

Choose Green City Leaders: 2020 ELECTION TOOLKIT

for voters and stakeholders in
Halifax Regional Municipality



Ecology Action Centre &
Our HRM Alliance

Environment and the City

Halifax Regional Municipality, along with all Nova Scotian municipalities, are holding municipal elections on October 17, 2020. The results of this 2020 election will set the tone of Halifax's locally-based environmental action for the next four years. The unanimous adoption of the Halifax Green Network Plan and Halifax's climate change action plan, as well as the unprecedented community support for climate, nature, and sustainability – seen through the climate marches, support for Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park, and the success of the Shaw Wilderness Park amongst many other events – have shown that now is the time to be ambitious and committed in building our community around sustainability. This election season, you can help make climate and environmental justice top election issues.



Our HRM Alliance is a coalition on over 60 organizations from sectors as diverse as health, environment, trails, business, community growth, and transportation advocating for a sustainable future through greenbelting and complete communities.

The **Ecology Action Centre** is a member-based environmental charity in Nova Scotia. We take leadership on critical environmental issues from biodiversity protection to climate change to environmental justice.

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help you, as a community member or representative of a community organization to engage your candidates in Halifax's top environmental issues. The toolkit provides background information and key facts for top issues with corresponding questions to ask your candidates. Things are looking different this election – some candidates are door-to-door canvassing while others are keeping their campaigns online. We've included a sample email and tweet for you to use or you can keep a copy of this toolkit on your fridge to engage with canvassers!

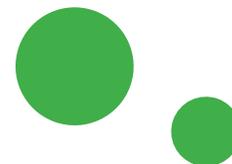
This toolkit contains:

- Top environmental issues for the 2020 HRM election
- Key background information and facts for each issue
- Succinct questions to ask candidates related to each issue
- Tips to identify good answers
- Sample emails

This toolkit is not a complete summary of all environmental and community issues in Halifax Regional Municipality. These are simply a handful of topics and issues that we would like to hear from candidates on. We highly encourage you to work beyond this guide and ask candidates about the issues most relevant in your community!

Election issues in this guide:

1. Affordable housing and inclusive development
2. Nature access
3. Halifax Green Network
4. Climate action
5. Community Food Security
6. Transportation



1. Affordable Housing & Inclusive Development

Building effective cities and walkable, complete suburbs are key to making our built environment more sustainable. In order to do this, our cities must serve the needs of all people. Adequate housing options are essential in making our cities work. **When people who wish to live in the Regional Centre are unable to find and afford housing, residents are pushed into suburban areas and the demand for suburban sprawl increases.** This has led to sprawl which not only places a greater financial burden on the municipality, but also degrades and replaces natural habitats, watersheds, natural corridors, and landscapes. The carbon footprint of this growth and settlement is more significant than most urban alternatives.



Halifax's vacancy rate is at an all-time low: 1% and the average rents have increased by 3.8% from the previous year (CMHC, 2020). Many have declared this a housing crisis which all levels of government must act on.

Candidates may mention that affordable housing sits under the purview of the Province. This means that technically, affordable housing isn't HRM's responsibility and that there are certain affordability-tools that HRM cannot do. HRM has the option to use the tools currently available to them to influence housing or to petition the province to take-over the responsibility of affordable housing.

Question 1: What would you change about HRM's current approach to engage and include historically displaced African Nova Scotian communities in the Cogswell District redevelopment and other significant development projects?

Question 2: What can HRM do to build more affordable housing options while affordable housing is under the responsibility of the province?

Question 3: Council recently approved changes to allow secondary and backyard suites across the Municipality. These suites offer an opportunity to create more age-friendly, accessible, affordable units across the Region, while building density, gently. Yet without regulations or incentives to keep these units affordable, Short-Term Rental companies (like AirBnBs) threaten to take over these units. What do you believe should be done?

Question 4: African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaw and newcomer communities have historically been left out of city planning processes. How will you make sure that the voices and concerns of these communities are heard and prioritized in council decisions?

A good answer may:

- Acknowledge the relationship between the Municipality and the Province (HRM is only allowed to do a set of actions which politicians often refer to through the HRM Charter)
- Build on limitations. While there are certain mechanisms that HRM currently cannot do because of limitations of the HRM Charter, there are actions HRM can take to address limited housing options
- Awareness of HRM's continued history of displacing Black communities and commitment in continuing to address this
- Make tangible commitments

Caution tape; what to look out for:

- Aspirational and theoretical responses that aren't rooted in actionable steps
- Jargon or terms that the general public wouldn't understand
- Refusal to take on responsibility for affordable housing
- Refusal to acknowledge HRM's history of leaving African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaq and newcomer communities out of planning processes and decision



2. Nature Access

COVID-19 has compounded existing issues and inequities across HRM including access to nature. Early on in the Covid-19 pandemic, HRM closed parks and trails. We've now learned in HRM, and from other cities, that parks can remain open with modifications during a pandemic, and continue to serve their vital role in community health. A nation-wide survey found that city dwellers now [appreciate parks more than ever](#), but cities will likely decrease their park budgets due to COVID-19.

Parks were already critical "green infrastructure," but are now turning out to be even more valued and versatile during a pandemic. However, **parks have been chronically underfunded, and have not been created or nurtured in equitable ways, leaving many communities underserved.**

Question 1: What do you believe needs to be done to build equitable access to greenspace, specifically within historically marginalized and underserved communities within a limited municipal budget?

A good answer may:

- Recognize that people in HRM value their parks, and this became even more apparent during COVID.
- Acknowledge that parkland acquisition and park maintenance do require municipal funds, but it's worth it.
- Realize that an equity approach should now be taken in park planning in HRM, and commit to lead on this if elected.
- Suggest collaborating with the volunteers already active across HRM's existing parks and greenspace.
- Recognize that HRM has dedicated some funds to parkland acquisition, but that we also must use creative approaches to provide parks and greenspace.

Caution tape; what to look out for:

- Stating that HRM has an annual operating budget for parkland acquisition and that's enough. This budget line was low before CoVid, and has been slashed since.
- Falling back on the idea that HRM has lots of parks. Communities in some parts of HRM do not have parks nearby, and there is currently no plan to rectify this.
- Claiming cities have more pressing matters to pay for right now. Parks have proven to be valuable assets for cities during a pandemic, including for their health benefits.

Learn more

[Park People: COVID-19 and Parks](#)

Article: [Parks are an Equity Issue](#)

3 large wild areas in HRM that need protection: [Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes](#), [Sandy Lake – Sackville River](#), and the [Purcells Cove Backlands](#).



3. Halifax Green Network

Between 1992 and 2014, Halifax nearly doubled in area but only grew in population by a fifth. To ensure continued access to nature, livable communities, and lower our tax burden we must control the sprawl of development. The Halifax Green Network Plan identifies the places where large-scale development should not happen because of existing value to ecology, economy, health and wellbeing. **Two years after Halifax council unanimously approved the plan, development is still occurring in the priority areas of the Green Network.** While council has passed the Halifax Green Network Plan and supported land purchases in the Backlands and Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes, we have not protected all of the land in the Green Network, and the Green Network is not guiding policy and development. What is needed now is committed and clear implementation to direct development away from our most vulnerable natural areas.

Question 1: What steps will you take to formally protect the Halifax Green Network before it is lost?

Question 2: Do you support the protection of Halifax's three wild areas: the Purcell's Cove Backlands, Sandy Lake-Sackville River, and Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes? What steps do you believe need to be taken to protect these special urban wilderness areas?

Question 3: Will you protect the fragile wildlife corridors mapped in the Halifax Green Network Plan? What steps will you take to ensure this is done in our community?

A good answer may:

- Recognize that timely action is required to protect greenspace and wildlife corridors from development.
- Make a commitment to protecting places like Sandy Lake-Sackville River, Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, and the Purcell's Cove Backlands – none of which are fully protected.
- Commit to supporting the Halifax Green Network Plan when opportunities to implement it come to council.

Caution tape; what to look out for:

- Referring to greenspace protection as 'too expensive' to do during the pandemic. The majority of the Halifax Green Network will be protected by zoning which has virtually no cost. However, HRM does have funds available for necessary land purchases.
- Thinking that the job is done. Halifax council has passed the Halifax Green Network Plan and supported land purchases but the Green Network is not yet guiding policy and development.

Learn more

[User's Guide to the Halifax Green Network Plan](#)

[The Halifax Green Network Plan](#) (full plan)

3 large wild areas in HRM that need protection: [Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes](#), [Sandy Lake – Sackville River](#), and the [Purcells Cove Backlands](#).

4. Climate Action

Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) recently unanimously approved HalifACT 2050, an action plan for to address climate change over the next thirty years. HalifACT identifies that there are risks to health, the economy, community safety and the natural areas within HRM. HalifACT was produced through two years of work by municipal staff to collect data and feedback on buildings, roads, community centres, local businesses and non-profit organizations within HRM. This action plan is trying to decarbonize HRM through investments in efficient buildings, renewable energy, water, critical infrastructure and services, natural areas and green infrastructure, planning, coastal preparedness, emergency management, community capacity, food, business and economy, municipal operations, governance, monitoring and carbon accounting.

HalifACT still has a lack of financing and implementation planning. The most immediate actions in HalifACT that needs financing and implementation planning are related to efficient buildings and renewable energy. This year, there are actions that HRM must begin work on including:

- adopting a standard net-zero and climate resilient new construction standard which they have committed to doing by by 2030,
- planning for climate resilience retrofits in all residential and non-residential buildings which must be complete by 2040,
- and focused investment into rooftop solar programming in order to meet the commitment of installing 1,300 MW of rooftop solar PV with storage by 2030.

While HalifACT is a 30-year plan, councillors will need to commit to ongoing financing and monitoring in order to see the effective and timely action on climate.

Net-zero Energy (NZE): a building that produces as much energy from on-site renewable energy sources as it consumes in a year.

Net-Zero Energy Ready (NZER): a building that has been designed to produce as much energy from on-site renewable energy sources as it consumes in a year but does not have the renewable energy source installed (and may never have the renewable energy source installed). These buildings can be more affordable than NZE buildings and very energy efficient like NZE buildings.

1.5 °C pathway: a city-level climate commitment to keep global temperature rise under 1.5 °C, which involves steep emission reductions to be achieved by 2030



Question 1: What will you do to ensure that efficient buildings and renewable energy actions outlined in HalifACT 2050 are financed and implemented? How do you plan to achieve the outlined 1300 MW solar energy target?

Question 2: The HalifACT 2050 plan falls short on reaching the 1.5 °C pathway. What will you do to ensure that a 1.5 °C pathway is reached?

Question 3: Did you attend and/or provide feedback at any of the 35 pop-up sessions, 25 public presentations, or online engagement surveys?

Question 4: What types of green jobs do you think HRM should be helping to create in the next thirty years?



A good answer may:

- Recognize the need for swift action on climate change, understand the importance of achieving steep emission reductions, show commitment to taking mitigation actions.
- Use the HalifACT guidelines to implement actions and measure achievements/ milestones against written or committed targets.
- Recognize the need for a focused working group, and allocate necessary human resources to carry out tasks.
- Interest in promoting benefits of solar and battery storage and green jobs.
- Acknowledge the thousands of people that directly contributed ideas to HalifACT and the ~160,000 people who were aware and actively following the development of HalifACT through social media.

Caution tape; what to look out for:

- Assuming climate commitments are only under a national scope or suggesting that the provincial and federal government need to provide more financial assistance. Programs are available but only if HRM has a clear plan in place to receive the funding.
- Siding with Business As-Usual case for emission reductions.
- Focusing on the initiatives that Halifax has already done rather than addressing the necessary actions ahead.
- Suggesting that research into alternative solutions should be done by HRM. This research has already been done by municipal staff and stakeholders.
- Considering natural gas, oil, coal and uranium 'green jobs'. All produce greenhouse gas emissions when used for energy production. Any job relating to biomass that is not sustainably harvested and efficiently burned is also not considered green

Learn more

[The EAC Electricity Report](#)
[Halifax 2050: Acting on Climate Together](#)
[The Green Jobs Report](#)



5. Community Food Security

Across Canada, municipalities are increasingly engaging in strategies and policies that support healthy, just, and sustainable food systems. This includes developing community and municipal plans that promote urban agriculture and encourage healthy and innovative food retail; building on municipal assets like libraries, community centers and transit systems; adopting procurement practices and waste recovery initiatives; and championing food charters and strategies. Municipalities are well positioned to foster collaborations within and across sectors that support food systems innovation.

In December 2019, Halifax Regional Council formalized the partnership with the Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA), endorsed the Halifax Food Charter and committed resources to work collectively to increase access to good food and strengthen the local food system. This kick-started the food action plan, branded as JustFOOD: Action Plan for the Halifax Region. **What is needed now are candidates who will commit to resourcing and implementing the Action Plan, to ensure that JustFOOD, once developed, becomes a plan that we can all be proud of.**

Question 1: How would you support the implementation of Halifax's food action plan?

Question 2: How will you work to support a healthy, just, and sustainable food system?

A good answer may:

- Show an understanding of the breadth of food issues. For example, are candidates considering urban agriculture, food waste, protection of farmland, procurement practices, healthy food initiatives, access to food for all residents?
- Support innovative partnerships. Community food security is not the responsibility of the city alone – it can only be achieved through partnerships involving all levels of government, community partners, public health, and the private sector.

Caution tape; what to look out for:

- Lack of recognition of food as a municipal issue.
- Aspirational and theoretical responses that aren't rooted in actionable steps.
- Jargon or terms that the general public wouldn't understand

Learn more

[JustFood Update Council Report](#)
[Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment](#)



6. Transportation

Transportation currently accounts for 32% of the Municipality's GHG emissions. This HRM regional council needs to encourage use of clean transportation, and improve the safety, reliability and efficiency of our transportation network. The incoming council is responsible for following through on the actions set out in the Integrated Mobility Plan, the Strategic Road Safety Framework and accelerating transit improvements by implementing the Bus Rapid Transit network, electrifying the transit fleet and support accessible community transit.



Rapid Transit – High frequency transit routes that make travel quick, convenient and reliable.

Bus Rapid Transit – Rapid transit services that operate using buses rather than rail vehicles, with dedicated lanes and other transit priority measures for reliable service in shared lanes.

Transit Priority Measures – Infrastructure that prioritizes the movement of buses over other vehicles to making public transit service more efficient and reliable. This includes bus lanes, queue jump lanes, dedicated boarding platforms, syncing traffic light cycles with bus location.

Active Transportation – Human-powered transportation. This includes walking and the use of assistive devices like wheelchairs, cycling, skateboarding, rollerblading, and more.

Minimum Grid – A network of bike facilities that together allow safe cycling access to many destinations across the city.

Question 1: Transit. The Rapid Transit Plan and electrifying the transit fleet have been approved by council; however, it is contingent on funding from the provincial and federal governments. How will you ensure transit remains a priority?

Question 2: Minimum Grid. The Active Transportation Priorities Plan was due to be completed in 2019, but is now due to be completed by 2022. What will you do to ensure Halifax's minimum grid of bikeways is completed on time?

Question 3: Rural Active Transportation. Will you approve funding for rural active transportation projects put forth in the upcoming Rural Active Transportation Plan?

Question 4: Consultation. What will you do to ensure collaboration with communities and underrepresented groups in sustainable and active transportation infrastructure development?

Question 5: Road Safety. What would you do to improve the safety of HRM's roads, and ensure the implementation of the Strategic Road Safety Plan?



A good answer may:

- Recognize that 60% of residents surveyed in HRM do not ride a bicycle because they do not feel safe.
- Recognize connected, convenient and safe bicycle lanes are needed to encourage more people to ride a bike for transportation.
- Make a commitment to investing in bus rapid transit and electrifying 50% of the transit fleet by 2028.
- Commit to approving and implementing HRM's transportation plans that already exist (including the Integrated Mobility Plan, the Strategic Road Safety Framework and the rural active transportation plan).
- Consider social equity as an essential part of transportation planning.

Caution tape; what to look out for:

- Candidate says there are not enough people cycling to invest in bike lanes or mentions that bicycle infrastructure is expensive. Learn more through the myth-busting page below!
- Thinking technology for electrifying the transit fleet is not proven, and that we should wait. HRM and other stakeholders have already proven this approach.
- Prioritizes parking* over the needs of people who walk, bike or take transit. (*With the exception of accessible parking).
- Defaults to using police enforcement as the solution to making streets safe.

Learn more

[**HRM's Social Policy Framework](#)
[Active Transportation Myth Busting Page](#)
[Integrated Mobility Plan](#)



Sample email from a citizen

Dear _____,

[Introduce yourself – if you are a community volunteer, an avid gardener, hiker, cyclist, or a concerned resident of their district, etc. add it here].

Across Canada, municipalities are increasingly engaging in strategies and policies that support healthy, just, and sustainable places to live. I know that now is the time to be ambitious and committed in building our community around sustainability. This includes developing strong plans and policies to protect the Halifax Green Network, build affordable and inclusive housing, provide safe and clean transportation, address community food security and take action on climate. I want to see Halifax become a healthy, just and sustainable place to live.

If elected to council, how will you work to support a healthy, just, and sustainable community? [Pick a few questions from the lists throughout this guide and/or add your own.]

Sincerely,

[Your name]



Sample email from community organizations

Dear _____,

[Introduce your organization – you can include your mission statement and/or vision here as well as who you represent]. Across Canada, municipalities are increasingly engaging in strategies and policies that support healthy, just, and sustainable places to live. I know that now is the time to be ambitious and committed in building our community around sustainability. This includes developing strong plans and policies to protect the Halifax Green Network, build affordable and inclusive housing, provide safe and clean transportation, address community food security and take action on climate. [Introduce your organizations concerns and/or members' needs as they relate to HRM – there may be a particular focus such as access to nature or food security that you want to highlight].

If elected to council, how will you work to support a healthy, just, and sustainable community? [Pick a few questions from the lists throughout this guide and/or add your own.]

Sincerely,

[Your name and position] on behalf of [your organization]

Voter Information

Who are your candidates and how do you vote?

Find your candidates' contact information on [HRM list of registered candidates](#).

Find your district using [HRM's District Look-up tool](#).

Each resident can vote for one candidate in a district as well as for the position of mayor. Email/tweet all candidates in your district as well as the mayoral candidates to create more conversations!

[Click here](#) for information on how to vote.

Get in touch!

Did your candidate commit to action? Let us know: tag us on twitter and Instagram [@EcologyAction](#) and on Facebook [@EcologyActionCentre](#) and tag [#hfxvotes2020](#) [#nspoli](#) [#nselections](#) [#halifaxelection](#)

Was your candidate lacking information on the subject you inquired about? The Ecology Action Centre is hosting a Q&A for HRM's municipal candidates to discuss the history and current needs of HRM's environmental issues on September 29th. You can urge your candidate to attend by contacting the Ecology Action Centre.

For more information please email: info@ecologyaction.

