

# seek

Planning & Design Centre Newsletter  
Issue 9 | July 2015

# MEGA PROJECTS

## Current Projects

Get the low-down on mega projects in Halifax

## From Old to New

What will happen to the Cogswell Interchange?

## In The Pipeline

What kinds of mega projects are in Halifax's future?



PLANNING  
& DESIGN  
CENTRE

# INTRODUCTION HALIFAX'S MEGA PROJECTS

The past couple of years have been big for Halifax - in more ways than one. The city has seen its fair share of new developments and it seems like everywhere one looks downtown, there are gargantuan construction pits and cranes that are as tall as the pits are deep. These construction sites represent a change in the urban fabric, and thereby, a shift in the image of the city of Halifax.

The ninth issue of SEEK explores the past, present, and future of mega projects in Halifax. In this edition, you will find a summary of the mega projects that have recently been completed in Halifax and the ones that are currently in progress. We will explore the attention that some of these projects have been getting from the public through the lens of social media. Looking to the past, the mega projects of yesteryear will be examined in both a historical context and in terms of their legacy. Before we began our research for this edition, we thought it was crucial to define what a mega project is, especially in the context of Halifax. While a mega project can be defined as one that costs \$1 billion USD and upwards, a more qualitative definition of mega projects is any development that has a substantial impact on the social, economic, or environmental conditions of a place, and, as such, receives widespread public attention.

The Planning & Design Centre aims to connect people to planning and planning to people. It is within our mandate that citizens are informed about and engaged with planning issues in Halifax so that we can work together to create a city that is liveable for all. With the higher rate of development that the Regional Centre is currently experiencing, we believe that it is important for the city to be conscientious about the services and infrastructure that are necessary to support further development. A strategy needs to be in place so that all aspects of the city can grow together.



## PLANNING & DESIGN CENTRE CONSTRUCTION SITE



The "Construction Site" is an arm of the Planning & Design Centre website that catalogues development and construction projects in Halifax's Regional Centre. It is updated to reflect current proposed, planned, under construction and recently completed developments in the area. Visitors can view a map that displays all of the entries and click on the flags to see more information about specific projects. When possible, links are provided to site photos, renderings, application documents, and other relevant information. The Construction Site is one way that the PDC aims to better connect people with planning by creating a space that presents current planning and development initiatives in a user-friendly format that helps to inform people about activity around them.

Visit <http://pdcentre.ca/construction-site> to check it out!

## SAY WHAT? WORD ON THE STREET

The Halifax Central Library was a highly anticipated mega project last year and it even received a nomination for World Building of the Year, but was it everything that Haligonians hoped for and dreamed of? We took to a platform where people truly speak their minds - Twitter - to see how people feel about the new facility.

-  "I'm never leaving. #halifaxcentrallibrary"
-  "#HalifaxCentralLibrary #SmallArtMosaic is a stunning visual display. I love everything about the new library. #2015"
-  "Feeling like the #HalifaxCentralLibrary is my office this week. It's like a library that's not just a library..."
-  "Impressed with the new #halifaxcentrallibrary ! Well thought out public space and bold design.."
-  "More people would spend time in libraries if there were more libraries like this. Beautiful: #HalifaxCentralLibrary"



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The PDC operates on 3 principles:

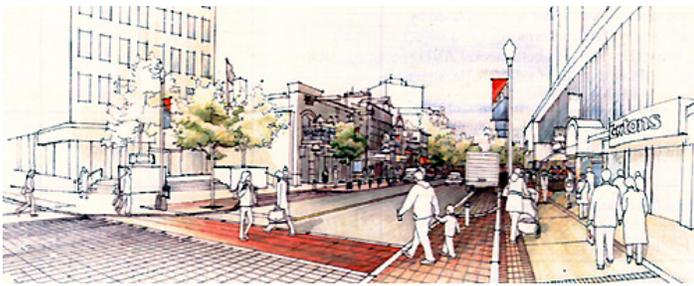
1. Access to information
2. Collaboration
3. Leadership & innovation

## THE EMERA OVAL SMALL PROJECT, BIG IMPACT

A permanent pavilion is currently under construction on the North Halifax Commons that will support future public use of the skating oval. The new structure will contain public washrooms, skate rentals, sharpening services, equipment storage areas, and some office space for staff. Though this project is not 'mega' in its scope or cost, its prominent public location and the likely impact it will have on a highly used and treasured public space makes it worthy for consideration as a 'mega' project. Designed to be only a temporary structure for the Canada Winter Games, its planned removal was met with public outcry ensuring its presence in the Commons became permanent. Now branded as the 'Emera Oval', the purchasing of the naming rights for the oval caused consternation for some.

The new pavilion will house necessary services for the popular skating surface that were formerly provided by much more unsightly means. The structure may be seen as aesthetically sensitive, if not pleasing, but it will also undoubtedly have an impact on the overall fabric of the Commons. Many will see the new building as a necessary improvement to oval operations though its construction does raise questions as to the evolution of the Halifax Commons grounds. It could be seen as another incremental step towards the development of lands dedicated by for use by the people "forever" by a King 250 years ago and which the Halifax Common Plan of 1994 (and revisions thereto) pledges to protect. Public input was sought during the planning and design of the new pavilion. Perhaps this addition to the Halifax Commons strikes a balance that will enable better use of this celebrated public space.

## FUTURE MEGA PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE



In addition to the list of larger projects that have been recently completed or those that are under construction in Halifax's urban Core (**Central Library, Nova Centre**), there is a collection of prospective large-scale projects in the pipeline that will have a substantial impact in the area.

Last summer, Halifax council approved a long-term funding strategy for large projects. Projects in their planning stages that are identified in the Strategic Capital Funding Strategy include a **Long-Term Arena Strategy, Dartmouth Sportsplex upgrades, the Cogswell Interchange** and a 5-year **\$50 million Downtown Investment** plan (which includes Spring Garden Road and Argyle Street streetscape funding). The Strategy also identifies several projects that are considered to be in the 'conceptual' stages and include a new performing arts centre, police station upgrades, a fire training facility, a library facilities plan, a commuter rail line/fast ferry upgrade, and a stadium.

The notion of a **premier sports stadium** in Halifax has garnered significant attention as of late. It is believed that such a stadium would boost Halifax's capacity to host larger events, such as professional sporting events and concerts. The proposition is inextricably linked to the prospect of a CFL football team. The mayor has indicated conceptual support for a new large stadium, has toured Ottawa's new TD Place Stadium, and has had preliminary meetings with CFL representatives. Opinions on this potential project surely differ and there is much to be reconciled before the project moves forward. There are a whole host of other development issues that warrant

more attention than the development of a large stadium whose primary function would be to host a professional football team. Making further improvements to public transit and active transportation networks, ensuring better winter sidewalk maintenance, and addressing food security are but only a few of these issues. Discussions about the stadium have been relatively minimal so far, though interest seems to be bubbling in the background.

A new **performing arts centre** could also be on the horizon for Halifax. Council has identified a need for an arts facility that would fill the gap for events that are not optimally suited to either the Rebecca Cohn Theatre or the Scotiabank Centre.

**Long-Term Arena Strategies** exist for both Peninsular Halifax and Dartmouth. On one side, the sale of the Forum building appears to be an integral part of the strategy to building a new multi-pad. On the other, consolidating facilities on the Sportsplex site is a primary goal. In both cases, concentrating facilities in urban areas in line with densification goals and favouring newer facilities over old are shared tactics.

Council is exploring a **commuter rail line** for the Halifax area. Major consulting firm CPCS was awarded the rights to perform a feasibility study. As part of this study process, a community open house was held this past February and a full report will be released in the coming months. The suggested route for this line is from downtown Halifax to Windsor Junction (through Bedford) to Enfield.

Current Fire Services training facilities are purportedly nearing the end of their lifespan and Strategic Capital Funding Strategy documents suggest a new facility is being considered for the Municipality. Details are otherwise sparse.

Suffice to say, there are lots of large projects coming to the fore that are at various stages of realization. Individual projects will evolve over the coming months and years. The sum of all of these large parts will significantly alter the look, feel and function of Halifax's urban core.

# CURRENT MEGA PROJECTS HALIFAX REGIONAL CENTRE

## 1. HALIFAX CENTRAL LIBRARY

**Cost:** \$57.6 million  
**Status:** Opened Dec. 2014  
**Notes:** 5-storey building including two cafes and a rooftop patio. Diverse spaces including many seating options, meeting spaces, First-Nations circle, a ground level 300-person auditorium, numerous computer stations, wifi, multimedia facilities and expanded collections.



## 2. SHIP BUILDING PROJECT

**Cost:** \$2.3 billion  
**Status:** Under construction. First steel was cut late June 2015.  
**Notes:** Irving Shipbuilding Inc. has the contract to produce 5-6 Arctic Patrol Vessels. Recently a somewhat controversial tax deal was agreed to between Irving and Halifax Regional Council.

## 3. MACDONALD BRIDGE BIG LIFT

**Cost:** Est. \$150 million  
**Status:** Under construction; Completion anticipated Dec. 2016.  
**Notes:** Overnight closures (Sun-Thurs.) began March 2015. Bike and pedestrian lanes will be closed until project completion. Bike and pedestrian shuttle service will begin Sun. June 28. Bridge clearance height will be raised 2.1m. No word on whether bicycle access will be improved on Halifax side concurrently.

## 4. NOVA CENTRE

**Cost:** Est. \$500 million  
**Status:** Under construction. Substantial completion set for Sept 2016, official opening set for Jan. 2017.  
**Notes:** An area of two city blocks equaling 1 million sqft. Will include 289,000 sqft of convention space, 18,000 sqft of public space; International financial centre, convention centre & luxury hotel, residential, retail, parking and public space.

## 5. HALIFAX SHOPPING CENTRE

**Cost:** Est. \$70 million  
**Status:** Under construction. Completion anticipated late 2016.  
**Notes:** 75,000 sqft of new retail space, a new entrance, a relocated "contemporary" food court. One existing office tower will be converted to 45,000 of retail space.



## 6. KING'S WHARF

**Cost:** \$500 million total. ~\$20million for each building  
**Status:** Two towers built, a third under construction, a fourth pending.  
**Notes:** A massive multi-high-rise condo-based development in Dartmouth Cove. Each tower is to include retail and commercial space.



## HUNTER STREET MICROLOFTS DENSITY IN A NEW WAY

You may not have noticed, but a trio of micro-loft buildings are being constructed on Hunter Street in Halifax's North End. This project embodies development at the opposite end of the scale as the many mega projects we discuss in this issue. We wanted to contrast these large scale development with this innovative project that has been spearheaded by Kerry Lynch, a graphic designer and passionate North-ender.

Designing small living spaces takes a skillful and conscientious hand. Each of the three housing units are 360sqft (12x20). Dozens of floor plans were considered in order to optimize the spatial layout. **"It's almost like designing a floor plan for a boat...you can't waste any room."** says Lynch. He adds that the loft aspect really adds to the feeling of the space being larger than it actually is. Details like forgoing window trim, doing drywall returns, painting the walls white and using lighter materials also accentuate that feeling of openness. Lynch wanted to use materials that met the requirements for construction that were also very low maintenance. Non-combustible siding was used for much of it (corrugated metal) due to proximity to property lines. That was balanced with cedar shakes in some places, which aim to tie in the new construction to the original houses and the neighbourhood. The new units are attached to the original houses through a breezeway system made from rough sawn lumber with plumbing and services in the decking. That rough lumber and the shakes juxtapose the corrugated metal façade, which along with the cedar shakes are quite low maintenance.

There is a profusion of higher-rise projects popping up, especially in the North End (like at Robie & Demone and multiple projects along Young St.) Lynch points out that the city has identified it as one area that they want density and growth so they've allowed height to accommodate that, which he understands to a point. "If you're going to put higher rise developments anywhere I think that's probably the place for it, but 19-stories is pretty tall." He points out that walking along Young and Robie in that area isn't very enjoyable as it is: "If you add 18 stories across the street, I wouldn't want to be out there in the middle of winter."

HRM has set a goal of locating 25% of all new housing units in the Regional Centre (with 50% to suburban areas with services and 25% to rural areas). Lynch suggests these goals are not being met because there is a lack of oversight: "there's no watchdog for it, maybe someone like the Ecology Action Centre should hold the city accountable for [meeting] some of those statistics. They might be closer this year with those mega-projects you've mentioned but they've probably been 5-10 years in the planning stages." He mentions that a major issue is that large residential building projects take a long time to go from proposals to inhabitable places." The Stantec study and the Ivany Report are saying this needs to be addressed now. **It's not 'Now or Whenever', it's 'Now or Never'** - it's really frustrating" He goes on to describe projects like the micro-lofts as shovel ready and suggests there are a thousand potential backyards on the peninsula where this could happen immediately and people could be moving into them in six months. "That's how you address density, not with a 19-storey building but with low scale residential. It's difficult to see our project if you don't know it's there. You maintain the streetscape and add density. The breezeway connections maintain greenspace for all of the people in the current duplexes and provide everybody their own private greenspace out back as well."

It might be enticing to suggest that time will tell what the impact of a wave of high-rise developments is on the peninsula and the North End in particular. However, the wait-and-see approach is not one that bodes well for creating a desirable urban fabric. Initiatives like Lynch's micro-lofts deserve an expedient push as a promising component to the overall solution to housing density in Halifax's Regional Centre.



# THE MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER PLAN STILL WAITING ON THE BUS..



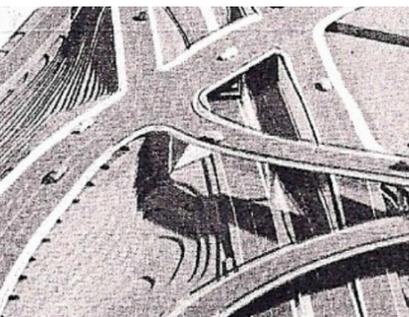
It's not surprising that this has been a time of big projects in Halifax. In some ways, the city seems to be living up the motto set forth in the recent rebranding: "be bold". There are some things, however, that the city could stand to be bolder about. The Moving Forward Transit Plan is one of these things.

In the Moving Forward strategy, Halifax Transit outlines four principles that are integral to an improved transit system for the Municipality: increase the proportion of resources dedicated to high ridership services, build a simplified, transfer based system, invest in service quality and reliability, and give transit increased priority in the transportation network. Instilling these principles into the transit network would require a complete overhaul of the existing system and infrastructure. When the highly anticipated Plan was released, however, it fell short of expectations for a bold new transit strategy for Halifax. While Halifax Transit has committed itself to making some changes to realize principles set out in the Plan, many feel as though they have not taken the extra step necessary to truly improve transit in Halifax.

It's More Than Buses (IMTB), a local transit advocacy group, has released an official review of Halifax's Moving Forward draft plan. While IMTB puts forth several recommendations for improving the Plan, the common theme of their Plan review is 'go big or go home'. Halifax Transit wants to create a simplified system and

IMTB implores them to simply the system even further and to cut away redundancies that still exist. Transit priority measures were identified as being crucial to the function of the network and IMTB believes that more measures are needed than what has been proposed. Finally, Halifax Transit wants to roll out the new Plan incrementally. IMTB believes that no time should be wasted and that the Plan should be implemented all at once. Ultimately, the responsibility for creating a more efficient, effective, and reliable transit network for Halifax falls not only on Halifax Transit, but also on Regional Council, who needs to lend more support to this new transit initiative.

Despite the higher levels of development within the Regional Centre, essential services like transit are not being developed at the same rate. Reliable public transportation is necessary for supporting further development and densification within the urban core. There is no better time to implement bolder strategies for transit to ensure Halifax can continue to grow. The Planning & Design Centre, in conjunction with Fusion Halifax, will host a panel discussion on the state of transportation in Halifax in July 2015. By providing a venue for the public to voice their concerns around public transportation, the PDC hopes to encourage further discussion with the City about the Moving Forward Strategy and encourage a bolder vision for implementation.



## COGSWELL INTERCHANGE FROM OLD TO NEW

The Cogswell Interchange is an artifact of the planning decisions of Halifax's yesteryear. The large piece of highway infrastructure that acts as a bridge between the North End and downtown on Halifax's Peninsula was the initial phase of a much larger elevated expressway project titled Harbour Drive. Ultimately scrapped, the expressway was to extend from the Interchange to the southern tip of the Peninsula, looping around towards the Northwest Arm.



Debate over the Harbour Drive project lasted for about a decade. With the opening of the MacDonald and MacKay bridges in 1955, there was pressure to provide greater access to downtown for those living in Dartmouth, which was largely suburban at the time. It was believed that providing this access would instigate economic growth downtown. Public opposition to the project, however, was overwhelming. For the Cogswell Interchange alone, 12 acres of "urban blight" were cleared, resulting in the demolition of close to 150 buildings. Citizens were concerned about the destruction of heritage buildings and established neighbourhoods.

While the Interchange is an ardent reminder of auto-centric attitudes of the past, the land upon which it sits represents an opportunity for positive change and growth for Halifax. The Cogswell Shakeup, a civic engagement event that was held in May 2013, asked citizens to imagine a future for Cogswell, barring any restraints of budget or logistics. People expressed a desire to see the Cogswell lands converted into a mixed-use neighbourhood where features like public and green spaces, better mobility through active transportation, urban agriculture, and a sense of neighbourhood and community were possible. This demonstrates the shift in attitude in regards to public infrastructure. Wherein the focus of the 60's and 70's was to push as many cars through downtown as possible, contemporary viewpoints champion the creation of places for people that can be reached on foot or by bike and where they choose to linger and engage with each other.

From information gathered during Cogswell Shakeup and other background research, HRM and Ekistics worked together to build a new Master Plan for the Cogswell Lands. This Plan includes a smaller street grid and many public amenities. It is unclear how the process of implementing the Plan will move forward now that it is in place, but, there is no doubt that the redevelopment of the Cogswell Interchange will be a new breed of mega project in Halifax. People, not cars, will champion the design process.



It was the outcry of citizens that eventually overturned the entire Harbour Drive project, but not before the Cogswell Interchange was completed. Construction began in 1968, just one year after ground was broken for Scotia Square. Council felt that pulling the plug on the Cogswell Interchange would jeopardize the contract for Scotia Square, as it was believed that the Interchange would bring people to the commercial shopping center.