

---

May 26, 2020

Dear Mayor Mike Savage and Halifax Regional Councillors,

On behalf of the Ecology Action Centre, we would like to acknowledge and thank the Halifax Regional Municipality for its efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of residents in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

In a time of crisis, we are reminded of the critical role municipalities play in our day-to-day lives. From maintaining transit service that carries essential workers, to helping to address food insecurity, to drawing on strong community relationships to communicate information - HRM has risen to this unprecedented challenge.

**We commend the Halifax Regional Municipality for their efforts on the following initiatives:**

- The strategic priorities of healthy and liveable communities – specifically regarding food access – have largely been exempt from direct budget cuts;
- Nimble use of volunteer resources to support the Mobile Food Market's food access programs;
- Offering free transit, and continuing to provide people with support to access essential services;
- Supporting the Halifax Mobility Response Plan that considers allocating more space for people walking, cycling and using a mobility device to access services and comply with physical distancing measures;
- Approval of the Integrated Mobility Plan, HalifACT, Food Action Plan, Green Network Plan: Support for these plans has better prepared our municipality to face these challenging times. It has set the roadmap for decisions needed to achieve the goals laid out in these plans, including creating healthy, equitable, prosperous and resilient communities. These plans have created a foundation for a future in which people getting around, reduce emissions, and increase healthy communities and access to green spaces.

As services slowly begin to re-open, the next challenge for municipalities is our recovery.

Governments across the country are asking: **How can we build back better?**

As HRM plans its recovery, the EAC would like to provide input on how HRM can align needed stimulus measures with core environmental objectives through a lens of just recovery. The investments we make now will either propel our communities into maintaining quality of life for all residents or re-enforce the status quo and lock HRM into a future that perpetuates climate change, inequality and deteriorates the health of our communities.

We also recognize the unique fiscal constraints of municipalities during this time, as property tax transfers are delayed, transit revenue is eliminated, and reserves are being reallocated to maintain general operating procedures. This makes HRM budget decisions even more critical, as the capital

---

---

projects and services we invest in now will determine the foundation on which we rebuild our municipality.

As stated by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), municipalities were already on the “front lines” of the climate change and biodiversity loss crises<sup>1</sup>. The EAC supports FCM’s recommendations in providing targeted aid to municipalities taking on many of the most pressing responsibilities in recovery. When municipalities take on this important role and are guided by responsive and forward-thinking principles, financial support for municipalities can result in unrivalled returns on this investment.

**We strongly urge the Halifax Regional Municipality support the following actions:**

- Despite cuts to Public Library operations and capital developments, follow through with plans to implement the **Library Food Smart Program** as stated in the 2020/21 Strategic Priorities.
- Implement temporary infrastructure to **support local businesses** and essential destination services including slow streets, temporary sidewalk and sidewalk infrastructure, intersection improvements, cafes and restaurant patios.
- Ensure we meet the needs of the captive transit audience through existing service or other means. **Maintain mobility options** and services across the municipality, in particular ensure that MUSGO Rider and the Spryfield Business Commission request-a-ride program remain in service.
- Provide ongoing ways to **hear from communities** and ensure the rapid implementation of policies, infrastructure and services are meeting the needs of residents.
- **Engage community volunteers** to increase the municipality’s capacity. For example, implement a “Safe Streets” ambassador program that trains volunteers to maintain temporary infrastructure and report damages to HRM.

**Build community resilience through the following actions, the majority of which qualify for funding from federal funding streams:**

- Implement the **Integrated Mobility Plan** as a major infrastructure project. The plan was created to build a healthy, sustainable, and more equitable municipality. Now, more than ever, it is important to continue to support capital projects that further these aims. The cost estimate to implement the IMP is approximately \$190 million and could be funded through Public Transit Infrastructure Fund (phase two) (PTIF2), Green Infrastructure Fund, and the COVID Response Fund for municipalities through Infrastructure and Communities Canada.
- Support the **Bus Rapid Transit** study as part of the PTIF2 and/or Federal Green Infrastructure Funding in order to recover transit ridership.
- Support the **Electric Vehicle Strategy** for HRM, that includes a fleet management system for vehicle-sharing for municipalities, organizations and businesses that want to optimize fleet management and offer a sharing economy (example: FCM funded SAUVÉR deployed Quebec & New Brunswick).

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://fcm.ca/en/focus-areas/climate-and-sustainability>

---

- 
- Support the **Electric Bus** Pilot project. This would result in \$163 million of saving over a 20-year period and offset 62.56 tons of emissions per bus per year.<sup>2</sup>
  - Support **Mainstreet** regions across HRM, including areas outside the urban core. This includes action such as streamlining processes to expand outdoor seating and patios, introduce speed reduction measures, wayfinding signage, street closures, and pilot infrastructure to support access to local businesses and services.
  - Complete the implementation of the **Halifax Green Network Plan** including protecting essential and important corridors, re-evaluating HRM's growth centres, and identifying service level targets for access to a spectrum of parks and nature.
  - Support a **Transportation & Energy Strategy**. Use the electrification of the transit fleet to position Halifax at the forefront of low-carbon mobility landscape. In addition to the provincial and federal government, HRM should partner with organizations such as our academic institutions, the Port of Halifax, CUTRIC, and Nova Scotia Power to develop a strategy for infrastructure that not only supports electric buses, but is also transferable and integrated to the local freight industry.
  - Support **acquisition of remaining wilderness** near urban HRM. These lands continue to perform vital ecosystem services, yet are at risk of destruction. Acquiring these lands prevents the loss of their climate change adaptation potential, and secures green infrastructure that provides co-benefits like public access to nature. Utilize federal funding available for this aim.

The municipality should be vigilant about **avoiding spending that will lock HRM into a future that perpetuates climate change and inequality, or deteriorates the health of our communities**. This includes funding major 'brown' infrastructure projects such as:

- The Burnside Connector (Contribution of \$15 million from HRM, \$270 million project cost).
- Stadium (proposed municipal contribution \$20 million, total public funding contribution of \$110 million).
- Continuing to allow sprawl through expansion of the Urban Service Boundary, which has been identified as the most costly form of growth to the municipality (HRM Cost of Servicing Report).

**We are deeply concerned about the decisions that have resulted in the following:**

- **Cuts to wilderness parkland acquisition budget.** These cuts suggest a worrying evaluation of the role that nature plays in creating a resilient community and fighting climate change. The degree to which people value parks and trails has been highlighted in recent weeks. Halifax's parks and greenspaces provide significant mental and physical health benefits to residents, wildlife habitat and corridors, and provide ecosystem services including acting as carbon sinks. It is crucial that we invest in greenspace including lands of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes, the Purcell's Cove Backlands and Sandy Lake – Sackville River as essential community services.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/180306rc1434.pdf>

---

- 
- **Cancelling three six-month positions from the HalifACT** Team suggests further delays in a plan that has become more important than ever. The research and analysis that would be conducted by these staff to inform an effective and ready-to-roll climate crisis response is pressing. This budget cut should be revised.
  - Continuing to allow sprawl through **expansion of the Urban Service Boundary**, which has been identified as the most costly form of growth to the municipality (HRM Cost of Servicing Report).

These are unprecedented times. Thank you again for your efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of HRM residents. We join you in applauding the extraordinary efforts of nurses, doctors, teachers, health workers, senior care providers, first responders, front line workers, public servants, and community leaders for working tirelessly to keep our citizens and communities safe and healthy.

We're in this together. Recovering from the impacts of the pandemic and the associated economic downturn, while preparing ourselves for the future climate crisis will require transformative change at every level of society. At the EAC, we believe the steps we take today can make us more resilient to the impending climate change and biodiversity loss crises. We believe that together we can reimagine and rebuild the economy while ensuring our communities are secure, healthy and resilient, and no one is left behind.

As we continue to move forward, know that the Ecology Action Centre is here to work alongside you in finding solutions to create resilient, healthy and prosperous communities.

Sincerely,



---

Marla MacLeod  
Director of Programs