

plan for the future

Development is a major issue in Halifax these days. In the recent mayoralty election every candidate on the scene was proposing increased development of some sort. If it wasn't a particular plan like the Arm bridge or Waterfront development it was the statement "Halifax needs more development."

Most Haligonians would probably agree that Halifax does need better housing, a better transportation system, a larger industrial base to employ its citizenry and many other improvements. But are the development projects currently being entertained by the city and provincial governments seeking to deal with these problems? Or even closer to the issue, do the governments really know what their priorities are concerning development?

By looking at a few projects now under consideration like the Quinpool Road proposal and Waterfront Development one wonders if long range benefits even entered into the discussion of these plans. Both projects are proposing the erection of high rise buildings to be used either as apartment/or business space. While the construction of these buildings will employ people on a short term basis any extended employment benefits are minimal. This is not to say that both proposals would not provide other 'spinoff' benefits to the city but only that an alternative project that would increase employment may be of more value to the city.

In light of Mayor Morris' recent speech on development it becomes apparent that the municipal government doesn't have a grip on its priorities in relation to development. Mr. Morris stated that its the developers responsibility to propose projects that will be in the best interests of the city. Does this mean that Ralph Medjuck knows what's best for Halifax? Would it not be better for our elected city officials to plan, in some depth, the type of development they wish to encourage in Halifax? If development is to move towards any constructive ends the use of impartial expertise rather than profit motivated developers might better serve the city's needs.

Mr. Morris, in his development speech, also mentioned that city council members today were more aware of the differences between good and bad development. This certainly is encouraging but it would be of greater benefit if the council would tell us what type of criteria is being used in making decisions about development. To say we (the council members) want to make Halifax a better city to live in is just dandy and no one could argue with its rationale. But this statement does limit ones understanding as to what city council is actually planning for the city (if they are at all) and if they have any idea of where Halifax will be in ten years (even though they may have been elected out of office.)

My purpose here is only to point out that there seems to be a lack of direction, priorities or whatever you want to call it in our city council and that to leave policy setting decisions to private developers is not a responsible attitude. The need for practical land use plans that seek to delineate the ideal Halifax is heading towards is imperative. Future council action may establish such plans but let's make sure that the plan and the ideal are moving towards the same end and not against each other as we have seen many times before.

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