

# To Build Or Not

**HALIFAX — What Direction to Take?**

It was once lamented that Halifax was twenty years behind progressive cities, but lately with a new awareness of the quality of life and the environment, Halifax finds itself with fewer ecological problems and a chance to lead the way as a city of the future. Many people are choosing Halifax as a place to live and work — the city offers a sane pace of life and many natural and historical resources. But Halifax, steeped in history has been moving along into the future without a "community plan" for the past 20 years. Citizens have been struggling for a new interpretation of progress — a kind of progress that maintains a continuity with the past and rejects the dehumanizing aspects of modern developments based on obsolete ideas of the 50's. Concerns have been raised over the years through one forum or another — the most notable Encounter on the Urban Environment. It was hoped that many of the recommendations from this week-long meeting, in 1970 with a 12 man team of international experts on most aspects of urban and economic development would serve as a reference point for planners, decision makers and people in both the private and public sector. Halifax has yet to take full advantage of its irreplaceable historic and environmental assets which form the basis of the City's unique identity.

In the same year as Encounter the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission was formed — an inter-governmental committee, representing the three municipal units and the provincial government. Its two basic objectives: 1) to document a development strategy for the metropolitan area and 2) to finalize a development plan for the area. In May, 1973 a plan was presented to the public for response and since then revisions have been made, a development strategy is being completed and we should look forward to both reaching the Provincial Cabinet this fall for approval. As the issues emerged during the early 70's it became clear that Halifax was in an uneasy limbo without a plan. Early in 1974, at the urging of various community groups, the City of Halifax appointed a Municipal Development Plan Committee charged with the task of coordinating the process of creating and effecting adoption of a municipal plan for Halifax. In August a Statements of Policy was released — this document is to be one of a series which will be dealt with. It is the Committee's hope that the public will assist not only in defining the problems but designing the solutions.



While all this is happening citizens realized that if many of these issues and problems were not dealt with on a day-to-day basis the plans would be obsolete before completed and adopted. Following are some of the major issues in the City today.

**Views from Citadel Hill:** The Citadel is one of Canada's most visited historic sites. Early in 1972 it became clear that high rise development would further erode the view from the Citadel to the Harbour. Citizens pressed for legislation to protect the views and the City passed a by-law early in 1973. A major development in downtown (the Maritime Tel & Tel Building) has already required that one view plane be altered and it is likely the by-law will be appealed to the Provincial Planning Appeal Board by the commercial interests it will affect — if the appeal is won, the views will once again be unprotected.

**Downtown Halifax:** Citizens have recently discovered the fine old Georgian and Victorian streetscapes of Granville and Hollis Streets. Halifax is the British equivalent of Quebec City — it is the oldest English Settlement in Canada. Although a group of historic waterfront buildings are under restoration (the N.S. College of Art & Design are the major tenants) many others are threatened. The Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia has proposed to City Council and the Provincial Government that these buildings be preserved so Halifax can have an historic quarter of similar value to those of Quebec City and Old Montreal. While the elected representatives look at the concept of "historic precincts" with interest no legislation to protect these buildings exists. Hopefully, a Downtown Committee appointed 3 years ago by the Mayor, will take into consideration the unique character and potential for the central business district of Halifax. (The Downtown Committee's plan should be soon ready for presentation to the public).

**Waterfront Re-development:**

On behalf of the Downtown Committee the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission had a group of architects prepare a plan for the waterfront. This feature of the regional plan created more interest in how Downtown Halifax should develop, especially in the waterfront strip running from near the Hotel Nova Scotian to just north of the historic waterfront buildings now being restored. Two development proposals for the waterfront have been submitted and both contain major federal and provincial government buildings, hotels, commercial outlets, and so on. Undoubtedly, citizens will want to be involved in planning for this major development. Their chief concerns are (a) that the waterfront be accessible to the public through public walkways along its entire length (b) that a good mix of activities and functions be provided for one to make the Downtown a 24 hour a day centre of life, instead of a dead no-man's land after 5 pm (c) that the Citadel Hill views and historic buildings be protected and (d) that the development be geared for transit more than for cars.

There are several other key questions about the future quality of Halifax-Dartmouth: the use of public versus private transportation system; the protection of residential neighbourhoods; the provision of natural recreation space; and the provision of low-cost family housing. A brief review of these issues will be published in later editions of the Gazette.

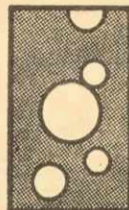
The changes a city goes through during its growth are fascinating to study — and of critical importance to the quality of life of its residents. These years are ones of tremendous changes in the cities of Halifax and Dartmouth. The question is whether we will protect and build upon the valuable historic and natural features here — or destroy them in our rush for "progress".

Prepared by the Community Planning Association of Canada. Nova Scotia Division.



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