

April 14, 2021

MEMO:

Friends of the Halifax Common (FHC) - Province of NS Amendments Committee:

Presenters: David Garrett, Co-Chair, FHC & Alan Ruffman, Co-Chair, FHC

The Halifax Common has been continuously diminishing in size since its creation by Royal decree over 250 years ago “for the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax as Commons forever.” Each generation has found needs that the Common because of its central location and numerous other features was used to meet, one parcel after another, one generation after another. For the generation previous to ours, that perceived need was largely parking, and one section of green space after another was turned into parking lots, such as at the old School for the Blind site at South Park and South Streets. For our generation, the perceived parking need continues along with new institutional and more recently athletic facility needs. Included in these new needs are the expansion of Citadel High, the planned vast expansion of the Halifax Infirmery, the two parking garages supplementary to the Infirmery expansion, the soccer stadium, the Oval, and now an Aquatic Centre. Perhaps these needs are necessary and perhaps needed in these locations, perhaps not, but the point remains, the diminishment of the Halifax Common continues, and now at an even greater pace than before, and it will certainly continue in coming generations until the Common as a large public open green space is gone. It can happen.

We at the Friends of the Halifax Common advocate that before any further major steps be taken in re-purposing any part of the Halifax Common that the comprehensive Master Plan for the Common, now in it’s fourth year of development by HRM, receive the full public consultation it requires both politically and legally and has not had, and then be completed and approved by Council. A piecemeal approach to filling various perceived needs without full public consultation, as happened in the Spring of 2020 with Council approval of the Summer St parking garages and more recently with approval of the Aquatic Centre funding is not an acceptable approach, again either politically or legally.

While Bill 103 appears as a minor Act to Amend Chapter 39 of the Acts of 2008, the HRM Charter, by adding Sections 66B (1) to (3), it is not at all clear what HRM has asked for. Bill 103 gives HRM permission to “erect on the Central Common of Halifax one permanent building to be used exclusively to support the aquatic area....”

The presentation to HRM Regional Council in mid-December of 2019 indicated that: “The estimated project budget of \$15 - \$17 million would cover demolition of the existing aquatic pools, playground and pavilion building, construction of a new outdoor pool, splash pad and aquatics building.”

However, the coloured diagram of the “Central Common Pool Pavilion/ Community Centre” that we have supplied to the Law Amendments Committee clearly shows that two buildings are to be constructed – one with male and female change rooms in black/green/light-brown/dark-blue and to the east a new building in red labeled as “Community Space.” There are also two new buildings shown on the staff’s coloured diagram of the “Aquatic Area,” also supplied to the Law Amendments Committee. Demolition of the old facility is to occur in the Fall of 2021 and construction is to take 12+ months with the facility opening in the Summer of 2023.

It would appear that the Legislature is being asked to approve only one building, but the plans indicate two. This uncertainty exists because while there were public consultation meetings in 2017 and 2018, no final proposed Aquatic Centre plan was brought to the public in 2019 and at no time since, and we are now well into 2021.

Further, the long-sought Halifax Common Master Plan has stalled and has ceased to be a priority for HRM staff and Regional Council. The 1994 Halifax Common Plan still remains the only Common Plan passed by Council and has not been followed in the

slightest by HRM, nor for that matter by the Province of Nova Scotia as it pursues the expansion of the Halifax Infirmary along with supplementary parking structures on Halifax Common land. Public consultation by HRM staff is clearly lacking vis-à-vis the Aquatic Centre, and the desire to pursue this single goal has thrust the long-anticipated Master Plan for the Halifax Common well into the background.

The Law Amendments Committee should not approve the proposed changes to the HRM Charter allowing the two proposed buildings, nor any other substantive modifications to the Halifax Common until the Legislature has been presented with the Halifax Common Master Plan, presumably in the process of being prepared by HRM.

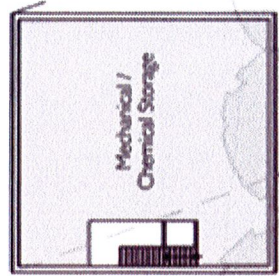
We recommend that The Law Amendments Committee set Bill 103 aside until HRM, with full public consultation, completes the Master Plan for the Halifax Common.

attachments



LEGEND:

- ① FEMALE CHANGE ROOM
- ② MALE CHANGE ROOM
- ③ UNIVERSAL WASH-ROOM
- ④ COMMUNITY SPACE
- ⑤ STAFF SPACE
- ⑥ CIRCULATION



CENTRAL COMMON POOL PAVILION / COMMUNITY CENTRE