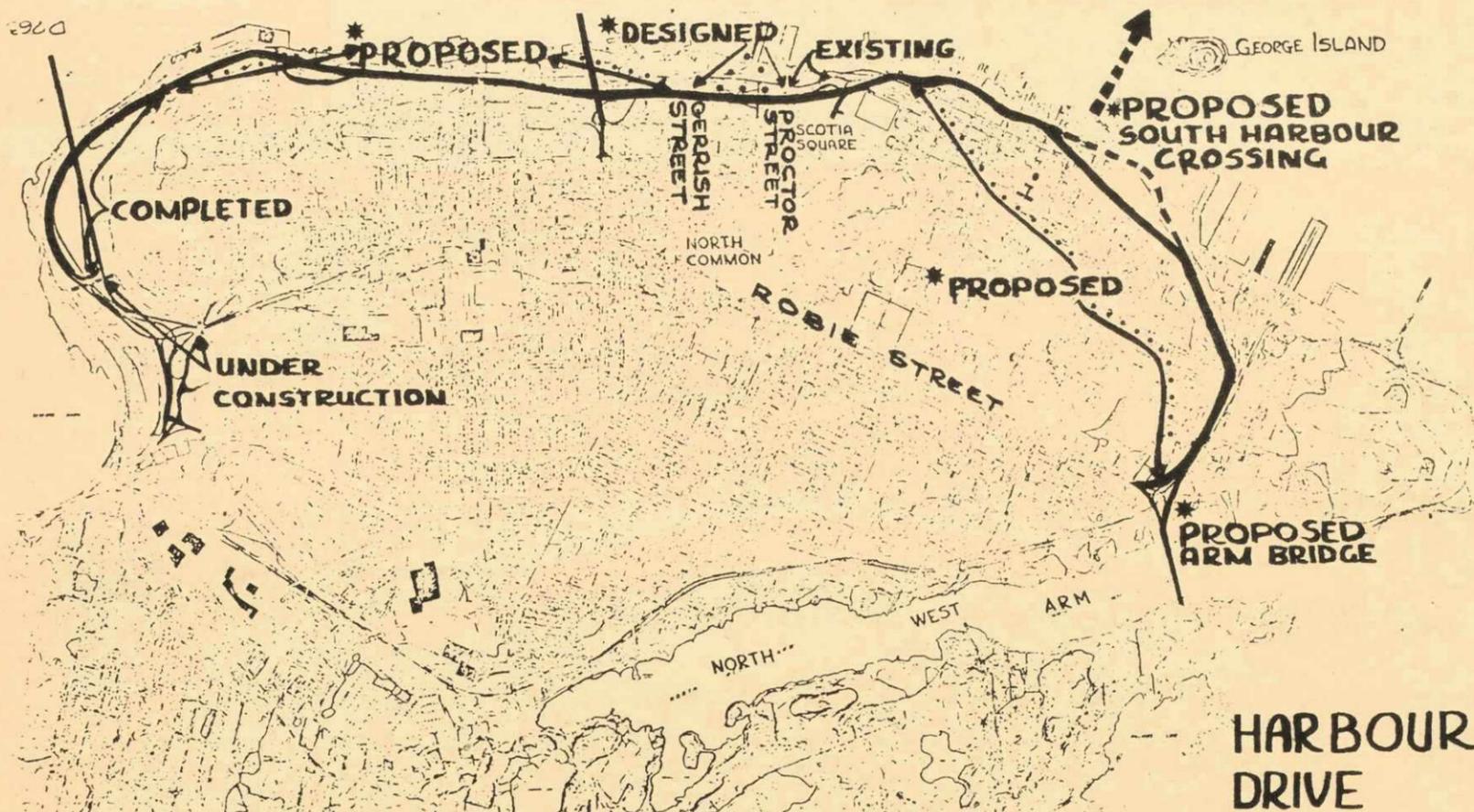


Public meeting on Harbour Drive held

Citizens pitted against city officials



by Mike Donovan

A public meeting on Harbour Drive North, held last week, pitted Halifax city officials against about 400 concerned citizens.

The Harbour Drive North Committee, headed by Alan Ruffman, sponsored the meeting at St. Pat's Elementary School on Maitland Street Thursday, Nov. 2.

City Management and Council were aligned on one side, and various action groups and concerned citizens on the other side of the Harbour Drive question.

The meeting was described as "an exercise in futility" by one very concerned citizen, since Mayor Fitzgerald, who chaired the meeting, was heard to remark the same morning that "Harbour Drive will go through".

The meeting was opened with an explanation of Harbour Drive by City Manager Cyril Henderson. He used detailed and brightly-coloured diagrams posted on the wall to aid him in his brief description.

The concept of Harbour Drive was developed in the 1940's and '50's when downtown Halifax was considered only a financial and business district. In order to alleviate the pressure on certain downtown arteries, a limited access, multi-lane highway was designed to extend from the Bedford Highway along what is now Barrington Street, then along Lower Water Street, around through the South End and across the proposed Arm Bridge to Spryfield. Besides taking the pressure off downtown streets, it was hoped that Harbour Drive would revitalize a dying

downtown. However, due to the high cost of the roadway (estimates range from \$10 million to \$40 million) Halifax city was unable to make its asphalt dream a reality.

In the last few years the financial picture has altered considerably with the formation of D.R.E.E. and the promise of federal free-money. Now that it is finally possible to proceed with Harbour Drive, many people have begun to question its entire concept.

This opposition stems from the belief that the downtown area is more than a financial and business district, but rather a viable community in itself. Also, a fear prevades among the critics of Harbour Drive that a super-highway through the downtown area will turn Halifax into the same type of stagnant asphalt jungle that exists in Los Angeles and Detroit today.

At the showdown Thursday evening, the nearly 400 people jammed into St. Pat's auditorium were unanimously opposed to Harbour Drive. They seemed to be divided into four camps of opposition. The first camp, whose strongest speaker was Marty Dolin, a prominent Halifax social worker, felt the

money allocated for Harbour Drive could be better spent elsewhere. Dolin, who was clearly against the concept of the motor-car, suggested that a more feasible and practical alternative to Harbour Drive would be an improvement of transit or the creation of new, faster transit systems.

Other speakers and the audience in general supported the idea of alternative transit systems. One speaker pointed out that cars were designed for open spaces, individuals, and the country; whereas transit thrives on people and the city. He added that transit is a functional, growing thing; while Harbour Drive will be obsolete in 20 years. Professor Andrew Harvey, speaking on behalf of several other Dalhousie teachers, cited a recent survey which he and his colleagues carried out. He said that out of a list of 24 public services, the people of Halifax ranked "increased spending" on transit as the 12th priority, while at the same time ranking "increased spending on roads and bridges" as priority #19.

He went on to say that 46.1% of the people of Halifax favored increased spending on transit and only 33% favoured roads

and bridges increases. After this clear-cut statement about where the priorities of the electorate lay, the audience broke into unrestrained clapping which was followed by a scolding from Mayor Fitzgerald.

The second camp, whose chief spokesman was Alan McPhee, an executive member of Heritage Trust, argued that the access lanes necessary for a four-lane highway would require too much land and result only in the destruction of historic and noteworthy buildings in downtown Halifax. He added, "People go downtown to see and enjoy buildings. If the buildings are replaced by highways, the people will not go downtown anymore."

A large group agreed with Anthony Cook, a representative of the Nova Scotia Association of Architects, that "no further decisions should be made until comprehensive studies have been carried out." He pointed out that all plans have been based entirely on engineering studies, while no study has been made of the social and economic impact on the city. He also pointed out that the high concentration of cars pumped into the city daily by Harbour Drive (65,000 cars) will be too much for the feeder streets to handle. Finally, he destroyed the whole myth upon which Harbour Drive is based, by

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