

Halifax Evolves



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Introduction

The **Canadian Urban Institute** (CUI) is the national platform that houses the best in Canadian city building, where policymakers, urban professionals, civic and business leaders, community activists, and academics can learn, share, and collaborate from coast to coast to coast.

CUI believes that by growing the connective tissue within and between cities of all sizes, we can together make urban Canada all that it can be.

Our **CUI x Local** series shines a spotlight on local responses to some of the most pressing challenges in Canada's large urban regions. In collaboration with city leaders, we're connecting with cities across Canada to seek out the very best ideas that can inform and be adapted by city builders across the country. And what we're seeing are solutions that demonstrate creative, sometimes risky, yet ever-inspiring approaches that haven't received enough national attention—yet.

In this spirit, *Halifax Evolves* reports on what people involved in African Nova Scotian communities, placemaking, community services, economic development, housing, urban planning, civic engagement, and more told us about their city, region and communities. Through meetings with a diverse cross-section of local leaders and passionate advocates, during one week in September 2021, another in May 2022 and virtually in 2023, we learned about the experiences and perspectives of the region's diverse populations. We heard about the many unique collaborations that are driving incredible “made-in-Halifax” solutions and locals' hopes for its future as an inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant region.

Halifax Evolves introduces city builders across Canada to the people, place, and potential of this region. The information gathered here reflects some of the best examples that Haligonians can offer to Canadians seeking inspiration and new ways of doing things to improve their cities.



Letter from Mary W. Rowe

President & CEO
Canadian Urban Institute

The Canadian Urban Institute is in the connective-tissue business, promoting lessons across cities and between people, governments, businesses and institutions engaged in urban life. Every city where a CUIxLocal program has taken place has highlighted the histories and contemporary challenges unique to that place. No one city is alike, but as the program has progressed through the pandemic, we are beginning to see from city-to-city patterns of commonality around which Canada must build a new, strong urban agenda.

Our engagement in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has spanned two years, working with a number of partners including Develop Nova Scotia (now Build Nova Scotia), the Halifax Partnership, Downtown Halifax Business Commission, Halifax Public Libraries and community members.

Halifax Evolves summarizes the many conversations, site visits, shared meals, walks, and follow-up sessions where Haligonians shared with us what's been working, what hasn't, and what's next for the city and region.

Over 24 months of visits and interactions, we have only begun to develop a vivid picture of some of the key dynamics at work across the region and to tell important stories of many journeys that include disenfranchisement and displacement, but also development and creative renewal. HRM has its own unique history, informed by its landscape, leadership, and the legacies of colonialism that reverberate still today, across HRM as across the country. The experiences of Black communities in Nova Scotia are unique and important, not only to people in HRM but also to our understanding of the evolution of urban life in Canada. We hope *Halifax Evolves* provides a glimpse into the rich and layered history of this city and region, and an initial introduction to the steps that people, institutions, and government are taking to come to terms with legacies of exclusion and displacement, and the actions the whole community is endeavoring to take towards restoration and reconciliation.

HRM has an abundance of assets—natural and human. The diversity of its physical environment is only one aspect of its uniqueness. It has a particularly diverse and vast geography – urban, suburban and rural – and is surrounded by neighbouring municipalities that share an interdependence with HRM and each other. We heard how this is both a strength for HRM and also poses a number of challenges, especially post pandemic. The many stories, initiatives, successes and continued challenges in this report provide a vivid picture of Halifax and the region as it grapples with new growth, change and reconciliation with African Nova and Indigenous communities.



We are very appreciative of the generosity of time and spirit the diverse communities of HRM extended to the CUI x Halifax process, and of their willingness to share crucial lessons as they continue to learn and work through together what the future of the Region is to become.

This document combines personal reflections with profiles of local organizations that are catalyzing economic and cultural development in ways that acknowledge and celebrate Halifax’s maritime history and capitalize on new development opportunities, institutional strengthening, and placemaking. Canadian city builders are richer for having even a brief introduction to the issues that the people and communities of HRM are tackling. As we continue to learn through our CUI x Locals, these stories are never the end of a country-wide conversation, but always a beginning. Especially as we collectively emerge from the pandemic and its still untold consequences, we all need to be careful city watchers, paying close attention to what others are trying and learning, to learn how we can support each other in our parallel pursuits of making our cities more livable, more just, and more equitable.

HRM is clearly a brave work-in-progress, one we have been privileged to be invited in to. We look forward to continuing to learn with them—and hope you will too—with this report serving as a starting point.



Summary

Halifax Evolves features the people, place, and potential of Nova Scotia's urbanized coastal region. This report shares how Haligonians are creating inclusive change, building connections that increase access to opportunity, and working toward a just future. This report highlights the ideas and people that are shaping the region to help others drive change in their own cities.

Three clear themes emerged: belonging, transition, and connection.

Belonging

Haligonians tell us about the many influences on their sense of belonging and the need for greater trust between communities, organizations, and government. They want the region to prosper and believe that there must be more equitable access to opportunity, whether for newcomers or people who have lived in the region for generations. They also talk of the incredible potential of community-led solutions to address economic development, planning, housing, and more.

Transitioning

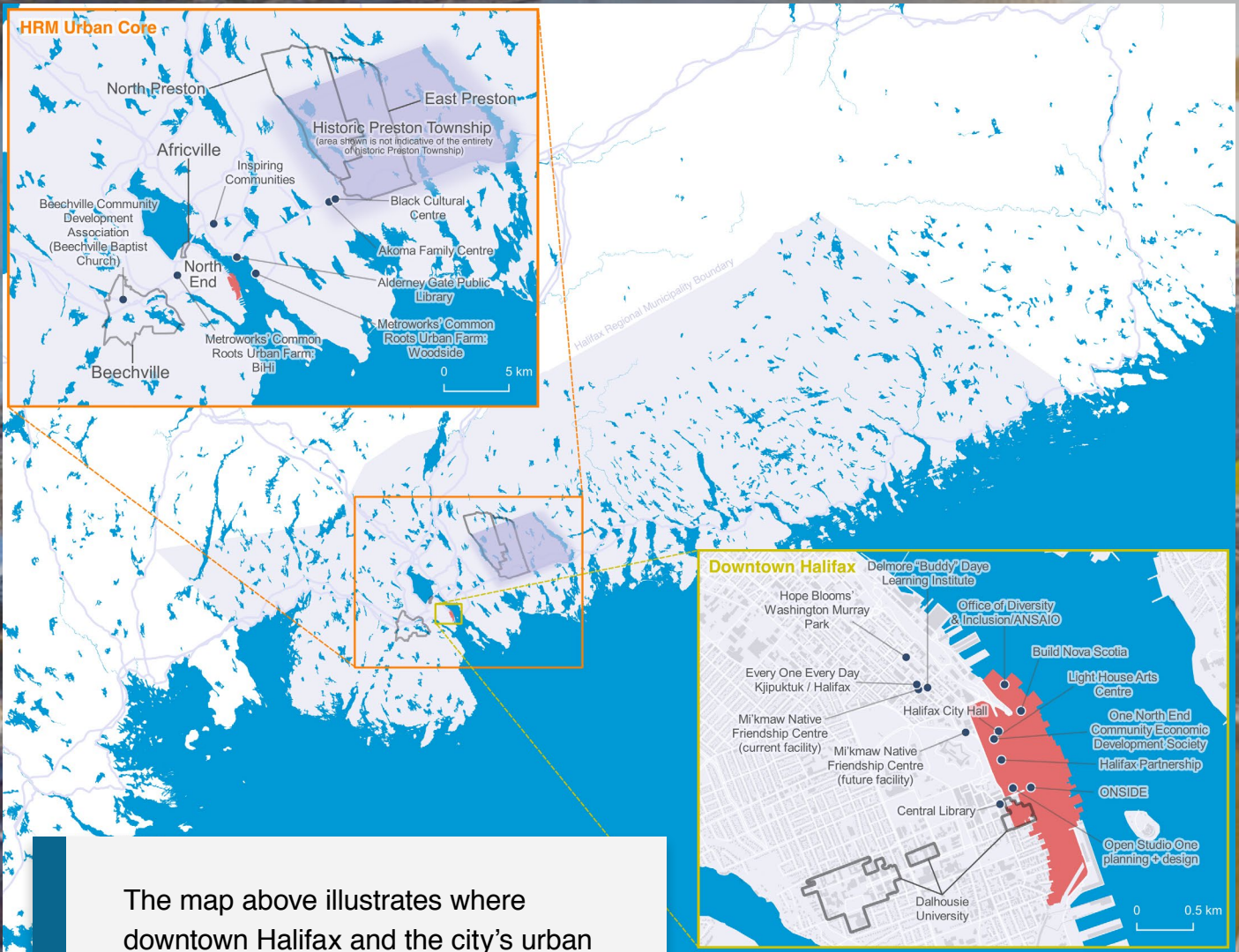
As Halifax experiences tremendous growth, people are coming to terms with what it means to be a large regional centre in a Maritime context. Local leaders believe this is a unique moment in time with the right conditions to challenge the status quo. They are motivated to build toward an equitable and inclusive future, one built on the deep knowledge and connections within and among communities. As the region transitions out of the COVID-19 pandemic, residents express hope that the recovery will serve all communities.

Connection

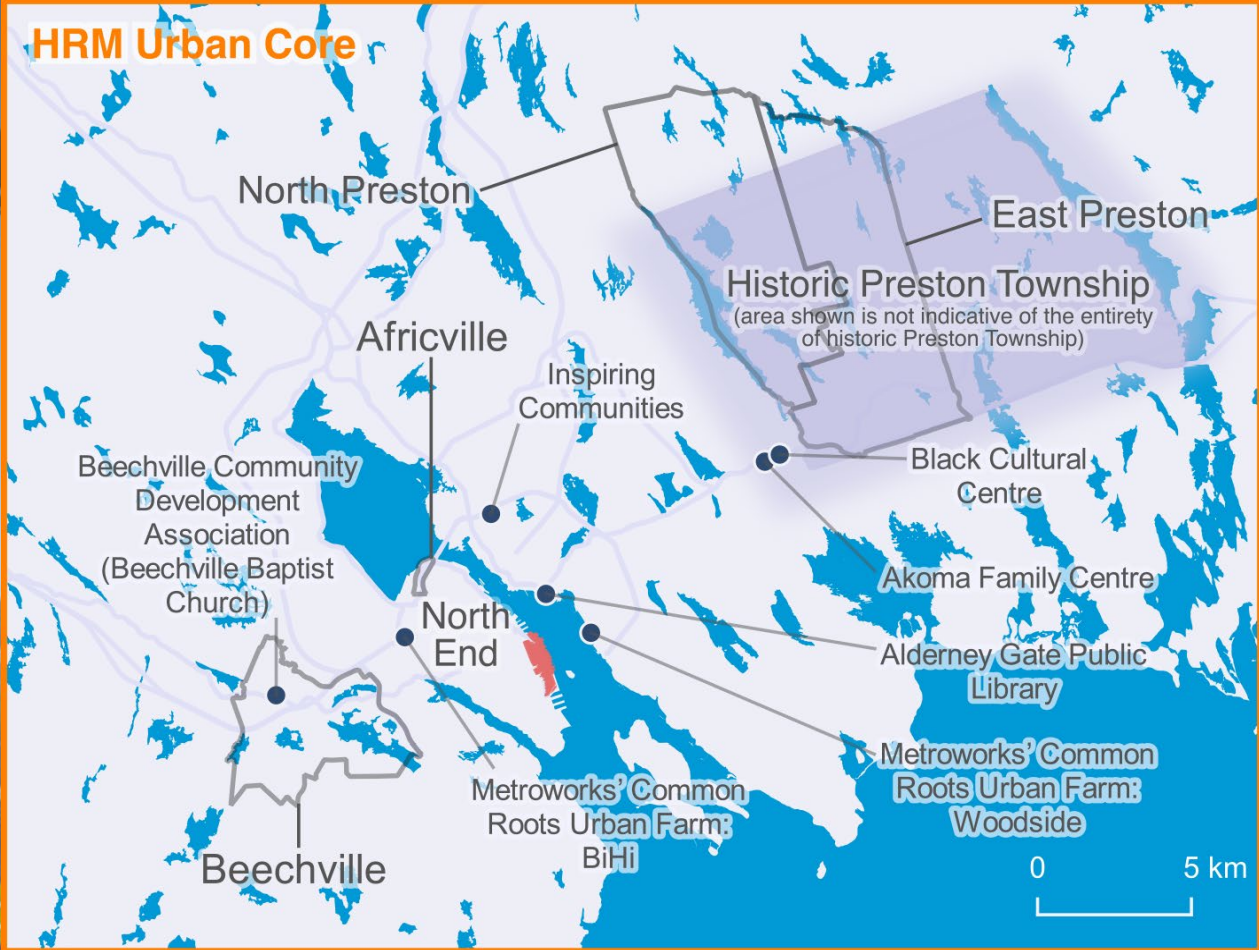
Haligonians reflect on the physical distances between communities and the lack of infrastructure, and how that distance affects their economy and quality of life. Yet the interdependence of the region—socially, culturally, and economically – is a strong emphasis of the work we observed. Each community is comprised of diverse populations with vastly different experiences, and there is a need for better connections that allow for greater opportunity to learn from and about one another. One such example is the potential of the public libraries and transit in ensuring no one is left behind.

Halifax Region Map

Halifax was incorporated as a standalone City in 1841. In April 1996, the Province of Nova Scotia created Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) by amalgamating all local governments in the wider county: the former Cities of Halifax and Dartmouth, the Town of Bedford, and the surrounding rural Halifax County



The map above illustrates where downtown Halifax and the city's urban core lie in relation to the entire HRM Boundary (shaded in light purple). On the righthand page, you'll find the organizations and landmarks that are profiled in *Halifax Evolves*, along with the boundaries of Beechville, Africville, and the Historic Preston Township.



Halifax at a Glance

480,582

July 2022 population, the largest city in Atlantic Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022)

11,000+ years

historic presence of Indigenous Peoples in the region

16,615

2021 Indigenous self-identified population (Statistics Canada, 2022)

20,565

2021 Black self-identified population (Statistics Canada, 2022)

400+ years

historic presence of African Nova Scotians in the region

A Vast Municipality

5,476 km²

massive in scale, seven times the size of Edmonton (Statistics Canada, 2022)

200+ communities

Urban, suburban, and rural

An Attractive Region

9.1%

5-year growth rate

2016-2021 population growth (compared to 5.2% 5-year Canadian growth rate) (Statistics Canada, 2022)

39 years of age

Average age of Halifax's population with people ages 15-29 making up the majority of growth in 2022 (Halifax Partnership, 2023)

4.5%

Annual growth for July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022, adding more than 20,000 new residents (Halifax Partnership, 2023)

31,532

2020-2021 record high university enrollment (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commissions, 2022)

4th

most desirable Canadian city for millennials (Point2, 2021)

An Innovative Coast

2,100+ companies, 15+ start-ups, and 6 post-secondary institutions

concentrated in the Halifax Innovation District

13%

mode shift from vehicle travel to biking, walking and transit use in the Downtown (Downtown Halifax, 2023)

60.5%

of employees provided with opportunities to work remotely (MQO Research, employee and employer survey, 2022)

A Growing, Yet Challenged Economy

\$48,876

second lowest household income per capita among a set of six similarly-sized cities (St. Johns, Quebec City, Kitchen-Cambridge-Waterloo, Regina, and Victoria: Halifax Partnership, 2022)

65%

increase in average house prices between March 2020 and March 2022 (National Bank of Canada, 2022).

7.5.%

highest inflation rate since 1982 (Halifax Partnership, 2023)

1% rental housing vacancy rate

second lowest in the country among 22 cities after Vancouver (CMHC, 2022)

60.7%

percentage of businesses facing difficulties hiring (Halifax Partnership, 2023)

+ 80%

of rural residents have difficulty affording general goods and services (Halifax Partnership, 2022)

\$23.50/hour

2022 living wage (compared to \$14.50/hour minimum wage) (Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, 2023)



People

Visiting and engaging with the community of HRM, we saw incredible energy among passionate Haligonian advocates engaged in the uplift of their communities.

Profiles of many of the people we met are featured, highlighting their vigorous efforts to build a vibrant, connected, and equitable region, and offering inspiration to city builders across Canada.



Progress operates at the speed of trust.”

Kjeld Mizpah (KJ) Conyers-Steede
Principal Consultant, Catalyst Conversation Strategies

Recognizing the Ancestral Homeland of the Mi'kma'ki

Kjipuktuk (Halifax) is located within Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral homeland of the Mi'kmaw Nation for over 11,000 years. The area encompasses all of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and extends into New Brunswick, Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula, and Newfoundland and Labrador. The Mi'kmaq descend from the original inhabitants of Atlantic Canada.

Under the rule of the British (and later Canadian) government, the Mi'kmaq were subjected to cultural assimilation and social experiments that fundamentally altered their way of life. Colonial governments attempted and failed to transform the Mi'kmaq into agriculturalists, and while they were integrated into the 19th- and 20th-century economy as labourers, it left them socially isolated.

For more than a century they faced discrimination, lacked civil rights, and were subjected to the horrors of the residential school system. In 1919 there was a forced relocation of Mi'kmaw residents from Dartmouth and Halifax county to the Millbrook reserve outside of Truro. The result was the resale of more than 300 acres of land by the federal government and removal of Indigenous communities from their native lands in HRM (Rutland, 2018). Then again in the 1940s, the Canadian government forced more than 2,000 Mi'kmaq to relocate to government-designated reserves. The impacts of these colonial experiments resulted in immeasurable grief, social isolation and multi-generational trauma still being felt – and necessary efforts for reconciliation.

Wije'winen: Toward Reconciliation Together

As the first inhabitants of Nova Scotia, the Mi'kmaq were the first inhabitants of Nova

Scotia with a rich history that dates back millennia. Today, the Haligonian Indigenous population is a great mix of many Nations. We heard about Indigenous-led community programming and social justice initiatives that are inclusive of all peoples, fostering the cross-cultural connections necessary to move forward on reconciliation.

The [Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Society](#) is a pillar of Halifax's urban Indigenous community. Its mission is to improve the lives of urban Indigenous Peoples through social and cultural programming. The non-profit has an open-door policy of making its programs, offered through the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, available to all. Programs including child development, employment, families, culture, housing, harm reduction, education, reintegration of offenders, and seniors. It has been improving outcomes for the urban Indigenous community since 1972.



Profile: Pam Glode- Desrochers

Pam is a Mi'kmaw woman, Executive Director of the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre in Halifax, and has been featured by Global News as an Everyday Hero. Her mandate is to provide social-based programming to urban Indigenous people, with a focus on reducing poverty and crime, improving outcomes in health, housing, homelessness, and justice, and promoting personal and community health and well-being. In 2017, Pam was awarded the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers by Canada's Governor General for her exceptional achievements and passionate career spanning over two decades.

Investing in Community Development

After decades under the leadership of Pam Glode-Desrochers, the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre has grown from eight to over 50 programs and employs more than 100 staff who serve thousands of Indigenous people with professional, social, and cultural supports. Its facility is now insufficient for serving the growing and diverse Indigenous urban population and has received broad support in its ambitious efforts to establish a [new building](#). The name of the new facility is the Wije'winen Centre, the Mi'kmaq word for “come with us”—an invitation for all Haligonians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to join the journey toward reconciliation and social justice. This is a placemaking effort rooted in Indigenous values, reflected in the design of its building and its inclusive programs.

The Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Society (MNFS) also plays a prominent role in the vitality of Halifax's North End area. One such example, [Every One Every Day Kijipuktuk-Halifax](#) (EOED), led by the MNFS is a partnership with [Participatory Canada](#) to provide a vehicle for reconciliation, enhance cross-cultural connections, and shift power dynamics through the co-design of community programs. EOED's mission is to expand the vision of Wije'winen into places and neighbourhoods across Halifax.

Another organization, [Ulnooweg](#), began in 1986 as one of a handful of Indigenous organizations sparked by the [Sixties Scoop](#) (the large-scale removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities). Launched as an economic, training, employment, and research firm, today it is an established and innovative non-profit dedicated to the success of Indigenous communities, individuals, and businesses. Ulnooweg has three divisions (development, education and research, and charity) and is in the process of transforming healthcare delivery for Indigenous Peoples across the province through the first [Nova Scotia First Nations Health Authority](#).

Halifax has no shortage of committed change-makers and advocates. We heard from leaders like Rodney Small, Executive Director of [One North End Community Development Society](#) (ONE). Started as a grassroots initiative in response to a CBC news article that described Halifax as “a city with two North Ends,” ONE evolved into a collaborative community development organization that is building the capacity of African Nova Scotians, seniors, and other vulnerable people by developing career paths and entrepreneurship through co-created initiatives.

For example, ONE partnered with [Common Good Solutions](#) and the Province through the Social Innovation Lab for African Nova Scotian Youth (ANS Youth Lab) to answer the question, “What can be done to bring African Nova Scotian youth employment in line with the rates of all Nova Scotian youth?” Working with youth up to age 35, students, employees, employers, and others, the ANS Youth Lab [identified barriers and solutions](#), including one that had never been tried before: a “one-stop shop” app that links African Nova Scotian youth to jobs, scholarships, and mentors.

Although this project is no longer fully funded, ONE continues to advance its work. As Rodney Small told us, “we weren't willing to let it fall to the wayside. As a grassroots organization, it wasn't as easy for us to just go and throw it to the side. We became obligated to close that employment gap.” ONE also runs the [The Matrix CODE](#), another outcome of the ANS Youth Lab, which brings together African Nova Scotians, governments, non-profits, and corporations to help youth develop skills and find technology-related careers.

[Inspiring Communities](#) is Halifax-based organization built on a foundation of collaboration and innovation to advance systems change. Led by Louise Adongo, since its founding in 2018, Inspiring Communities has grown to become the social innovation and evaluation hub in Atlantic Canada, connecting communities to share lessons learned across social impact projects. [Between the Bridges](#), a collective impact initiative based in Dartmouth North, became part of Inspiring Communities in 2019. When COVID-19 necessitated school closures in 2020, Between the Bridges spearheaded a collective effort to meet the unprecedented need to set up remote learning systems quickly. [Read the success story here.](#)

Also located in Halifax’s North End, [Hope Blooms](#) is a youth-driven charity and social

enterprise where youth are empowered to become “change agents in their community; improving food security, education, social inclusion; and disrupting [the cycle of] poverty.” A vibrant and warm place of gathering and ideation, programs include camps, mentorships, agricultural skills, culinary education, and tutoring. Hope Blooms hires high school graduates to help raise funds for their post-secondary studies and champions young kids’ entrepreneurial projects. For example, [Hot Cocoa Boys](#) sold hot chocolate in the winter and lemonade in the summer to raise funds for a new basketball court with a beautified seating area for seniors next to Murray Washington Park.



**Profile:
Rodney
Small**

Rodney is a highly motivated leader with a passion for entrepreneurship, community economic, and people development. He believes innovation and entrepreneurship are key for creating economic prosperity and sustainability. As Executive Director and Job Success Coordinator at ONE, he leads programs that are co-designed with youth to help them achieve their career goals. Rodney holds a Bachelor of Management with Integrity from Dalhousie University and is the subject of [RDS vs. A Story of Race and Justice](#), a short film about his journey to shake stereotypes that followed him as a Black teenager and his successful landmark court case.



**Profile:
Louise
Adongo**

As Executive Director of Inspiring Communities, Louise is deeply committed to transformation in service of advancing social justice, equity and inclusion; particularly for those on the margins and often left out of decisions that disproportionately impact them. She brings care and intention to uncovering the roots of tangled problems; enabling shifts to greater resilience, sustainability, and impact. A resident of Dartmouth, in participating in the CUIxHalifax process, Louise hopes that we asked better questions and brought an unconventional collective of people together to share their thoughts on how we might make incredible things happen as we design for living in new (and regenerative ways) in this growing city.



**In conversation with Rodney Small
[Working from the Grassroots]**

The North Grove is a community hub in Dartmouth dedicated to family-focused and food-oriented programming. As the first community food centre in Atlantic Canada, opened in 2015, North Grove provides a variety of food programs including a drop-in breakfast, community meals, a fresh food market as well as gardening and cooking workshops and demonstrations –all of which are supported by its on-site community farm. Family programs include summer camps for young children, play groups and one-on-one personalized family-matching support and resources.



**Profile:
Kolade
Kolawole-
Boboye**

Kolade grew up with the support of Hope Blooms and now works there as a manager, helping a new generation of kids create their own projects. Building on the experience of starting his own salad dressing business, Kolade has been working on designing and upgrading a greenhouse to complement the outdoor garden and enable the community to grow produce year-round. He also leads the Community Fair Food Market which provides families of children enrolled in any of their programs with digital “market coins” to purchase healthy food for discounted prices. Kolade owns his own record label, LDN Records (Let Dreams Be Noticed), combining his passion for music and youth inspiration. He provides a platform on Hope Blooms’ own stage for musicians to perform and inspires kids to create music through the SEED Summer Camp.

Adapting to Unprecedented Growth

In 2014, [the Province recognized](#) an urgent need to retain newcomers and skilled labourers to reinvigorate its economy and improve standards of living. Halifax is now undergoing a migration boom, setting a record high for university enrollment, which increased again in 2021-2022 (totalling more than 32,000 students) with one-third from other provinces and nearly one quarter from outside of Canada. After a decline in immigration during COVID, Halifax welcomed just over 12,000 new residents from outside of Canada in 2022.

Although the region has been accepting a steady arrival of newcomers for decades, for some there is still a sense of resistance to ‘come from aways’. Both international and domestic migration during the pandemic have intensified the pressure on the region to embrace its growing diversity and draw on this strength as part of what makes it unique, recognizing the talent of recent arrivals as well as its Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities. Similarly, the transition from university to work life is often difficult and highly competitive for recent graduates.

Participants identified a number of opportunities to strengthen the region’s functioning and collective identity, including better transit connections beyond the peninsula, affordable housing, opportunities for meaningful civic engagement, better collaboration among HRM’s departments, and participatory budgeting. On an individual basis, participants identified the need for strengthened social support systems and professional networks to help create connections, such as through volunteer work.

There are a number of programs and organizations supporting the integration of students and immigrants. Each year, [Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia](#) works

with immigrants to build settlement plans that are tailored to individual challenges and skills. It also provides programs for youth, wage subsidies for refugees, volunteer opportunities, employment opportunities for women, trade skills verification, skills matching, and more.

[EduNova](#) works to retain international students after graduation, offering a ten-month program that provides career development opportunities and helps them build stronger community connections. Halifax Partnership's [Connector Program](#) connects new residents and recent graduates with established businesspeople and community leaders. Through informal networking sessions—such as conversations over coffee—participants can grow their professional networks. Since 2009, over 4,400 people have used the Connector Program, while close to 2,000 have found jobs via their new professional relationships. The program was

recently expanded to include an African Nova Scotian stream.

[Fusion Halifax](#) is a volunteer-run organization that connects and empowers young leaders to improve their communities. Fusion runs innovative, environmentally conscious, and accessible activities that support young professionals' success and wellness in the region through networking and skills development.

Elevating Diverse Experiences Through the Arts

The arts were highlighted as a way to bring people together and increase the visibility of diverse community expressions especially for newcomers. Helping to provide a platform for diverse artists, [The Charles Taylor and Media](#)



[Arts Association](#), is a non-profit that honours the influence of African Canadians and other filmmakers. The Association produces the annual Emerging Lens Cultural Film Festival, which provides opportunities for storytellers and artisans to experiment and highlight their art in a variety of medium. The Film Festival is free for the public.

Founded in 2019, [The Wave Placemaking](#) is a non-profit focused on creating people-place connections. The Wave utilizes community design and digital marketing tools in its project planning process, working toward the goal of place-led designed communities. Initiatives led by The Wave include NS+PEI Asian Food Festival and Canada Day Drumming. Similarly, Youth Art Connection partnered with Develop

Nova Scotia (now Build Nova Scotia) to host the Salt Yard Sessions on Halifax’s waterfront featuring fourteen free events celebrating local talent, food, and community.

[Light House Link](#) offers a supportive environment for entrepreneurs in the creative sectors. As a multidisciplinary arts centre, its mission is “to nurture a community of diverse creatives to grow their businesses and grow supportive communities.” It acts as a hub for artists, creative entrepreneurs, non-profits, and businesses under one roof. To represent the diversity of Nova Scotia’s creative sector, it recruits people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, artistic practices, gender identities, skill sets, and lived experiences.



Profile:
Joyce Liu

Joyce moved to Halifax in 2012 to pursue a degree in community planning and follow her dream to live near the ocean. Joyce described how she realized, between graduation and her professional work experience, that local and new Nova Scotians aligned with her values. She founded [Lumi Studios](#) in 2017 to make urban planning more accessible using stories, videography, graphics, and simple language to communicate. In 2019, Liu founded The Wave Placemaking, a non-profit organization which focuses on creating people-place connections. Liu is a storyteller who highlights the positive transformations that result from the arrival of young people and immigrants to Nova Scotia.



Profile:
Shelley Fashan

Shelley is a community-based grassroots activist whose passions include the performing arts, film, and politics. Shelley has a long history of community involvement, activism, and volunteering that includes sitting on the Board of Directors of several music and arts councils. As a documentary filmmaker, Shelley is known for her work with young and emerging artists, creating spaces for them to develop within their disciplines. She focuses on bringing together community, culture, and social development to give youth the tools and mentoring necessary to achieve their goals. Shelley is the co-founder of the Emerging Lens Cultural Film Festival.

TD Main Stage





Place

Geography and built form shape cities and their cultures, informing where we live, how we live, how we move through our urban spaces, and how we connect to each other. Place includes the natural and built landscape around us, formal and informal organizations, and our access to economic and institutional resources, transportation, community services, green space, and more. *Halifax Evolves* highlights the challenges facing a broad region with both urban and rural components as well as the individuals, institutions, and organizations aiming to transition Halifax toward a more equitable and inclusive future.



There's a need for change and reorganizing our thinking about how we organize cities altogether—how we get from one place to another, how we connect different parts of our lives, how we can actually think about a form of city as much more dynamic than it's been. [Halifax]'s growing at a really, really good pace. But we frequently take growth as something that happens to us, as opposed to something we plan for. It requires us to think beyond what's happening today and think more about the world we want to live in tomorrow, and then find ways today to get closer to that.”

Frank Palermo

Founder and President, Open One Studio planning + design

Investing in Infrastructure and Mobility

HRM is a vast region of over 5,000 km² with interconnected urban, suburban, and rural areas. Trying to address the challenges of various areas—urban, suburban and rural—is complex, as different areas have strong identities while interdependent. Rural communities have seen a significant increase in some infrastructure like high-speed internet but lack other basic infrastructure like sidewalks. Access to transit, housing, and employment remain problematic for some communities, particularly among rural African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities.

The sheer expanse of the HRM was acknowledged as a challenge in creating accessible and frequent transit making it difficult for people to move around the region, preventing permeability between neighbourhoods, and creating economic hardship or a lack of opportunities for those who do not own a car. This impact was felt acutely by newcomers, youth, and households with low-to-moderate incomes—especially rural residents without access to a vehicle.

Community transportation services have stepped up to fill the gap. [MusGo Rider](#) and [BayRides](#) provide door-to-door transportation services to number of rural communities including Musquodoboit Harbour, Musquodoboit Valley, Lake Echo, Porters Lake, Chezzetcook, Sheet Harbour, and surrounding communities. Run by a Cooperative, the service has filled a gap not provided by public transit systems and could be extended across the region to provide more consistent transportation options.

In 2021, the Province introduced the Joint Regional Transportation Agency Act and formed the [Joint Regional Transportation Agency](#) (JRTA) to conduct a comprehensive review of all modes of transportation associated with HRM and surrounding areas, including roads, bridges, highways, ferries, transit, rail, airports, and ports. A forthcoming report by the JRTA and on-going engagement will inform a [Regional Transportation Plan](#) that seeks to ensure consistency with HRM's growth and development, as well as safe, efficient, and coordinated movement of people and goods.



Commemorating African Nova Scotian Communities

The presence of Black people in Nova Scotia predates Halifax's founding as a municipality in 1749. After the American Revolution, Black settlers and Loyalists began to arrive, many via the Underground Railroad, seeking land and a life of freedom promised by the British. The descendants of these migrants are African Nova Scotians, a cultural group distinct from Black newcomers who arrived from the Caribbean and Africa to Canada starting in the 1920s.

African Nova Scotians' 400-year presence in the region has created deep roots and attachments to place. However, over decades a number of decisions by public authorities resulted in the displacement and disenfranchisement of residents from historic African Nova Scotian communities. Africville was one such place, established in the mid-1800s on the Bedford Basin's south shore. Despite on-going challenges such as inadequate plots of land, a lack of basic services and inhospitable uses, African Nova Scotians persevered and built socially-connected, self-sufficient communities. In 1964, Halifax City Council voted to forcibly relocate Africville residents claiming the land for industry and infrastructure with only some of the residents receiving compensation. The last remaining home was destroyed in January 1970, and for years the land stood vacant, used only as a dog park. A [formal apology](#) was issued in 2010. Residents of Africville and their descendants continue [to seek compensation from governments](#) and ways to recognize the legacies of their community.

Other African Nova Scotian communities have suffered similar experiences and outcomes to that of Africville. For example, displacement and transformation has impacted access to the baptismal lakes of Preston Township and Beechville—places of significance to the African Nova Scotian community.

Local organizations continue to advocate for commemoration of these communities. In 1983 the [Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia](#) (BCC) was established to protect, preserve, and promote the history and culture of African Nova Scotians. In Africville, a reconstruction of the original Seaview United Baptist Church stands by the shore of the Bedford Basin and houses a museum to commemorate the historic African Nova Scotian community.

Valuing the unique cultural assets of these historic Halifax communities is a crucial step in reconciling and dismantling systemic practices. Today, in some African Nova Scotian communities, many people still do not have clear title to their land and there remain outstanding land claims. The path to full reconciliation is on-going.

Keeping Assets in the Community

For over 200 years, many African Nova Scotians have been living on land passed down by their ancestors without clear title. As a result, they face challenges in securing a mortgage, bequeathing or selling their land, or accessing housing grants. Meanwhile, the younger generation is becoming disconnected from their connection to place. As Dr. Harvi Millar of St. Mary's University explained, "[Due to] lack of opportunity, many have had to leave the province. When [land] passes on, the children do not necessarily want to return, and so they have to dispose of their parents' assets."

Grassroots organizations within African Nova Scotian communities have called for local homeowners to refrain from selling their land, as they recognize that ownership is a key driver of intergenerational wealth, which contributes to the ability to build the economic security necessary for success and quality of life in one's own community.

The Province's [Land Titles Initiative](#) aims to help residents in the communities of North Preston, East Preston, Cherry Brook/Lake Loon, Lincolnville, and Sunnyville attain clear title to their land for no cost, a legal process that is otherwise expensive. As an example, Akoma Holdings owns the assets of the [Akoma Family Centre](#), including 300 acres of land and several buildings. Akoma is committed to stewarding these assets from an Afrocentric perspective to create economic and social opportunities for African Nova Scotian communities and Haligonians in general.

Community land trusts and other models of land tenure are being explored for funding housing. Positive examples already exist in the region, such as in Preston Township, where advocates want to see funding restored to the Preston Area

Housing Fund to address the housing needs for that community. Maps Chidzonga highlighted the work in Upper Hammonds Plains as another example: "In many ways they [the community of Upper Hammonds Plains] are set to be the model, potentially, for how communities can engage in community land trust initiatives."

Responding to a Housing Shortage and Increased Homelessness

Rapid population growth is increasing the need for housing supply and affordable housing solutions in the HRM. As in other Canadian cities, some are concerned that older, affordable housing stock is being torn down and replaced with pricier new developments. Rent increases, low vacancy rates and "renovictions" were also described. The cost of housing was made even more apparent during the pandemic, when the average sale price for a house in Halifax increased by 65%—almost twice the national average. Even areas outside of the downtown core do not offer housing that is affordable to meet community needs.

While the HRM remains affordable compared to other regions in Canada, Halifax Partnership notes that inflation and housing price increases are outpacing the increase in average incomes. Eric Lucic, HRM Director of Strategic Projects, concurred, noting that stagnant wages are "at the root of the affordability crisis." On the supply side, Patrick Sullivan, President and CEO of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce, warned that rising interest rates, building costs and labour shortages are limiting developers' ability to build housing. While the HRM approves approximately 4,000 housing units each year, it's not keeping pace with demand. As Patrick explained, to catch up within the next five years, construction of 11,000 to 12,000 units must happen each year.

Affordable housing falls within the mandate of provincial government, and the HRM is not equipped with the necessary tools to address the situation alone. Organizations are developing affordable housing, largely funded by CMHC's [Rapid Housing Initiative](#), a federal program. As with transit, the region's vast geography creates challenges, as rural, suburban, and urban require different approaches to housing and homelessness.

Given pressures on housing and other economic challenges, the number of unsheltered people in HRM has more than doubled from spring 2021.

[A count of those](#) without a safe, permanent address identified 586 people on April 7, 2022.

Volunteer groups are doing what they can to help, with some churches offering space for tents and [Halifax Mutual Aid](#) providing insulated, watertight sheds. Another group of residents established [P.A.D.S. Community Advocacy Network](#).

“The biggest issue for housing seems to be the lack of affordable, safe, and appropriate housing

in the city. In the homelessness sphere, the challenges are around funding. I've spoken to a number of service providers who say it's difficult to find qualified and experienced people to work with street-involved individuals, and even more difficult to pay them appropriately so they remain with the organization. There's lots of great work going on, but much of it seems to be volunteer-driven and disconnected.” – Brianna Maxwell, Author of *Exploring Homeless Vulnerability and Climate Change in HRM, 2020*

According to Sue Uteck, Executive Director of the [Spring Garden Business Area Association](#), the lack of housing and access to services is having an impact on people's well-being. “If you're at risk on the streets, there is nowhere to use a bathroom. No one's going to let you in.[!] plead every year [for] a washroom in Victoria Park. Can somebody have some dignity?”

Navigator Outreach Program

Even before the pandemic, additional resources were provided to the street-involved population. The Navigator Street Outreach Program was started in 2007—developed and supported by the [Spring Garden Area Business Association](#) and [Downtown Halifax Business Commission](#). The program provides dedicated staff (“Street Navigators”) to connect street-involved individuals with support to overcome barriers to accessing employment, housing, and health services. Supports include finding housing, employment, medication, access, obtaining identification and referrals to appropriate community programs. Acting as a one-stop resource sharing organization, the Navigator Outreach Program makes the process of finding support easier as the program continues to grow. The program now extends to Downtown Dartmouth and North End Halifax run by the [North End Business Association](#) and [Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission](#).

Activating Places: Placemaking, the Waterfront and Redevelopment

We heard many examples of placemaking and “place activation” that enliven public spaces and create opportunities for social connection through art, food, performance, and more. Community groups and residents want even more initiatives to help create a sense of place in downtown Halifax. They suggested that streamlined regulations and additional funding could help maintain and activate such public spaces. While there are effective plans and policies for placemaking, implementation can be slowed or halted by multiple departments needing to be involved and general risk aversion. In reaction, people and organizations have worked to quicken the pace of action with “guerilla tactics” used by arts organizations seeking to display their works or create new spaces outside of formal arrangements.

On a broader scale, the evolution of the Halifax Waterfront organization into Develop Nova Scotia (DNS), now Build Nova Scotia (BNS), has a broad mandate to steward strategic development projects for the Province, beyond the waterfront itself. With the expansion of uses along the waterfront to include more residential units, retail and essential services, BNS has been engaged at the onset of new development to focus on placemaking efforts that cater to the everyday needs and experiences of local communities. The work of BNS is fostering a much greater recognition that placemaking plays a vital role in economic development.

One example, the CUNARD Public Space project, is a new three-acre, mixed-use space at the water’s edge. As part of the engagement process, Develop Nova Scotia (now Build Nova Scotia) conducted almost 200 hours of conversations on play, inclusion, and other topics with almost 150 stakeholders and partners. The process integrated an

inclusive design approach with traditional public engagement formats to facilitate deeper learning about the needs and experiences of various communities related to the waterfront. BNS’ focus shifted from “what we heard” to “what we’re hearing” to acknowledge the role of relationship-building through public engagement. Learning should continue, building connections that continue to have a vital role in placemaking, place management, and economic development moving forward. CUNARD’s [What We’re Hearing Report](#) is a compilation of many principles and lessons learned through this process.

Another example is the Cogswell Interchange, which consumed 16 acres of land, destroying connections between downtown Halifax, the North End, and a large section of waterfront, and displacing thousands of vulnerable residents when it was built in the 1970s.

In 2013, Halifax embarked on a multi-year plan to reconnect the waterfront and downtown. [The Cogswell District](#), Halifax Regional Municipality’s largest city-building project ever, will replace the expansive roadway interchange with a new neighbourhood to knit together downtown and Halifax’s North End, and help reconnect with more of the waterfront. The plan includes a renewed grid street layout, a pedestrian square, and additions to the region’s cycling infrastructure. A [design review and report](#) completed by Gehl & Associates identifies modifications to ensure the neighbourhood is accessible and connected, and that the public realm supports a livable environment. The report resulted in changes to the plan to address connectivity and pedestrian safety. While the plan has evolved in physical design, there is concern that [issues of land divestment and commitments to affordable housing](#) are still not in place as construction commences on the Cogswell District.

Placemaking and Wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing is a broad construct that typically includes an individual's own evaluation and cognitive appraisal of their life, happiness, satisfaction, positive emotions (i.e., joy and pride) or negative emotions (i.e., pain, worry, and anxiety).

In Halifax, work has been completed by [Davis Pier](#) to evaluate the relationship between the experience generated by placemaking projects and the perceived wellbeing of individuals who visit a particular place. Advocates for the use of subjective wellbeing see it as a way to gather evidence-based data to be used by decision makers on placemaking initiatives.

While Build Nova Scotia is still testing the methodology, case studies suggest a causation between placemaking and increased social wellbeing. In this instance, subjective wellbeing is measured based on four questions: How satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Overall, how happy do you feel? Overall, how worried do you feel? Overall, how much do you feel things you do are worthwhile? Findings are evaluated against a control group in order to compare and understand the net benefits of the experience being measured. If one desired outcome of placemaking is to increase the happiness and satisfaction of residents, a documented measure of wellbeing can be used to support investments in placemaking.

Introducing Community Action Planning

Communities are looking to be included as equal partners in municipal planning processes. Those we spoke to identified the importance of “moving at the speed of trust,” taking cues from the Black community, and acknowledging that relationships with the HRM have been strained for generations. They explained that it has taken honesty, sincerity, energy, and time to rebuild trust, and required government officials to meet the community on their terms and in their spaces.

The [Beechville Community Action Plan](#) (CAP) provides a case study of how an Afrocentric approach can help a community realize its own vision. Community advocate and researcher Maps Chidzonga describes HRM's approach in

Beechville as, “a departure from the traditional way of doing things in the sense that we invested more time and energy on the front end of the process, to go out to the community, to spend time, to listen, to learn, but most importantly to respond to [Beechville's] needs.”

HRM city planners are working to prioritize the needs of the Beechville community through community action planning. Kate Greene, HRM's policy program manager, referred to the community's significant sense of loss, describing how in the 1970s and 1980s, the Province and HRM encouraged industrial development that encroached on Beechville. Additionally, in the 1990s, new development displaced many of the original families who resided there since the War of 1812. A priority of the Beechville CAP was to recognize the historic community and advocate for the respect it deserves. Kate told us that

“Community action planning is a term we’ve been using to describe the work that we’re trying to do in community. This comes from the energy in community around developing a strategic plan and plotting a way forward and plotting a vision for their development. So, the way I see this is HRM is playing a support role to help the community realize their vision.”

The Beechville CAP signals a new way of working with communities. It includes expanding the community’s boundaries to the original historic limits, erecting commemorative signs, and protecting and celebrating the community. This includes transferring ownership of burial grounds near the Beechville Baptist Church and the baptismal path that leads to Lake Lovett, developing an archaeological plan, and renaming Lakeside Industrial Park to Beechville Industrial Park. The CAP also identifies publicly owned lands for the HRM to transfer back to the community for greenspace, gardens, and community land trusts; the need to improve water quality and access; and the need to work with the Province to secure affordable housing in the Munroe subdivision.

Dr. Harvi Millar further explained, “We have to build the capacity and we have to resist the temptation to engage organizations and consultants and so on from outside of our community who do not understand what we are. We need to begin to trust our own capabilities.

Otherwise, we will continue the state of dependence on outside suppliers.”

The [Beechville Community Development Association](#) (BCDA) has also developed its own strategic plan rooted in the desires of the community. The BCDA is housed in the Beechville Baptist Church and is made up of committed community members from youth to elders. HRM was invited into their planning process and now provides ongoing staff support to take on tasks. CUI attended the BCDA’s bi-weekly walkabout, which brings planners to the community to listen and learn through place-based narratives and lived realities. Maps Chidzonga told us, “I think these community walkabouts are deeply humanizing. Not often do you get planners and the community interacting in between or outside of projects.”

Maps told us that communities want to see more response and culturally appropriate approaches to urban planning and engagement. “Planning tends to be very opaque, very rigid, and very bureaucratic and it’s often market-led and market centric. This [traditional] type of planning really prioritizes the growth imperative, and is defined by the dominant group, those with the most power and influence. So, if you’re not the dominant group, planning happens to you, not for you, not with you.”





Profile: **Mapfumo “Maps” Chidzonga**

Maps is a passionate community advocate and researcher committed to upholding the moral foundations of community, respect for human dignity, and the promotion of alternatives to unfair social, political, and economic systems. He developed an Anti-Black Racism Resource Guide to educate HRM staff on the historical context of how urban planning has contributed to contemporary injustices in Black communities. For Maps, the most rewarding part of his work with the Region’s African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO) and the Office of Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) was the opportunity to meaningfully engage underrepresented and underserved communities to elevate their voices in planning processes. He continues his work at a greater scale as the Senior Engagement Strategist for the Province’s Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives (OEA). Maps plays a lead role in shaping, guiding, and supporting multiple online and in-person engagements that inform an all-of-government approach to address systemic inequity and racism, promoting diversity, accessibility, and inclusion, and achieving equitable and anti-racist outcomes that improve the social and economic well-being of all Nova Scotians.



In Conversation with Maps Chidzonga

[Afrocentricity: A Humanizing Approach to Community Planning]

To this end, Maps offered an example of how an Afrocentric lens could be applied to zoning by-laws in Beechville. Historically, African Nova Scotian families built homes for their relatives in village-style clusters known as homesteads. This pattern is not permitted under current regulations that limit lots to one or two houses. A culturally appropriate zoning policy that enables Beechville residents to build homesteads that follow these historic patterns of settlement would help reinforce social support systems and strengthen African Nova Scotians sense of identity, belonging, and rootedness in the land.





Profile: Delvina Bernard

Delvina is an adult educator, artist, and institutional change strategist with a 30-year impact. Recently, she was appointed as the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Advisor at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax. Delvina is a seventh-generation African Nova Scotian who traces her Canadian ancestry to the United Empire Black Loyalists of 1783 and the Black Refugees of 1812. She has been a strong influence in the growth and development of the Canadian Afrocentric education movement and is a member of Afrocentric International. She founded both the Africentric Learning Institute of Nova Scotia and the African Nova Scotian Music Association. As a former singer-songwriter, producer, and music director for the internationally acclaimed feminist music collective, Four the Moment, Delvina is recognized as a change-agent in the Canadian music industry, widely credited for giving shape to the unique African Nova Scotian/Canadian music aesthetic. Delvina is a staunch proponent of developing strong communities of activism and support for institutional change, and is an advocate for gender justice, Indigenous rights and reconciliation, reparatory justice for the enslavement of African people, and economic and social justice for marginalized populations. Delvina believes, “adults can be taught to walk away from unproductive habits, unconscious biases, and systemic structures that keeps society confined to status quo ways of seeing and doing.”

Potential

We heard (and saw) HRM as a regional municipality in a state of significant transition, particularly in light of three years of COVID-related impacts. This engagement suggests HRM has a unique opportunity to become a model for how a mid-sized municipality – with a vast geography – can accommodate growth and generational changes, diversify its economy, and address key challenges in ways that best harness community solutions to inform and strengthen municipal capacity and leadership.

Halgionians told us what they see for the future of their region and the opportunities that they want to build on. As the region experiences population growth, builds greater understanding of systemic exclusion, and looks to an equitable future, it has an opportunity to respond, led by community, with the support of government and other partners. *Halifax Evolves* highlights the calls to action and tangible initiatives that are building connections among people and place to shape the region's future.



There's always a power in an invite... It's about how you present a space to the public which will entail whether or not they are even welcomed to come."

Rodney Small
Executive Director, ONE North End



[In Conversation with Rodney Small \[Power in an Invite\]](#)

New Economy: Growth in Technology, Innovation and Post-secondary

By virtue of its growing population, concentration of universities, and development potential, HRM stands at a moment in time where its residents can take advantage of growth to guarantee a more equitable future. But seizing the opportunity requires the support and buy-in of the municipal and provincial governments.

Efforts to develop an integrated regional economic development strategy as promoted by the [Halifax Partnership](#) that both strengthens the local economy AND promotes investment and new opportunities is seen as a powerful initiative but exposes underlying tensions between advocates of the more traditional approaches and understandings of Halifax's economic strengths, and those wanting to see more investment in innovation and risk-taking.

We heard calls for governments operating in the Halifax region to investigate how to create more flexibility in funding, granting, and administrative processes to support innovation and adopt the products of companies based in Halifax.

Wendy Luther, President and CEO of Halifax Partnership would like to see governments as early adopters of technology developed in Halifax. Procurement processes and information technology security issues were identified as barriers. "Government needs the will and openness to try something different." There is an opportunity to support local startups in the Halifax Innovation District and give them opportunities to thrive. And, as proposed by Nova Scotia's former Deputy Minister of the Department of Business Bernie Miller, "Institutional level change is required for the region to leverage its comparative advantage."

In partnership with HRM, Halifax Partnership developed [People. Planet. Prosperity. Halifax's Inclusive Economic Strategy 2022-27](#). The report was informed by conversations with and written

submissions from more than 2,500 business leaders, residents, and partners in communities throughout the municipality, who shared ideas, insights, and actions to build a more inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and prosperous Halifax over the next five years.

Wendy Luther noted, "What we have learned from these conversations is embedded throughout the Strategy with a focus on ensuring all Halifax residents can contribute to, and benefit from Halifax's growing economic prosperity, that we need to continue to support business and communities as they rebound from the pandemic's ongoing effects, and that we have untapped economic potential in rural Halifax. At the same time, we need to tackle growing pains, so ensuring our residents have access to a range of affordable housing options is critical for current and future inclusive economic growth."

From our conversations, Halifax is already the home to many exciting projects and recognized as a great city to study. An innovative approach towards tackling many ongoing challenges could come from the relationship between the City and post-secondary institutions to leverage assets and allow students to form deeper connections with the city around them. We heard that although funding requirements restrict certain work, universities and colleges in Halifax are finding ways to share resources and leverage assets from the field to engage their students in community-based programming. [Sandboxes](#), a collaborative space, allows access to heavy material equipment for both students and businesses, creating a more porous interface with the city itself. Also, the HRM Planning Department hosts six internships a year as a way to engage student with the possibilities of working in Halifax after graduation. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Regional Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program (REAP) is collaborating with a number of universities including Dalhousie on a [program](#) to utilize economic concepts to tackle issues at a localized scale.

Belonging: A More Inclusive And Equitable City

Committing to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

International recognition that people of African descent are a distinct group whose human rights need to be promoted and protected has spurred institutional change in Nova Scotia. In 2004, the Province created [African Nova Scotian Affairs](#) to help people access programs and services, promote history and heritage, facilitate conversations between community, government and partners, and work with communities to resolve issues. In addition, HRM created the [African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office](#) (ANSAIO), now integrated into its Office of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in response to the 2010 Africville apology. ANSAIO leads [initiatives in workplaces and communities](#) to address anti-Black racism, and in June 2021, Regional Council approved a [framework](#) to guide the development of a strategy and action plan. D&I has also appointed Diversity Advisors to work with equity-deserving groups in the region—African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, immigrants, gender, accessibility, Francophones—and facilitate their full participation in civic life.

Building Trust

Haligonians are passionate and creative problem-solvers that want to see equitable change happen. Historical experiences have eroded trust between community organizations and the HRM thus highlighting the importance of leadership by government, institutions, and other organizations to overcome past experience and build trust.

Participants suggested that the “trust gap” could be addressed with efforts to create more

intentional relationships through inclusive and meaningful public engagement, greater representative diversity, and securing equitable economic development. We also heard calls for governments and institutions to create pathways to urban planning processes that enable communities to advocate and build for themselves and that allow diverse community members to be involved in the development process and to participate in decisions being made, and at leadership tables.

HRM staff recognize they have a role to play in building meaningful, ongoing, and face-to-face relationships, in supporting community-based leaders and local facilitators, and in providing continuity between HRM and the community beyond any singular project. In response, HRM city planners described how they are rethinking their approach to community engagement by making an effort to shift from “transactional” to “reciprocal” relationships.

“I learned as planners it is not our job to manage expectations in community. We need to let communities lead and just be honest about boundaries.” – Community Planning & Engagement session participant

“I loved the idea of reciprocal relationships and the efforts being made—it takes time, money, and commitment.” – Community Planning & Engagement session participant

Crafting an Inclusive Future

A definitive highlight of our CUI x Halifax sessions was learning about the ongoing community-led economic development work of the African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity Advisory Committee. Comprised

of representatives from each of the historical communities in the province, the committee is leading the implementation of an action plan endorsed unanimously by Halifax Regional Council in May 2020. Multiple participants identified this framework as a model for any strategy going forward, as it not only centers the needs and desires of communities as foundational to the planning and implementation process, but also recognizes that they have been planning for generations.

Committee Co-Chair Dolly Williams explained that while the current generation is not the first to work toward self-determination, it is the first time that HRM has engaged the Black community as equals in economic development. “This plan is built on the contributions and continued work that was done by countless

generations of African Nova Scotians who have come before us. This simply is the first time the City of Halifax has engaged the community as equal to help create and implement the plan.”

The [ANS Road to Economic Prosperity Action Plan](#) is a five-year strategy and a “living document” developed and owned by African Nova Scotians. Built on six Afrocentric values – foundation, unity, continuity, alignment, collaboration, and leadership – it provides 30 actions. The approach to its creation and implementation offers a framework for culturally appropriate community development across Canada.

As Carolann Wright, Director of Capacity Building & Strategic Initiatives African Nova Scotian Communities at Halifax Partnership



Profile: Dolly Williams

Dolly is a passionate African Nova Scotian community elder dedicated to helping others. Dolly is intensely involved in her community, serving as Co-Chair of the African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity Advisory Committee representing East Preston. She is also Chair of the 30-year-old Preston Area Housing Fund, serves on the board of Akoma Family Centre, and is one of the five task force members to develop the Black Business initiative (BBI), which celebrated 25 years of success. Dolly is the author of *Black Women Who Made a Difference in Nova Scotia*, is the recipient of many awards, and has delivered presentations across Canada and internationally. In the face of 400 years of systemic discrimination against her community, Dolly warns, “we cannot put our full trust in some governments,” and that communities must work “For Us. By Us. With Us.” in collaboration and unity.

Among other strategies, the ANS Road to Economic Prosperity Action Plan identified Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) as a method of enabling and funding the development of local community infrastructure. Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) ensure that community resources are part of a development agreement. Communities can negotiate for amenities and assets such as green space, affordable housing, and jobs before a project begins – ensuring that benefits from new development are directed back to the community. HRM has no legislative requirement to implement CBAs, and developers are not mandated to establish such agreements. As such, legislative change would be required.

stated, “We are clearly here, as peoples of African descent, because of economics. How we were treated in that process becomes about race. We are here because it was economically expedient to have free land and free labour in order for the colonial mindset to have profited.” Carolann summarized the Action Plan’s economic priorities as:

- building unity, capacity, and leadership among African Nova Scotian communities;



Profile: Carolann Wright

Carolann is an African Nova Scotian elder and Halifax Partnership’s Director of Capacity Building and Strategic Initiatives for African Nova Scotian communities. She is a trained facilitator and mediator with over 30 years of experience in economic development. She works on behalf of African Nova Scotian communities on strategy, community planning, and labour market development. Carolann talks about “keeping her head on a swivel,” to be nimble and adaptable when dealing with the government and navigating the planning process. She led the first economic plan that includes a Black community and has done extensive work to build unity among African Nova Scotians. Halifax is very special to her because it hosts the oldest population of Africans in the diaspora in Canada.

- establishing land ownership;
- developing infrastructure within communities; and
- improving education, employment, and entrepreneurship outcomes for African Nova Scotians.

“We are African Nova Scotian. We are diverse and strong. We come with a long history of achievements, resourcefulness, and resilience. We bring strong, vibrant, creative expertise, and experience in all aspects of community life. Over the expanse of Nova Scotian history, our consistent contribution to the socio-economic, cultural, and political vitality to the province continues to be significant. Our commitment to defining our agenda, crafting our future, protecting our heritage, defending the integrity of our historic lands, legacies, and the boundaries remain critical and urgent priorities. Our value, cultures, priorities are informed by the best interests of our communities. This includes our shared understanding of our right to determine our own ways forward to go on with our work, in our African diverse framework and traditions, to own, control, and manage our economic affairs, and resources to support the development and application of appropriate structures, policies, and action in this regard.” - Dolly Williams, Co-Chair, East Preston, Road to Economic Prosperity Advisory Committee



**In Conversation
with Carolann Wright
[Toward African Nova Scotian
Prosperity]**

Transition: The Right Moment For The Region

Measuring Change

In May 2022, Halifax Partnership launched its updated annual [Halifax Index](#), which provided an opportunity for CUI and Develop Nova Scotia (now Build Nova Scotia) to bring together Black leaders and an Indigenous leader from the business and research communities to discuss data collection and relationship building.

Participants raised the importance of collecting the right data for communities to truly see how they are doing. However, there was concern that information will be used against communities. Carolann believes this would be facilitated by having the community involved in setting the benchmarks so that the right information is collected for the benefit of community: “We know that Black communities do not trust participating in surveys and census. We always say what do you need the information for? Who is using it?”

As part of the African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity Action Plan, Halifax Partnership is working with community to develop an African Nova Scotian Prosperity and Well-being Index. Modeled after the Halifax Index, the African Nova Scotian Index will track and report on progress on economic and community well-being, based on actions, and key challenges, opportunities, lessons learned, and best practices. The Index will be presented annually to ANS communities, partners, stakeholders, and funders. In addition, we heard calls to go further and account for the conditions of all ethnic groups in the region.

Integrating lived experiences alongside quantitative data is a next step. Sylvia Parris-Drummond, CEO of the [Delmore “Buddy”](#)

[Daye Learning Institute](#) (DBDLI) spoke of the “opportunity to validate some of the anecdotal things that we know.” DBDLI’s work reaches educators, policymakers, and the general public working towards positive outcomes for Africans in Nova Scotia. Sylvia noted the importance of connecting with individuals’ experiences: “We’re able to speak from the perspective of our uniqueness, so the lived experience, right? While we’re in the process of collecting this hard data, people can still tell you about what’s happening. Our experiences with the school system, our experiences with society broadly. All those things should be heard as truths—whether it’s checking back in about what we get in the hard data, or whether it leads us in a direction about what to look at more intensely.”

The impact of accurate statistics on the well-being of Indigenous individuals and communities was also raised as well as the need to provide space and time for Indigenous people to experience trauma and heal. Exposure to accurate information has been traumatic for Indigenous youth and retraumatizing for Indigenous elders as they are confronted by the true reality of what has happened to their communities.

Preparing for Climate Change

In 2020, HRM adopted [HalifACT 2050: Acting on Climate Together](#) – a transformational plan to achieve a net-zero economy by 2050. HRM recognizes the high servicing and environmental costs of urban sprawl, and the need to introduce more compact forms of development to meet the region’s climate goals. A recent property tax increase also includes a line item for implementing climate initiatives.

In late 2019, Hurricane Dorian ripped through the region, knocking out power for a week in some communities and disrupting phone and water services. Considering the region's vulnerability to more frequent and extreme weather events, as experienced with significant weather events and wildfires in summer of 2023, there is increasing concern for the effects of climate change with session participants proposing the creation of a public insurance fund for the costs related to climate-related catastrophic events. We also heard requests for accessible emergency preparedness information, such as through a YouTube channel or through community organizations. More recently there have been calls for a climate equity plan for HRM, recognizing the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable communities.

[HalifACT 2050](#) is an ambitious plan to carve out a low carbon pathway to 2050. This entails a comprehensive green transition for the entire regional economy. It was touted as a success and has gained support from the Mayor and Council. For example, Halifax's deep retrofit program for older homes is one of Canada's earliest climate actions utilizing a poverty and equity lens. We also heard that HalifACT 2050 is an excellent opportunity to strengthen and incorporate Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities into the advancement of the region's economic future and to consider environmental justice given the unequal impacts of extreme wind, sea level rise, flooding, and heat waves on equity-deserving groups. To continue to make progress, the plan needs consistent funding and staff resources from HRM as well as collaboration with provincial and federal governments.

Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation

The provincial "[Ivany Report](#)" highlighted the importance of entrepreneurship for the HRM and the wider economy. Halifax is a great place for young entrepreneurs to experiment, as Downtown Halifax and Dartmouth are home to the [Halifax Innovation District](#)—the largest innovation cluster in Canada outside of the Kitchener-Waterloo-Toronto corridor.

Whether by opportunity or necessity, young people are creating startups and running their own businesses throughout this district. [ONside](#) is a non-profit that identifies innovation-driven entrepreneurship as an important part of the provincial economy. ONside recognizes that to achieve these benefits, access to opportunity for women, rural, Indigenous, and African Nova Scotians communities must be developed to create "positive feedback loops" that link



Profile:
Dave Rideout,
Metroworks

Dave Rideout is the President and CEO of Metroworks, working with a diverse team, each with a varied and valuable background to make Metroworks initiatives possible. In this role, he leads a variety of initiatives to help people overcome obstacles to achieve their employment and education goals. Some of the social enterprises under the Metroworks umbrella include the Stone Hearth Bakery, the Ampersand Café, Stone Hearth Catering, and Common Roots Urban Farm. In addition, MetroWorks manages a number of federally and provincially funded initiatives that support individuals with employment barriers achieve their vocational goals.

different users and markets together – thereby accelerating investment, value and job creation, and growth.

During our visit, CUI noted how [MetroWorks](#) has brought employment programs and opportunities to many Haligonians, and how their farm brings energy to an under-utilized park in Halifax “and fills it with life and people.” The non-profit employs 100 full-time staff and has several social enterprises like the Ampersand Café, Stone Heart Bakery, Common Roots Urban Farm, and a Mobile Food Market.

Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 and its associated restrictions placed a great strain on the region’s businesses.

The need for supportive action brought the business improvement districts, chambers of commerce, Halifax Partnership, and Discover Halifax together to chart a path towards post-pandemic recovery. They are coordinating and collaborating on economic action plans and strategies. Two industries that experienced the heaviest employment losses since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic were accommodation and food services, and wholesale and retail. The industry that saw the most growth during the same period was the professional, scientific, and technical services sector (Statistics Canada, 2021).

The Nova Scotia Business and Labour Economic Coalition’s [Tactical Recovery Plan](#) (June 2021) focuses on the opportunities that the pandemic presented for reinvention and systems change, while acknowledging its devastating and far-reaching impacts. The Plan is guided by the principles of collective impact, inclusive communities, inspiring action, and building back better. We heard calls for the Province to continue its implementation of the Tactical Recovery Plan and for HRM to market and celebrate Halifax’s businesses and cultural

diversity – promoting and preserving the cultural roots of Mi’kmaq, African Nova Scotians, and newcomers.

In Downtown Halifax, recent data has shown positive trends, from population growth to downtown pedestrian activity, faring better than many of its counterparts (Downtown Halifax, 2023). While downtown commercial vacancy rates are still elevated at nearly 17 percent they have dropped since a peak in 2021. Retail sales and new business creation are all trending in a positive direction (Downtown Halifax, 2023). However, like most Canadian downtowns, daily vibrancy continues to be hampered by the continued absence of a large percentage of office workers, and overall commercial assessments, despite robust construction, continue to decline.



Profile:
Paul
MacKinnon

Paul has been the Chief Executive Officer of the Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC) since 2002. Paul is a passionate advocate for downtown Halifax, calling for the need to make the right decisions and investments so it can continue in its role as the economic, cultural, artistic, historic, and entertainment hub of the city. The DHBC focuses on advocacy, beautification, marketing, and membership engagement for its 1,600 member businesses. Paul serves on the board of the International Downtown Association, as well as its Canadian Leadership Group, and is the past President of Downtowns Atlantic Canada. He was one of the first Canadians to receive a certification in Leadership in Place Management (LPM).

Supporting Diverse, Mixed-use Neighbourhoods

Despite a low-density and dispersed population across the HRM, Halifax has seen residential density added to its downtown core and surrounding communities helping to create a mixed-use environment that supports complete communities. We observed downtown Halifax and the adjacent neighbourhoods in transition. New forms of housing are a part of the solution. For example, accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and small-scale multi-family dwellings allowing up to four units in a residential building have been permitted as of right. This is the type of gentle density that has been missing from most of Canada's cities and can help retain neighbourhood character while adding new residents and diverse housing forms.

Challenges include a significant increase in the number of unhoused individuals, many of whom are sleeping rough in and around downtown exacerbated by diminishing housing affordability and availability. In addition, with growth comes the potential for displacement as buildings and sites are redeveloped for more dense and newer housing. This scenario is playing out in the Ocean Breezes Village complex in Dartmouth where residents of a 1,000-unit housing complex must relocate by May 2024 when the site is to undergo redevelopment. The developer has offered assistance to [rehouse long-term lease holders](#) elsewhere in the complex as the site is developed in phases, or to receive compensation to find new housing. In a tight housing market, many are fearful this will not come to fruition.



Connection: Building Connections Between People And Places

Community Activation and Investment

During CUI's sessions words like "playful" and "people-first" used to describe what the future of downtown and core neighbourhoods could be. Session participants suggested that making these areas more diverse and welcoming will require family-oriented amenities, programs that cater to local residents, the activation of community-led spaces and events, and measures to ensure housing and business diversity. Increased programming was identified as a means of anchoring downtown as the "place to be" through sports, food, festivals, lights, art, and more.

One such example is for HRM to build off the success of [SWITCH Halifax](#) (now called HALIFAX: Open Street Sunday), an annual downtown street party. Local business associations partner to close sections of Agricola Street, Spring Garden Road, and Argyle Street to vehicular traffic to open up spaces for people to walk, skate, run, and roll. Events included free entertainment, classes, and activities. It was also an opportunity for businesses to extend beyond their storefronts and for local vendors to set up retail stalls. Similarly, downtown Dartmouth hosts an [Open Street event annually](#) in June and an annual street festival in January providing an example of [winter activation and placemaking](#).

For the longer-term, participants called for HRM to prioritize people over cars through flexible streets, pedestrian-oriented sidewalks, and reduced parking requirements; to create flexible guidelines for new buildings to facilitate future changes in use, and to amend zoning by-laws to allow more uses. To facilitate this

change, developers were called on to explore the adaptive re-use of underutilized commercial buildings. There were suggestions that the private sector could be better leveraged to be part of local solutions by animating ground floor spaces, creating a balance of uses in new development, and investing in the restoration or retrofitting of heritage properties. HRM policy has followed suit, removing parking requirements for residential development as part of the Centre Plan for downtown. In the past few years, Halifax developers have been ahead of the trend in office-to-residential conversions with several examples underway or complete.

Libraries as Social Infrastructure

Libraries in Halifax are taking on a wider range of important roles in the community. According to Ken Williment, Programming and Community Engagement Manager for the Basin District, the [Halifax Public Libraries](#)' 14 branches are well-positioned to experiment with new initiatives that overturn the traditional notion of what libraries provide. Halifax Public Libraries has the resources and expertise to try new things, and with a population of 450,000, Halifax is of a scale where changes can also be more easily implemented than in a larger municipality.

Libraries have always provided access to great collections of books, but now loan musical instruments, accessible format materials, and even radon detectors. Libraries have also focused on digital literacy by providing easy access to free Wi-Fi and technology.

According to Chief Librarian Åsa Kachan, libraries are also doing a lot of work on the front

line of community well-being, from providing access to public washrooms, defibrillators, Naloxone, COVID rapid tests, and menstrual products. Halifax Public Libraries works closely with community agencies and partners—a practice which is foundational to the way it supports people. By breaking down silos between community service providers, libraries

build a deeper understanding of community need and therefore can have a greater impact. The libraries serve people from all walks of life, from providing a “soft place to land” for new parents, food learning for teens, supporting newcomers’ integration, incubating businesses, serving up coffee for those experiencing poverty, and providing early literacy supports to young children—all free of charge.



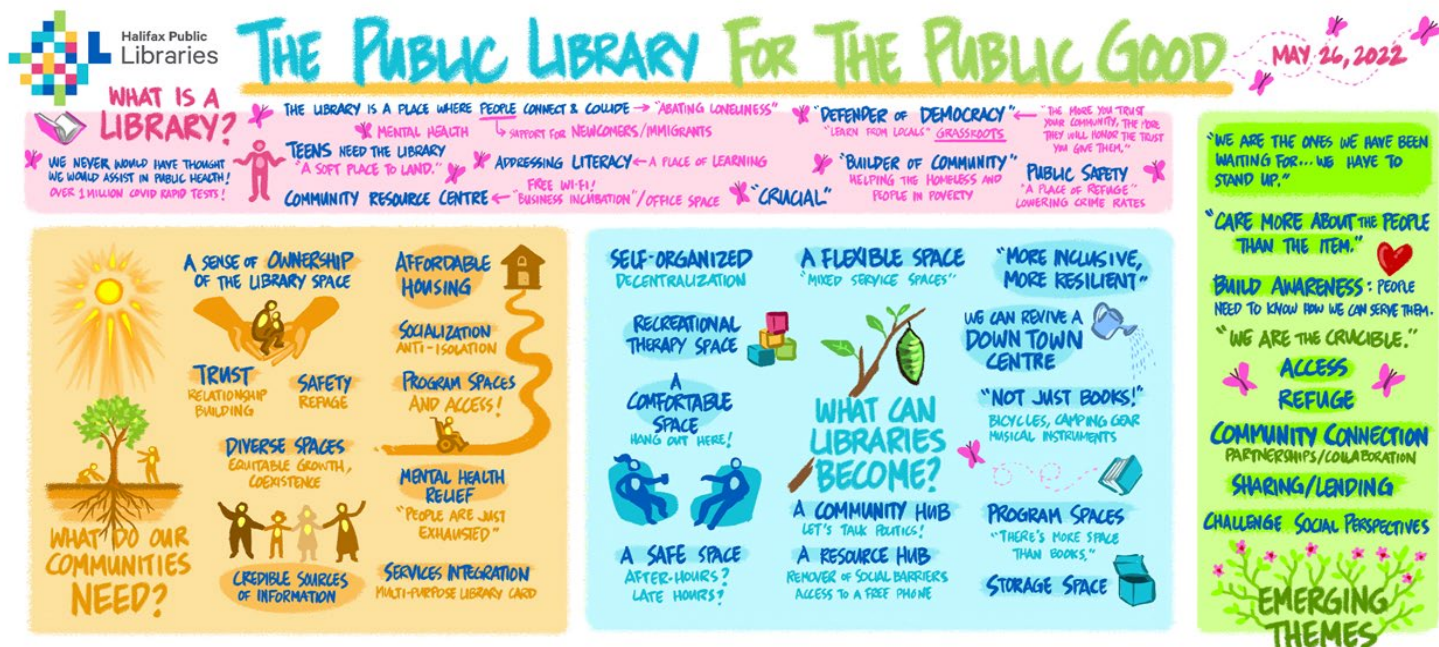
Profile: Åsa Kachan

Åsa is CEO and Chief Librarian for Halifax Public Libraries, leading a team of 400 staff working across the 14-branch library system. In her role, she ensures that libraries are welcoming spaces that reach diverse populations with equality and respect. She firmly believes that libraries play a central role as defenders of democracy, a place where people of all walks of life can connect. Under her leadership, the opening of the Halifax Central Library in 2014 garnered international acclaim for architecture and social impact.

Åsa emphasized the library’s function as “a defender of democracy and a builder of communities”. “Our public libraries, just the very act of being a public space that belongs to everyone, is a place where you’ll bump up against somebody who has had an entirely different path or a different life experience, and maybe has a completely different view on a topic than you do. It is in the collision and connection, and even the disagreement, that we build understanding and empathy.”

The Public Library for the Public Good

On May 26, 2022, Halifax Public Libraries and CUI hosted a workshop to explore the evolving role of libraries for the public good. During the event, graphic illustrator James Neish captured the ideas discussed. (See illustration below.)



Connecting the Region

Participants shared many ideas for more effective and equitable mobility across the region: express buses and bus rapid transit routes, water-based transit, and frequent and reliable service to connect rural areas and low-income communities to each other, the core, employment centres, hospitals, and other key services. They also noted that free transit for youth could build a transit habit that follows them into adulthood. They also emphasized a role for the HRM and the Province in highlighting the cost benefits of transit investment and introducing new metrics.

According to Frank Palermo and the team at the Open Studio One planning + design, the five most pressing needs of our time are the environment, health, equity, economy, and growth – needs that are deeply interconnected. Frank suggested that light rail transit is key to meeting these needs in a crosscutting and transformational way to make Halifax a model for post-industrial urban, suburban, and rural communities. Improving transit in Halifax and Nova Scotia would enable people without a car to access employment and quality of life opportunities, reduce rural isolation, and improve connectivity throughout the province.

Frank is a founding member of [Leading with Transit](#), a group of citizens, planners, developers, and advocacy groups working on a mission to “make transit the first and best choice for getting around in HRM.” A collaboration between multiple sectors and organizations, Leading with Transit is based on the proposition that the long-term future of communities, villages, towns, and cities across Nova Scotia depends on re-imagining transit as essential, “extraordinary,” and permanent public infrastructure.

“I think too much of planning falls into dampening expectations. We have to stop doing that. It’s about developing a vision about

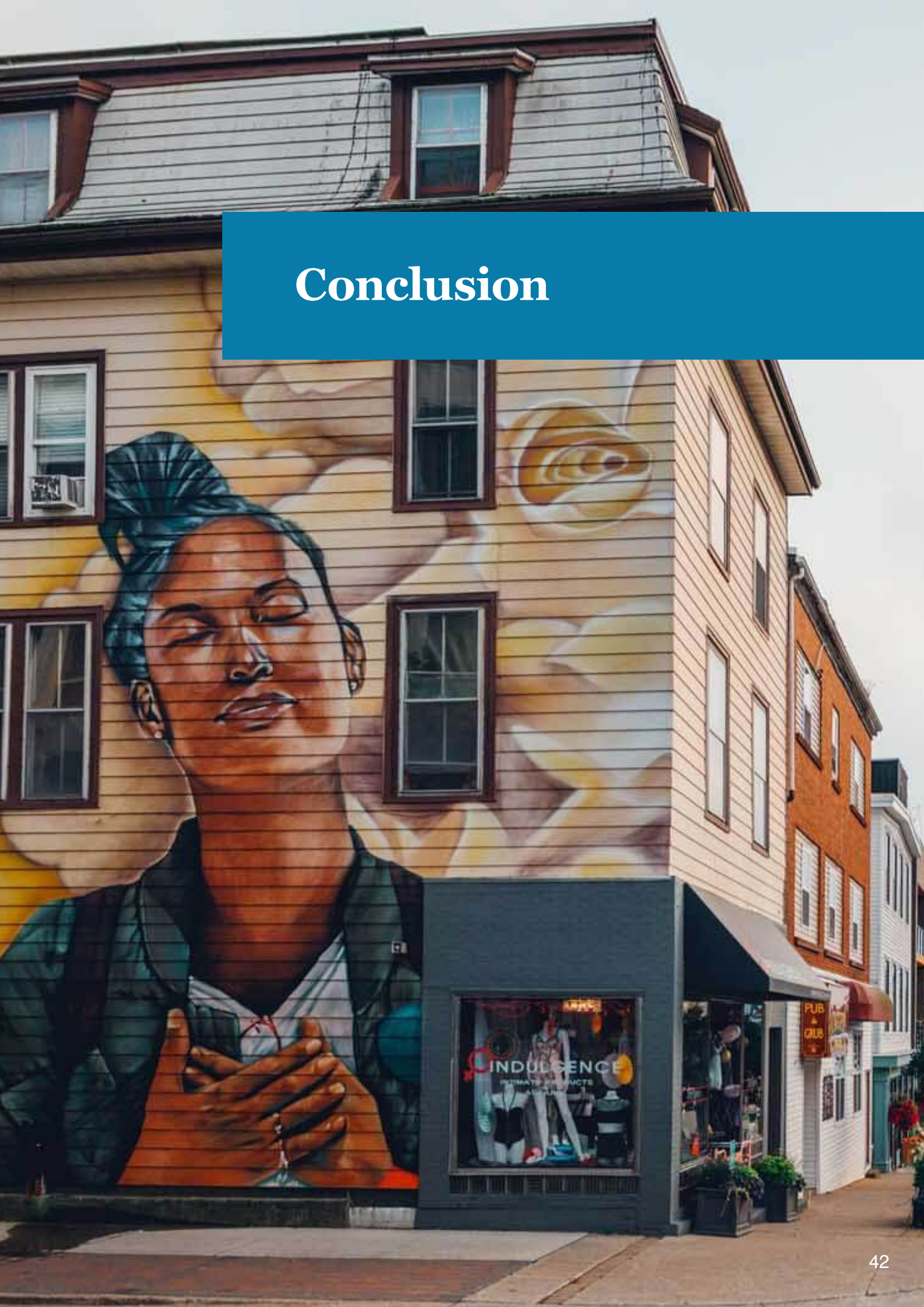
the kind of place that we want, about how it is that we’re going to use growth in a positive way to make the community something more. It’s a way of seeing how we could take an active hand in shaping our own future, as opposed to waiting for it to happen to us and then rushing to catch up and figure out what services, what infrastructure we need. The basic infrastructure that’s going to make the difference in terms of taking the lead in all of this is light rail public transit.”—Frank Palermo



Profile: Frank Palermo

Frank is the Founder and President of Open Studio One planning + design (OSO, formerly the Cities and Environment Unit), an established local planning and design firm that works to shift planning practices to be more creative, accessible, and participatory. Frank and the team at OSO believe that local people in different organizations and levels of government should be involved in every step of every small and large project to imagine, develop, and build a future that “lifts all boats.” Frank has a background in architecture, planning, urban design, and teaching. He believes in working with communities so they can shape their own future by bringing together different disciplines and points of view, and his firm strives to “bring people closer to planning and planning closer to people.”

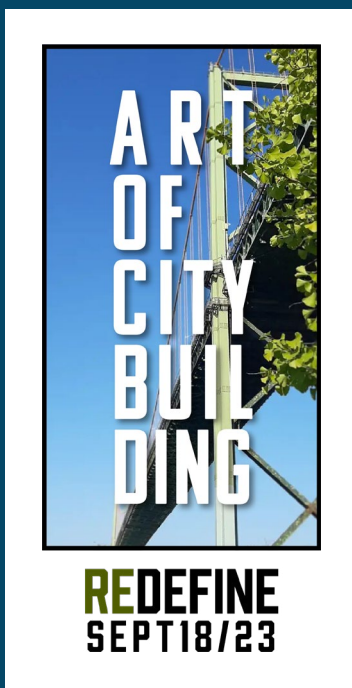
Conclusion



HRM's diverse cultural and economic history resonated throughout the pandemic as the region received an extraordinary number of Canadian migrants arriving from other parts of the province and country, bringing new talent and experience but also putting extra pressure on municipal services, and previously existing challenges around housing options and mobility. As with cities across the country, housing pressures have mounted, with newcomers challenged to find affordable choices, and a growing number of people experiencing homelessness.

As we publish this report, there are tents outside City Hall, providing shelter to residents – many of whom are employed – but unable to find appropriate housing. This continues to be the Gordian knot of Canadian urbanism, needing coordinated, multiple investments in housing unit creation and supports. HRM needs the support of the Governments of Nova Scotia and Canada, for what has become not only a human rights issue for those not housed, but also for the economic and social well-being of every community within HRM.

The governance structures available to Canadian cities are not well set up to create the kind of regional planning and coordination we can see is needed both in HRM and other key regions. Formal two-tier municipal/regional structures have had very mixed results in other jurisdictions, which may be why more flexible 'problem-solving tables', as we saw form up across the country during COVID, are valuable models for the future. This could be no more clearly illustrated than by the severe weather events of the summer of 2023, and the resilience challenges ahead, which will not follow any municipal boundary in taking their toll. HRM is well positioned to work with its neighbours – and other sectors – to address shared challenges, be they environmental, economic or social.



The Art of City Building

Halifax Evolves is released in parallel with The Art of City Building (AOCB) conference in Halifax on September 18, 2023. AOCB is an annual global conference hosted by the city building leadership groups located in HRM. Each year this convening focusses on a topic of local and international relevance, attracting global expertise, grounded in local experience. <https://www.artofcitybuilding.ca/>

Acknowledgements

CUI x Halifax is the result of generous contributions from a diverse cross-section of partners. We reached out to our trusted network of people who live in and love Halifax, and they helped us set up meetings and roundtable discussions with local leaders throughout two separate weeks in September 2021 and May 2022. We wish we could include the names of everyone who supported this program with their insight, experiences, and resources. We couldn't have done it without them!

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Program Sessions

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

- Discussion: The Black Experience
- Discussion: Community Experience, Belonging, and Connection

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

- Discussion: Climate
- Discussion: The Arts
- Discussion: Young People and the City

Thursday, September 23, 2021

- Discussion: Planning & Development
- CityTalk: The Future of Cities Post-Election Dispatch from Halifax with Mayor Savage
- Discussion: Placemaking and Placekeeping
- Discussion: Homelessness and Access to Housing

Friday, September 24, 2021

- Discussion: Universities and The City
- Discussion: Talent, Economic Development & Tourism
- Workshop: Restore the Core – The Future of Downtown Halifax
- Discussion: Local, Small Businesses

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

- Discussion: Diversity & Inclusion Advisor Team Huddle
- Workshop: Community Planning and Engagement
- Discussion: Future of the Local Economy
- Community Tour: Preston Township

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

- Community Circle: Preston Township
- Discussion: Major Issues & Priorities with HRM Staff
- Workshop: Leading With Transit
- Community Tour: North End Halifax & Africville
- Canadian Healthy Communities Initiative Site Visit: MetroWorks
- Canadian Healthy Communities Initiative Site Visit: Hope Blooms' Murray Warrington Park Playground

Thursday, May 26, 2022

- Workshop: The Public Library for the Public Good
- Discussion: Subjective Well-Being Measurement and Impact of Placemaking
- Community Tour and Dinner: Beechville

Friday, May 27, 2022

- Halifax Index Discussion: Moving to Inclusion
- CityTalk: Rising Tides and Recovery Plans
- Meet and Greet: CUI x Halifax Social

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CUI x Local

CUI x Local is a cross-country engagement tour to gather interpretations, data, assessments, priorities, bright spots, and stories from on-the-ground voices to help deepen our collective understanding of the interconnected and interdependent issues facing urban Canada. Alongside local partners, we are organizing week-long residencies involving a combination of public and invitation-only meetings and activities.

By looking at local issues and connecting them nationally, [CUI x Local](#) will strengthen the connective tissue within and across communities from coast to coast to coast.



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