

It's a question of "Progress or People"

No comprehensive development exists for Halifax

by Mike Donovan

Over eighty percent of North Americans live on less than 2 percent of the land; and the number of people pouring into that 2 percent is increasing every year. Twenty-five years ago, it was the duty of the city government to provide services such as roads, sewers, and police protection for a scattered collection of houses. Today the same city government must oversee massive economic development policies, initiate and engineer urban renewal programs, public housing projects, and must combat spiralling crime costs. It is up to the municipal government to determine, plan, maintain or improve the quality of life of over three quarters of the North American continent. To do this depends on elected representatives who traditionally maintain a minimum standard of mediocrity; it depends on the political whims and ambitions of ungenerous federal and provincial governments; it depends for support on the funding of a tax system unchanged since the turn of the century.

In a personal interview with Halifax's Mayor Walter Fitzgerald and City Manager Cyril Henderson, GAZETTE was informed by the former that: "The greatest block to the development of the city is the archaic tax system we are working under."

This appears to be at the foundation of the development problems presently being suffered by Halifax. The mayor and manager were anxiously awaiting the findings of the Graham Commission which they hoped would turn over such things as the administration of justice, highways, and education to provincial funding control. However, it cannot be denied that another major reason for the confused development in Halifax is the lack of a comprehensive, and detailed Municipal Development Plan. The plan proposed January 10, 1973 by the city was described by the Mayor, himself as "motherhood" and satisfied no one. To obtain specific answers to some development problems GAZETTE interviewed the Mayor.

GAZETTE: When will the city propose a detailed specific overall municipal development plan?

Mayor Fitzgerald: I would think that after the city finalizes its general broad

principles in conjunction and working with the citizens in each and every community we will sit down and draw up a development plan that will reflect the thinking, not only of the community, but in relationship to its needs, its financial obligations. Yes, I think we will have a detailed development plan drawn up with input from staff, our view, citizens, and Council.

GAZETTE: How will the citizen input be obtained?

Henderson: There are all sorts of ways of doing this in terms of contact with citizens' groups, in terms of public hearings, in terms of ad hoc advisory groups of one sort or another.

Fitzgerald: (Firstly) citizens are interested in their own little community. In Halifax there are about eighteen individual communities. Secondly, they're also interested in certain things that go on in the city as a total—transportation, roads, water.

We will, as time goes on, be sitting down in that community (Ward 10 as an example) discussing and map what there is, what they would like to be there, what could be there. Then somebody will be coming back in a subsequent meeting and saying: Look, here is what you have said about your own particular community, what has been said about it is good for the general city in relation to roads, et cetera. Here is what we think is good. Then they will have input into the plan, and on top of that they will look at the finished product and make a decision whether this is acceptable. And there will be some things that certainly won't be clear (!) in regards to what is going on... But I think that is the way it has to be done in order to get community input...

GAZETTE: How long do you think this will take?

Fitzgerald: I think we can do it in a year. I think the major work will be done by the end of next summer.



The Masterplan was explained to the public last fall by City Planning Director, Ed Babb. (art mackay/dal photo)



Mayor W. Fitzgerald and City Manager Cyril Henderson at work defending progress.

Henderson: ... at this stage, we've come to the point where we've got to deal with some concepts rather than with drawings on a piece of paper. Are we interested in growth here in the community and the economic benefits that this brings in terms of jobs, in terms of tax liability in the community. Or are we more interested in the preservation of our history or in the preservation of Boulderwood in the fashion that it is (to use an example). Are we prepared to pay, as a community, the price of lowered incomes, less affluence, continued pollution of our lakes and oceans, continued inadequate water supply in areas, continued poor roads and inadequate parks and stay as we are, and not have the greater intensity of people, the larger number of high-rise buildings in town, the pressure you get in bigger cities with the tempo that some people don't like?

ON THE VIEW FROM THE CITADEL

GAZETTE: Are you in favour of preserving the view from the Citadel?

Henderson: Not universally. Only certain segments — Harbour Mouth, Georges Island, Centre Channel, Historic Precinct section — we may cut one of these out.

ON PRESERVING DOWNTOWN HALIFAX

GAZETTE: You say that you can't really control the use of the historic buildings in downtown Halifax. Why can't you simply zone the land for historic purposes or refuse to grant demolition permits?

Henderson: The land values in that area have gone up from 75 cents to \$25 per square foot because we have encouraged development in downtown with Scotia Square. You then turn around to the person who has paid \$25 per square foot and say you've got to preserve those buildings as they are. You just can't do this...

ON UNIVERSITY EXPANSION

Fitzgerald: Look at South Street and the area through there. These places, because of the University expansion, were allowed to deteriorate. I told Senator-President Hicks that nothing

goes on the other side of South Street. They're planning that big University Athletic Complex there (Studley Field — a playground opposite the football field on the South side of South Street) I think the University should be contained.

CONCERNING HARBOUR DRIVE

Fitzgerald: Harbour Drive will go no further south than the Cogswell Street Interchange.

It is clear that the Mayor and City Manager have no clear idea of a comprehensive municipal development plan or any intention of creating one. Mayor Fitzgerald's scheme for citizen participation is highly commendable, but practically impossible. A coalition of interest groups has proposed a "Citizens' Advisory Planning Committee" to work in conjunction with the city planning staff and Council to draw up an overall plan. The City Manager feels that this is impractical.

The Mayor, without doubt, is genuinely interested in the people of this community—their betterment, prosperity and way of life. Some of his ideas such as the extensive Art & Music Education program in City Schools show understanding and interest in the people. We also agree with the Mayor's plan to subsidize mortgage payments in public housing "so as to give the residents a stake in the community," and believe in his genuine interest in preserving at least 6700 acres of watershed land for the purposes of a public park.

However, it is equally clear that the Mayor is severely misguided in his belief that progress, construction, highrise, more freeways, and uncontrolled development will in the long run benefit the people. Witness New York, Detroit, Toronto, Vancouver, and Los Angeles.

The Mayor must begin to realize the facts of the future — that development in Halifax City must be controlled stringently, and that at no time should houses or people-orientated services — playgrounds, parks, et cetera, be sacrificed for uncontrolled development. The question is still "Progress or People?". The Mayor would like to be in favor of both. That is impossible.



Is this skyline soon to resemble Manhattan's?



One of the older buildings downtown that may be in the way of progress.



Progress or preservation of history — it's black and white to Henderson.