



6 March 2025

Budget Committee - Halifax Regional Council  
1841 Argyle St, Halifax, NS B3J 3A5

**RE: 2025/26 Municipal Budget**

Dear Mayor Fillmore and Regional Councillors,

As you finalize the 2024-25 budget for Halifax Regional Municipality, the Ecology Action Centre urges you to consider our comments on the relevant business units. We encourage decisions based on evidence, prioritizing investments in staff, programs, and policies that will strengthen the resilience and well-being of HRM communities and residents.

Being the first approved budget under a new Council, it presents a crucial opportunity to demonstrate leadership and lay the foundation for a just, vibrant municipality rooted in respect, belonging, and ecological resilience over the next four years. Council must ensure Halifax's award-winning climate action plan is properly resourced to meet its stated goals and effectively respond to the climate emergency.

**STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORTATION PLANNING, and PUBLIC WORKS**

- We do not support eliminating tree planting in the urban forestry program as proposed.
- HRM must prioritize the movement of people, not personal vehicles, by resourcing work on multi-modal transportation corridors in the urban core and in communities that are growing. A focus on improved transit and mobility networks will improve mode share overall.
- Car-ownership is a significant portion of households' expenses. By continuing to build a sprawling city without attractive and viable alternatives to personal vehicles we are forcing residents to bear the financial cost of being car dependent.
- Every year infrastructure projects hit labour bottlenecks – we need to see planning which accounts for and mitigates these bottlenecks to move projects forward faster.
- We support significant investment in pedestrian infrastructure (i.e. sidewalks), which will help to make our communities more walkable sooner and help close the first and last mile for people taking transit.
- The forthcoming city bike share program is long overdue and should be celebrated as a big win for making Halifax a better cycling city – but we also need to continue to build out a protected bike network to ensure that riders are safe.
- HRM should explore deterrents for personal vehicles, particularly larger and heavy vehicles, such as increasing parking fees and registration fees.
- The Integrated Mobility Plan needs to be renewed, and its jurisdiction expanded to address the current growth rates and build for tomorrow.
- Given the inability for HRM to lower speed limits and enact photoradar (provincial jurisdiction) we would like to see an increase in fines issued by HRP and the RCMP for speeding, aggressive, and distracted driving.

## PARKS & RECREATION

- We urge you to commit more resources to strategic parkland acquisitions (in the Capital Budget), prioritizing lands near Sandy Lake Regional Park, Shaw Wilderness Park, and Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area. All three are identified in the Regional Plan as HRM's "Nature Parks" (called Wilderness Parks in the budget document).
- We also note that there is no Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for annual parkland acquisition – there should be one.
- This is the right year to begin foundational work for a "Regional Parks Priority Plan, as committed to in the draft Regional Plan. This should appear in the 2025/26 Key Deliverables section of the budget.
- A budget for tree planting within parks (as there used to be), work on wetland protection and enhancement, and continued work on the Municipal Natural Assets Initiative (MNAI) are not reflected in this year's budget, but should be included. This work pays dividends in ecosystems services but HRM must invest in nature today.

## HALIFAX TRANSIT

- We are happy to see electric buses enter revenue service at a responsible pace. Stress-testing a few electric buses in winter conditions on routes closest to the depot is providing insight on vehicle reliability for a smoother rollout, while maintaining service reliability for passengers. Other Canadian transit agencies have rushed their electric buses into service, only to face unexpected challenges at scale with steep impacts on service reliability for passengers.
- We are happy to see investment in washroom trailers for staff at transit terminals. Predictable washroom access for staff will support predictable service for passengers. Many of the terminals where staff have requested washrooms are being redesigned over the next few years, and we hope to see plumbed washrooms become standard at all transit terminals, including Park & Ride lots.
- We support the replacement of Halifax Transit's articulated buses that are reaching end of life. While we would prefer new the articulated buses be electric, we understand the need for more high-capacity buses on busy routes sooner than the charging infrastructure can be built, and recognize the emissions reductions of more fuel-efficient vehicles on high ridership routes.
- We support the proposed [BAL item] investment in maintaining 10 aging buses for another 2 years in service. Many agencies deferred fleet replacement due to the pandemic drop in ridership, but demand has exceeded the supply of new and used buses available for purchase now that ridership has grown beyond pre-COVID levels. While it is more expensive to maintain buses past the end of their service life, this investment is a critical interim measure to ensure transit continues to be a reliable travel option until replacement buses are delivered.
- We support expanding what performance metrics Halifax Transit reports, with a focus on understanding staff wellbeing to guide improving recruitment and retention of Operators.
- We support the increased recruitment of transit operators and improvements to safe working conditions; however, we are urging Halifax Transit to address bus and ferry operator shortages to return to the planned service levels necessary to deliver on bus rapid transit and The Moving Forward Together Plan.



## PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

- We are thrilled to see a key deliverable on the Halifax Green Network Plan, to provide a progress report to Regional Council on the Green Network Plan in 2025/26 and complete implementation by 2028/29.
- We support making development policies and processes clearer and more efficient, to build housing across the housing spectrum more quickly, to address immediate and crucial housing needs. We, however, continue to push for building of complete communities and implementation of all HRM priorities plans in order to ensure walkable, transit-oriented, and climate resilient communities. The housing shortage is one of the most urgent priorities in municipal land-use planning, however, development cannot move forward without careful consideration of the environment and all elements of community planning.
- We support continued progress on the Regional Plan review and critical work on affordable housing policy and incentives. We are looking forward to engaging in Phase 4 of the Regional Plan Review (Final Plan Approval) this year.
- We support HRM's commitment to net-zero new construction and deep energy retrofits of its existing buildings. Where and how we build is critical to ensuring we are mitigating and adapting to climate change as we meet our housing needs. All new builds and retrofits should account for embodied energy—the energy used in the manufacture and shipment of materials—as well as operational energy.
- We support HRM's increased investment in coastal and freshwater flood risk management and development sensitive to the risks associated with coastal spaces and floodplains. With its extensive coastline, HRM has a responsibility to ensure people and property are safe from the risks of risks flooding, coastal erosion and storm surges.
- EAC is also keen to see the results of HRM's Navigator pilot project to help homeowners save significant energy and money through deep energy retrofits. Residents need ongoing assistance navigating the complex variety of financial supports and companies offering energy audits, insulation and building upgrades, and heat pump installation. Such wraparound support is also important in addressing energy poverty, which remains higher through Nova Scotia than in the rest of Canada.

## PROPERTY, FLEET & ENVIRONMENT

- HRM must remain a leader and be ambitious in its climate action efforts. It is crucial that HRM rejects the proposed funding cuts to HalifACT and continues to invest in staff capacity, programs, and projects to achieve our climate goals and prepare for both current and future climate impacts in HRM.
- HRM must remain steadfast in commitments to provide resources for deep-energy retrofits, HRM's Municipal Electric Vehicle Strategy, electrifying our transit fleet, and achieving our emissions reduction goals.
- HRM must invest in the critical infrastructure needed to ensure that we are adapting to the impacts of climate change, including prioritizing nature-based solutions to climate change and investing in naturalization and biodiversity projects while disincentivizing shoreline hardening.
- HRM should ensure that all development along the coast considers historical and future access for people to coastal spaces.



## COMMUNITY SAFETY & REGIONAL POLICE

- HRM must fully fund Part B of the JustFOOD Action Plan as a long-range strategy for a healthy, just, and sustainable food system. The Action Plan positions HRM to increase impact by coordinating Municipal work, aligning action, reducing silos, increasing community capacities, and eliminating inefficiencies while addressing food system challenges proactively and collaboratively — reducing reliance on costly, reactive solutions.
- HRM must implement the recommendations made in the January 2022 report 'Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM' submitted by the Board of the Police Commissioner's Subcommittee to Define Defunding Police.
- HRM must not approve the purchase of armoured vehicles, which only serve to militarize our police force, and for which there is currently no policy for when and how they would be used.
- To invest in true community safety and resilience, the disproportionate police budget should be curtailed, and resources should be redirected to essential community services, like fire departments, emergency shelters, cooling centers, and social support systems. The city should allocate resources to infrastructure and services that build community resilience, such as public transit, walkable neighbourhoods, parkland, arts programming, and civilian emergency services, which enhance safety for all.

Halifax is an exciting, beautiful, and prosperous place to live. While we support efforts to improve efficiency and save money for HRM residents, some of the proposed budget cuts will undeniably create long-term funding challenges and jeopardize HRM's future as a resilient and livable city. We urge Regional Council to make the necessary investments to ensure that Halifax continues to be a great place to live.

Sincerely,



Maggy Burns  
Executive Director,  
Ecology Action Centre

