



Subject: *Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy - Environment*
To: CAO for Planning Advisory Committee, May 21, 2024
Date Prepared: May 15, 2024
Related Motions: PAC23(59) and C23(383)
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Approved by: John Woodford, Director of Planning and Development

Summary

As part of the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy, Planning staff have consulted with reviewing agencies that have an invested interest in the environmental sustainability of the Uniacke area. This report includes recommendations for Planning Advisory Committee's consideration.

Financial Impact Statement

Planning staff has budgeted for the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy as part of the 2024/2025 Budget Cycle.

Recommendation

Include the recommendations outlined in the Uniacke SPS Environment report in the draft Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy Report.

Recommended Motion

Planning Advisory Committee recommends that Council:

- *authorize staff to include the recommendations outlined in the Uniacke SPS Environment report in the draft Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy Report.*

Background

As part of the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy, comments have been requested from Halifax Water and the Sackville Rivers Association on environmental related concerns that the organizations may have. Staff have also reviewed comments from the Uniacke Community Survey related to environmental sustainability and have developed proposed recommendations based on feedback from the agencies and the survey results.

SURVEY RESULTS

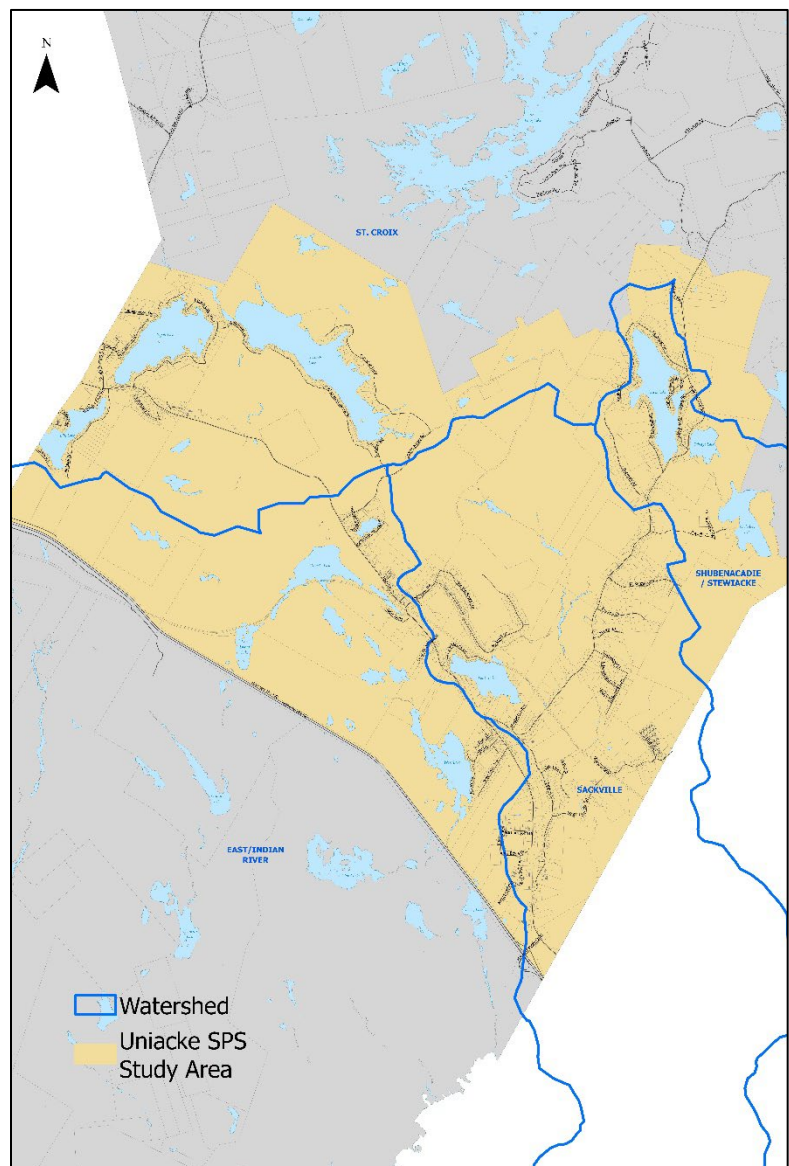
Residents of Mount Uniacke appreciate the natural environment and the majority of respondents to the public survey indicated that it was one of the many reasons why they enjoyed living in the community. When asked if the protection of wetlands was important to them, 95% of respondents indicated 'yes' that it was important. Other questions regarding sustainability, though varying greatly, did show that respondents do have concerns with over-development and ensuring that the natural environment can handle an increase in population, and more demand for on-site services. Respondents also mentioned protecting the lakes and wetlands, building with green and/or local materials, using green technologies to reduce energy consumption, and having amenities and services in the community so there is a reduction in transportation and emissions.

Many respondents indicated that when building new homes and businesses tree cutting and the removal of natural vegetation should be limited and hard surfaces should be minimized. This concern was also echoed by the Sackville Rivers Association. In response, staff recommend adding a policy to the MPS that considers the retention of natural forest cover when considering planning applications for residential development with onsite services.

HALIFAX WATER

Due to Mount Uniacke's topographical location, the community is at the intersection of four different watersheds. To the right is a map showing the names of each of these watersheds. The Pockwock Lake Watershed is a sub-watershed of the East/Indian River Watershed. The Pockwock Lake Watershed is the watershed that provides the majority of drinking water to Halifax. Boundaries for the Pockwock Watershed extend into the Municipality of East Hants. Between Halifax Water and Crown Lands, much of the land in Mount Uniacke which is located in the Pockwock Lake Sub-Watershed is in public ownership.

As part of the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy process, staff did a presentation for the Pockwock Lake Watershed Advisory Committee in March of 2024. The presentation discussed proposed development in the Uniacke area. In



addition, staff requested comments from the Watershed Manager on issues East Hants could take into consideration when drafting the secondary plan. No specific comments on the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy process were forthcoming.

SACKVILLE RIVERS ASSOCIATION

Mount Uniacke is home to the headwaters of the Sackville River. The Sackville River runs through multiple communities including Mount Uniacke, Sackville, and Bedford, and both the Little Sackville River and the Sackville River are known to flood during heavy rainfall events. Last year, during the July 21-22 rain event, the Sackville River and the Little Sackville River overflowed their banks and caused extensive damage to buildings and infrastructure surrounding the river. Future development around the headwaters of the Sackville River should be considered in how it will impact flooding in Mount Uniacke, South Uniacke, and downstream. Further to this, a study has previously been added to Section E3: Municipal Projects and Studies of the MPS, therefore, staff recommend that money be budgeted for the floodplain study for the Sackville River in the 2025/2026 Budget Cycle.

Completing a flood plain study for the Sackville River in East Hants could limit any potential flooding issues in future developments in the vicinity of the Upper Sackville River in East Hants.



Planning staff met with members of the Sackville Rivers Association on April 10, 2024, to discuss the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy. As a follow-up the Sackville Rivers Association provided staff with items they would like to have considered as part of the Secondary Planning process. Below are some of the specific issues the committee would like East Hants to take into consideration when developing the secondary plan:

- 1. Development should be encouraged to practice minimum disturbance in watercourse buffers in instances such as watercourse crossings.*
- 2. Watercourse buffers should be a minimum 20-meters wide, with increases to the minimum in proportion to slope.*
- 3. Ideally, minimum watercourse buffers would be 30-meters wide (plus accommodation for slope) and would be zones of non-disturbance (with the exception of a low-impact recreational uses such as a trail)*
- 4. Where parkland contribution is a requirement of the development, preference would be to the watercourse buffer being the priority for allotment and preference would be for the parkland/buffer to be in public ownership (to avoid having private landowners cutting trees to the water post-development)*
- 5. Disallow the burying of natural watercourses/drainage channels, even for short reaches, and require the use of open-bottom culverts or bridges when crossing a watercourse (instead of a standard round culvert)*

6. *Consider adding watercourse buffers to ALL watercourses, which includes all wetlands as defined by the NS Environment Act (which includes any wetland without associated surface water - from the NS Environment Act 2022 - (bg) “wetland” means land commonly referred to as a marsh, swamp, fen or bog that either periodically or permanently has a water table at, near or above the land’s surface or that is saturated with water, and sustains aquatic processes as indicated by the presence of poorly drained soils, hydrophytic vegetation and biological activities adapted to wet conditions)*
7. *Consider the requirement of underground parking in larger residential MUB development (within the footprint of the building) and keep parking requirement for residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional to a minimum to reduce the footprint of above-ground parking (thereby reducing lot disturbance and runoff potential).*

In response to items one and two, East Hants does have watercourse setbacks in the Uniacke area. There is the Watercourse Greenbelt (WG) Zone along the Sackville River and Black Brook, where no development can take place; there is a 30 m setback from the lakeshores; a 20 m setback from watercourses where the WG Zone is not in place and the watercourse is wider than 0.5 m; and a 6 m setback where the watercourse is less than 0.5 m or intermittent or seasonal.

As part of the lakeshore and watercourse setbacks, there are regulations that prevent the removal of vegetation. Unfortunately, some property owners choose to ignore the regulations and destroy the riparian buffer for aesthetic reasons. There seems to be a lack of understanding of how the destruction of the riparian buffer destroys the health of the lake/watercourse ecosystem. Development control staff have completed two educational campaigns in the Uniacke area by mailing letters directly to lakeshore property owners outlining the importance of riparian buffers and reiterating watercourse regulations in East Hants. Planning staff recommend that a requirement be added to the Subdivision Bylaw that would require Surveyors to include buffers from watercourses on plans of subdivision so that potential property purchasers are aware of any development restrictions.

In response to item 4, public ownership of land adjacent to a watercourse would protect the riparian buffer. However, open space dedication in East Hants is not intended for conservation purposes. The East Hants Subdivision Bylaw indicates that any open space dedicated to the Municipality has to be useable land intended for recreational purposes. Although the Bylaw does allow the Municipality to acquire parcels of land for conservation purposes that have specific important ecological and cultural qualities. An alternative to acquiring wetlands for open space purposes would be to acquire them as part of the stormwater management system for larger developments. As an example, in the Corridor, as part of negotiations for master-planned communities, the Municipality will acquire larger wetlands as part of the natural stormwater management system.

Item 6 would be difficult to regulate without guidance from Nova Scotia Environment and Climate Change. Currently, getting feedback or information from NSECC on the location and boundaries of a wetland is challenging. Staff do not have the expertise to determine wetland boundaries in order to create a setback from a wetland. If, in the future, NSECC changes its approach to wetland protection, the Municipality could revisit this request.

Item 7, although underground parking would reduce the amount of hard surface areas for water to runoff, staff do not believe it is a viable option due to the costs of constructing underground parking. If, in the future, Municipal services become available to the Uniacke area, the Municipality could consider revisiting this request again.

- *Comments from Sackville Rivers Association regarding stormwater management*

1. *Development shall, where possible, consider the use of higher-infiltration surfaces (i.e. natural landscaping, permeable concrete, porous asphalt, pavers, etc.) to reduce the amount of runoff from the site, and the use of stormwater management techniques to match pre-development runoff flows/volumes in post-development conditions.*
2. *Development shall, where possible, limit site disturbance strictly to the footprint of buildings/infrastructure, leaving the remaining areas of the lot where construction is not occurring untouched (i.e. no changes to elevations or ground cover, including trees)*

Currently, stormwater management plans are only required in the Mount Uniacke Growth Management Area. New development outside of the Growth Management Area currently doesn't require a stormwater management plan. In accordance with Council direction, Staff are in the process of amending the Subdivision Bylaw (SUB) to require stormwater management plans for developments with new roads in all areas of the Municipality. Amendments to the SUB will likely be completed sometime this fall.

Prior to considering amendments to the Municipal standards to include natural stormwater management methods, staff recommend completing the Sackville Rivers Floodplain study to understand the potential for flooding in the Uniacke area. Once the study has been completed, staff can look to Halifax's Stormwater Management Standards for Development Activities, which contains a selection of Best Management Principles (BMPs) for natural stormwater management.

WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

In 2022, Planning staff met with biologists from the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. At the time DNR expressed concerns about development occurring in East Hants and that continued development was negatively affecting wildlife corridors. Biologists indicated that they were starting to see genetic differences in some species depending if they were from the north or south portion of the province. Essentially, Halifax and the developed areas around Halifax, West Hants, and East Hants are acting as a barrier for wildlife and the populations of wildlife from each end of the province are not mixing.

In an effort to minimize development's impact on wildlife, staff recommends that a study be added to Section E3: Municipal Projects and Studies of the Municipal Planning Strategy to identify and create policies for the protection of natural wildlife corridors. Natural corridors are undeveloped areas that provide linear connections between larger patches of wilderness.

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

The Halifax Regional Municipality has been undergoing a review of its Regional Planning Documents. As part of the review, HRM has updated some of the provisions regarding the environment, including but not limited to the following:

- Protection of natural corridors to allow for wildlife to move freely through the Municipality.
- New policies around urban forests.
- Creating policies around green infrastructure.
- Lake water management plans and establishment of phosphorus loading limits.
- Updating coastal regulations and new policies addressing sea level rise.

Recommendations:

Based on the results of the Uniacke Public Survey and consultation with our reviewing agencies staff have developed a list of proposed recommendations to be included in the draft Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy:

1. Adopt a policy that considers the retention of natural forest cover when considering planning applications for residential development with onsite services to reduce the potential impact on waterways and wetlands and to preserve as much of the natural environment as possible.
2. Amend the Subdivision Bylaw to require that areas of non-disturbance, such as buffers from watercourses, be added to all tentative and final plans of subdivision.
3. Add a project under Section E3: Municipal Projects & Studies to complete a wildlife corridors design study to ensure that future development limits its impact on wildlife's ability to move to and from different parts of the Municipality and beyond.
4. Include a Floodplain study of the Sackville River in the 2025/2026 draft budget.

Attachments