

Press Release

HRM by Design: Good intentions but not ready for approval, says GPI Atlantic

May 4, 2009

HRM by Design has laudable intentions to revitalize the downtown in a sustainable way, but its implementation may well end up increasing congestion, greenhouse gas emissions and energy use, and threatening the city's cultural heritage, unless properly planned.

As such, approval of the downtown development Plan is premature until its impacts are properly assessed, says Genuine Progress Index (GPI) Atlantic in a 15-page written submission to HRM Council today. GPI Atlantic is a Halifax-based non-profit research group that measures the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of progress.

"Without fully and properly addressing the potential impacts of this targeted development on the downtown core, there's a danger of unleashing a process that may undermine sustainability," says Dr. Ronald Colman, executive director of GPI Atlantic. "HRM first needs to complete its Transportation Master Plan, Sustainability Plan, and Energy Plan to ensure that the proposed influx of new residents and workers into the downtown doesn't increase congestion and undercut HRM's greenhouse gas reduction targets" says Dr. Colman.

A 2008 GPI study found that rush-hour congestion already costs HRM more than \$7 million a year in lost time, excess gas, and related greenhouse gas emissions on HRM's main arteries alone. The study examined dozens of transportation indicators and concluded HRM's current transport system is unsustainable. "Until we see HRM's completed Transportation Master Plan that intends to improve public transit, active transportation, and transportation demand management, we won't know if HRM by Design will contribute to or detract from sustainability," says Colman.

Despite the urgency and danger of climate change and HRM's stated commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, GPI Atlantic notes that HRM by Design does not require developers to reduce or even monitor GHG emissions, to employ alternative energy systems, or to use sustainable building practices. Instead, such sustainable design plans remain voluntary. Instead of preventing excess GHG emissions, HRM by Design requires developers to mitigate impacts of climate change like sea level rise and storm surges. Until HRM has completed its Sustainability Functional Plan and Energy Plan, GPI Atlantic says, approval of HRM by Design is therefore premature.

"It is troubling that without setting key directions and timelines for meeting required reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, or examining the implications for energy supply and demand management, HRM by Design may well undermine environmental sustainability," says Dr. Colman. "Approving HRM by Design without an impact assessment



on whether it will increase or decrease GHG emissions may well violate the precautionary principle clause of the Province's Environment Act.

GPI Atlantic also urges Council to assess the potential impacts of the proposed downtown structural developments and proposed new height regulations on the city's cultural and aesthetic assets, including its remaining built heritage and the viewscapes of Halifax Harbour.

GPI Atlantic emphasizes that it is not giving a negative appraisal to HRM by Design, but simply urging a full impact assessment of HRM by Design prior to approval to ensure that the Plan's good intentions are realized in practice. "Built infrastructure, once in place, will have major and often irreversible impacts for generations to come," says the GPI Atlantic submission. "Respect for the wellbeing of future generations of HRM residents requires these cautionary and prudent steps prior to approval of HRM by Design."

"In this case, we simply cannot afford to put the cart before the horse," says Colman. "There is simply too much at stake to approve this Plan prematurely and without knowing its full impacts. Council has already committed to proper transport, sustainability, and energy functional plans. We need to see those completed Plans before HRM by Design can be properly evaluated."

-30-

For more information please see GPI Atlantic's attached 15-page submission to HRM Council (which will also be posted on the GPI Atlantic website at www.gpiatlantic.org), or contact: Ronald Colman, Executive Director, GPI Atlantic at (902) 823-1944 or (902) 489-7007, or Linda Pannoza at (902) 857-2058