

Items for meeting between the Housing Task Force and The Sandy Lake-Sackville River Regional Park Coalition

February 28 2022, 9:30am

Background:

The Sandy Lake – Sackville River area was first identified in 1971 by a joint provincial/municipal effort with the assistance of federal biologists, as part of a large, ecologically-connected unit that should be preserved in its entirety as a Regional Park. In the intervening years half of its watershed was changed from P-park zoning to housing. This was a political decision. No biological studies were done at the time to determine if this change of zoning would affect the quality of the remaining park lands. Developers of course began purchasing properties on speculation. Now, as part of the current Regional Plan Review, developers who control about 600 acres in the Sandy Lake watershed are poised to have their housing plans undergo Secondary Planning.

Our coalition has been working for years to conduct studies and to preserve the outstanding biodiversity and conservation value of the area, including 15 species at risk living in 11 habitats, plus its recreational and educational values. It now has a chance to remain the gem that it still is. On November 9, 2021 HRM councillors voted unanimously in support of Councillor Blackburn's motion for an independent, environmentally-based boundary study for Sandy Lake - Sackville River Regional Park. (HRM's 2014 Regional Plan called for a park boundary study for the area too, but it was never done.) This study has the possibility to give us all peace of mind that the area will be documented and seriously considered for protection. This is a key step in realizing the Park's huge potential to serve the city as one of its most valuable greenspaces in a rapidly growing area. However, even with the strong support of the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP), the overriding priorities in the Regional Plan remain focused on housing, not on environmental protection or park land protection.

Our main topic of concern relating to the housing task force:

On the one hand, 1. Years of collaborative work between the Municipality, city staff, and community volunteers have created the HGNP, HaliFACT and other documents pending inclusion in the Regional Plan review. They need to be implemented. Tandem efforts and collaboration have also taken important natural areas closer to their highest and best function as wilderness parks. However, portions of some parks are already at risk from potential housing developments, in particular, **Sandy Lake-Sackville River Regional Park**, Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes and Purcells Cove Backlands. All of this collaborative work must not go to waste. These parks and the HGNP must not be sacrificed in the heat of the moment.

And 2. A narrow focus on housing could also put at risk **the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGNP)** and environmentally sensitive areas that ultimately enrich the community and foster the type of community that is drawing so many whose desire to live in our community.

On the other hand, the housing task force is in a position to assist the city to preserve the at-risk lands in the Sandy Lake watershed and others, and also to assist the city to implement the Halifax Green Network Plan. **Will the task force do these things?**

Opportunities:

This article, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nova-scotia-housing-task-force-halifax-development-1.6315601> says that, " One plot in Dartmouth has already been dedicated to a new housing development, and Lohr said more than 30 additional parcels have been picked and are awaiting cabinet approval."

Our request is that the province might help preserve Sandy Lake by trading with the developer who owns the property at most risk, Clayton Developments controls about 600 acres to the west of Sandy and Marsh Lakes.

From page 6 of Clayton Development's application to the city for secondary planning of their Sandy Lake lands (attached) it appears as if they may still be open to a trade to preserve the park. Even if the 200 acres proposed for high density is eventually approved (depending on the outcomes of a biologically-based park boundary study being done by the city) Clayton told us they would consider trading the back lands to the city. Their application to the city indicates the same.

A. Please provide us with a map or list of the 30+ properties the task force/province has identified.

At City Council on January 25th, Councillor Kent moved that a 400+ acre development be accelerated in Eastern Passage. It already has bussing and servicing. The motion passed unanimously. Councillor Hendsbee expressed interest in development in Musquodoboit Harbour and Porter's Lake although services are not readily available there. Wayne Mason mentioned the development at Penhorn Mall plus the 15 buildings coming at the West End Mall. There are 3000 units now ready for permits.

B. Could the lands at Eastern Passage or Musquodoboit or some of the 30+ properties mentioned above be part of the solution to trade to protect Sandy Lake?

Further Suggestions to facilitate housing:

There are indeed actions the province could take to facilitate housing. We suggest the following:

- 1) Changes to the Environment Act that would facilitate the redevelopment of brownfield sites, and/or incentives to facilitate redevelopment of such sites, at the same time without compromising the environmental concerns arising from the contamination. The current onus on new purchasers of such sites has hampered their redevelopment and it is time that the situation was addressed. (Action 31 of the HGNP requests that as well)

- 2) Speeding up the process to clean up the Montague Mines pollution and the associated pollution of Barry's Run would bring on line the Port Wallace Subdivision that appears to have good community support. It would take pressure off the Sandy Lake situation to buy time to get the independent boundary study done and assessed.
- 3) Providing incentives for the ~10,000 already-approved residential units that are waiting for the property owners to file the building permits could help.
- 4) Assisting the city to activate the HGNP so it is clearer where development can safely happen with the greenbelt established. That would include clarification of wildlife corridors needing preservation and augmentation. Clear development rules are what the development industry is continuously calling for. Greenbelt legislation that fixed the location of the wildlife corridors would achieve exactly what the industry has been calling for – certainty.
- 5) We need a well-thought-out park plan, a Park Systems Plan city-wide, so that the city knows where to develop housing. This would speed up decisions regarding the design of any large subdivision as the parkland issues are resolved in advance and with the large community in mind so that trail connections are optimized, for example. Community groups have been calling for an overall park plan which doesn't just focus on tot lots for some time. Perhaps the Province could assist the city with funding for more staff to carry out these HGNP tasks more quickly so that there is more clarity and less opposition to potential housing developments. The HGNP is about more than parks. It is a guide that needs filling out to ensure better city-planning with the advantage of corresponding land optimization.
- 6) The city has requested a number of changes to the Halifax Charter. The Province could act on these changes through this Task Force. Two changes have been requested by our groups, one is a change to s.235, which the City asked for in 2018, and the second sought by Coalition members being a change from 1-year to 5-years for land acquisition in s.237.
- 7) More provincial staff (DTAT, D. Env, D. Natural Resources and Renewables, D. Municipal Affairs...) involved in the processing of permits to speed up the process on the provincial side and staff needed in relation to move on each of these topics above.

Will you find out if the province would make lands available to trade with Clayton in order to save some or all of the lands at Sandy Lake?

Please be sure the Task Force moves with care to protect present and proposed parks.

Thank you for your consideration of these ideas, and in particular, for assistance to preserve Sandy Lake-Sackville River area and to help the city to move on implementing the Halifax Green Network Plan.

Sincerely,

Co-chairs Karen L.H. Robinson and Walter N. Regan and the 29 Coalition groups

SL-SRPCoalition website: www.sandylakecoalition.ca

SLCA Website: www.sandylake.org

RP+10 Submissions: <https://www.sandylakecoalition.ca/rpsubmission>

Natural Wonders Avian Species report: <http://sandylake.org/avian-and-species-at-risk/>

Park Planning Study: <http://sandylake.org/sandy-lake-sackville-river-regional-park-2020-planning-study-2/>

Dr. David Patriquin's Summary of A Report on the State of Sandy Lake February 23, 2021:

<http://versicolor.ca/sandylakebedford/waters/lakes/sl-report-summary/>

Ducks Unlimited Wetland Report <https://sandylake.org/ducks-unlimited-wetland-assessment-report/>

Nova Scotia Crown Share and Legacy Trust Wildlife Corridor Charette Report: <http://sandylake.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WildlifeCorridorCharretteReport.pdf>

SL-SRRP pamphlet: <https://www.sandylakecoalition.ca/why>

Drone video: www.sandylake.org

Sandy Lake - Sackville River Regional Park Coalition Member Groups:

Sandy Lake Conservation Association

Sackville Rivers Association

Agropur Cooperative Dairy Bedford Plant

Beechville Lakeside Timberlea Rails to Trails

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Nova Scotia Chapter

Canoe/Kayak Nova Scotia

CARP Nova Scotia Chapter

CP Allen High School's Cheetahs for Change

Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association

Ecology Action Centre

Five Bridges Wilderness Heritage Trust

Friends of Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Society

Friends of McNabs Island Society

Friends of Nature

Halifax North West Trails Association

Kingswood Ratepayers Association

Lucasville Community Association

Lucasville Greenway Society

McIntosh Run Watershed Association

Mountain Bike Halifax

Nova Scotia Bird Society

Nova Scotia Salmon Association

Nova Scotia Wild Flora Society

St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association

The Halifax Field Naturalists

The Neighbourhood Association of Uplands Park

The Turtle Patrol

Trips By Transit

WRWEO / The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail