

18 November 2019

Peter Duncan  
Planning and Development  
Halifax Regional Municipality  
PO Box 1749  
Halifax, NS B3J 3A5

**Re: Construction Mitigation**

Dear Mr. Duncan,

HRM is growing at a rapid pace, with new residents and construction in the downtown core, this presents an exciting economic development opportunity for local businesses! Construction, however, can have a negative impact on their operations and many businesses suffer significant losses in revenue or are forced to close all together.

A construction mitigation strategy would benefit all of HRM's rapidly changing communities. The Spring Garden area has at least 7 proposed or already underway development projects, in addition to a major streetscaping construction project occurring in 2021. Quinpool and Downtown Dartmouth are set to undergo significant changes with the Centre Plan. Recent experiences with the construction of the Nova Centre, Argyle streetscaping, and the numerous mixed-use developments occurring throughout the Regional Centre, highlight the importance of a robust construction mitigation plan that meets the needs of both the developers and local communities.

Below is a list of recommendations to include in a construction mitigation Administrative Order that would truly support the continued growth of urban HRM and the businesses which make our community a desirable place to live, work, and play. After meetings with Peter Duncan, this letter and list was developed in collaboration with the BIDs, the Canadian Federation for Independent Business, and the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. Feedback was also provided by various developers.

Construction Mitigation Recommendations

**1) Direct Compensation to the Affected Businesses**

- a) Create a compensation program for cases where construction has a moderate to major impact, for an extended period on the operations of local businesses. The program should be easy to understand and access, involve justifiable and timely monetary compensation and be financed by factoring in its costs in the budget of each project.

Examples, include tax relief, interest free loans, direct compensation, or a grant system (e.g., Montreal has set a budget of \$25 million to businesses affected by public works construction in the next 5 years).

## **2) Funding for BIDS to Promote the Area During Construction Periods**

While new construction is creating challenges for local businesses and BIDS, it is also earning new revenues via development fees. Redirecting a portion of existing development fees to BIDS and local businesses can temporarily ease the challenges. HRM should also contribute a percentage of the budget for major construction projects to a grant program for marketing, events, and beautification.

- a) The creation of a construction mitigation fund, funded from current developer's fees, to use for marketing/events/beautification in the area. This fund would be a city-wide initiative, managed by the local BIDS where one exists. If there is no BID, HRM or another group, should activate those funds.
- b) Create a grant that is 2% of the total budget of a major streetscape project (some % of the total fee), to be used by the local BID for marketing/events/beautification.

For example, in Hartford, CT they created wayfinding signage playing off popular song lyrics. These were used to convey that the area under construction was open for business and to direct visitors. Here in Halifax, the Downtown Halifax Business Commission hosted a series of community events to draw visitors to Argyle during the streetscaping construction. These events were used to highlight the potential of the street post-construction, in addition to supporting businesses through the construction period.

## **3) Better Communication**

- a) Designate a business liaison officer with managerial authority for each project.
- b) Clearly articulate expectations and enforce the requirements of CMP regulations.
- c) Coordinate with BIDS and other stakeholders to assist in community engagement.
- d) Create one-page FAQs with the details of construction projects (e.g., parking for construction workers; expected timelines).
- e) Require temporary wayfinding and signage.
- f) Appropriate advance notification needs to be communicated prior to commencing construction.
- g) Adopt a more comprehensive approach to signage that creates vibrancy and a sense of place in each business district.
- h) For large projects, require accessible communication of project timelines. For example, graphic timelines should be presented through signage around main entrances to disrupted areas, and a website should include the project timeline with milestones and progress reports.

## **4) Site Management**

- a) Job Site Hoarding
  - a. Require job site hoarding that contains dust and debris, minimizes noise, and which better protects the pedestrian realm. Modular wire mesh fencing with fabric screening does not achieve those objectives. In contrast, solid hoarding allows for bright and vibrant side walls, creates pedestrian walkways, and additional signage opportunities;
  - b. Create recess areas to allow for breaks in pedestrian walk-ways;
  - c. Use renderings on hard hoarding to create depth illusions.
- b) Sidewalks and Lighting
  - a. Incentivize and prioritize keeping sidewalks open as much as possible;
  - b. Lighting needs to make construction areas feel safe and accessible for all people.
- c) Parking
  - a. Additional well marked parking needs to be provided and properly signed and advertised in advance construction.
- d) Queuing areas need to be thoughtfully placed for consideration of disruption to both parking and business access;
  - a. Limit idling for trucks;
  - b. Implement restricted times for truck deliveries for materials, when possible;
  - c. Haul routes should be easily accessible to eliminate turning needs and left-hand turns as this will reduce the time construction vehicles are in the impacted area.

## **5) Better Planning**

- a) Create a no surprise rule mandating HRM to track the condition of infrastructure and let local businesses know of construction well in advance. Building on requirements for ongoing monitoring outlined in the Economic Strategy, HRM should have a state of the infrastructure report, a 10-year capital investment plan, and conduct relevant pre-construction consultation with all impacted businesses;
- b) Employ a comprehensive planning approach, using the “dig once” principle and the phasing/timing of projects;
- c) Improve the contracting process with integrated mitigation provisions and a bonus/penalty system, especially for early/late completion of the project.

## **6) Better Engagement**

- a) Provide clearer expectations around meaningful engagement with stakeholders and community;
- b) Require HRM to engage with stakeholders when considering amendments to the Construction Mitigation Administrative Order, including developers, BIDS etc.;
- c) Require the developer and HRM to engage the local BID during the creation of a Construction Mitigation Plan;
- d) Make construction mitigation plans publicly available, so local BIDs, businesses, community etc. are aware of requirements and mitigation efforts being taken.

## **7) Uniform Application of the Rules for Developers and HRM**

- a) Host public meetings prior to construction to provide clarification to businesses and residents;
- b) Ensure information about the project and scope of the work is transparent to gain support from businesses and the public.

## **8) Other**

- a) Expand Administrative Order to ensure utilities adhere to the same guidelines as HRM (e.g., Halifax Water; Heritage Gas; NS Power etc.);
- b) Enable utility crews to complete timely clean up of the work site by allowing them to take down road construction signs rather than waiting for HRM staff.

We urge Regional Council and HRM staff to consider these recommendations for construction mitigation. HRM is growing at an unprecedented rate, these recommendations will enable businesses to continue to thrive during construction projects and work in collaboration with HRM and private developers.

Sincerely,

Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses  
Downtown Halifax Business Commission  
Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission  
Halifax Chamber of Commerce  
North End Business Association  
Sackville Business Association (?)  
Spring Garden Area Business Association  
Spryfield Business Commission  
Village on Main