

Ecology Action Centre Raises Concerns about Halifax Green Network Plan “Primer”

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[KJIPUKTUK (Halifax)] – On March 23, HRM staff released the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP) “Primer,” which is intended to provide details for the Implementation Strategy. This Plan has been in development for three years, under direction from the Regional Plan, and has undergone a massive consultation phase already. In this final phase, staff are requesting that the Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) Standing Committee direct that they use the “Primer” as the framework for the final round of public engagement, and for the development of the full consolidated Halifax Green Network Plan. CPED will debate the Motion **Wednesday, April 5th beginning at 1:00p.m.** in Council Chambers.

Staff and the hired consulting firm O2 have done incredible work compiling multi-layered data values on our environmental and sociocultural landscapes in HRM. The scope of the data compiled and dedication to fact-based decision-making is impressive, and the “Primer” has all the elements necessary for directing future growth of the region and creating a modern Greenbelt/Green Network for Halifax.

However, we are concerned that staff are recommending public consultation on a “Primer” document that is fifty-four-pages long and contains deeply technical details that will be very difficult for the public to digest. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “primer” as “an elementary textbook that serves as an introduction to a subject of study.” This “Primer” should be clear, understandable, and should focus on introducing specific directions for implementation. In its current format, the “Primer” is a complex and lengthy document with far too much takeaway information and no guiding vision. We are concerned that the directions for implementation in policy and on the ground are still extremely vague and will lead to a complicated and confusing public consultation process of limited value.

“City staff should be taking the Ecological Areas Map (Map 6) to the public and explaining that these are the proposed landscape values that need protection, and listing their recommended policy amendments that would turn these landscape values into a protected Green Network or Greenbelt, and then asking the public: what do you think?” says Jenny Lugar, Sustainable Cities Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre. “Without a clear sense or step-by-step process of how the Plan will be implemented the public consultation process is premature. ”

Halifax-based coalition Our HRM Alliance has asked in a letter submitted to CPED that the Standing Committee urge staff to re-examine the “Primer” as a tool for consultation and give the public the option of statutory implementation for the HGNP through its adoption into the Regional Plan.

“Creating a Greenbelt is what motivated the development of this Plan in the first place, so the public should be given the option to support establishing one in this consultation,” says Lugar. “While we fully support the work that has been done to produce all the tremendous data in this

'Primer', we believe that staff must do two things: first, staff must take the "Primer" and boil the technical language down so that people can understand the intent and goals. Second, staff must recommend specific and understandable implementation strategies to the public in order for consultation to be meaningful. As it sits, the "Primer" is not comprehensible for the general public because it contains far too many "Directions" without any clear goal. People will likely be left with a lot of questions about whether the Green Network is actually a place on the map or just a high-level concept that will simply gather dust on shelf somewhere."

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