

Friends of Halifax Common-1763-2013

6032 Charles St
Halifax, Nova Scotia
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December 3, 2012

NS Law Amendments Committee
P. O. Box 1116 Halifax,
Nova Scotia B3J 2X1

RE: Bill 157

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Friends of Halifax Common (FHC) is disappointed to learn that the provincial government will proceed with legislation to permit HRM to construct a permanent building on the North Common to support a seasonal recreational activity. Since our inception FHC has worked tirelessly to have the a positive long-term vision based on the excellent public consultation and plan resulting in the 1994 Halifax Common plan and adopted by the city of Halifax.

FHC has never been against the Oval, but we continue to be for the Halifax Common and achieving the principal recommendations in the plan:

- Section 2.1- The amount of public open space in the Halifax Common will not be decreased.
- Section 3.1- The amount of land owned by the City of Halifax will not be decreased.
- Section 3.2 -The City will seek to increase the amount of land under city ownership through recapture of lands.

Major concerns with the decision of the provincial government to introduce legislation amending the Halifax Charter to permit another permanent structure on the North Common are:

1. Protective Legislation:

Premier Dexter was inspired to introduce legislative protection for the Dartmouth Common. Friends of Halifax Common has written to Premier Dexter asking for similar legislation for the Halifax Common on two grounds but this has been denied.

- Premier Dexter was inspired to introduce legislative protection for the Dartmouth Common. Why is it the case that what is good for the gander is not good for the goose?
- In 2012 the Halifax Common will be 250 years old. Premier Dexter could have ensure the future of the Halifax Common going forward by appropriately enshrining its protection as a commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the gift of the Halifax Common to "*the inhabitants of the town of Halifax forever*" by King George III in 1763.

2. Poor Governance of the Halifax Common by HRM:

In letters to Premier Dexter, Leonard Preyra, Maureen MacDonald and meetings with Howard Epstein and John MacDonnell (attached), Friends of the Halifax Common have outlined many examples whereby the government of the Halifax Regional Municipality has

shirked its fiduciary responsibility with respect to the Halifax Common. Some of these were illegal and are known to the province- the illegal buildings on the North Common. Some were illegal and known to both the public and the province- the Concerts of the Common scandal. Some of them are illegitimate-such as the 2010 promise of \$2.7 million in improvements to the North Common with a temporary Oval which now seems to exclusively being spent on the EMERA Oval and building without a legitimate public consultation process. By allowing HRM to continue to build “one more time” on the North Common the provincial government is rewarding HRM’s illegal behavior.

3. Provisos in Exchange for Legislation:

Friends of Halifax Common wrote to government to suggest provisos now that the legislation is coming forward as a condition of that legislation that would ensure there was an improvement to the aesthetic character of the buildings, lights, electrical boxes and chillers. These included:

- A requirement for an integrated landscape design and masterplan for the entire Halifax Common based on the 1994 Halifax Common Plan.
- A requirement that the support buildings/structures for the Oval presently built on the North Common including the chillers and electrical supply box in the southeast corner and the electrical box adjacent to the Centennial Fountain as well as any other or subsequently needed infrastructure be buried underground. This is in keeping with the Halifax Common being a public and open place.
- A requirement that the stadium-style lighting be removed and something on shorter and multiple poles with lighting cutoffs be installed; this provides better and more direct lighting and causes less light pollution.
- A requirement that there be no parking on the Common for any vehicles.
- A requirement that there be no corporate signs for sponsorship on the Common.
- A requirement that there be no fencing enclosing any significant portion of the Common.
- A requirement that there be no vending on the Halifax Common.

These suggestions were ignored.

4. As the permanent building for the EMERA Oval won’t be built in time for this season, Friends of Halifax Common suggested options in lieu of the permanent building for the seasonal Oval to HRM, to the Premier, to John MacDonnel and to Maureen MacDonald. There is still time to slow down the process and find more imaginative and better long-term solutions. The options are as follows:

- Both Ottawa and Winnipeg have temporary shelters for their winter skating. As the use of the purpose of the proposed building is seasonal HRM could do as Winnipeg and have a design competition for temporary buildings to accommodate the seasonal needs of the skaters-the zamboni could be in a tent and then stored off site at the HRM parks and grounds near the Public Gardens.

- Please see the gallery website with the photos of successful Winnipeg shelters:
<http://www.warminghuts.com/gallery/display,gallery/17/2010> This exciting solution could be organized in collaboration with projects that the School of Architecture already engages in.
- The Pavillion could be a better location for a new building as it is a site dedicated to our youth and could have an expanded purpose to support the existing sports and play activities infrastructure on the Central Common all of which have longer seasons. These include the skate park, the wading pool, the playground, the swimming pool, the baseball field, tennis courts and the soccer field. Or instead of a new building it could be determined that the Pavillion, which has existing washrooms could be upgraded or expanded. This is an opportunity for the city to take the time to do a long-term plan for the entire Common and think in a macro aspect about what is a good location and a real purpose for a building long-term as there won't be any permanent building built this year in any case. A new building could be part of a re-design of the Central Common.

These options are apparently being ignored.

Friends of Halifax Common did not come to the provincial government as its first recourse. Since its inception in 2006, FHC has written letters, done art project, organized Jane's Walks, made presentations to HRM Council, community councils, & met with the Mayor and Councilors in an attempt to invoke a better sense of stewardship by the city but all measures have failed.

Small achievements to date do include:

- Better public appreciation for the extent of the original land grant – 265 acres bounded by Robie St on the west, North Park, Bell Road, South Park on the east, Cunard on the north and South Street on the south.
- HRM placing the 1994 Halifax Common Plan on the website.
- Initiating the dialogue with Capital Health which led to the 5 year commitment for the Common Roots Urban Garden at the site of the former Queen Elizabeth High School

But efforts to have the 1994 Halifax Common Plan respected have been ignored. So much of the Halifax Common has been lost that there really needs to be some sober second thought about doing a "micro" project without a full-macro vision for the next 250 years. At present approximately 20% of the Halifax Common remains as public open space. Public open space on the peninsula is at a premium as the HRM attempts through densification, to increase the population on the peninsula by 25,000. Public open space is highly important to both mental and physical health. It does not have to be packaged into a sports function as benefits are derived from passive recreational enjoyment.

How poor that this NDP government's legislation enables further encroachment on the Halifax Common instead of its offering it stewardship and protection for the future.

(by email)

Peggy Cameron,
Co-chair, Friends of Halifax Common