



Ecology Action Centre – Candidate Survey 2024

Candidate for Councillor, District 7 – Halifax South Downtown

Name of Candidate: William Breckenridge

1. The [Halifax Green Network Plan](#) (HGNP) should be used to guide the region's growth, but full implementation of the plan requires resources and enforceable rules to protect important greenspace and wildlife corridors. Will you support the full implementation of the HGNP to protect the Green Network? Explain why or why not (optional).

Yes, I support the full implementation of the Halifax Green Network Plan. Since the initiative began, we have witnessed an increase in threats to HRM's greenspaces and wilderness. A fully implemented HGNP is essential for environmental and ecosystem protection, ensuring that communities develop where services and amenities are available, and enabling existing communities to benefit from the health advantages of being connected to and close to nature.

Given the rapid expansion of HRM's population, it is crucial to amend the Regional Plan to include the Green Network in considerations for proposed changes to the urban services boundary, settlement designation, and reserved lands. Inclusion in the Regional Plan would provide the GNP with the necessary regulatory strength for enforceability. Without the GNP in place, development decisions may continue to allow inappropriate development or land use that poses a threat to green space, wildlife, wetlands, habitats, etc.

The GNP should be used as a guiding principle for all land use planning, influencing decisions on zoning to effectively protect sensitive lands, create wildlife corridors, and preserve urban forests. The category of cultural landscapes requires greater attention as many historic, cultural, and community landscapes are currently underappreciated and undervalued, leading to their disappearance. HRM should demand for amendments to the Heritage Property Act by the province to enable the conservation of cultural landscapes. It is crucial to identify and prioritize these landscapes now rather than later.

I also believe that HRM needs to prioritize and protect parks and greenspaces within the urban core/Centre Plan area. A green network plan should be formulated for this area. The population is rapidly expanding in the regional center, placing greater demands on existing public lands, yet no new park space has been established. Meanwhile, HRM is designating many new encampments on public park space. Meagher's Park and Victoria Park have been closed for months awaiting rehabilitation due to being long-time encampment sites. I am committed to ensuring that parks receive more attention and better budget support.

2. Will you commit to ensuring Halifax Transit attracts and retains enough staff to implement the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network and ferry routes in the [Rapid Transit Strategy](#)? Explain why or why not (optional).

Yes, I am committed to ensuring that Halifax Transit attracts and retains enough staff to implement the Bus Rapid Transit and ferry routes in the Rapid Transit Strategy. Halifax Transit staff, especially drivers, are under a lot of stress, especially since COVID. The issue of attracting and retaining workers may not be strictly monetary but could relate to a range of problems from personal safety to public respect. Drivers are the on-the-job experts, but how often does management ask them for suggestions on how to improve transit services, bus routes, schedules, etc.? Are HRM Transit management properly trained in transportation and understand modal shift, or are they old-school traffic engineers?

An important question is, do HRM Mayor and Council prioritize public transportation over private vehicles? HRM sends mixed signals regarding moving people out of private vehicles and onto the bus/ferry. For example, how do HRM's claims of wanting more people to use public transportation align with its recent fare increase? What about the cancellation of services or scheduled routes? These actions penalize the very people it claims to welcome, who may be the least able to afford it.

Is HRM using its ability to generate revenue fairly and equally among all citizens? It receives transit revenue from three sources: general property taxes, special property taxes for those living within 1 km of a bus stop, and transit fares. Is there a special fee for anyone living within 1 km of a road? Is HRM exploring other deterrents to reliance on private vehicles, such as congestion pricing, increasing parking fees, surcharges for oversized vehicles, or incentives for car-shares/bike-shares?

Research indicates that HRM's plan to widen roads for designated bus lanes rather than reallocating existing road space is a significant problem. Road widening, even for public transportation, will maintain the status quo or induce more traffic, not relieve congestion.

A quicker and less costly solution would be to create bus lanes within the existing infrastructure, known as a road diet, which is successfully used by cities worldwide serious about modal shift. While unpopular with motorists, research shows no significant lasting impact on them, as drivers are flexible and will adapt to available routes, while buses improve travel time.

Unfortunately, HRM's transportation systems have largely focused on roads facilitating and accelerating new growth outside the urban center, leading many people to drive into the city for



their needs. Redirecting growth to create a multi-centered region can address this and other infrastructure problems.

HRM's planning policies should be clearly focused and integrated to avoid confusion. For example, people living in centers facing demoviction and renoviction are pushed further out and rely on cars for transportation.

Why does HRM treat Halifax Transit as a secondary transportation mode? What is done to make it affordable, accessible, and popular? Initiatives like the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program expanding to all students in grades 7-12 in HRM schools are commendable. How can this be more widely adopted, such as with seniors, cyclists incorporating bus routes into their commute, and low-income individuals?

When was Halifax Transit's last innovation to promote and educate the public about the benefits of taking the bus? COVID showed the system's flexibility. Offering free bus service on weekends, holidays, and special events could be a simple start.

A major priority for ensuring the efficient operation of transit is to prioritize the security and safety of bus operators and riders. Additionally, management should actively listen to operators and the public to improve routes and enhance the overall transit experience.

3. Will you commit to implementing the [Road Safety Strategy](#) and achieving its vision of zero injuries and fatalities across all modes of transportation? Explain why or why not (optional).

Yes, I fully support the Road Safety Strategy and the goal of achieving zero injuries and fatalities for all modes of transportation. However, I have concerns about the adequacy of HRM's strategic plan and whether the goal is being taken seriously enough or if real solutions are being prioritized.

The Road Safety Dashboard is a valuable initiative for monitoring data on injuries and fatalities across all modes of transportation. The numbers, particularly given the population size, should be alarming to all of us. It is crucial that we take concrete steps towards reaching the goal of zero injuries and fatalities.

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjojNDRIbWJiNTYtMzZjMi00ZjgwLWEyOTctNzlwZmY2MmFINDQyIiwidCI6IjA1YjdIN2Q2LWI3MWItNDdkYS05M2VmLWFhYzcyMjNmODIINSJ9>

The majority of transportation-related injuries and deaths involve vehicles. Reducing the number of cars should be a top strategy for keeping pedestrians and cyclists safe.



Implementing the Rapid Transit Strategy for better public transportation is just one part of the solution. HRM must also make using cars less convenient compared to other travel modes. We need a low-car future now. For example, it should reduce parking availability, increase parking fees, tax parking lots, introduce congestion pricing and tax roads, promote car shares/bike shares, and stop spending money to expand, add lanes, or widen the road network.

All streets should be designed to slow traffic and safely accommodate all pedestrians and cyclists, not to make car travel more efficient. Does HRM's staff have training in transportation management or only in traffic management? Keeping the public safe isn't acceptable in half-measures.

4. Are you committed to ensuring the continued implementation and full funding of the [JustFOOD Action Plan](#) as the municipality's first comprehensive, long-range food strategy, which will increase collaboration across levels of government and among community partners, strengthening our collective capacity to build a just, healthy, and sustainable food system. Explain why or why not (optional).

Yes. I am committed to ensuring the continued implementation and full funding of the Just FOOD Action Plan. With climate change impacts (extreme weather, pests, disease) and increasing poverty, citizens are at ever greater risk of food insecurity. Like many HRM initiatives, the Just FOOD Action Plan needs to be incorporated and fully integrated into all policy and planning, making it a priority rather than just a check-box.

HRM citizens are progressive and have advocated for important changes that have led to significant policy decisions such as the pesticide ban and recycling/composting initiatives. However, these changes occurred over 30 years ago and are still limited. Questions arise as to why some sectors are still allowed to spray pesticides and why some are not required to reduce/recycle/compost waste. What is HRM doing to significantly reduce overall waste production?

For instance, regarding

Urban Farms, why did it take HRM three years to relocate the Common Roots Urban Farm to a smaller location far from the city center, surrounded by roads, noise, and pollution? If the goal was to serve immigrants, why not expand the Farm or establish a second location? Despite over 800 citizens petitioning HRM council to relocate the Farm to the former St. Pat's High School site, their request was ignored. The new Halifax Common Master Plan lacks a designated Urban Farm site.

Regarding Drive-Throughs, why does HRM continue to permit fast-food drive-throughs? These establishments promote unhealthy food choices, encourage car use, and contribute to pollution and hard surfaces.

Where are the HRM initiatives to remove asphalt and utilize urban green spaces for purposes like rewilding or urban gardening? The city's lack of response to the NS Department of Health and Wellness and the Federal Parks Canada decision to pave the Garrison Grounds reflects poorly on efforts to create a healthy, sustainable future.

While HRM has a long history of Farmers Markets and Food Co-ops, these initiatives are largely driven by the people rather than the city. As HRM redevelops and removes older, affordable spaces, the physical location of markets or food distribution places becomes scarce and less affordable. When HRM sells a property, does it fully consider other community uses?

As HRM densifies, there is a growing demand for public open spaces like parks and green areas. HRM must incorporate the value and need for sustainability into its planning more broadly. The Parks & Recreation division is underfunded and primarily focuses on recreation, relying heavily on volunteer stewardship for park maintenance and services. While citizen engagement is positive, the current approach may put food security goals at risk or indicate a low priority for achieving them.

5. With climate change wreaking heat waves even in temperate climate zones, and the price of home-heating fuel spiking due to global conflict, access to affordable home energy efficiency has become a human right crucial to comfort and standard of living. Cities across Canada are seeing tenants mobilize for these rights. As an elected official, would you support a "right to efficiency" by-law supporting tenants' rights to affordable energy efficiency support? Explain why or why not (optional).

Yes. I advocate for a "right to efficiency" by supporting By-Laws that protect tenants' rights to affordable energy efficiency. It is disappointing that Premier Houston has postponed the adoption of Pan-Canadian bylaws that would mandate new buildings to adhere to a higher efficiency performance based code.

I also believe that all levels of government should implement carbon budgets for building materials to reduce upfront emissions. A prime example is HRM's failure to regulate demolitions, which leads to the unnecessary replacement of buildings that could be repurposed or modified. This results in additional upfront greenhouse gas emissions from new materials, increased waste, landfill burden, and impacts housing affordability. Additionally, both upfront and operational greenhouse gas emissions are closely linked to building height and design, which are influenced by zoning regulations. These are significant climate issues that HRM should address, but has not done so thus far.

Special note: We also need a clear mandate for coastal protection in HRM, such as the shoreline of Point Pleasant Park. The public needs to be engaged in the process.

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6. There are multiple stressors on local freshwater quality and quantity such as increased development and an increase in water-related climate events (e.g., floods, droughts, storms). Do you commit to advocating for and supporting watershed level management in municipal planning? Explain why or why not (optional).

Yes. I support and advocate for watershed-level management in municipal planning. HRM has recently approved the initiation of a pilot for the new Integrated Watershed Management Framework for Dartmouth Lakes and Nine Mile River watersheds. This initiative will help guide any changes to the framework, gather data, establish the scope of work, and provide budget estimates. Once this pilot is completed, HRM will look to expand watershed-level management to its 46 identified watersheds.

The urgency to prioritize a broader scope, such as watershed-level management for planning and zoning, is crucial due to increasing pressures from development, industry, transportation, agriculture, and the expectations of citizen recreational users. Climate change is also rapidly altering established weather patterns, leading to more extreme weather events like floods, droughts, and fires that impact watersheds. While citizen stewardship is a critical component of watershed protection, the responsibility ultimately lies with HRM to establish clear regulations. This effort is also closely linked to the completion of HRM's Coastal Zone Protection and other ecosystem-level initiatives, such as the Green Network, but it is unclear if these are being considered in conjunction, (see question seven below).

7. Will you, in the absence of a provincial Coastal Protection Act, advocate for and work towards passing municipal by-laws designed to address development on vulnerable coastal properties and infrastructure? Explain why or why not (optional).

Yes. HRM is actively engaged in various initiatives to gather information, develop policies, and establish regulations and by-laws to address development on vulnerable coastal lands. The 2022 Extreme Water Levels report (<https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/standing-committees/1-hrm-extreme-water-level-report-cbcl-2022.pdf>) provides a comprehensive overview of vulnerable coastlines and identifies extreme static water levels that could result from tides, storm surges, and sea level rise. It delineates these impacts across five coastal zones with similar coastal conditions and shorelines.



The primary purpose of this information is to inform planning processes by assessing the risk of flooding to existing and future development and infrastructure. A recognized limitation of the report is its focus solely on open coastal areas, necessitating further study on the effects of tides, storm surges, sea level rise on coastal bays, inlets, harbors, and stormwater runoff.

Similar to other HRM reports, the insights provided in the 2022 Extreme Water Levels report are crucial for updating the Regional Plan and are complemented by additional reports that gather pertinent data and enhance mapping capabilities, such as the 2024 Flood Hazard Maps and the ongoing mapping of Wave Runup along HRM's coastline.

The collaborative efforts of working groups like the Green Shores Local Government Working Group and the Resilient Infrastructure Standard Group aim to enhance technical support, staff training, and hazard identification for climate change adaptation, engineering, and protection planning. However, HRM's ecosystem-level planning efforts and individual reports still exhibit fragmentation. For instance, the Integrated Watershed Management Framework's impact from climate change may be accelerating HRM's planning and zoning processes, but this connection remains unclear.

Overall, HRM is falling short in treating climate change as the urgent crisis that it is. Despite widespread awareness among HRM citizens about the need for action, HRM staff reports often downplay environmental implications or overstate environmental resilience. Recognizing the urgency of the climate crisis and the need for immediate action, I pledge to prioritize climate change in all my work and decision-making if elected.

