

## **Background and Commentary Cogswell District Redevelopment 60% Design Recommendations Report by Gehl**

The public overwhelmingly agrees that the Cogswell Interchange should come down but there are still a lot details to determine. This includes how the Cogswell District redevelopment can be the catalyst to re-establishing connectivity and how future opportunities can strategically enhance existing communities and other city initiatives, like transit. Now is a critical time to have these conversations. If the conversation is limited now about what Cogswell can be, opportunities to do really amazing things will be lost.

The Cogswell District redevelopment is an exciting opportunity to look at the reality of how to achieve the 7 Principles that Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has endorsed and imagine the human experience on the ground. The project is currently advancing from a generalized 60% plan to a more detailed view, particularly with respect to the public realm, towards 90% design.

To be clear, the Gehl Report is not an alternate design to what HRM is working on. It is a review of the 60% design plan approved by Regional Council in June 2018, with recommendations to guide design and planning moving forward, towards the 7 Principles approved by Council for the Cogswell District. Using the 7 Principles and looking at other great cities and best practices, the Gehl Report applies these learnings through examples and recommendations. The report is a guiding document for putting people and places first in the city-making process.

A series of public engagements helped inform the project this fall. We have the 60% design, community input, and now this report, but there are still many decisions to be made. A continuing conversation is required for the Cogswell community moving forward.

“To truly make this district a model for how to right an urban renewal wrong, fundamental elements need to change. Without these changes, the design can still be improved, but for the district to become a model for what’s possible when people are put first in the city making process, key elements need to be rethought:

- People-first Vision and Targets
- Road Network
- Building Type
- Undefined Open Spaces
- Block Size”

(p6, Gehl, 2019)

### **SUMMARY OF GEHL REPORT CITY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

“This section explores how the wider context the Cogswell District sits within may impact future design and development. We present these issues as considerations as more work is needed to study them and the impact they could have on the Cogswell District:

- Consider how the Cogswell Plan relates to citywide planning, transport, and heritage initiatives

- Leverage the plan with adjacent development
- Realign road network with adjacent sites
- Maximize buildable area
- Design streets as places
- Create gateways into urban neighbourhoods
- Allow surrounding context to inform building heights
- Define people-first targets and vision

Studying some of these issues takes time, but a deeper look into them need not delay planning and design for Cogswell. Instead, these larger issues are more reason to create a flexible masterplanning framework that prioritizes adaptability.” (p33, Gehl, 2019)

## **SUMMARY OF GEHL REPORT DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Gehl Report presents nine district recommendations. Below is a summary of each key recommendation:

### **CONNECTIVITY**

#### **1. Improve connectivity within the district.**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: It prioritizes vehicles, not pedestrians/bike connections.
- Recommended action: Increase number of pedestrian crossings.
- Recommended action: Create frequent opportunities for east/west crossings.
- Recommended action: Replace South Roundabout with a traditional intersection.
- Recommended action: Improve protected bike lanes on both sides of Cogswell Street, add additional bike connections on Cornwallis Street.

#### **2. Improve quality of connective tissue.**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: It doesn't connect to north-east and Halifax Waterfront and doesn't connect adjacent properties.
- Recommended action: Smaller vehicle lanes on Barrington Street and Poplar Street.
- Recommended action: Create wider sidewalks on Barrington Street, Poplar Street, and Upper Water Street.

#### **3. Create places for people to connect.**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: It is unclear what variety of social opportunities will be available in the district, e.g. activities, programming, and public space features.
- Recommended action: Design public spaces to encourage a variety of social opportunities.

### **OPEN SPACE**

#### **4. Provide a variety of public spaces.**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: It is unclear how open spaces will support different programs.

- Recommended action: Clearly define hierarchy of public spaces including privately owned public spaces (POPS), Granville Square, and transit plaza as they relate to the existing open space network.
- Recommended action: Consider mid-block public alleys instead of POPS.
- Recommended action: Examine the intended Granville Square as the heart of the community (see sample program on P. 75).

**5. Define access level.**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: The public spaces aren't defined and it is unclear what they're intended for.
- Recommended action: Clearly define quality criteria and access levels for POPS.
- Recommended action: Define the spectrum of public open spaces.

**6. Improve human experience.**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: It does not adequately show how pedestrians will be protected from heavy traffic.
- Recommended action: Where public spaces are adjacent to vehicle/transit traffic, emphasis should be placed on the comfort of the public space user.
- Recommended action: Design for comfort in open spaces, maximize sunlight, and protect from wind by adjusting building massing.
- Recommended action: Identify opportunities to commemorate culture and heritage.

**URBAN BLOCK**

**7. Diversify building typology.**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: It does not define building typology but suggests a large-scale development pattern.
- Recommended action: Planning policies and real estate exercises should encourage multiple opportunities for development on smaller parcels with eclectic mix of building types.

**8. Create vibrant, defined edges.**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: It suggests buildings with uniform building frontages.
- Recommended action: Provide smaller buildings with many entrances.
- Recommended action: Create active edges with variety and articulation every six metres.

**9. Reflect Halifax identity**

- Core challenge with the 60% Plan: It is unclear how new developments will connect to the identity of Halifax's existing city fabric.
- Recommended action: Reflect existing city fabric of small, fine-grained building frontages.

**GEHL RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS**

1. Create a shared vision for the Cogswell District.
2. Develop urban design guidelines for the Cogswell District.
3. Ensure the Cogswell Plan is adaptable and can respond to future changes.
4. Create an early activation strategy.
5. Create a strategic plan and activation plan for the Halifax Waterfront.