



## Mini-Project Ideas – PLAN 6000

Note: This project list is generated by the Halifax Regional Municipality. These projects are identified as current, immediate need for different units within the municipality. You may consider generating a mini-project idea from this list as long as it fits with the requirement of this studio. Note that most projects are large in scope. Therefore you MUST give substantial thought on what smaller components you may be interested to accomplish within the studio project (keeping in mind the time resources that you have). I haven't removed contact names of HRM planners. Please do not contact them unless you generate a specific mini-project idea from the list later in the semester. You could choose other projects of your interest (beyond this list). Please read my instruction for the Assignment 7/8 in OWL. This list can be seen as a guide only for generating project ideas starting from November 5<sup>th</sup>. I am proactively distributing the list for your review.

### 1. Comprehensive Analysis of the Low-density and Medium-density Residential Neighbourhoods of the Regional Centre

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A good portion of the Regional Centre<sup>1</sup> is presently occupied by low-density and medium-density residential neighbourhoods, most of which could be classified as being stable. While the Regional Centre Plan Team is not intending on encouraging dramatic changes to the stable low and medium-density residential neighbourhoods, it nonetheless wants to bring forward some changes to the overall planning framework. First, it wants to standardize methodologies, like the height calculation methodology, so that things are assessed the same way no matter the location (for example, while the maximum allowable heights may differ across the plan area, the height calculation methodology should be the same everywhere). Second, the policies and regulations should recognize and protect the character of unique neighbourhoods. In order to support the preparation of a new approach for the low and medium-density residential

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<sup>1</sup> The Regional Centre includes Peninsula Halifax and the portion of Dartmouth that is contained within the arc of the Circumferential Highway.

neighbourhoods, a comprehensive analysis will need to be undertaken. The analysis would look at things like existing and allowable heights, lot coverage, accessory uses and structures, setbacks, main uses, densities, home occupation allowances, etc. The project itself could be tackled by multiple teams, each picking a sub-area of the Regional Centre. The objective would be to find where similarities and differences exist throughout the Regional Centre.

## **2. University Campus Planning**

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Municipal planning policies and land use by-law regulations affecting the land holdings/campuses of Dalhousie University, the University of King's College, and Saint Mary's University (SMU) were developed in the 1970's and 1980's. Two of these universities, Dalhousie and SMU, have recently adopted new master plans that may not be fully achievable under the current municipal planning framework. In addition, new trends have emerged over the past decade in the way universities operate and serve their faculty and student body (for example by providing more services and commercial uses on campus). Therefore, the objectives of the project would be twofold: (1) to identify the changes that will be required with the existing policies and land use by-law provisions to accommodate current master planning objectives developed by the universities, and (2) to identify emerging land use planning trends in university campus planning across North America.

## **3. Commercial/ Mixed Use Streetscape Typology Study**

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Conduct a study to determine the existing streetscape typology/ies for existing substantial commercial/mixed use areas in the Regional Centre. Identify character defining elements such as building heights, built form, open space, cultural artifacts, sidewalk widths and treatment, and vegetation/landscaping treatment. Identify potential cultural influences/implications. Examine any links between commercial successes and character defining elements.

## **4. Master Plan for a Comprehensive Development District – Port Wallace Site**

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The newly approved Regional Plan calls for the development of a new master planned community on a greenfield site in the Port Wallace area of Dartmouth. The work by either a group of students, or as a studio class project (preferable) would be to develop a concept plan together with draft planning policies, land use by-law regulations, and design guidelines that would guide the future development of the lands in a sustainable way by:

- Preserving sensitive lands (including wetlands);
- Ensuring a mix of uses and housing types;
- Promoting the use of transit and active transportation through the provision of complete streets and a transit oriented development model;
- Providing an effective and natural stormwater management system; and
- Providing ample, quality and interconnected open spaces.

## **5. Transit Oriented Development Concept Plan for the Halifax Shopping Centre – West End Mall – Manulife Complex**

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This location, within a Regional Plan Growth Centre, is evolving with the conversion of the former Bay store building to offices, the rail cut greenway proposal, proposals to reconfigure the Halifax Transit bus terminal, and longer-term transit options explored in the Bedford-Halifax Corridor study. Deliverables would be concept maps, potential pedway linkages across the CN line and Mumford Road, preferred transit nodes and recommended building forms.

## **6. Transit Oriented Development Concept Plan for The Village at Bayers Road**

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A comparable transit oriented development concept plan within the same Regional Plan Growth Centre could also be done at The Village at Bayers Road, including the Superstore to the north and potential links with the new Chain Lakes Trail.

## **7. Rural Economic Strategy for HRM**

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A Rural Economic Strategy for HRM would be a policy-oriented project, the need for which has become apparent during consultations for RP+5. Since the Halifax Regional Development Agency (HRDA) merged with the Greater Halifax Partnership (GHP), the rural areas have not had their own clearing house for ideas about economic viability. Demographic and technological shifts affecting rural areas, such as retirements in the baby-boom generation, information technology, high-speed internet, car sharing and eco/heritage tourism, would be important factors to consider, as would the inherent relationship between rural communities and surrounding open space. This could fit well into the Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan envisaged in the Regional Plan.

## **8. Cultural Landscapes**

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HRM now has the ability to designate and protect cultural landscapes and the municipality wishes to expand heritage and cultural policies to recognize these valued assets. Using the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) as the foundation, HRM is looking for help in developing a process (toolkit) for articulating the heritage and community value of these landscapes. Of particular interest are older village centres in rural and coastal areas, where built form, scenic views, traditional economies and cultural identity converge to create iconic landscapes.

## **9. Pinecrest-Highfield Park Neighbourhood Profile and Asset Map**

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The Pinecrest-Highfield Park neighbourhood is an important part of the Regional Centre. It is bounded on the east by Albro Lake, on the north by Highway 111 and the Burnside Industrial Park, and on the west by Victoria Road. The area's history dates back to early 1800s, with much of the development taking place in early 1900s, in the post-World War II period, and in the 1960s. In 1991 the former City of Dartmouth adopted the Pinecrest-Highfield Park Neighbourhood Plan, which formed the basis of a Secondary Planning Strategy and a 10-year action plan for the community. These documents form an important context for the Regional Centre Plan process. A current Neighbourhood Profile and Asset Map are also required, and should include an overview of:

- Community history;
- Planning activities and current zoning;
- Demographic and household socio-economic profile;
- Housing profile (age, number, type and condition of dwelling units);
- Property ownership, including vacant lands;
- Development activity;
- Location and nature of existing community assets (e.g. cultural and open spaces, schools, recreation centres, active transportation routes, transit, grocery stores, employment, community organizations, health and social services etc.);
- Any recent community engagement activities;
- Review of the Neighbourhood Plan, Secondary Planning Strategy and Land Use By-Law; and
- Other pertinent topics that can inform future planning and community engagement.

## **10. Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan**

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The vast network of open space lands and aquatic systems throughout HRM perform a range of environmental, social, cultural and economic functions and benefits. A Greenbelting and Public Open Space Priorities Plan (Open Space Plan) will establish a long-range strategy for the protection and management of a sustainable network of natural areas, cultural landscapes, public parks and corridors and ecological systems. The Plan will focus on protecting and enhancing an interconnected system of open space lands for conservation purposes, for shaping settlement form and community identity and for providing public recreation and community connection opportunities. A regional network of open spaces will be identified using principles of landscape ecology to protect and preserve connectivity between natural areas for habitat conservation and ecological health, to enable sustainable community design, to help define communities, and to benefit HRM's economy and the health and wellness of its people. An implementation framework will include integrated land-use planning and public lands management tools to ensure the protection of the right open space lands in the right location for sustainable outcomes.

## **11. Best Practices Research in Plan and By-law Drafting**

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Best practices research across Canada, the United States, Australia and elsewhere on the structure of planning documents, their organization into sections, their formatting, general provisions in land use by-laws, hierarchy, nomenclature, etc.

## **12. Restructuring and Redevelopment of the Kemp Road Lands**

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The newly adopted Regional Plan calls for a minimum of 25% of the future growth of dwelling units in the Municipality to happen in the Regional Centre. Likewise, the Regional Centre Plan, which is currently being worked on by planning staff, will call for higher densities in the Regional Centre by densifying in the two downtowns, along commercial corridors, and on opportunity sites, both small and large.

One area in particular that is emerging as a potential long term (20+ years) development node is the Kempt Road industrial lands, which can be defined as the lands contained within the area bordered by Young Street, Windsor Street and Robbie Street/Massachusetts Avenue (with the exception of the Department of National Defence lands). The area is currently being mainly used for car dealerships, which are land intensive operations that may be better suited elsewhere in the Municipality.

This project would make for an ideal studio project which could look at a number of issues as diverse as road network re-design, transit oriented development, active transportation infrastructure, urban design, public open space siting and design, complete street principles, complete neighbourhood principles, healthy community principles, servicing, mix uses, appropriate heights and densities, etc.

## **13. Investigating the Use of Expert Panels for Public Engagement**

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Community engagement in planning practice is continuously evolving. Planners find themselves caught between growing community expectations for meaningful engagement and

ever-tighter timelines to complete planning processes. In Halifax, Community Planning Committees have traditionally been appointed to compliment broader community consultations and to act as a sounding board for planning processes. Are planning committees an indispensable part of the planning process, or could they be replaced by expert panels, on-line and other forms of engagement?

## 14. Health Impact Assessments

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HRM is looking to develop a program for analyzing the health impacts of large scale land use proposals and policies. Utilizing health impact assessments (HIAs) will assist in determining if proposed policies and developments are furthering the goal of healthy communities. The research would consider best practices in HIA's and in particular community-led HIAs, such as People Assessing Their Health (PATH), as developed by the Coady Institute.

## 15. Ridesharing

Contact Person: Julie Wynn, Smart Trip Coordinator, Planning & Infrastructure  
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The [hfxridematch.ca](http://hfxridematch.ca) carpooling website is an online ride matching system that makes it easy to share seats or to catch a ride. The system matches people based on proximity to origin and destination points and travel routes, as well as similar working hours and compatible carpooling preferences. However, there is certainly room to improve the Halifax ridesharing program and the effectiveness of the website. This project would include conducting research on:

- The latest/best practices/technologies in on-line ridesharing programs (comparison matrix);
- The service provider(s) that other municipalities/regions are currently using; and
- The effectiveness of mobile applications in increasing the usability of the service.

The final outcome of the project would be twofold: (1) a recommendation on the best approach(es) to promote/encourage the use of [hfxridematch.ca](http://hfxridematch.ca), and (2) a recommendation on how best to incorporate social media messaging as part of the system.

## 16. Downtown Halifax Pedway System

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HRM is currently undertaking an advanced planning exercise in preparation for the eventual removal of the Cogswell Interchange in Downtown Halifax. In place of the Interchange, the Municipality plans on establishing an at-grade street network and some public open space, with the balance of the lands to be declared surplus and sold off to help defray the cost of the removal of the interchange and the creation of new public infrastructure. The surplus lands are to be redeveloped with mixed commercial/residential uses.

One question that has come up during the planning exercise has been how committed should the Municipality be to maintaining in place the existing pedway system? Such a question can only be properly answered by weighing the various pros and cons and challenges that result in keeping or removing the system. However, in order to answer this one question, more knowledge on the system and its impacts must be known first, this would include:

- What is the number of businesses that directly or mostly depend on the pedway system?
- Who is using the pedway system and for what reasons?
- How does the use of the system vary throughout the day and year and during various weather conditions?
- What is the impact on the streetlife and on the street-level businesses in the area?

These questions can be answered by making use of one or more of the following methods: physical inventory, survey, and circulation patterns modelling.

## 17. Emerging Retail (long-term research project)

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What are the long-term planning implications of on-line retail and how do businesses position themselves to cope with this developing phenomenon? Should we be expecting different impacts on the big box format versus the main street retailers? What are the impacts and opportunities for main street retailing (show room concept, click and collect at local store, 3D printing, etc.)? Will big box suffer more than main street retailing?

## 18. Marketing Secondary Units

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The benefits of secondary units, also known as accessory or basement apartments, secondary suites and in-law flats, are well documented in planning literature. In Nova Scotia municipalities may voluntarily establish municipal planning and zoning by-laws to enable secondary units, yet community acceptance may limit the use of such policies. What would make secondary units more acceptable within a single-unit dwelling neighbourhood? What are the barriers to embracing secondary units? What role do market forces play, and should the municipality actively promote and support an increased use and legalization of these units? This topic could include lessons from other places, and could include a survey of select Halifax neighbourhoods (e.g. Westmount or Downtown Dartmouth).

## **19. Rooming Houses**

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Rooming and boarding houses have a long history in Halifax, and although they can be riddled with problems they provide market housing to those who have few other housing options. Rooming houses are disappearing in many Canadian inner city neighbourhoods. According to community housing activists, in 2007 there were 153 rooming houses in Halifax while in 2012 there were just 25 and dropping. What is the history and current status of Halifax's rooming houses? How has the "rooming house" model evolved in recent years to provide affordable, flexible and safe housing options? What role can rooming houses fill in Halifax's housing continuum, and what can municipal policies do to ensure that they provide an acceptable and safe housing for those who require it?

## **20. Mumford Terminal Capacity Optimization**

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The existing transit terminal on Mumford Road is nearing capacity and requires an intervention to ensure it can continue to meet operational needs of Halifax Transit, while also acting as a comfortable and safe transfer point for transit users.

It is unclear at this point if changes to the existing terminal site will be enough to accommodate projected growth, if the terminal site will need to be expanded, or if an alternative site will need to be identified.

This project will recommend to Halifax Transit the preferred alternative (rebuild on existing site, expand existing site, or relocate terminal to a new site) and suggest a preliminary terminal design.

## **21. Transit Priority Corridor Study**

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Transit Priority Measures (TPM), like bus lanes and signal priority, give public transit an advantage in very congested transportation corridors and are important to create a reliable and competitive transit network.

This project will identify a key transit corridor in the HRM and recommend appropriate TPMs to improve travel time for transit vehicles. The final report will identify some idea of time savings that the proposed TPMs will achieve, and identify foreseeable challenges in implementing the measures.

## **22. Research on Best Municipal Practices to Promote “Walkability”**

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The Active Transportation Priorities Plan proposes the development of a program to implement a number of “walkability” pilot projects. This is part of the municipality’s objective to increase the mode share of walking. This student project would aim to understand the approaches other jurisdictions have taken to improve walkability and to propose program elements for Halifax.

## **23. Best Practices to Increase Walking in Rural Communities**

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The Active Transportation Priorities Plan proposes a new initiative to provide improved walking facilities in more rural areas. There are a range of challenges to building sidewalks and facilities in rural communities. These include the distances, the high cost and the lower population base.

However, there is a recognized need to make walking more accessible, particularly in designated rural centres. This project would identify the range of factors involved in making decisions on initiatives to facilitate more walking in rural areas. These include: jurisdictions, road design standards, greenway options (off-road), funding models, operations, and others. The project would identify practices from other jurisdictions that could inform development of a program here. The project could also try to quantify the benefits of developing pedestrian facilities in rural areas. A community within the Municipality could be used to develop a case study. Musquodoboit Harbour has been suggested as a community that would make an ideal case study.

## **24. Bicycle Facility Evaluation**

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This project would evaluate the success of existing municipal bicycle facilities. Evaluation factors would include: usage rates, demographics, safety (e.g. collisions, perceptions) connectivity, user perspectives, and others. The project would be used to improve current routes, plan connections, inform social marketing projects and refine planning and operational practices.

## **25. Bicycle Facility Planning and Implementation**

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Following the approval of the Active Transportation Priorities Plan, the municipality will begin planning and implementing the Regional Centre bikeway network. In this project, a team of planning students would collaborate with staff and/or consultants to plan one or two new routes. Potential activities would include: monitoring and evaluation of candidate routes; alternative route analysis; preparation of public engagement materials; assisting with public engagement; providing input to functional and detailed designs. The exact functions would be determined depending on the time available and the status/stage of each particular planning project.

## **26. Pop-up Public Spaces**

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HRM is looking for research into the possibility of creating a program and toolkit of designs and materials that could be made available to groups interested in developing temporary public spaces in their community. HRM would like to examine the cost and benefits of a program to give groups easy access to pre-approved designs and pre-assembled materials to create customizable spaces for whatever event or gathering they propose. This research would compile best practices and programs from other regions. At the local level, research would consider opportunities such as potential uses/users, partnerships, and funding sources along with potential barriers such as approvals, storage, liability, etc. Ultimately the work would lead to a critical path for developing the program, toolkit and application package.

## **27. Blue Flag Beaches Program**

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The Blue Flag label is a voluntary program run by the Foundation for Environmental Education, which recognizes sustainability efforts of beaches and marinas through “strict criteria dealing with Water Quality, Environmental Education and Information, Environmental Management, and Safety and Other Services”.<sup>2</sup>

HRM would like to know if there a role for municipalities to play in promoting blue flag beaches? What works and what does not? What are the opportunities?

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.blueflag.org/>