

# HAF Action Plan Summary – Halifax Regional Municipality, NS

## **Explanatory Notes:**

- *The following summary is a high-level overview of the approved Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) Action Plan.*
- *Local governments are expected to follow statutory processes and procedures when considering and adopting bylaws and policies, including public notification and input processes. HAF recipients have committed to follow regulatory requirements and to actively pursue the relevant council or other approvals needed to advance these initiatives.*
- *HAF recipients are also required to complete and regularly update a Housing Needs Assessment Report.*

## **Initiative 1: Streamlined Operational Processes and Customer Support Services for Permitting**

Streamlining and speeding up the development approvals process through upgrades to the city's e-permitting system and other operational changes (*implementation through 2024 and 2025*).

- A new program team will be assembled to identify and deliver efficiency improvements and the initiatives in this action plan.
- Potential improvements include automatic issuance of low-complexity permits and enhancements to HRM's online permitting portal.

## **Initiative 2: Reduce Upfront Cost for Permit Application**

Making it easier for developers to finance the early stages of large residential projects by enabling them to defer a portion of their permitting fees (*implementation by early 2024*).

- With this change, only 25% of permit fees will be paid when an application is submitted and the balance due at the beginning of construction, with an option to defer payment until permit issuance.
- E-permitting software will be upgraded on an accelerated timeline to facilitate partial payments (see also Initiative 1).

## **Initiative 3: Non-Residential to Residential Conversion**

Encouraging the conversion of underused non-residential buildings (such as commercial or office spaces) to increase the supply of housing (*implementation through 2025*).

- HRM will amend its planning documents and permitting processes to remove regulatory barriers to conversions to residential.
- HRM will identify underused properties well-suited for conversion and select a few projects for a pilot program that will help assess the viability of a long-term financial incentive program for conversion projects.

#### **Initiative 4: Encourage Development Along Bus Rapid Transit Corridors**

Encouraging higher density along key transit corridors in the urban core (*implementation through 2025*).

- HRM will work with property owners to identify and resolve potential barriers and consider non-financial incentives, such as expedited permit approvals, that will encourage the timely development of properties along bus rapid transit corridors.

#### **Initiative 5: Heritage Development Agreements**

Reducing the approval time for new developments integrated with, or built on, heritage building sites (*implementation in 2024*).

- HRM's existing Heritage Development Agreement Policy (adopted in 2022) provides incentives for the preservation of heritage building sites and allows significant new development on these sites.
- Additional staff and resources will be hired to speed up the approval process of projects selected for the initiative to six months, from one to two years currently.

#### **Initiative 6: Encourage Small Scale Residential**

Lowering the upfront costs required to develop small-scale housing (accessory dwelling units (ADUs), tiny homes, backyard suites, etc.) to promote affordable gentle density in existing neighbourhoods (*implementation in 2024*).

- HRM will work with stakeholders and other orders of government to develop and implement the funding program, including reductions to permit and other fees, and a grant/loan program for energy-efficient or affordable small-scale homes.

#### **Initiative 7: Pre-Approved Building Plans**

Speeding up the approval process for small-scale homes using pre-approved building plans (*implementation in 2024*).

- Approval processes for small-scale and modular housing will be streamlined by developing and selecting pre-approved standardized plans.
- Partnerships will be established with local businesses to generate pre-approved plans.

## **Initiative 8: Expand Affordable Housing Grant Program**

Refining and expanding HRM's Affordable Housing Grant Program, including for private-led affordable housing development (*implementation through 2025*).

- HRM will research affordable housing best practices from other jurisdictions and engage provincial partners and relevant stakeholders, including non-profits and private developers.
- The Affordable Housing Grant Program will be refined, expanded to allow for more investment, and eligibility will expand to include new areas of the municipality and private developers whose projects create affordable housing.

## **Initiative 9: Resource Surplus Land for Affordable Housing Program**

Adding new resources to unlock surplus municipal land to develop affordable housing (*implementation in 2024*).

- This initiative will allow HRM to fully implement its surplus land program for affordable housing and unlock new affordable housing developments through lower land costs.
- HRM will seek out local affordable housing projects and partnerships and provide support to assess surplus lands for redevelopment.

## **Initiative 10: Regulatory Changes to Support Housing**

Updated planning rules will allow more housing to be built without the need for rezoning or lengthy discretionary planning approvals.

- Beginning in early 2024, a series of planning changes for the Regional Centre and suburban areas will be brought forward to increase allowable heights and densities, increase the number of units permitted on one lot to four, remove or reduce minimum parking requirements, and allow more density near post-secondary institutions (*implementation through 2024 and 2025*).
- HRM will create an Affordable Housing Strategy with dedicated staffing to support the development of affordable housing (*implementation through 2026*).