



P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
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**Item No. 21.2**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**April 29, 2025**

**TO:** Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**FROM:** Councillor Deagle Gammon, Chair, Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee

**DATE:** April 17, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Integrated Tourism Master Plan 2023 Status Update

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**INFORMATION REPORT**

**ORIGIN**

April 17, 2025 meeting of Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee, Item 13.1.1.

**BACKGROUND**

Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee received a report dated March 20, 2025 and a received a presentation from Ross Jefferson, President and Chief Executive Officer of Discover Halifax titled "Integrated Tourism Master Plan 2023 Status Update".

For further information refer to the attached staff report dated March 20, 2025.

**DISCUSSION**

Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee considered the report dated March 20, 2025 and approved a recommendation to forward the presentation to Halifax Regional Council for information purposes.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial implications are outlined in the attached staff report dated March 20, 2025.

**RISK CONSIDERATION**

Risk consideration is outlined in the attached staff report dated March 20, 2025.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Meetings of the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee are open to public attendance and members of the public are invited to address the Standing Committee for up to five (5) minutes during the Public Participation portion of the meeting. Meetings are live webcast on Halifax.ca. The agenda, reports, video, and minutes of the Standing Committee are posted on Halifax.ca.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

Environmental implications are outlined in the staff report dated March 20, 2025.

### **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee – Terms of Reference

#### **Oversight – Planning**

3. The Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee shall provide oversight of the Municipality's Regional Plan and Regional Planning Initiatives, as follows:
  - a. overseeing the Municipality's Regional Plan and Regional Planning Initiatives;
  - b. reviewing and recommending to the Council the scope of the five-year Regional Plan reviews including roles of sub committees;
  - c. co-ordinating with the other Standing Committees on major Regional Plan initiatives;
  - d. being involved in developing the Municipality's approach to public participation programs for various planning processes such as regional and municipal planning strategy amendments; and
  - e. overseeing the priority setting relative to the Community Visioning Program, Functional Plan Implementation and major planning projects.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – Staff report dated March 20, 2025.

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Report Prepared by: Simon Ross-Siegel, Legislative Assistant, Municipal Clerk's Office 902.292.3962

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P.O. Box 1749  
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**Item No. 13.1.1**  
**Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee**  
**April 17, 2025**

**TO:** Chair and Members of Community Planning and Economic Development  
Standing Committee

**FROM:** Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** March 20, 2025

**SUBJECT:** ITMP 2023 Status Update

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**ORIGIN**

February 23, 2021, meeting of Regional Council,

**11.2.1 Halifax Regional Integrated Tourism Master Plan**

**THAT Halifax Regional Council: ...**

**2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with Discover Halifax to provide annual updates to Council on the Halifax Regional Integrated Tourism Master Plan; ...**

MOVED by Councillor Russell, seconded by Deputy Mayor Outhit

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Integrated Tourism Master Plan (ITMP), adopted by the Regional Council in 2020, has served as a comprehensive roadmap for strategic tourism development, contributing significantly to economic growth. As Halifax continues to grow and evolve, an ITMP update is necessary to reflect emerging opportunities, challenges, and industry best practices. The ITMP update is managed by staff from Discover Halifax, who oversee project consultants and contract administration with the goal of completing the updated plan by June 2025. Guidance and oversight are provided by the Discover Halifax Board of Directors and the ITMP Advisory Committee, which includes key stakeholders from government, business, and community organizations.

The ITMP 2030 was developed through a structured, three-phase approach to ensure a thoughtful and inclusive strategy for Halifax's tourism industry. The process began with the **Discovery Phase**, where insights were gathered through surveys, interviews, and workshops with key stakeholders. This was followed by the **Validation Phase**, which focused on confirming key findings through broader public and industry engagement. The final phase of **Prioritization**, which is underway, will evaluate and rank tourism initiatives based on their potential impact and feasibility. Discover Halifax consultant's report through the first two phase is in Attachment 1.

Through engagement, several key themes emerged. There is a clear need for improved transportation networks, better visitor amenities, and stronger cross-sector collaboration. Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of a balanced approach to short-term rental regulations, supporting tourism while being mindful of housing challenges. Growth opportunities were identified in areas such as cruise tourism, business events, eco-tourism, and off-season attractions. The consultation also highlighted the importance of better representation of diverse cultural heritage in Halifax's tourism offerings, as well as the need for expanded marketing and infrastructure for the city's music, nightlife, and festival industries.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee:

1. receive this staff report for information and receive a presentation from Discover Halifax regarding the Integrated Tourism Master Plan; and,
2. forward this Report to Regional Council for information.

## **BACKGROUND**

Discover Halifax, the Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) official destination marketing organization, has been promoting Halifax as a premier Canadian destination since 2002. The ITMP, adopted by the Regional Council in 2020, has served as a comprehensive roadmap for strategic tourism development, contributing significantly to economic growth and supporting the region's recovery from the pandemic. With 28 key initiatives, the plan has guided efforts to enhance visitor experiences while ensuring that tourism benefits residents, businesses, and the broader community.

As HRM continues to grow and evolve, an ITMP update is necessary to reflect emerging opportunities, challenges, and industry best practices. Discover Halifax is leading this initiative, with the goal of completing the updated plan by June 2025. The process will include extensive community and stakeholder engagement, ensuring alignment with federal, provincial, and municipal tourism strategies while maintaining a strong commitment to sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

The ITMP update is managed by staff from Discover Halifax, who oversee project consultants and contract administration. Guidance and oversight is provided by the Discover Halifax Board of Directors and the ITMP Advisory Committee, which includes key stakeholders from government, business, and community organizations. HRM is represented at the Discover Halifax Board of Directors and the ITMP Advisory Committee by Maggie MacDonald, Executive Director of Parks & Recreation, who is a member of both. By updating the ITMP, HRM is reinforcing its commitment to sustainable tourism growth, strengthening its position as a year-round destination, and ensuring that tourism continues to deliver economic, cultural, and community benefits for years to come.

The ITMP 2030 has reached significant milestones in Q1 2025. The Discovery and Validation phases have been completed following extensive stakeholder engagement, public consultations, and industry workshops. These efforts have shaped a comprehensive tourism strategy that prioritizes infrastructure improvements, expanded cultural representation, year-round tourism development, regulatory enhancements, and sustainability. The next phase, the Prioritization Lab, will focus on finalizing key actions and implementation strategies to ensure long-term tourism growth in HRM.

## **DISCUSSION**

As the ITMP undergoes a five-year review, it is essential to reaffirm the continuity and validity of its Vision, Goals, and Strategic Themes. While the tourism landscape continues to evolve, these foundational elements remain as relevant today as they were at the project's inception. Maintaining them ensures



strategic consistency, long-term impact, and alignment with HRM's broader economic and community objectives.

#### The Vision Remains Relevant and Aspirational

The vision of making Halifax "everyone's favourite Canadian city" reflects an enduring ambition that guides tourism development while fostering local pride and global appeal. HRM's natural beauty, cultural richness, and welcoming community remain strong differentiators, and the vision continues to encapsulate what stakeholders, businesses, and residents aspire to achieve. Changing the vision prematurely could introduce instability, whereas maintaining it reinforces HRM's brand identity and long-term strategic focus.

#### Goals Continue to Drive Sustainable Tourism Growth

The four established goals growing tourism employment, increasing revenues, enriching residents' lives, and aligning with related strategies are still the pillars of a thriving tourism industry. Despite shifts in travel trends and external challenges such as economic fluctuations or environmental concerns, these goals remain timeless and necessary to ensure Halifax remains a competitive and sustainable destination.

- **Tourism Employment & Revenue Growth:** Tourism continues to be a key driver of HRM's economy, and growing employment opportunities within the sector remains crucial for both job creation and workforce development. Revenue growth supports reinvestment in local infrastructure and attractions.
- **Community Enrichment:** A strong tourism industry enhances residents' quality of life by supporting local businesses, cultural initiatives, and public spaces.
- **Strategic Alignment:** The ITMP must continue to align with community, municipal, provincial, and national strategies to leverage funding, partnerships, and shared infrastructure investments.

#### The Strategic Themes Provide a Strong Framework for Implementation

The six strategic themes established in the ITMP continue to address key areas critical to HRM's long-term tourism success:

1. **Make it easy to get here and visit:** Transportation availability and convenient visitor experiences remain fundamental to tourism growth.
2. **Develop responsible tourism:** Environmentally responsible travel, destination sustainability, accessibility for persons with disability continues to grow in importance and our industry and community must remain committed to responsible tourism.
3. **Build and enhance key demand generators:** Investment in major events, festivals, and attractions are crucial for continued visitor interest and economic impact.
4. **Establish, identify, and appoint tourism leadership:** Strong governance and leadership ensure industry resilience, innovation, and coordination.
5. **Attract highest yield and growth markets:** Focused marketing on high-value tourists maximizes economic benefits while managing visitor volume.
6. **Be vibrant and alive, 365:** HRM has plenty of offerings to many diverse visitors year-round, growing this to a more stable, diversified economy will reduce our dependence on seasonal peaks.

These themes remain broad enough to adapt to new industry developments, yet specific enough to guide action and policy decisions effectively.

The existing vision, goals, and strategic themes remain strong, adaptable, and reflective of both the tourism industry and our community priorities. While new insights and initiatives will be integrated during the review process, keeping these core elements intact ensures continuity, strategic focus, and sustainable industry growth. The ITMP's direction remains sound, and reinforcing its original guiding principles will help HRM stay on course toward long-term tourism success.

#### Stakeholder Consultation & Key Insights

The ITMP 2030 was developed through a structured, three-phase approach to ensure a thoughtful and inclusive strategy for Halifax's tourism industry. The three-phase approach is as follows:

1. **Discovery Phase:** Gathered stakeholder insights through surveys, interviews, and workshops.

2. **Validation Phase:** Verified key findings via public and industry engagement.
3. **Prioritization Lab:** Evaluating and ranking tourism initiatives based on **impact and feasibility**.

Engagement was a core component of the consultation process, ensuring that industry stakeholders, tourism professionals, and the public had opportunities to contribute their perspectives. The process included 18 in-depth interviews with tourism partners, 24 themed consultation sessions with over 75 businesses and organizations, and 8 public engagement sessions across the Halifax Regional Municipality. Additionally, 181 stakeholder survey responses, 257 public poll contributions, and 51 responses via an interactive mapping tool helped shape the plan's direction.

The consultation process was structured to engage industry stakeholders and tourism professionals while integrating broader public input. The primary objective was to capture insights from tourism businesses, industry leaders, and organizations to shape the ITMP's decision-making framework.

#### Preliminary Findings & Key Priorities

The ITMP 2030, recognizes that the region has the opportunity to enhance its tourism infrastructure, diversify visitor experiences, and strengthen its position as a premier travel destination in Canada. This strategic vision focuses on key initiatives that will drive economic growth, support local businesses, and create a more inclusive and sustainable tourism industry.

By prioritizing infrastructure improvements, cultural and heritage tourism development, policy and regulatory enhancements, and emerging market opportunities, HRM can ensure that both visitors and residents benefit from a well-balanced and thriving tourism sector. This report outlines some of the preliminary areas of focus, highlighting key investments and initiatives that will shape the next phase of HRM's tourism evolution. To elevate HRM's tourism industry and enhance visitor experiences, the ITMP 2030 discovery process has revealed several focus areas as follows:

- **Infrastructure & Transportation Enhancements** – Investments in mid-size and large event venues will support business and sports tourism, while public transit expansion and road improvements will enhance accessibility. Upgraded parking, public washrooms, and signage will improve visitor convenience, especially in high-traffic areas like Peggy's Cove and the Halifax waterfront.
- **Cultural & Heritage Tourism Development** – Strengthening the representation of Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian, and Acadian cultures is significant. This includes supporting entrepreneurial growth, cultural storytelling initiatives, historical tourism experiences, and programming to foster authentic, and a more inclusive tourism experience.
- **Year-Round & Regional Tourism Growth** – Addressing seasonal fluctuations, the strategy promotes off-season festivals and winter tourism while expanding rural tourism initiatives to distribute visitor traffic beyond downtown Halifax. Business and sports tourism will also see a boost through enhanced venues and infrastructure.
- **Policy & Regulatory Enhancements** – Streamlining permitting and licensing for tourism-related businesses will make it easier to host events. Clearer regulations on short-term rentals will balance tourism growth with housing needs, and new funding mechanisms will support large-scale events and infrastructure development.
- **Emerging Tourism Segments & Demand Generators** – HRM aims to tap into high-growth tourism sectors such as cruise tourism, live music and nightlife, sustainable travel, and culinary tourism. Expanding excursion options, investing in entertainment districts, and promoting eco-friendly travel initiatives will help the city stay competitive in the evolving tourism landscape.
- **Accommodation & Short-Term Rentals** – With increasing visitor demand, expanding mid-tier hotel options and exploring seasonal university accommodations will provide more lodging choices. Balanced short-term rental regulations will ensure that tourism growth does not negatively impact housing availability.
- **Business & Event Tourism Development** – Continued investment in event infrastructure will attract large conferences, trade shows, and international sporting events. Improved regional transportation options will also enhance HRM's accessibility for event attendees.

Through these targeted strategies, HRM is positioned to build a more resilient, diverse, and sustainable tourism economy that benefits both visitors and local communities. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders and implementing data-driven decision-making, the city can establish itself as a premier tourism destination with a vibrant, year-round appeal.

#### Evaluation & Setting Priorities

Evaluating each proposed initiative is essential to ensure its effectiveness, optimize resources, and align with Halifax's long-term tourism goals. It allows stakeholders to measure impact, identify challenges early, and make data-driven adjustments for continuous improvement. Proper evaluation also ensures that investments in infrastructure, marketing, and policy changes deliver meaningful benefits to both visitors and local communities. Additionally, it fosters transparency, builds stakeholder confidence, and helps HRM remain adaptable in an ever-evolving tourism landscape. By assessing each initiative's success, HRM can refine its strategy and maximize the positive economic and social impact of tourism.

The evaluation criteria for assessing initiatives under the ITMP is structured to ensure that proposed actions align with broader goals and strategic objectives.

#### Next Steps & Implementation Plan

A joint meeting between the ITMP Advisory Committee and the Discover Halifax Board of Directors is planned for May 9, 2025 (tentative date). This session will focus on presenting the final consultant report, fostering discussions on key strategic tourism initiatives, and ensuring alignment between governance, industry leadership, and implementation priorities.

The action plan for this meeting includes finalizing implementation strategies by assigning leads and defining clear execution steps. Strengthening regional collaboration will be a priority, with an emphasis on enhancing partnerships with both local and national stakeholders. Optimizing resource allocation is another key focus, ensuring that essential initiatives receive the necessary funding and support. Additionally, a system for continuous monitoring and evaluation will be put in place to track progress and make data-driven adjustments as needed.

As the ITMP 2030 plan reaches its final stages, HRM has a unique opportunity to build a sustainable, inclusive, and high-impact tourism economy. The success of this initiative relies on ongoing collaboration, informed decision-making, and strategic investments. By harnessing stakeholder insights and aligning industry priorities, Halifax can solidify its position as a premier tourism destination with a diverse, year-round appeal that benefits both visitors and residents alike.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

No financial implications at this time.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

No risk considerations were identified.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Community engagement was undertaken by Discover Halifax, aligned with the approved approach. Further community engagement is detailed in Attachment 2 - Community Engagement Overview.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 - ITMP 2030 What We Heard Report March 2025

Attachment 2 – Community Engagement Overview

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Report Prepared by:      Brendon Smithson, Director, Regional Recreation Services, Parks & Recreation,  
902.498.2086



# Halifax Regional ITMP 2030

## What We Heard Report

March 2025

This **What We Heard Report** was prepared by  
UPLAND Planning + Design for Discover  
Halifax

March 2025



UPLAND



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# PART 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 About the Project

The Integrated Tourism Master Plan (ITMP) 2030 will build on the vision, goals, and strategic themes that were established when the first ITMP was launched in 2019, and will continue to be the foundation of the plan.

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) covers a large geographical area, with each of the 210 communities having their own unique characteristics. Working with stakeholders and partners from across the region will help provide a clear picture of the strengths and opportunities in each area, and create a roadmap for future tourism growth. This project will help to encourage more collaboration between communities, working towards the vision of being globally recognized as Canada's favourite city.

HRM has tremendous potential for further growth through tourism, and the ITMP 2030 will continue to strengthen the economic and social benefits of the industry for people who live, visit, and invest in the region.

**The ITMP 2030** serves as a roadmap for decision-making and investments related to tourism in HRM. It provides guidance and a framework for tourism-sector businesses and organizations to work together to create a region that is alive and thriving year-round.

The ITMP is intended to be a plan for all stakeholders and partners in tourism. No initiative will be able to be effectively actioned by a single organization. Since most initiatives will require partnerships to achieve success, tourism sector business and organizations will need to work collaboratively towards our common vision of being Canada's favourite city.

### Project Timeline

- ★ **Stakeholder Engagement (Fall 2024)**  
This stage involved bilateral meetings with relevant groups and associations to understand the priorities within the tourism industry.
- ★ **Community Consultation (Winter 2025)**  
Online engagement began in Fall 2024 with the launch of the public survey and interactive mapping activities, followed by regional meetings across HRM.
- ★ **Final ITMP 2030 (Spring/Summer 2025)**  
The final document will be presented to HRM Council.





# PART 2

## WHAT WE DID

### 2.1 Introduction

Gathering input from residents and stakeholders is critical for identifying the key issues and opportunities in a community. Recognizing this, the project began with an Engagement Strategy Meeting followed by an extensive formative engagement process. The project team hosted a series of engagement activities between September 2024 and March 2025 where participants were invited to share their perspectives and insights on their vision for the future of tourism in the HRM.

To ensure that the findings represent the diverse population of the HRM, multiple methods of engagement were used, including:

- Advisory Committee & Board of Directors Engagement
- Stakeholder Discovery Sessions
- Project Website & Public Survey
- Regional Engagement Sessions
- Stakeholder Validation Sessions

Engagement activities were promoted through multiple channels, including:

- Discover Halifax website and LinkedIn
- Partner organizations' social media platforms
- Project website
- Discover Halifax member email list
- Direct emails and phone calls to identified stakeholders

### 2.2 Engagement Activities

**Advisory Committee & Board of Directors Engagement:** To kick off public engagement for this project, two engagement sessions were held with the Discover Halifax Board of Directors and Advisory Committee members between September and November 2024. Additionally, one-on-one interviews and group engagement sessions were conducted with key stakeholders between October and November, all aimed at gathering insights on the current tourism landscape in HRM and providing stakeholders with more information about the project.



#### **Board of Directors Engagement:**

Date: September 18, 2024

People Engaged: 12

#### **Advisory Committee:**

Date: November 13, 2024

People Engaged: 16





**Stakeholder Discovery Sessions:** A critical part of the ITMP process was to hear from businesses, organizations, and partners in the tourism industry. Between November and December, we hosted 24 group sessions and 20 one-on-one interviews. These sessions and interviews were designed for people working in the tourism industry to share the challenges they currently face, the opportunities they see, and what improvements they think would help propel the HRM towards being vibrant and alive all year round.

Dates: November - December 2024  
People Engaged: 125+ stakeholders



**Website & Public Survey:** The survey was an opportunity to hear directly from residents about their views on the challenges and opportunities facing HRM's tourism industry, their vision for tourism development for the region over the next decade, and the programs and policies that are needed to help realize that vision.

Survey Open: December 2024 - March 2025  
People Engaged: 181 (survey), 349 (overall online contributions), 1,000+ (unique website visitors)



**Regional Engagement Sessions:** Eight in-person, regional meetings were hosted across HRM in February and March to talk in-depth about the ITMP and get a better understanding of the local issues in all the unique corners of the municipality. These sessions provided a second opportunity for residents to inform and validate what we heard through the public survey.

Meeting Dates: February 24 through March 6, 2025  
People Engaged: 100+ community members



**Stakeholder Validation Sessions:** Our team hosted three final sessions with stakeholders and partners. Each session was targeted to a specific group: **Food and Beverage, Music, Festivals and Night-time Economy, and Hotels and Business Events.** These sessions were an opportunity to share what we heard through previous public and stakeholder engagement and dive deeper into what initiatives and activities would have the greatest impact on tourism in the HRM.

Meeting Date: March 3 through 6, 2025  
People Engaged: 70+ stakeholders

## PART 3

# WHO WE HEARD FROM

### 3.1 Stakeholders

The project team engaged with **over 125 stakeholders** from a diverse range of sectors including:



#### Accommodations

We spoke to industry group representatives, as well as accommodations providers from across HRM (from hotels to short-term rental operators).



#### Food & Beverage

We spoke to industry group representatives, restaurateurs and bar owners, as well as local hospitality and culinary program educators.



#### Entertainment Industry

We spoke to industry group representatives, promoters, venue operators, and artists.



#### Transportation

We spoke to government officials, local transportation authorities, private coach and rental car businesses, and representatives of the cruise industry.



#### Businesses

We spoke to business improvement districts and local representatives of HRM's chambers of commerce, as well as local business owners.



#### Museums & Cultural Spaces

We spoke to representatives from a number of HRM's valued museums and cultural spaces, and attractions.



#### Sports

We spoke to representatives from venues and organizations who promote sporting events in HRM.



#### Festivals & Events

We spoke to representatives from many of HRM's most popular festivals and events.



#### Cultural Groups

We spoke to a groups representing the interests and initiatives of Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian, and Acadian communities.



#### Tourism Operators

We spoke to tourism operators from across the region to learn about the opportunities and challenges in all corners of HRM.

*We would like to thank each and every person who lent their time and voice to this project. **Thank you!***

## 3.2 Public Survey Participants

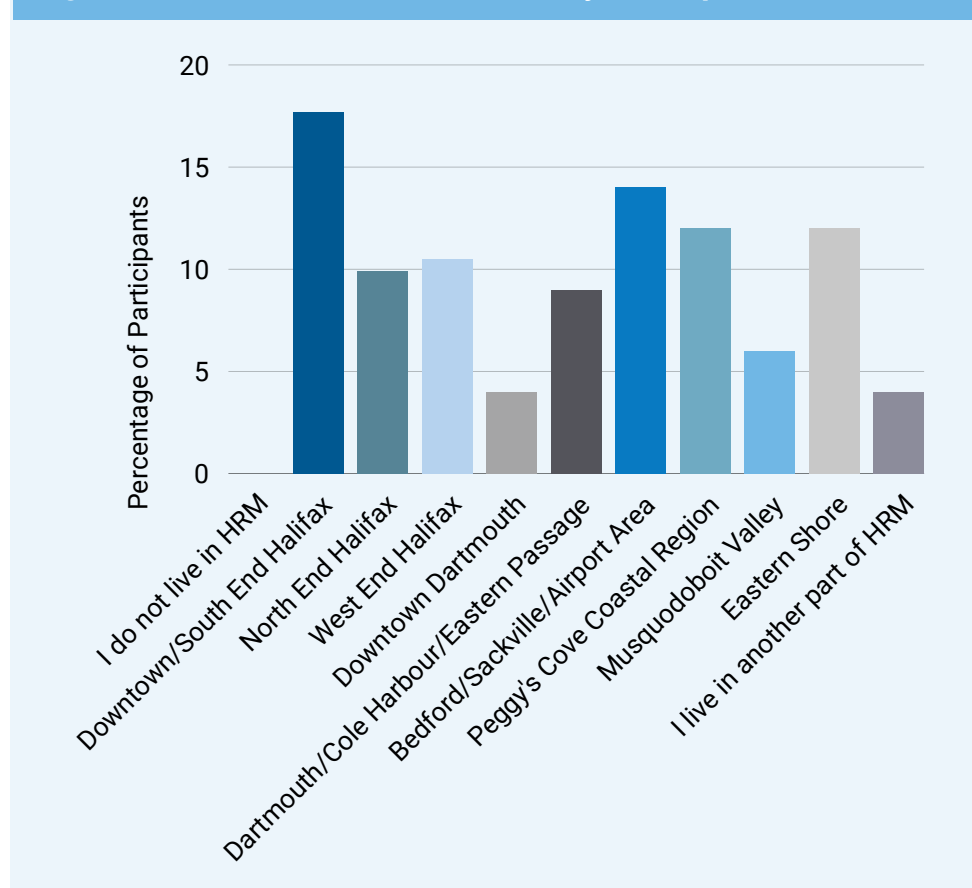
The public survey focused on identifying unique opportunities and challenges in the eight unique regions of the HRM. The survey asked residents to contribute to an online map, creating a visual representation of assets, challenges, and opportunities throughout the HRM. The public survey was open from September 23 until March 10, 2025.

A total of **181 respondents** participated in the online survey, offering valuable insights and diverse perspectives on various aspects of their community.

Snapshots from the survey will be shared throughout the report, and the full survey can be made available upon request.

### Public Survey Participants Home Community

Figure 1: Home Communities of Survey Participants

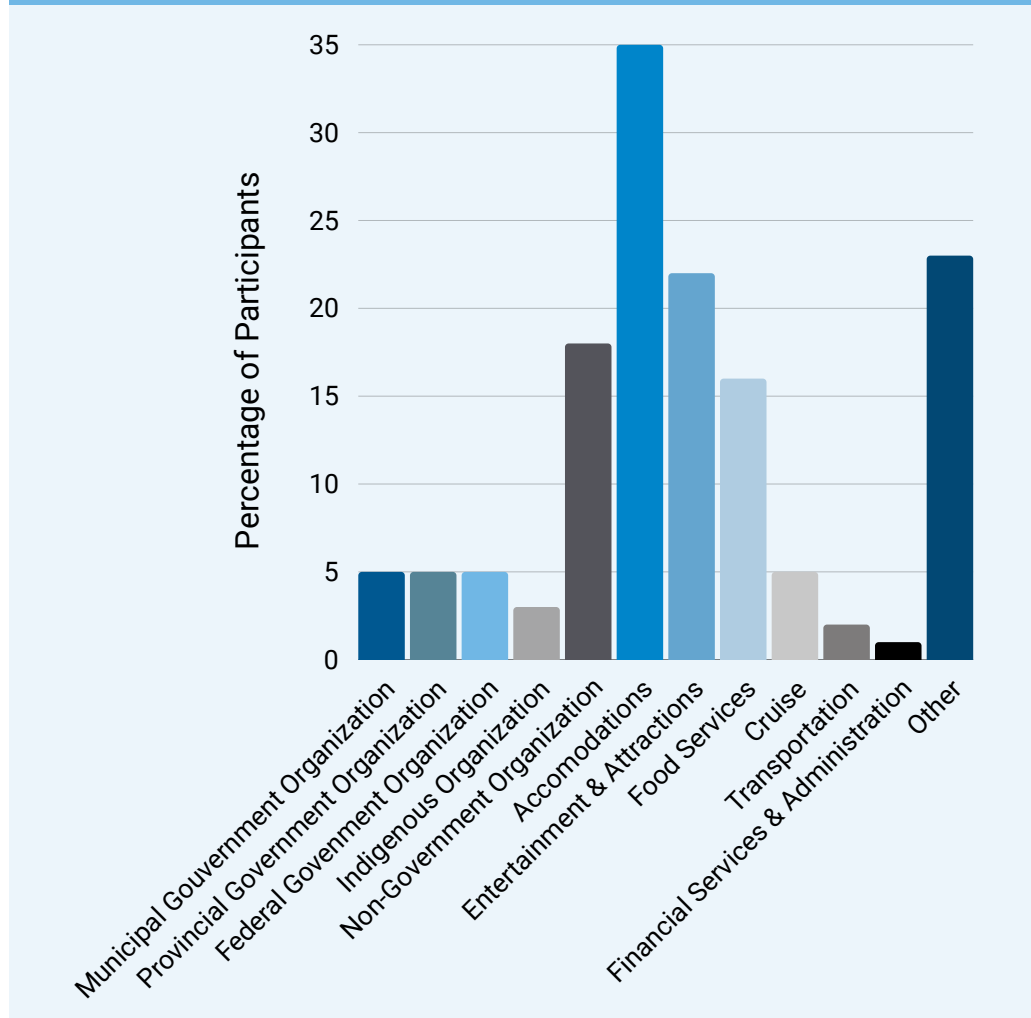


### Participants Communities

Survey respondents come from various areas across the HRM, with no participants reporting residence outside the region. The majority live in Downtown/South End Halifax, Bedford/Sackville/Airport Area, and the Eastern Shore. The fewest amount of respondents are from Downtown Dartmouth, other areas of HRM, and the Musquodoboit Valley. Responses to the survey questions can be influenced by where participants live, which is important to keep in mind while viewing the survey responses.

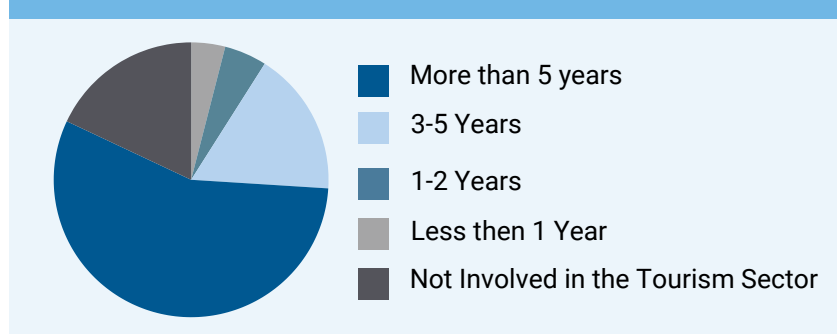
## Public Survey Participants Involvement in the Tourism Industry

Figure 2: Tourism Sectors Represented



Survey respondents are involved in tourism in a wide variety of ways. Most respondents indicate that they are involved in the Accommodations sector, Entertainment & Attractions, or a sector not represented in the survey. The least amount of respondents represent the Indigenous Organizations, Transportation, and Financial Services & Administration sectors. Government organizations and the cruise sectors are also among the least represented.

Figure 3: Time in Tourism Sector



### Time Involved in the Tourism Sector

More than half of survey respondents have worked in the tourism sector for more than 5 years. Only 9% of respondents indicated working in the tourism sector for less than 2 years.

# PART 4

## WHAT WE HEARD

### 4.1 Introduction

Feedback from stakeholders and the public was collected and thoroughly reviewed. All comments were analyzed and grouped into 7 themes:

- » Accommodations
- » Food & Beverage
- » Transportation
- » Infrastructure
- » Festivals, Music & Events
- » Key Attractions
- » Policy Changes

The following pages include a summary of what we heard for each theme, including some region-specific highlights. Below are some overall highlights from across the region related to participant identified key assets, challenges, and opportunities.

#### Key Assets

- Historic and cultural attractions and events
- Waterfront, harbour, and coastal attractions
- Ease of access to outdoor and nature activities
- Accommodation and rentals
- Sense of community and hospitality
- Accessibility and walkability
- Vibrant downtowns and local businesses
- Rich culture and historical identity

#### Challenges

- Transportation and accessibility
- Restrictive short-term rental regulations
- The impact of chain retail developments on local businesses
- Affordable and diverse accommodations
- Lack of tourism businesses and assets in suburban and rural areas
- Lack of year-round activities and attractions
- Staff shortages
- Housing and affordability
- Limited event venues and accommodation options

#### Opportunities

- Transportation and connectivity
- Expanding tourism reach and experiences
- Tourism infrastructure and accommodations
- Sustainability and community support
- Support for small businesses, including promotion of the retail sector
- Short-term rentals and housing
- Cultural and event expansion
- Affordable and accessible tourism

## 4.2 Key Themes

### Accommodations



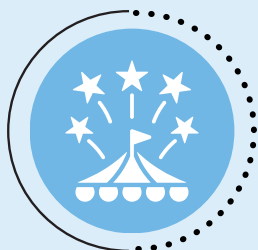
- There is a shortage of accommodations during the peak season.
- Suburban and rural areas need more accommodation options, including hotels and short-term rentals.
- Rates are high in the peak season, pricing local travellers out of the market.
- Short-term rental regulations are impacting the ability to provide accommodations in suburban and rural parts of HRM.
- There are challenges attracting and retaining workers in this sector.

### Food & Beverage



- HRM “punches above its weight” with its awesome food and beverage scene - our restaurants are some of our greatest assets.
- Rising costs and labour shortages are big concerns for restaurant owners throughout the region.
- There are challenges attracting and retaining workers in this sector.
- There are opportunities to better promote food and beverage as a career path, and encourage continued education and training.
- There are opportunities for more events and festivals that centre around the culinary and beverage scene.
- There is a need for more support and promotion for suburban and rural restaurants and bars.
- There are opportunities for more experiential food and beverage tours that highlight small rural farms and restaurants.
- Outdated policies and regulations pose barriers to hosting more inclusive and flexible events.

### Music & Festivals



- The music sector plays a crucial role in the HRM tourism industry.
- There is a need for a dedicated outdoor festival space to accommodate large events with dedicated infrastructure.
- There is a desire to see a unified events strategy that helps to reduce competition and improve scheduling.
- The concept of a “Music City” could help unite the city’s cultural offerings and enhance its tourism brand.
- Want to see more events and festivals outside of downtown Halifax and Dartmouth.
- Should diversify the types of events HRM hosts. There is lots of opportunity for more arts-based events.



## Key Attractions



- HRM has lots of great attractions and experiences for tourists, and we do a good job of promoting those offerings.
- More could be done to promote attractions outside of the urban core and celebrate key attractions across region.
- There are opportunities for more family-friendly attractions in the region.
- We should consider our natural assets (like beaches, parks, and trails) as key attractions and make it easier for people to find and access these areas.
- Tourism in Halifax is highly seasonal and it makes it difficult to operate and keep staff year round.

## Transportation



- Rental cars are scarce during the peak season.
- Parking can be challenging especially downtown.
- Traffic congestion is becoming an increasing issue and has impacts on day tours.
- Opportunities to improve micro-mobility options like bike shares and scooter rentals.
- Opportunities to improve public transit - especially to provide greater access to key attractions and amenities (i.e. beaches, trailheads, airport).
- Transit within the urban core is viewed as an asset with significant room for improvement.
- There is a dire need for public transit to extend throughout the HRM to connect urban and rural areas.
- Wayfinding and signage could be improved on a regional scale.

## Infrastructure



- Improving access for water-based businesses with public dock infrastructure, etc. could help to bring new attractions to the waterfronts.
- There are public infrastructure “dead zones” - especially in rural parts of HRM. Examples include internet, cell service, and accessible infrastructure.
- Public washroom facilities are lacking across the region.
- Investing in EV infrastructure will be important for the future.
- Ensuring cellular and internet service across the HRM is critical for the travelling public.
- Conferences and business events are looking for more off-site venues to host attendees, but not many of these venues exist in HRM.
- There is a significant lack of mid to large size venues for music and business events.



## Policy Changes



- Liquor laws are archaic and require an overhaul.
  - They create challenges for all-ages events.
  - Inconsistent in interpretation and enforcement.
- Short-term rental regulations are too restrictive, especially for those operating in the rural and suburban context.
  - Understanding there is a housing crisis, feelings are that the regulations are too strict and impede economic development.
  - Need to address the shortage in accommodations in areas outside of the downtown core.
- Desire to see updates to the Motor Carrier Act to encourage and grow ground transportation options.
- Fears of retaliation within the industry for speaking out against regulations, there is a need for a neutral party to advocate for the sector.

## Other Topics



- **Retail:**
  - Retail is often lumped in with restaurants and bars, but is a distinctly different business type.
  - HRM is a shopping destination - not enough promotion of this.
  - Culture around opening hours is not accommodating for tourists with many shops only open from 9am-5pm.
- **Art & Craft:**
  - Many artisans and craftspeople spread across the HRM - opportunity to promote the region for its artists.
  - Art tours of different parts of HRM (Peggy's Cove, Eastern Shore, etc.).



## 4.3 Existing Initiatives

The original ITMP included 28 initiatives to support and grow the tourism industry. While not all of the initiatives were achieved, 75% of them were advanced to at least a detailed planning stage.

ITMP 2030 will build on the original plan, which means ongoing initiatives may be included in the update. During the regional engagement sessions, we asked community members about the ongoing initiatives, with the goal of understanding —should we love it, or leave it? We wanted to know which initiatives ITMP 2030 should continue to focus on (do you love it?) or whether we should leave them and focus our energy and resources elsewhere.

Summarised below are the top initiatives participants love, or would rather see left behind. Throughout the regional engagement sessions, we saw a lot of interaction with the initiatives people love, but participants were more hesitant to identify the initiatives they would prefer to be left behind.

### LOVE IT

*Top identified initiatives to carry forward to ITMP 2030*

Supporting the development of Wije'winen Centre

Create two events, including a signature event

Action the Halifax Rapid Transit Strategy

Enhance demand generators for designated arts, entertainment, and heritage districts

Increase the availability of public washrooms throughout the region

### LEAVE IT

*Top identified initiatives to leave out of ITMP 2030*

Develop a plan for sustainable growth of the cruise sector

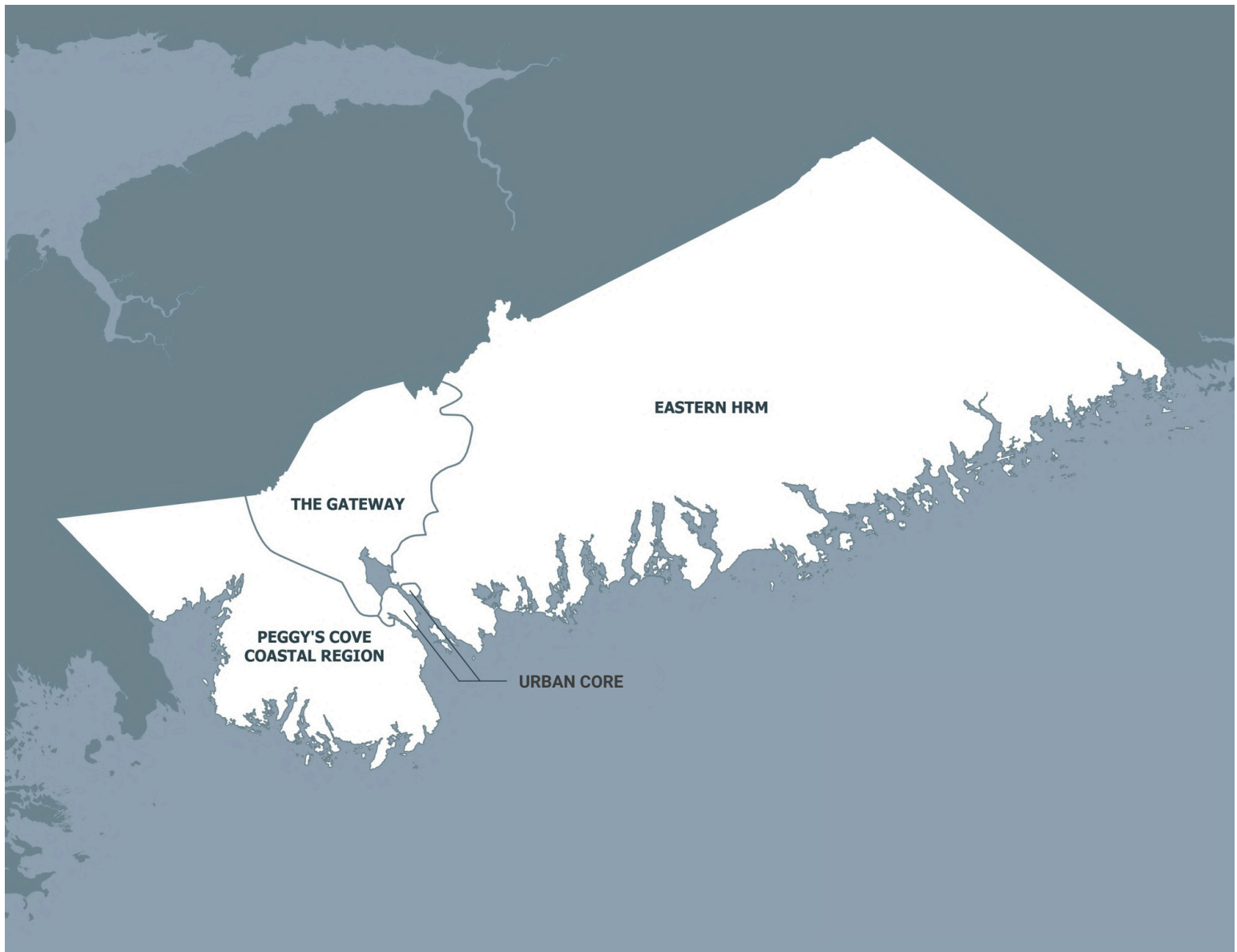
Launch Halifax Music City Strategy

Support policy process for short-term rentals



## PART 5

# REGIONAL THEMES



### 5.1 Introduction

The following section looks at the key themes that emerged across the geography of HRM. We have grouped communities into the following regions:

- » **Urban Core:** Halifax, Dartmouth, Cole Harbour & Eastern Passage
- » **The Gateway:** Bedford, Sackville & the Airport Area
- » **Peggy's Cove Coastal Region:** Peggy's Cove, St. Margaret's Bay & Hubbards
- » **Eastern HRM:** Eastern Shore & Musquodoboit Valley



## 5.2 Urban Core: Halifax, Dartmouth, Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage

We heard a lot about the incredible tourism assets in the urban core - bringing together a dynamic mix of history, culture, and amenities within the beautiful landscape of one of the world's most special natural harbours. Many engagement participants, from across HRM, spoke of the urban core as a huge draw for the region, citing the local food and beverage scene, key attractions like Citadel Hill, Pier 21, the Public Gardens, George's Island, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (among many others), and a diverse array of local businesses as some of our greatest offerings.



Some feel that the urban core is lacking in cohesive connectivity and want to see better and clearer signage throughout the area to encourage visitors to explore both sides of the harbour. There is also a desire for greater transportation options to connect the urban core to other parts of HRM.

### 5 Most Popular Existing Initiatives



- Create a community-led vision for the Dartmouth Waterfront
- Enhance demand generators for designated arts, entertainment, and heritage districts
- Create two events, including a signature event
- Supporting the development of Wije'winen Centre
- Increase the availability of public washrooms throughout the region



### 3 Least Popular Existing Initiatives



- Attract more people to skilled labour program for the restaurant sector
- Support policy process for short-term rentals
- Develop a plan for sustainable growth of the cruise sector

## What opportunities exist in the area?



- Year-round tourism options, especially the shoulder seasons
- More retail offerings, especially downtown, that operate later in the day
- Better transportation options to connect to other destinations like beaches and parks
- A fully connected regional trail system
- Telling a more representative story about the region's history and celebrating the Mi'kmaw culture and history
- Recognize HRM as a shopping destination (consider incentives for keeping shops and galleries open later especially during the peak season)
- Co-locating amenities and key attractions - for example a cafe kiosk in Point Pleasant Park during the summer months



## What's missing or underutilized from the local asset inventory?



- Permanent stadium at the Wanderers Grounds
- A great outdoor concert venue
- An indoor venue for 200-250 people
- An indoor venue for 1,500-5,000 people (between Scotiabank Centre and Lighthouse Centre)
- A new large capacity stadium
- Waterfront infrastructure - Africville, Purdy's Wharf, Dartmouth, Eastern Passage, George's & McNab's Islands and "port of refuge" (emergency docking areas) infrastructure for operators



## Other Key Takeaways



- Embrace the working waterfront history on both sides of the Halifax Harbour



## 5.3 The Gateway: Bedford, Sackville, Airport Area

The Gateway region of HRM is experiencing some of the highest rates of development in all of HRM, and as the community grows, so do the opportunities for more tourist destinations and amenities. We heard about a great need for additional accommodations in this part of HRM, especially in Sackville and Bedford. We also heard about the need to improve infrastructure in this area moving forward to better facilitate the movement of people, especially when considering the new ferry service to Bedford, which would bring other transportation connection needs to allow visitors to get around.



### 5 Most Popular Existing Initiatives



- Support policy process for short-term rentals
- Supporting the development of Wije'winen Centre
- Create an experience development program
- Enhance demand generators for designated arts, entertainment, and heritage districts
- Attract more people to skilled labour program for the restaurant sector

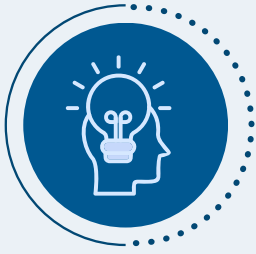


### 3 Least Popular Existing Initiatives

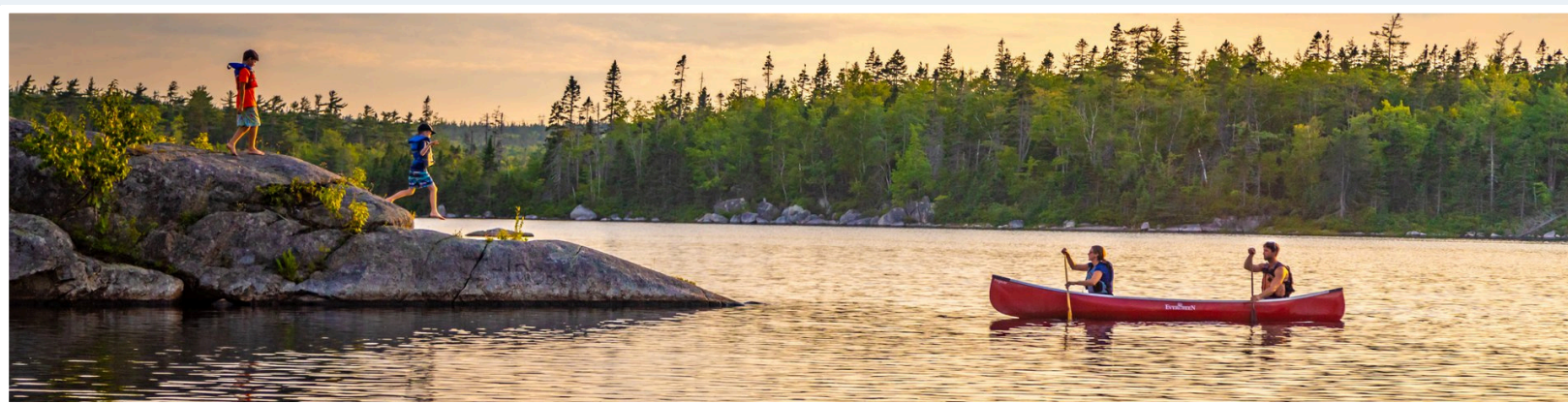


- Launch Halifax Music City Strategy
- Implement the Marine Visitation Plan
- Action the Halifax Rapid Transit Strategy

## What opportunities exist in the area?



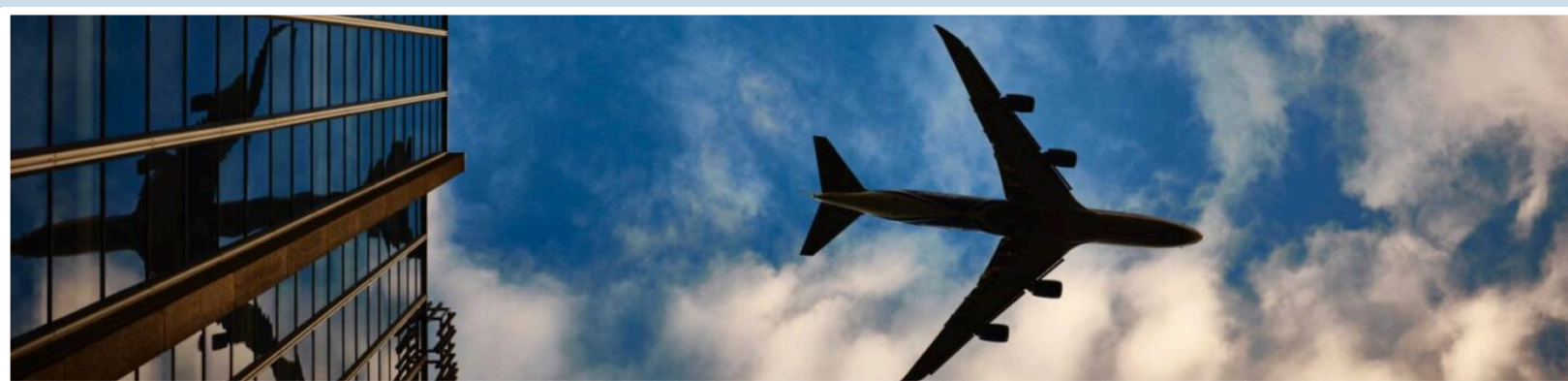
- Better promotion for the assets in this part of HRM (museums, parks, trails, restaurants, etc.)
- Need for a hotel in Sackville
- Need for a diverse range of accommodations to suit the needs of travelers
- Improving transit connectivity for residents and visitors
- Promote restaurants outside of the urban core through events like Dine Around
- B.A.T.H. - Boardwalk around the Halifax Harbour
- Events/concerts/festivals could be hosted outside of the core



## What's missing or underutilized from the local asset inventory?



- Community halls are underutilized
- Aviation Museum is underutilized
- Acadia Park is underutilized
- Fultz House Museum
- Sackville Lakes Provincial Park



## Other Key Takeaways



- Short-term rental regulations are negatively impacting the ability to provide accommodations in this area
- Apply a tourism lens as infrastructure investments are made in the coming years



## 5.4 Peggy's Cove Coastal Region: Peggy's Cove, St. Margaret's Bay, Hubbards

The Peggy's Cove Coastal Region is a beloved and world-famous tourist destination, synonymous not just with Nova Scotia, but the whole of the Atlantic Region. We heard a considerable amount about the importance of the iconic Peggy's Cove for our local tourism economy, but we also heard about the challenges that its popularity has posed to residents in the region.

Discover Halifax is currently undertaking a visitor-carrying capacity study and continues to engage with residents as part of the ITMP process. These efforts are in response to concerns raised regarding overcrowding during the peak tourism season and increasing frustration among residents about congestion and other negative impacts associated with the high volume of visitors.

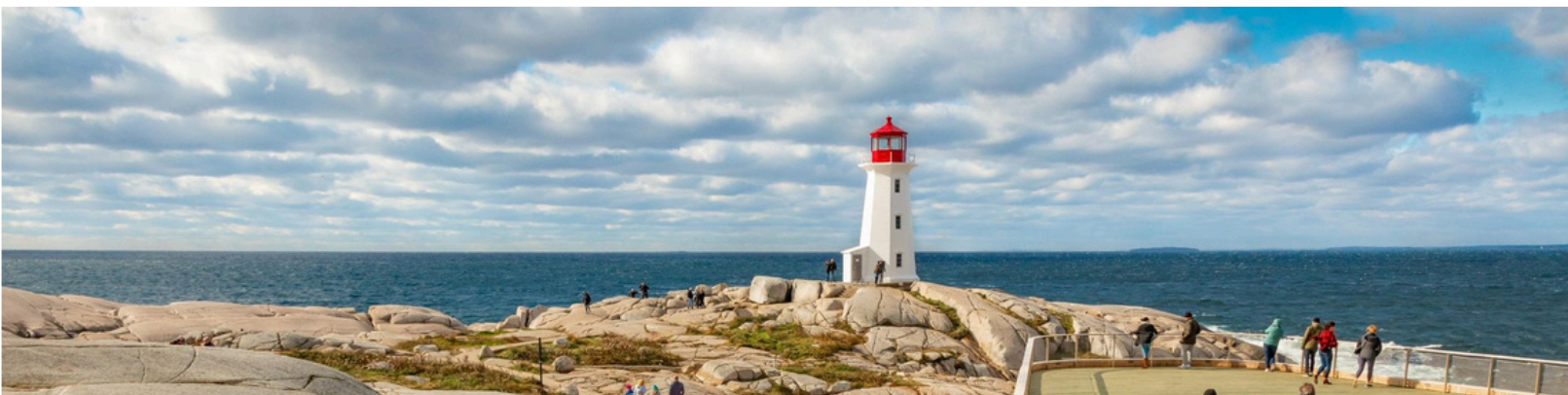
However, we also heard about the incredible opportunities that exist in the surrounding area to help take the pressure off of the village of Peggy's Cove and provide more opportunities for visitors to the area to take in the local culture.



### 5 Most Popular Existing Initiatives



- Create two events, including a signature event
- Action the Halifax Rapid Transit Strategy
- Enhance demand generators for designated arts, entertainment, and heritage districts
- Implement the Marine Visitation Plan
- Develop a plan for sustainable growth of the cruise sector



### 3 Least Popular Existing Initiatives



- Support policy process for short-term rentals
- Launch Halifax Music City Strategy
- Attract more people to skilled labour program for the restaurant sector





## 5.5 Eastern HRM: Eastern Shore, Musquodoboit Valley

We heard a lot about the untapped potential of Eastern HRM - from the rich agricultural history in the Musquodoboit Valley to the pristine coastline of the Eastern Shore. Many feel that this area is overlooked and has lacked investment to make tourism a strong economic contributor.

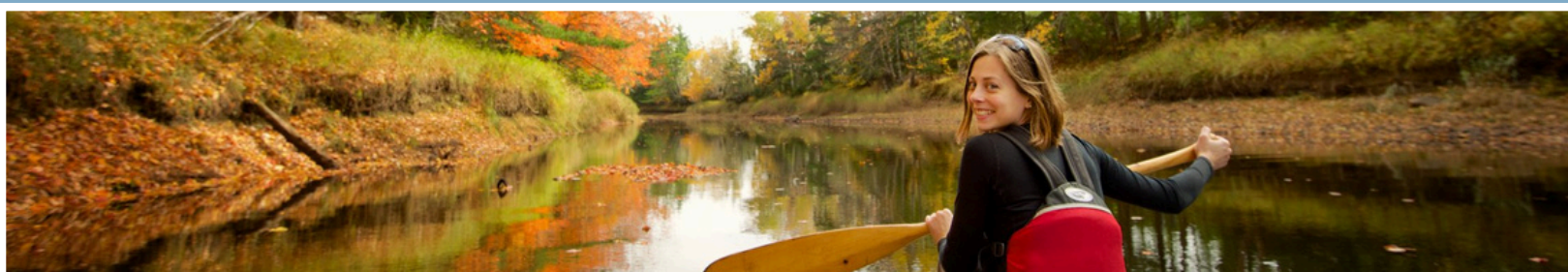
We heard about the possibilities for agri-tourism offerings, outdoor adventure experiences and tourism opportunities to simply take in the beauty and serenity of the area.



### 5 Most Popular Existing Initiatives



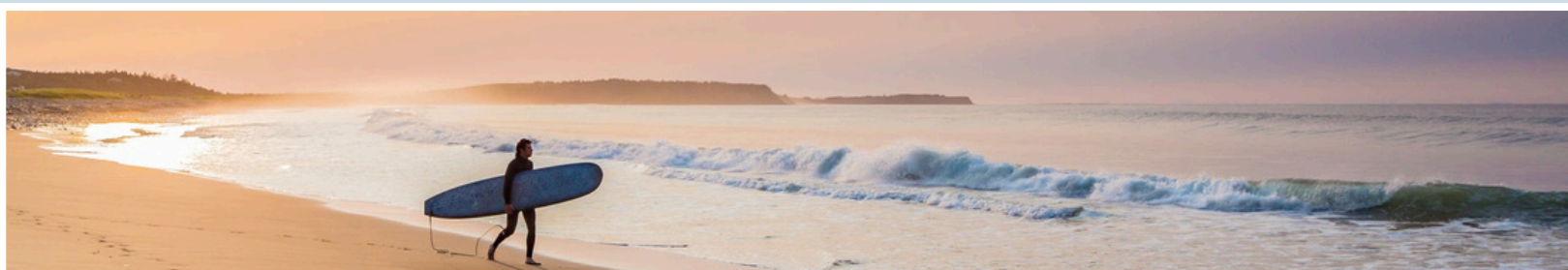
- Supporting the development of Wije'winen Centre
- Action the Halifax Rapid Transit Strategy
- Increase the availability of public washroom facilities
- Implement the Wild Islands Plan
- Enhance demand generators for designated arts, entertainment, and heritage districts



### 3 Least Popular Existing Initiatives



- Develop a plan for sustainable growth of the cruise sector
- Develop the new waterfront art district for everyone to experience art and culture
- Launch Halifax Music City Strategy



## What opportunities exist in the area?



- Promoting the beauty and serenity of the Eastern Shore (“where you go to get away”)
- Public space improvements - making nice public spaces for people to stop and enjoy
- Dark Sky Preserve designation for the Eastern Shore
- Connecting the trail network and collaborating with the Trans Canada Trail
- Brand Musquodoboit Harbour as “The gateway to the Eastern Shore”
- Opportunity to help grow the Halifax Exhibition into a larger event
- Tours for cruise passengers to see the Wild Islands and experience local farms and restaurants outside of the downtown area
- Packaging and promoting adventure tourism offerings
- Public washrooms and EV charging stations along the eastern shore
- Space for an art gallery or artisan market
- Extended public transit service to bring people to the area (even if it was seasonal or for special events)
- Need for public boat launch facilities
- The “small hall” experience - more intimate venues, “feeling like a local”
- Establishing a seafood festival that highlights the products and local impact of the fishery



## What’s missing or underutilized from the local asset inventory?



- The Lupin
- The French Duck
- Community and recreation facilities (i.e. Port Dufferin)
- Tangier Ranch
- Coastal Adventures
- Norse Cove
- SUP Mushaboom
- Golf Course
- Provincial Campground at Musquodoboit Valley Provincial Park with accessible camping

## Other Key Takeaways



- Short-term rental regulations are negatively impacting the ability to provide accommodations in Eastern HRM - need to find a rural solution
- Area needs a specific, tailored strategy for tourism

### Community Engagement Overview

Gathering input from residents and stakeholders was essential in identifying key issues and opportunities for tourism in HRM. To achieve this, the project began with an Engagement Strategy Meeting, followed by an extensive outreach process from September 2024 to March 2025. Various engagement activities provided participants the chance to share their insights and vision for the future of tourism in HRM.

### Engagement Activities

#### Advisory Group & Board of Directors Engagement

- **Board of Directors Session:** September 18, 2024 (12 participants)
- **Advisory Group Session:** November 13, 2024 (16 participants)
- **Additional Stakeholder Sessions:** One-on-one interviews and group discussions with key stakeholders (October - November 2024)

#### Stakeholder Discovery Sessions

- Aimed at businesses, organizations, and tourism partners to discuss current challenges, opportunities, and ideas for growth.
- **Sessions Held:** 24 group sessions and 20 one-on-one interviews (November - December 2024)
- **Participants:** 125+ stakeholders

#### Website & Public Survey

- Allowed residents to share their views on tourism challenges, opportunities, and future goals.
- **Survey Open:** December 2024 - March 2025
- **Engagement:** 181 survey responses, 349 online contributions, 1,000+ unique website visitors

#### Regional Engagement Sessions

- Eight in-person meetings across HRM to discuss local tourism issues and validate public survey findings.
- **Dates:** February 24 - March 6, 2025
- **Participants:** 100+ community members

#### Stakeholder Validation Sessions

- Three targeted sessions focusing on Food & Beverage, Music & Festivals, and Hotels & Business Events.
- **Dates:** March 3 - 6, 2025
- **Participants:** 70+ stakeholders

This process ensured a broad and inclusive representation of voices, shaping a shared vision for HRM's tourism future.