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Community Forum III: Vision to Reality

Summary of Community Feedback

The focus of Community Forum III was a concept plan for the development of the Upper Tantallon area at the Crossroads. Held on April 16-17, 2010, the forum welcomed over 100 community residents representing more than 30 community organizations.

This document was prepared by the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association, the St. Margaret's Bay Chamber of Commerce, and the St. Margaret's Bay Region Tourism Development Association

Background

On April 16-17, St. Margaret's Bay residents participated in the third annual Village Forum, entitled "Vision to Reality." The event was the culmination of three years of visioning undertaken by the community in response to the rapid commercial development of Upper Tantallon Village at the Crossroads.

In 2008, Forum I—"Managing Change"—explored the forces behind rapid development and galvanized community support to establish their role in managing change. In 2009, Forum II—"Visioning a Village"—articulated the SMB community values and made them evident to politicians and developers.

Participants in these first two forums were generally agreed that the existing HRM municipal plan identifying Exit 5 at the #103 and Hammonds Plain as a "population hub" should be refined. Specifically, an unintended result of the "hub" scenario is that the commercial development following the new population growth into the Greater Tantallon area is spilling over from the Exit 5 parameters, and "compromising" the rural quality of Upper Tantallon Village as a gateway to Peggy's Cove and St. Margarets Bay in general.

The predominant zoning of this area, technically known as Planning Districts 1 and 3—"As of Right" MU 1 and MU2—, has encouraged commercial infringement on the coastal corridor. Forum participants sent a strong message that the "coastal village quality" of Upper Tantallon at the Crossroads, specifically that section within the coastal corridor, should be protected from uncontrolled commercial development.

Eighty-two percent of Forum I participants were opposed to the box-store type developments in the designated village area; at the very least, they wanted "controlled" development that respected specific design criteria and community input.

Participants in the second forum said they supported development of a more "personal scale," featuring more small business, services and appropriate local enterprise. Residents also called for the "clustering" of residential expansion with appropriate commerce, education, and recreation facilities in a village setting.

All three forums were cosponsored by the SMB Stewardship, Chamber and Tourism Associations and attended by provincial MP's, HRM councilors, and HRM planners and facilitators. The forums were well-publicized and attracted over 100 Bay residents, with Forum III hosting representatives from 31 Bay organizations and church groups. Participants included landowners (11%), residents (9%) and business people (8%) in the proposed village zone, developers 2%, and residents of greater SMB (88%).

Forum III

Forum III translated the community values into a “village concept,” providing a clear road map for HRM planners and councilors to create a special development zone in Upper Tantallon at the Crossroads. Forum III was designed to provide the last link for translating community vision into an amended municipal plan for the area.

“Vision to Reality” consisted of a Friday night overview presentation on how communities can participate in managing change. A presentation by Andy Fillmore, HRM’s manager of the HRM By Design process, was followed by a community-authored presentation to summarize the highlights of the previous two forums and their aftermath.

The Saturday morning event began with a presentation of a “six point plan”—the six features suggested to define a rural coastal village—upon which the ground rules for controlled development in the village could be established. The six features, with a series of elaborations under each, were presented as proposals in the form of clear statements.

The proposals were authored by a steering committee drawn from the three sponsoring organizations, with help from Bay experts in the fields of planning, architecture, trail management, and group organization. The committee took its direction from past Forums, various precedents—local and otherwise—, expert advice, and constant attention to the opinions of residents, businesses, and community leaders.

The design meetings took place over the four months leading up to the April 16-17 dates and were facilitated and guided by HRM planners under the leadership of Roger Wells. After Forum III, participant feedback was compiled and tabulated by members of the SMB Stewardship team.

Each participant was given a workbook containing the statements and a rating scale asking for his/her level of agreement or disagreement. Most questions also included a comments section.

For the remainder of the morning, participants could elect to visit up to three of the six pavilions representing each of the points in the six-point plan. Each pavilion was hosted by “facilitator-experts.” Then, after a complementary lunch, the group was gathered back together for “facilitator-expert” reports and discussion amongst the group as a whole.

The Six Point Plan

Six Key Features of a Coastal Village

- 1, Village Boundaries
2. Natural Environment and Cultural Assets

3. Connectivity and Streetscaping
4. Land Use
5. Site Design:
 - (a) Landscaping
 - (b) Lighting
 - (c) Signage
 - (d) Environmental Protection
 - (e) Physical Layout
6. Building Design

The results of the workbooks are appended to this introduction and provide the substance of the Forum III report.

Preliminary Analysis

In general the extent of agreement evidenced by Bay residents to the proposed features far exceeded the degree of agreement on statements in questionnaires from the previous forums. For example, the lowest approval rating for the six main propositions was 92 percent agreement level, with the average being close to 97%. Each of the statements and the degree of agreement or disagreement provide a clear indicator of community values. The results provide a clear path forward to the drafting of a new development plan for Upper Tantallon at the Crossroads.

A similar high level of agreement occurred with the sub-statements, with only two statements, one suggesting “traditional light design for street lighting” and the other to “Encourage a traditional arrangement of commercial buildings, parking lots, roads and walking paths” receiving agreement at 67%. These examples indicate a “weakness” in defining the term “traditional” and the insightfulness of the participants in addressing grey areas. While there was almost unanimous agreement for setting the village boundaries as proposed, many comments suggested that they be extended, mostly in the area of the Old School Road to provide more room for development.

The comment sections to each of the statements are illuminating as they display the concern and breadth of thinking among the participants and give HRM planners an extra dimension of elaboration to consider in drafting a new Village plan. The comments amplify the group understanding of what is being affirmed or denied.

The compiled workbook response provides a clear picture of how a wide cross-section of Bay residents wants to see Tantallon at the Crossroads develop; it also provides a benchmark of community evaluation for other Bay villages who may wish to conduct their own visioning process.

Bay residents want to see Upper Tantallon at the Crossroads as a village that has distinct boundaries, with its own special development plan quite apart from that of Exit 5. As befitting a gateway to Peggy’s Cove, the village will have its own identity, being rural in a “modern” way, with a discernable architecture, signage, scale, and

focus on community interactions; it will encourage small business, appropriate land uses, street and yard landscaping, a concern for natural environment, green building techniques and energy conservation, along with walking and biking connectivity. In summary, it will be a town that develops in tune with the community values.

Next Steps

The SMB residents have gathered a compelling body of intelligence related to the development of their village. What remains now is for HRM to acknowledge our community efforts and to translate this consensus into municipal law.

To formalize this process, Roger Wells of HRM Planning suggests that the community present this Forum III report to Western Regional Community Council:

“In terms of protocol from here, I would suggest that the Report be ‘tabled’ or ‘accepted’ at an upcoming meeting of Community Council. Community Council could then approve a Motion recommending that Regional Council request staff to prepare a report regarding the initiation of a process to amend the MPS and LUB to incorporate the recommendations of the Forum report.”

HRM Staff will work with the Bay Steering Committee and public over the summer and fall to prepare a draft set of MPS policies and regulations, and anticipate a public hearing before Regional Council during the winter of 2011.