

*Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy:
Environment*

Planning Advisory Committee
May 21, 2024

Planning and Development



EAST HANTS

Background

- As part of the Uniacke Secondary Planning Strategy, comments have been requested from Halifax Water and 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

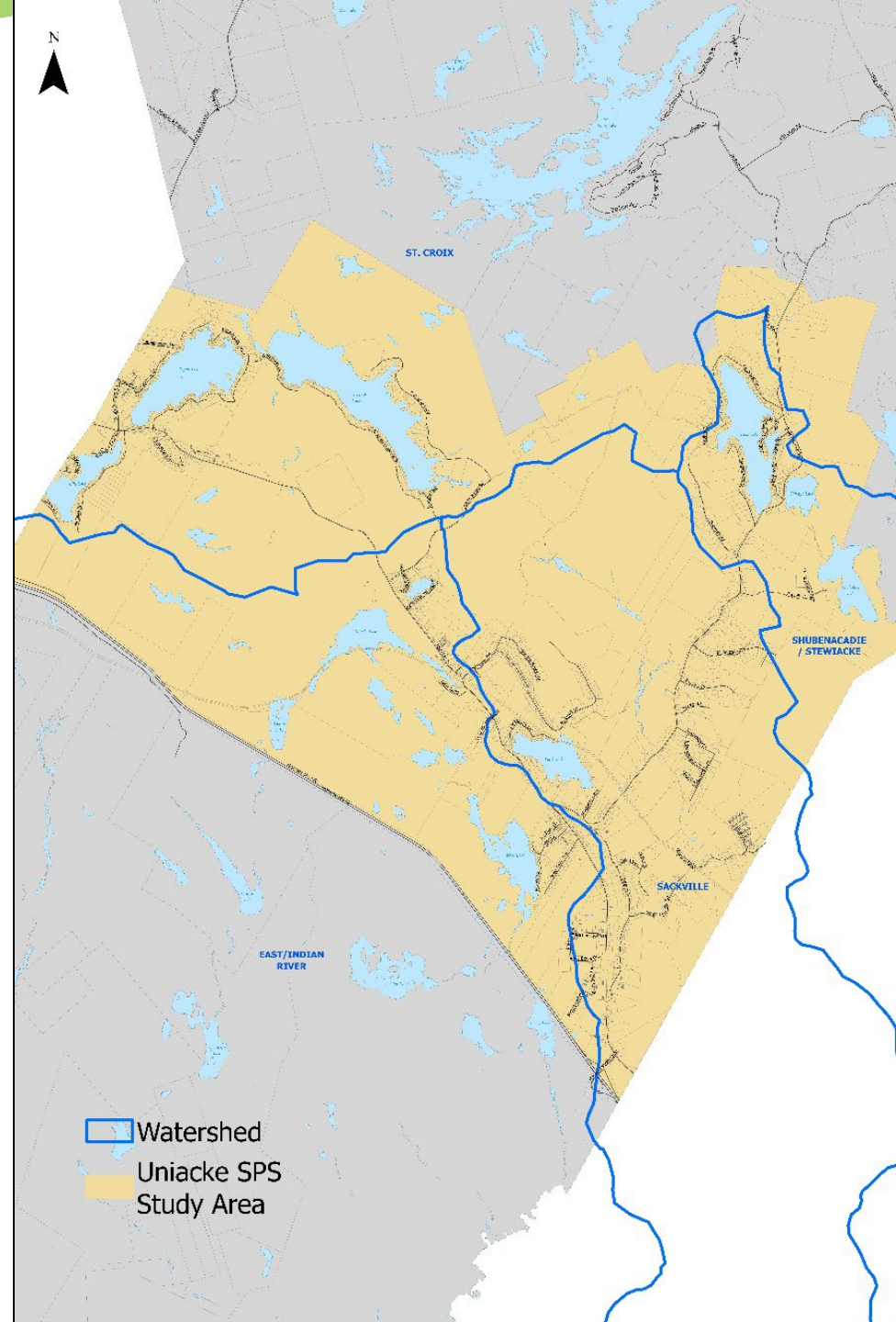
- Residents of Mount Uniacke appreciate the natural environment and the majority of respondents to the public survey indicated that it was one of the many reasons why they enjoyed living in the community.
- When asked if the protection of wetlands was important to them, 95% of respondents indicated ‘yes’ 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.

Survey Results

- 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.
- Adding such a policy to the MPS could apply to areas of on-site services in East Hants.

Halifax Water

- Due to Mount Uniacke's topographical location, the community is at the intersection of four different watersheds.
- The Pockwock Lake Watershed is a sub-watershed of the East/Indian River Watershed.
- 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.



Halifax Water

- 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.

Headwaters of the Sackville River

- 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 Little Sackville River overflowed their banks and caused extensive damage to buildings and infrastructure surrounding the river.



Image from CBC



Image from Saltwire

Headwaters of the Sackville 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 floodplain study for the Sackville River has previously been added to Section E3: Municipal Projects and Studies of the MPS, staff therefore recommend that money be budgeted for the study 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.

Sackville Rivers Association

- 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.
- Details of their requests and staff's response have been included in the report.
- The following slides include a short summary of their questions and staff's recommendation.

Sackville Rivers Association

- The Sackville Rivers Association had suggestions around watercourse buffers. In addition to what is already included in the MPS and LUB, staff recommend adding a regulation to the Subdivision Bylaw that would require watercourse buffers and WG Zone boundaries be added to tentative and final plans of subdivision. This change would impact all of East Hants.
- The Association suggested setbacks from wetlands. It is very difficult to determine the boundaries of a wetland, and information from NSECC is inconsistent. In addition, NSECC does not require setbacks from wetlands and the department does not comment on planning applications when asked for comments. Therefore, without the cooperation and support from NSECC, staff would not recommend establishing setbacks at this time.

Sackville Rivers Association

- Requested that East Hants consider open space dedication for public ownership of land adjacent to a watercourse.
- 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. However, regulations do not prevent the Municipality from taking ecologically or culturally important conservation lands.
- 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.

Sackville Rivers Association

- Sackville Rivers Association also had suggestions around stormwater management.
- Currently, stormwater management plans are only required in the Mount Uniacke Growth Management Area.
- In accordance with Council direction, Staff are in the process of drafting amendments to the Subdivision Bylaw to require stormwater management plans for developments with new roads in all areas of the Municipality.
- 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 wildlife corridors and to make recommendations for the protection of natural wildlife corridors for all of East Hants.
- 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 for Draft Report

- Below is a list of recommendations from the commercial report for 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.

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.***