HRM’s development. The HRM is currently updating two planning processes under the PlanHRM¹⁰⁶ moniker, the Regional Plan 5 year review (RP+5) and the Centre Plan. Along with the updating of HRM’s Urban Forest Master Plan, these plans will have a direct and significant impact on the density and livability of our communities.

RP+5 sets the debate of complete neighbourhoods versus bedroom communities, while the Centre Plan's goal is to unite numerous planning strategies and bylaws under one umbrella (note: each distinct neighbourhood will have its own height and density limits.) One of the key parts of the Centre Plan, density bonusing, requires a provincial amendment to the HRM's Charter. Density bonusing mandates maximum building heights and is a powerful planning and community tool to negotiate for the inclusion of various public amenities (trails, affordable housing, streetscaping) into a development. We look forward to this amendment being made during the next sitting of the provincial legislature.

Both plans, RP+5 and centre plan, are indicative of the crossroads the HRM has found itself in far too often, and how it is rectifying it through necessary community input and consultation into planning strategies and bylaws. The HRM is to be commended for encouraging and fostering public consultation to establish density, urban design and land use bylaws through the HRM by Design process for downtown Halifax. A similar level of consultation should occur in the rest of the HRM. It is also critical for Council to respect the outcomes and follow through on these community-built plans, rather than continually allowing exceptions that run counter to their intent because of competing geographic or other interests. In particular, the Council must honour the letter and the spirit of the Halifax Regional Plan, and vow to prioritize support for development of the core.

'More Roads For More Cars' Not Solution

Personal automobile transportation is increasingly challenging for everyone. The average commute time (round trip for both private and public transit) for HRM is 65 minutes. This is the same as Ottawa, and compares to Calgary at 66 minutes, Vancouver at 67 minutes, and Montreal at 76 minutes.¹⁰⁷ About 78% of the HRM population commutes to work by car.¹⁰⁸ 41% of residents who live in the Urban Core and work in the Capital District walk to work.¹⁰⁹

An annual publication of full car costs shows that the average annual fixed costs of operating a small car in 2011 was \$6438.72 (in insurance, license and registration costs, depreciation, etc.). This is \$417.64 per day.¹¹⁰ An analysis of the full costs of car commuting in Halifax found there are even greater "hidden" car costs of \$3,790 per person (in 2006).¹¹¹ Those costs come through higher property and income taxes to pay for roads and policing the roads and, especially, through in higher health care costs related to the car commute. Increased pollution increases the rates of asthma and

other ailments, and car travel is many times more dangerous than transit travel, resulting in enormous costs for emergency care. Add to this the costs of sitting in a car. All told, the 2006 GPI study concluded that the typical car owner is paying about 25 percent of his or her income for car-related expenses. In other words, car drivers directly pay less than 50 percent of the total costs of driving a car, while transit users directly pay more than 60 percent of the total costs of taking the bus. Traffic congestion alone is costing Haligonians about \$7 million in lost time and wages annually.¹¹² Therefore, even paying for services that make it easier for other people to take transit reduces the total costs for people who drive cars. A \$2 bridge toll is an investment in overall economic health, both for the community generally and for the person paying the toll.

ACTION 42: *Work with the province and the Halifax Harbour Bridge Authority to institute a bridge surcharge dedicated to transit funding. Additional revenue raised: unknown.*

A key component of reducing greenhouse gas is to reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicle use. According to HRM Metro Transit¹¹³ a single 40-foot bus takes the place of approximately 40 vehicles on HRM streets, reducing GHG emissions by 20%. Individuals using public transit instead of a private vehicle can prevent nearly a tonne of pollutants from being released into the atmosphere every year. Improving pricing, planning and commuting option measures will reduce reliance on vehicles.

The HRM has challenges providing public transportation options to the region because of the vast territory it serves (including areas with sparse population). However ‘more roads for more cars’ is not a long-term solution. Increasing the number of roads and streets or their capacity through widening, increases reliance on vehicles and consequently volume. Proposed new roads construction and road widening projects will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Some examples include widening of Bayers Road (\$16 million in 2009)¹¹⁴ or an estimated total of \$1 billion for the entire project including provincial government’s portion¹¹⁵, widening of Herring Cove Road (\$2.5 million), and the Bedford West over-sizing (\$3 million).

ACTION 43: *Do not proceed with the Bayers Road widening. Estimated Cost-Saving: at least \$16 million in Capital Spending to be re-allocated to Active Transportation and Public Transit.*

In addition to road widening and new roads, the idea of a third bridge had been discussed, which should be opposed. Jurisdictional issues arise

Transportation Infrastructure in the HRM

Relative Infrastructure Costs Per Kilometre

Highway: \$3 million/km

Urban Road: \$1.8 million/km

Bike Lane: \$500,000/km

Bike Path: \$1.6 million/km

Sidewalk: \$135,000/km

Total Surface Length in HRM, kms

Roadways: 1,700

Sidewalks: 800

Bike Lanes: 80

The above figures are reproduced from the Planning and Design Centre's newsletter, Seek 5; http://pdcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Seek_005.pdf

especially with bridges because the Halifax Harbour Bridges is a commission of the provincial government and all financing is approved by the Nova Scotia Cabinet. It is a self-funded user-pay operation, but The Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board approves toll rates set by HHB.

ACTION 44: *Council should ensure that the third harbour bridge idea is not supported by the provincial government.*

The bridge issue highlights why it is problematic that the provincial Department of Transportation has so much say over regional plans, but is only concerned with roads, and has no mandate for transit or active transportation.

ACTION 45: *Support the creation of a regional transportation authority, which will have a mandate to increase transit usage, as well as active transportation; mandated by the provincial government, it would work with an eventual provincial public inter-community system or Maritime regional public transit system.*

Public Transportation

Metro Transit provides public transit services for more than 25 million riders annually. It operates 252 vehicles, as well as 3 Ferries, 30 Access-A-Bus vehicles, 3 Community Transit vehicles, 20 premium branded MetroLink vehicles, and 10 MetroX vehicles. It employs 815 people.¹¹⁶ Transit's budget for

2012–13 is \$101.47 million. In 2010–11 they recovered 46.9% of costs from users.¹¹⁷ The HRM spends about the same amount per person on transit as it does on building new roads. It is estimated that 90% of the HRM population (urban and suburban) live within 500m of a transit stop.¹¹⁸

The five year transit plan that exists is only a starting point, much more needs to be done. Even to support the initiatives in this plan, Council needs to approve the capital funds required. Any investment in transit must consider the diverse needs of its users. For example, full time student passes for youth (age 5–15) should be valid all day long and not just during daylight hours. In addition, the HRM must fund Metro Transit for late-night ferry and bus services as well as early-morning ferry and bus services are a priority.

ACTION 46: *Increase our investment in our transit system, in order to make it more dependable, accessible, user-friendly and affordable. Estimated Investment: \$20 million*

Additional investments in public transit must plan for a multi-modal system, including the integration of walking, cycling and multiple transit modes. These budget lines should be designated as priority and only be increased. As part of this plan, *it is imperative that the HRM develop minimum density targets for transit corridors and encourage growth on and near terminals.*

The HRM needs to make a substantial investment in public transit so that people can move more efficiently within the municipality. Several ideas have been discussed, but either they have not been resourced or they are still being studied or they have stalled for various reasons. For example a fast ferry, the HarbourLink was studied in 2005¹¹⁹ with two ferries proposed (\$6–8 million construction costs per ferry).¹²⁰

ACTION 47: *Institute a timeline to move the planning of the fast ferry between Bedford and downtown Halifax and seek partner funding as is required.*

Another idea that was discussed numerous times including 2010 is a commuter rail. This idea was most recently studied in 2003 and reviewed in 2010. The idea is for a commuter rail line either from Windsor to Halifax downtown or from Truro to Halifax Downtown. The study focused on Truro-Halifax.¹²¹ While more study might be required to actual implement the line, the study should be funded now and implementation should proceed, though we recognize that CN must also agree. It is estimated to cost \$31 million to build and about \$7 million in operating costs (some of which will be offset by riders' fees).

ACTION 48: *Build commuter rail line between Truro and Downtown Halifax. Estimated Investment: \$31 million*

Active Transportation

While HRM does have an Active Transportation Plan,¹²² it doesn't appear to have influenced this year's budget given that it allocates \$2.4 million of road paving projects but 0 metres of bike lane included even as part of shoulder widening, addition of on-road bicycle lanes or lane reductions to allow the addition of bike lanes. Contrast that with Holland where there are 2.7 bikes per resident¹²³, 16–20,000 km of cycling paths and a population that thinks cycling for everyday activities is normal. The Hague- a city with approximately 500,000 citizens has about 400km of separated cycle paths and 70 km of street cycle lanes. Between 2006 and 2014 the city invested 48.5 million euros in cycling (increasing parking facilities; cycling network improvements; improving cycling unfriendly sites and surfaces). Between 2006 and 2010 cycling increased by 10%. The 2011–14 plan aims to work to a 30% increase in cycling to a percentage by 2020 and 50% by 2030, as compared to the rate of 2005.¹²⁴

Over the long run, a zero-emissions transportation system must be rooted in more complete communities, where high-density housing is located close to public and private services and amenities. Without the need for long commutes, walking and biking could eventually encompass half of all trips.

The Active Transportation Plan (ATP) is very detailed with recommendations for on street bike lanes, for paving shoulders, for pedestrian network, for multi-use trails.

ACTION 49: *Implement recommendations in the ATP with priority for moving people in the core and to the core. The North-South Bicycle Corridor,¹²⁵ currently being discussed, should be funded and move forward as part of this investment. Estimated Investment: \$23 million*

Principle 5: Community Economic Development, Reclaimed Neighborhoods

This principle involves reclaiming self-sustaining neighbourhoods to support compact mixed land-use development within a framework of nodes, and with a range of housing opportunities and employment choices.

Whose Ships Start Here?

“Every project in every part of this region and every plan is an opportunity for innovation and creativity. Each project, every expectation has the potential to distinguish us, to build on what makes us special, to improve the quality of our community.”¹²⁶

The much heralded Ship Starts Here contract has created optimism in Halifax and across Nova Scotia. But as more details come out if we are not careful the real winners may not be the people of the province, but the Irvings, who will make millions, perhaps billions, in profits on the contract (while also receiving \$300 million in corporate welfare from the provincial government). The only other winner might be the military industrial complex, who will contract to this project and drain billions out of our economy to build war ships. We cannot let this moment pass us by; opportunities like this do not come often. It is important that we make strategic investments, building on our successes and realizing our potential as a city, in order to ensure all people in HRM benefit from the anticipated economic growth. The very social, cultural and environmental sustainability of our community depends on the leadership of our public officials to implement a vision and secure our future.

Co-Operatives: A Model That Should Be Supported to Grow and Thrive

Halifax Regional Municipality, like all Canadian cities and regions, relies far too much, for the initiation and continuation of economic activity, on private business. Many of these investor-owned businesses are from outside the region (often out of province) and most are interested primarily in obtaining the greatest return on capital invested. Consequently, municipal governments are constantly afraid to offend these interests or to make demands upon them. And these businesses are fickle.

In the mix of businesses, Halifax needs more home-grown enterprises owned by the people who use the goods or services they produce, or who work there. These enterprises are called co-operatives, and they are an excellent way of spurring community economic development. They are inexorably tied to the community in which they are situated and serving their stakeholders` interests is their prime responsibility.

As businesses, co-operatives are more robust than other enterprises. In Quebec, the long-term survival rate of co-operative enterprises is al-

Here Are Just a Few of the Co-Operatives Contributing to the Community in Halifax

Over fifty housing co-operatives like Kabuki, Crossroads, and Lamplight provide affordable accommodation to the general public and to communities of people with particular needs.

Kazan Co-op presented the play “Communion” by Daniel McIvor at the Neptune Theatre in early 2012.

Us vs Them Theatre Co-operative is the resident troupe at Bus Stop Theatre.

Atlantic Filmmakers Co-operative has been producing and presenting films since 1973 and training generations of cinematic creators.

The ThirtySomething Dance Co-Operative recently presented “Bringing It back, Yo!”

Artist-run galleries like Eye Level, Viewpoint, Seeds, Khyber, The Masters Brush, and the Centre for Art Tapes allow visual artists to pool their resources to present their work to the public.

At The Halifax Circus Co-operative, Cirque de Soleil veteran Mike Hirschbach presents shows and trains budding performers.

Faced with an absence of grocery retailers in the city’s north end, a group of supporters are attempting to set up a co-operative to provide this essential service.

The Halifax Media Co-op conducts investigative journalism and presents forums on topics of pressing interest.

The coffee roasting workers’ co-operative JustUs! (based in Grand Pré) runs two coffee houses in downtown Halifax (and one to open in Dartmouth) and also markets its products at kiosks at several Halifax universities.

The old and the new Farmers’ Markets are co-operatives of vendors.

most twice that of investor-owned companies.¹²⁷ The same pattern is evident across the country.

Nova Scotia has a long history of co-operatives, starting possibly as far back as 1861 with a co-operative store in Stellarton. Early in the 20th Century, Catholic priests Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins started the Antigonish Movement of consumer and worker self-help.

In Nova Scotia today, co-operatives employ 7000 people and provide 6000 people with homes. 308,000 Nova Scotians are member-owners of the province’s 402 co-op businesses. These businesses are often the only provider of services in a community — credit unions are the only financial institutions in 34 Nova Scotia communities and are a vigorous members of HRM’s financial community.¹²⁸

One of the reasons co-ops work so well is that they are owned by the members of the community who use their services and/or by the workers who work in them. Co-operatives can be found in all types of sectors and industries, including production, retail, finance, agriculture, services and the arts. Ownership provides an incentive for productivity and sound management.

Another reason co-ops work so well is that they have principles over and above making profits (though many of them are profit-making.) The International Co-operative Alliance has an inspiring list of principles: 1. Voluntary and open membership; 2. Democratic member control; 3. Member economic participation; 4. Autonomy and independence; 5. Education, training, and information; 6. Co-operation among co-operatives; and 7. Concern for community.

Across the world, there are bustling and healthy cities that can thank co-operatives for their vigour. Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain, Bologna and Imola in northern Italy, Manchester in England, Toulouse in France, Bangalore in India, all cite co-ops as a prime vehicle of their economic development. In Canada, co-operatives abound in Quebec City, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

ACTION 50: *Designate an HRM employee as a liaison officer to co-operatives (much like the province does with its Co-operatives Branch in the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations.) No cost.*

ACTION 51: *Collaborate in the establishment and funding of a “Centre for the Promotion of Co-operative Enterprises” which would provide much needed services like advice, links to finance, promotional help and other specialized services to co-operatives as well as advise commercial and social entrepreneurs about the advantages of the co-operative form of enterprise. Estimated Investment: \$30,000 per year for the HRM with partners and funding from other sources.*

ACTION 52: *Establish special incentives and tax rates to encourage the formation of co-operatives. Set up a grants fund for assistance to co-operatives; Estimated Investment: \$5 million.*

Housing

Housing prices in the HRM are going through the roof, with real estate companies and speculators creating upward pressure on the market as a result of the Ships Start Here contract. Dispute this mania, it is important to keep

Urban Density Can Be Achieved Without Height

In the debate over development on the Halifax peninsula, much has been made of the need for increased population density. But there is very little specificity on what level of density is desirable.

And thus, the discourse has been captured by the developers. “You don’t want suburban sprawl?” goes the developers’ narrative. “Well, we’ll give you density downtown. But the only way to achieve density is to build up.” They make the false distinction between single family homes at one end of the spectrum and tall buildings at the other, with nothing in between. Indeed, in the public discourse, height is associated almost axiomatically with densification. This is good for the developers, for whom height can mean extra profit. But is it good for the rest of us?

There is a growing opinion among urban planners that density has its limits. There is a “sweet spot,” a point at which density and liveability are both maximized while keeping construction costs and other negative externalities of tall buildings in check. That occurs between 12,000 and 13,000 people per square kilometre. Many cities e.g. London, Paris, have achieved high density on a people-friendly scale.

There is now proof right in the heart of Halifax that denser does not necessarily mean taller.

Bounded by Queen St., Holy Cross cemetery, South Park St., Morris St., Brenton St. and Clyde St., most of Schmidville consists of 19th century houses with some dating back as far as the 1700s. The community is on the list for Heritage Conservation District designation by HRM.

Friends of Schmidville, a community association representing residents of Halifax’s oldest and largest contiguous historic neighbourhood, estimated the density in its six hectares. At between 15,000 and 23,000 residents per square kilometre,¹²⁹ Schmidville is in the same population density league as Manhattan (26,718 ppl/sqkm), Paris, France (20,909), Mumbai, India (22,947), Dhaka, Bangladesh (19,447), and Barcelona (15,991).¹³⁰ AND YET THE SCHMIDTVILLE HEIGHT LIMIT IS ONLY 35 FEET (about 10.7 metres.) There are also shops, an elementary school and a senior’s day centre, all of which have no permanent residents. And, many of the houses have sizeable backyards, and wonderful gardens.

For Canadian context, HRM, with its suburban sprawl, has a density of only 17 ppl/sqkm, downtown Halifax has a density of between 4000 and 7000, Urban Toronto’s is 7000 and the density in Vancouver’s downtown peninsula is 12,100. Schmidville is almost twice as dense as the most tightly packed of those.

How is such high density achieved with so little height? Schmidville is a mix of rooming houses, apartments and family dwellings (many of them with rental rooms.) While some of the buildings house single families, many of them are subdivided by floor. And in a few cases, there is more than one building on a lot. The community contains students, renters and owner-occupiers with a large variety of incomes and ages. While some buildings are of recent vintage, much of the infill sensitively reflects the character of the historic neighbourhood.

In fact, Schmidville fulfils all of the priorities of HRM by Design: density, stability, walkability, mixed usage, appropriate scale, complete streetscapes, infill, and inclusive mobility.

in mind that rising housing prices do not lift all boats. While it may assist older families who own their home to retire, it makes home ownership outside the realm possibility for many Nova Scotians. With average housing prices rising faster than the national average¹³¹, Nova Scotia is facing an affordability challenge as wages remain below the national average too¹³².

This boom is of course artificial and entirely based on economic speculation. The economic rent created by the boom is also a façade masking a growing level of household debt¹³³ and shrinking incomes¹³⁴.

Those who rent their homes are also seeing increases when it is time to sign new leases. Combined with a low vacancy rate¹³⁵, the cost of rental units in HRM is rising well above the rate of inflation¹³⁶.

One of the timely actions that is required is for rent controls to be implemented. HRM technically lacks the power to implement rent controls, but the municipality can and should request the provincial government do so. To date, the provincial has been noncommittal, but they have yet to be asked officially by HRM.

ACTION 53: *HRM request the provincial government implement rent controls throughout the municipality and to improve tenants' rights. No cost.*

ACTION 54: *Pass the 15% solution — like other municipalities around country, HRM should pass a by-law requiring 15% of all new housing developments to be quality, affordable housing.¹³⁷ No cost.*

ACTION 55: *Invest in capital grants for community-based supportive housing.¹³⁸ Estimated Investment: \$5 million*

ACTION 56: *Invest in capital grants for student housing coops. Estimated Investment: \$5 million*

ACTION 57: *Invest in capital grants for artist-run community spaces that includes artist housing. Estimated Investment: \$5 million*

Principle 6: Protecting and Sharing the Commons

The goal of the sixth principle is to preserve open space, agricultural land, natural beauty and critical environmental areas.

A critical component of protecting and sharing the commons is ensuring that growth is sustainable and that environmental considerations are forefronted. The AMB supports *Our HRM Alliance's* proposal for creating a greenbelt as a containment boundary for new growth. A greenbelting pro-

vides: “a physical representation of areas where growth should be encouraged and areas where human development should be restricted.” Greenbelting can therefore “help maintain natural areas for wildlife, public access, and the vital services that ecosystems perform while allowing for low-impact development in the right places.”¹³⁹

ACTION 58: *Institute a greenbelt in HRM. Estimated Investment: \$5 million*

Food Policy and Food Security

“Food Security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.¹⁴⁰ At a community level, supporting food security is about creating healthy, vibrant communities that are socially just and self-reliant. With increasing need and public awareness, community food security is an outcome that municipal, provincial and federal governments can strive for and achieve through the appropriate policy frameworks, planning and budgetary allocations.

Realities of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity in a community means that not everyone is able to access enough healthy food for themselves and their families. In NS, including the Halifax Regional Municipality, food insecurity is a reality for too many people. Since 2008, the number of Nova Scotians who visited a food bank increased by an astounding 33%.¹⁴¹

Poverty is the main cause of household food insecurity. Nova Scotians relying on minimum wage¹⁴², Income Assistance¹⁴³, and seniors not accessing the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)¹⁴⁴ are especially vulnerable. They are unable to afford healthy food because fixed costs such as housing (including, heat and power), transportation and childcare leave little left for food.

Consequences of food insecurity:

- Mothers sacrifice their own food intake to ensure their children have enough¹⁴⁵
- Time and financial constraints can lead to a reliance on cheap, processed convenience foods, which over time, can lead to loss of cooking skills, and poorer health outcomes. At a systems level, this trans-

lates into too much health care spending on preventable chronic conditions such as obesity and Type II diabetes.¹⁴⁶

Food insecurity is not the result of food costs being too high (in fact, Canada has one of the cheapest food systems in the world, where on average, Canadians spent only 10.2% of their annual budgets on food, down from 18.7% in 1969¹⁴⁷). Multinational food corporations tend to keep food costs low by paying the lowest price possible for agricultural commodities like grain, livestock and vegetables. This means that primary producers are getting smaller and smaller shares of the food dollar.¹⁴⁸

As farming profits diminish, farms close and our capacity to produce local foods is lost.

- In NS, “estimates show that only about 8.4% of our diet is produced on NS farms. Fifteen years ago it was closer to 15%.”¹⁴⁹
- In NS and elsewhere, small-scale farmers have been hurt by commodity-based, export-focused policies. As recommended in the People’s Food Policy (2011) a “shift toward a community-based, sustainability-focused agriculture that prioritizes healthy eating for all Canadians” is needed.¹⁵⁰

Current Spending

Municipal strategies:

- Spending to support local food production and distribution
- Supporting farmers markets
- “On April 7, 2009, Halifax Regional Council approved the funding agreement between HRM, the Nova Scotia Farmers’ Market Development Cooperative and the City Market of Halifax Cooperative Limited, to facilitate the disbursement of \$1,000,000 towards leasehold improvements associated with the Halifax Seaport Farmers’ Market.”¹⁵¹
- Municipal support for community gardens
- The HRM permits community gardens on municipal property, application required.¹⁵² Registered non-profit organizations and charities can also obtain funding for community gardens through the HRM Community Grants Program. There are two types of grant (a) a project grant of up to \$5,000 and (b) a capital grant of up to \$25,000.¹⁵³

- Public transportation spending also enhances access to food, decreasing individual and household food insecurity.

Becoming Food Secure

The AMB supports investments to enable more residents to be food secure. This includes the need to work with the provincial government on poverty-reduction measures, such as:

- Increasing the number of affordable, safe housing units to reflect the number of households living below the low-income cut off.
- For residents receiving Income Assistance, advocate for adjusting shelter allowances to reflect current housing costs and index allowances to reflect location, family size and the cost of living.

It is important that HRM develop a food security policy as part of its Community Sustainability Plan. In implementing this policy, it will be important to develop supporting tax and zoning policies that encourage small-scale food processing industries and community gardens. It is recommended that community gardens, community kitchens and community food centres be established. All of these initiatives promote connections among food, culture, and enhancing food skills. Building on such resources, successful programs piloted elsewhere include: community cooking and preserving programs, food buying cooperatives, and food box programs.¹⁵⁴ The AMB invests in community kitchens which serve as hubs to pilot programs such as a community preserving programs through education on preserving food and providing access to community or individual freezers. These kitchens will also partner with other community organizations, to develop bulk buying and group transportation to grocery stores, food buying cooperatives.

ACTION 59: *Establish a grants to support provincial and municipal food policy councils and groups such as the NS Food Policy Council, NS Food Security Network, EAC's Food Action Committee who are working to build sustainable and food secure communities. Estimated Investment: \$300,000*

ACTION 60: *Establish a grants fund to support community gardens and programming on food security. Estimated Investment: \$200,000*

ACTION 61: *Establish a grants fund to support operating farmers' markets. Estimated Investment: \$200,000*

ACTION 62: *Establish grants to support the development of community kitchens. Estimated Investment: \$300,000*

ACTION 63: *Establish three Community Food Centres (which would encompass a community kitchen and a community garden); one in the North End of Halifax, one in Spryfield and one to be determined. Estimated Investment: \$900,000*

Energy Efficiency

Historically Nova Scotians produce some of the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the world with fossil fuels being the basis for meeting our electrical, transportation and home-heating requirements.¹⁵⁵

Both HRM and the province are extremely vulnerable to the predicted outcomes of climate change, which include increased storm surges, extreme weather events, flooding, sea level rise and coastal erosion. These effects will result in rising costs associated with insurance claims, repair or replacement of damaged infrastructure, mitigation and adaptation. And because Nova Scotians are reliant on imported fossil fuel for most of our energy needs we have neither assurance that our energy needs will be met nor that our energy will be affordable- citizens of HRM have no energy security.

HRM manages an asset portfolio that includes 278 buildings, 1,780 km of roads, 1,200 vehicles (\$231.8 million value & \$17.7 million to maintain), and 793 parks. The cost to replace these assets is estimated at \$5 billion, and this does not include the approximately \$2 billion of water and wastewater assets owned and managed by Halifax Water, a public utility wholly owned by Halifax Regional Municipality.¹⁵⁶

In HRM between \$1.2 and \$1.5 billion is spent on transportation, heating, and electricity by the city, its residents and industries, etc. Reliance on imported fossil fuels means, two-thirds of this value leaves the city, the region and the country. An expenditure of \$25 million per year on efficiency could result in a \$4 million savings per year.

HRM with other levels of government has spent approximately \$15 million on its own energy efficiency over the past 4 years for an estimated saving of \$4 million in energy costs per year. In total HRM spends approximately \$25 million per year on its energy. So far improvements in efficiency resulted in an approximately 33% return in energy savings.

HRM is currently undertaking a \$35 million conversion to LED street lights over the next 5 years. This is mandated and cost-shared by the provincial government and will have a 5–10 year pay back in cost-savings.

HRM's Solar City project enables the Municipality to provide financing to individual homeowners for solar improvement. The original \$8.5 million pilot project was intended to encourage individual homeowners to install solar panels for heating domestic hot water with user pay financing to be re-paid through property tax bills as a local improvement charge for individual homeowners who installed the solar panels. The initial pilot phase of 700 homes (1,000 panels) was over-subscribed and quickly expanded to 1600. Economies of scale offer important opportunities for saving in purchase and installation price as well as increased economic benefits through quicker pay-back and greater job creation.¹⁵⁷

The Province of Nova Scotia made the commitment to contribute up to \$1,250,000 in rebates to the pilot program through its agent Efficiency Nova Scotia as well as low interest financing. A Dartmouth Company, Thermo Dynamics Ltd,¹⁵⁸ which makes solar heating equipment worked with HRM staff for two years. Notwithstanding this good news story, staff recommended to Halifax Regional Council the project be killed in a report dated June 20, 2012 and discussed by Council at its July 8, 2012 meeting.¹⁵⁹

Ultimately Council did not accept the staff recommendation and voted to defer the decision until a response was received from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities regarding an application made to its "Green Fund."

ACTION 64: *Fund the Solar City project whether or even if funding is not forthcoming from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities "Green Fund". Estimated Investment: \$6 million (this will come out of the Halifax Atmospheric Fund if needed-see below)*

The HRM region has almost one-half of the population and economic activity for the province of Nova Scotia. Therefore, there is tremendous economic incentive to improve efficiency for not just electricity, as targeted through Efficiency Nova Scotia, but also for heating and transportation.

To achieve its energy goals, the Alternative Municipal Budget establishes the Halifax Atmospheric Fund. It will be similar to the well-proven 20-year-old Toronto Atmospheric Fund.¹⁶⁰ Criteria for projects funded by HAF will be similar to those of TAF with a strong potential to result in significant reductions in greenhouse gas and air pollution, especially in the area of transportation- and heating-related emissions. Projects using social innovation to promote local engagement and financial-innovation to promote invest-

ment in climate change mitigation will be prioritized. Best practices will be adopted and the HAF will work cooperatively with Efficiency Nova Scotia to avoid duplication of effort. Examples drawn from TAF of what these monies would be used for include the provision of:

- the provision of strategic advice and guidance to HRM Planning and Development for supporting smart city development including examples such as: or outdoor lighting guidelines to minimize energy use and light pollution; achieving highest energy standards for buildings;
- investments in energy efficiency (especially transportation and heating);
- Local Improvement Charges to finance energy efficiency and renewable energy projects through the property tax bill and tied to the property; and,
- Energy retrofit projects in mid-rise, multi-unit buildings, institutions or commercial operations in partnership with a private sector company, by using small direct investment alongside other subordinate debt investors to attract senior debt, and use the blended capital for financing.

As many of these projects will have a 6–8 year payback period the fund will effectively be a revolving fund. Operations will have a ceiling cost of no more than 20% (\$200,000) per year.

ACTION 65: *Establish a Halifax Atmospheric Fund. Estimated Investment: \$20 million/year*

Conclusion

THIS ALTERNATIVE MUNICIPAL Budget lays out an alternative vision of municipal services and their financing. We hope that it will inform debates and discussion leading up to this year's municipal elections and beyond. In addition, as the ship-building contract moves forward, the HRM must take concrete action to protect the common good and ensure everyone benefits. As the AMB makes clear, serious investments in housing, transit, jobs, public services and the environment are necessary to ensure all benefit from the proposed economic growth.

As we have outlined here, the Halifax Regional Council must show leadership and invest in light-rail, building the next generation of public transit in the municipality. The municipality says the only thing holding back a more detailed study on the issue is disagreements with CN Rail. Council cannot let the railroad corporations' interests rank above the needs of the traveling public.

Another key economic investment is in early learning and child care, which will give families the flexibility they need to participate in the boom, especially working women. The return on investment is better, dollar for dollar, when investing in childcare over other infrastructure projects.

Nova Scotia has a proud collective heritage of strong cooperatives, organized originally through the efforts of Father Moses Coady and the Antigonish Movement. Building on this heritage and putting supports in place for the development of new and existing coops will yield major dividends.

To be successful public participation in economic decisions, including but not limited to the HRM budget, must also be improved. The Alternative Municipal Budget makes strategic investments to ensure all people in HRM benefit from the anticipated economic growth and ensures the social, cultural and environmental sustainability of our community.

Notes

- 1** Halifax Regional Municipality, *Approved Operating Budget 2012/13: Introduction*. Halifax, NS. Hereafter referred to as Budget Booklet. <http://www.halifax.ca/budget/documents/12-13V4ApprovedBook.pdf>
- 2** Budget Booklet, Ibid
- 3** Budget Booklet, Halifax, NS.
- 4** Our 'other' category includes expenses for the following business units: Legal Services & Risk Mgt; Human Resources; and Finance & Information, Communication, and Technology. For an explanation of what is included in the Fiscal Services category see: <http://www.halifax.ca/budget/documents/12OKDone2012-13FiscalBudget.pdf>
- 5** See budget overview: <http://www.halifax.ca/budget/documents/6OverviewofBudgets-ApprovedBudgetjuly5.pdf>
- 6** Halifax Regional Municipality, *Approved Operating Budget 2012–13*, Budget Booklet, p. C1.
- 7** For details on the Project Budget, see: <http://www.halifax.ca/budget/documents/21Capitalsheets.pdf>
- 8** Tim Bousquet, Billion dollar Bayers Road/102 project will destroy Halifax transit forever, Reality Bites: The Coast, September 12, 2011; <http://www.thecoast.ca/RealityBites/archives/2011/09/12/billion-dollar-bayers-road102-project-will-destroy-halifax-transit-forever>
- 9** For details on the Reserve Budget: <http://www.halifax.ca/budget/documents/20aSummaryofReservecombined.pdf>
- 10** Budget Booklet, Ibid.
- 11** Budget Booklet, p. c15.
- 12** Budget Booklet, p. c19.
- 13** Please see the June 18, 2012 Report of Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer to Halifax Regional Council for the full details of the financial arrangements and ownership possibilities between the Provincial Government and HRM: <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/>

documents/120710ca1119.pdf; See also critical analysis of this decision here: Christopher Majka <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/convention-centre-nova-scotia>, as well as Tim Bousquet's analysis in a series of articles on Reality Bites, part 5 can be found here: <http://www.thecoast.ca/RealityBites/archives/2012/07/09/why-the-convention-centre-sucks-part-5-trade-centre-limiteds-hidden-subsidies>

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15 Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Keep moving forward: Pre-budget *Submission (Ottawa: FCM, 2011)*. Retrieved from http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/2012_Pre_Budget_Submission_EN.pdf

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17 Halifax Regional Municipality. (2009). HRM, 2009/10 Council Focus Area Report: Infrastructure. Halifax, NS. Retrieved from, December, 2009. <http://www.halifax.ca/budget/documents/CouncilFocusInfrastructure.pdf>

18 Canadian Urban Libraries Council, an analysis of public library trends, April 2011. http://www.culc.ca/cms_lib/CULC%20Public%20Library%20Trends.pdf

19 IBID, FCM, p. 11.

20 For an excellent review and backgrounder on municipal government in NS, Paul Hobson, David Cameron and Wade Locke, *Final Report: A Question of Balance-An Assessment of the State of Local Government in Nova Scotia*, A discussion paper prepared for the Union of NS Municipalities (UNSM, 2005).

21 World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Report of the World (Brundtland Commission on Environment)* published its report in 1987 and *Development: Our Common Future*. <http://www.un-documents.net/cfr.org/economic-development/report-world-commission-environment-development-our-common-future.pdf-brundtland-report/p26349>

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