

Anika (Ah-knee- ka)

she/her

District 8

The climate changing is an emergency and needs to be treated as such

TRUE

Every year the municipal budget has far less money than the city needs to do everything it wants. This year is shaping up to be the worst one yet. Why do you think this is?

The sheer size of HRM due to amalgamation means that our municipal services (roads, water, sewage, waste collection, emergency services, etc.) need to cover a vast area. The more spread out a population the more expensive it is to provide services. The denser urban Halifax core subsidizes suburban and rural areas.

Cars also don't pay their fair share. Building and maintaining roads, plowing, and policing are massive municipal expenses. Parking largely remains free and is subsidized by the general public. Our roads should be focused on moving people and goods, not individual cars. Cars contribute to wear and tear on roads, congestion, accidents and deaths, pollution, and general isolation and community disconnect.

Finally, the provincial government has passed many costs onto cities by failing to fulfill their duties. They've neglected to take meaningful action on climate change and housing. They have failed to proclaim the Provincial Coastal Protection Act, and there have been significant delays in the Traffic Safety Act and Provincial Active Transportation Strategy. The Provincial Housing Agency is still failing to provide solutions to our housing crisis.

This failure means that costs are downloaded onto municipalities. Municipalities are left to handle emergency responses and clean-up after hurricanes, floods, fire, and infrastructure repairs. They are also burdened with the housing crisis, support programs, increasing public safety concerns, and managing tent encampments. HRM could and SHOULD be doing more on all of these issues, but when higher levels of government fail to do their job and collaborate, the costs end up on the shoulders of municipalities and taxpayers. Municipalities can't run a deficit unlike provincial or federal governments.

There are two ways to move forward - raise taxes or grow. Since we are growing, we should grow smart. That means building complete communities, with denser central areas, with amenities that are walkable. This will help increase the municipal budget but not increase the cost of services exponentially.

In June of this year, council passed an Infrastructure Asset Management Administrative Order. What does this AO do? Do you think it is needed? Why or why not?

The AO is the brainchild of our new Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Cathie O'Toole. It aims to improve how HRM plans for and manages its infrastructure assets over the long term.

The AO evaluates the full costs and impacts of infrastructure assets throughout their entire lifespan. This includes not only the initial investment but also ongoing maintenance, operational costs, and eventual replacement or disposal.

By adopting this long-term perspective, the AO enables better planning and budgeting for the future. This approach helps in making more informed decisions about investments, maintenance schedules, and resource allocation.

Overall, the Infrastructure Asset Management Administrative Order is a proactive measure that aligns with best practices in asset management. It facilitates a forward-thinking approach that can enhance both the sustainability and efficiency of HRM's infrastructure management.

One of the first major policies you're likely to vote on is the on-going regional plan review. What do you know about this review?

When Halifax, Bedford, Dartmouth, and the "county" were amalgamated into HRM in 1996, each area had its own land use by-laws and planning strategies. This led to a lot of confusion, overlap, and contradictions under a single governing body.

In 2006, the first regional plan aimed to harmonize these various municipal plans, it was reviewed in 2014. However, it didn't sufficiently address future needs. Since that time HRM has experienced unprecedented growth and surpassed the population targets in the 2014 Plan.

The current Regional Plan review is an overhaul. Creating a new plan and vision for where and how HRM will grow to a population of 1 million people, a milestone we are projected to meet by 2050. The goal is to identify where there's room for new housing and other support services needed for the growing population. For example, planning new housing for young families must also consider future needs like local schools, playgrounds, and park space. Additionally, it must account for systems like transportation, energy, and our green network.

Much good work have been completed since the last Regional Plan review in 2014. Mainly the adoption of many priority plans including the Integrated Mobility Plan (2017), Halifax Green Network Plan (2018), HalifACT Climate Action Plan (2020), Sharing Our Stories etc etc -- One of the main impetuses (and challenges) of updating the Regional Plan is to ensure alignment with these priority plans.

In short, a progressive and adaptive Regional Plan is critical for the municipality to successfully plan for the future.

In the [current draft of the plan](#) there are a lot of proposed changes to municipal governance. What are some of your favourites and why?

I'm impressed by how the draft Regional Plan incorporates concepts and policies to advance HRM's priority plans, including the Halifax Green Network Plan, Integrated Mobility Plan, and HalifACT. I fully support these initiatives and believe they should guide new growth and development in the region. It's great to see the RP take a long-term perspective for a future population of 1 million, especially given HRM's current housing needs and the strain on municipal services.

I advocate for directing 90% of new growth into urban and suburban areas, which will help improve our infrastructure, reduce GHG emissions, and foster more walkable, sustainable communities. The RP's focus on 'missing middle housing' is a step in the right direction, aiming to create dense, vibrant neighborhoods with diverse housing options, active transit, essential services, and access to nature. We need to establish firm standards for complete communities and make growth and development decisions based on these principles.

I'm pleased to see Policy EC-56, which promotes sustainable coastal management by considering long-term climate impacts, ecosystem health, public risk, and adaptation strategies. Additionally, I support Policy EC-61, which encourages protecting and restoring natural coastal ecosystems, using nature-based solutions. These policies emphasize retaining and improving public coastal access.

What are some of the proposals that you would change and why?

We need to take the RP further by prioritizing zoning and investment in transit-oriented hubs and corridors, implement BRT and the all ages and abilities (AAA) bikeway network, to truly build transit-oriented complete communities. This is the only way to address the demands of rapid population growth and escalating needs.

The plan needs to be much stronger on environmental protection. HRM requires concrete policies and tools to effectively safeguard areas critical for biodiversity and climate change. It is unacceptable that only some wetlands are given a 30m buffer—this buffer should apply to all wetlands, not just those near watercourses

or designated as Wetlands of Special Significance (WSS). We must consider the entire watershed system, not just individual wetlands.

My top concern is ensuring that the Regional Plan translates into real action. It's crucial that staff and Council have clear, actionable tools to implement the Plan effectively. We need firm guidance to prevent harmful growth, protect valuable greenspaces, and promote sustainable development. This is essential for achieving a future that is more affordable, healthier, and sustainable.

Earlier this year, the city passed a set of bylaw changes known as the Housing Accelerator Fund By-laws. In your own words please describe what the point of this policy change is. Do you agree with it?

Earlier this year, the city passed the Housing Accelerator Fund By-laws. Here's what these changes are all about:

This initiative started as a federal project that provided grants to municipalities to encourage zoning changes aimed at increasing the availability of "missing middle" housing. In other words, it's about promoting housing types that fall between single-family homes and high-rise apartments—like duplexes and townhouses.

Under these by-laws, if the city implements certain zoning changes, it can access federal funding. The key changes include:

Increased Height Limits: Allowing taller buildings as of right in urban centers.

Transit-Oriented Development: Encouraging more development around key transit corridors and near schools and universities.

Density in Suburban Areas: Identifying important locations in suburban communities for increased density based on transit access and other services to promote complete communities.

The funding accelerates the process by addressing delays in approvals, including increasing city staff to help move things along faster.

The by-laws also aim to address the issue of spot upzoning, where individual properties are rezoned to higher values, leading to luxury housing. Instead, these by-laws encourage broader zoning changes to support affordability and act as a pressure release valve. The downside is that we could stand to lose a lot of character and end up with sterile and ugly developments. HRM has many heritage zones with protections, so the character of neighborhoods will still be considered - but we do need more steps to ensure this.

****Do I agree with these changes?*** Yes, mostly. I believe the Housing Accelerator Fund By-laws are a positive step. They address the need for more diverse housing options and make it easier to integrate new developments into existing communities. By promoting density and transit-oriented development, they help build more sustainable and complete communities. Additionally, broader zoning changes can help mitigate the effects of spot upzoning, making housing more affordable. The focus on increasing city staff to speed up approvals is also a practical move to reduce bureaucratic delays. However, by moving quickly - which we need to because we've failed to be prepared for growth - we stand to put decisions in the hands of developers without community buy-in. It's not ideal but we're in a bad situation because of poor planning.

What changes would you make to the HAF bylaws, if any? (Please be as specific as possible.)

1. Integrate Heritage Protection with Community Organizations:

In the North End, where density is already high, it's crucial to balance new developments with heritage protection. I propose coordinating heritage protection efforts with legacy leases for NGOs such as Akoma, United Way, YMCA, and the Mi'kmaq Friendship Centre, Adsum etc. This could ensure that heritage buildings are preserved while supporting organizations that provide valuable community services.

2. Enhance Support for Community and Commercial Spaces:

- Community Spaces: Offer tax breaks for properties that provide community spaces. This could encourage more nonprofits and community-focused organizations to utilize or create spaces that benefit residents.

- Commercial Spaces: Implement tax incentives for commercial properties that offer affordable rent to small local business start ups. Particularly equity seeking entrepreneurs.

- Outreach and Support Services: Extend tax breaks to businesses and properties that offer outreach and support services, helping to foster a supportive environment for those in need.

3. Utilize Municipality-Owned Spaces for Non-Profits and Arts:

- Designate certain municipality-owned spaces for use by NGOs and arts organizations. This can provide them with affordable or free spaces, which is vital for their operations and for enriching the community's cultural life.

4. Incentivize Leasing of Empty Commercial Spaces:

- Implement a tax on empty commercial storefronts or suites to encourage property owners to lease them out, potentially for short-term uses like pop-up shops. This would help activate vacant properties and support local entrepreneurs.

5. Explore Single-Point Access Buildings:

- Look into adopting enabling language for single-point access buildings, which can enhance efficiency and reduce costs. Single-point access designs can improve the functionality of housing by minimizing the need for multiple hallways and staircases, thus increasing usable space and promoting better character density.

6. Accessibility Requirements:

- Ensure that new developments adhere to best practices for accessibility. This includes features such as door openers, keypads instead of screens for the blind, a percentage of wheelchair-accessible units, and wheelchair-accessible common spaces. These measures not only support individuals with disabilities but also facilitate aging in place.

7. Address Municipal Garbage Strain:

- With increased development in the North End, there is a significant strain on municipal public garbage cans. For buildings over five floors or with 30 or more units, require that they provide and manage their own public garbage cans. This will help alleviate the burden on municipal services.

As part of the Housing Accelerator Fund money, the federal government asked Halifax to expedite its suburban plan review. The provincial government did the same when they announced the most recent special planning areas. Why do Halifax's suburbs need to change?

Halifax needs a better suburban plan to contain and reduce urban sprawl by focusing on building complete communities.

The suburbs are expensive for the city. The current suburban areas are costly for the city to maintain. We spend more on services and maintenance in these areas than we collect in property taxes. To address this shortfall, either taxes need to increase or we need to boost density in the suburbs to generate more revenue.

The suburbs cause transportation bottlenecks. Suburban sprawl contributes to traffic congestion and bottlenecks, as many residents commute long distances into the downtown core. By creating more complete communities—where people can live, work, and access amenities closer to home—we can reduce reliance on cars and ease transportation pressures.

The suburbs aren't sustainable. Urban sprawl impacts our greenbelt, our watersheds, and forces people into lifestyles that rely on personal vehicles.

The Bedford Common Plan is a great example of how suburban areas could be successfully densified. It shows that increasing density in suburban areas can enhance community functionality and contribute positively to both local economies and transportation systems.

In the current [draft of the suburban plan](#) there are a lot of proposed changes. What are some of your favourites and why?

I support the Suburban Housing Accelerator Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy's "Vision" for our suburban areas. It envisions urban communities with a network of parks and trails, vibrant and walkable centers, main streets, and neighborhoods. Doesn't that sound like a nice place to live? To bolster the vision, the SP is guided by five core concepts, including: open space and culture, complete communities, human-scale design, pedestrian first, and transit supportive growth.

I support the policies to increase housing choices for all residents, to create more dense mixed-use buildings which could also offer work-live studios, daycares, restaurants, and other community needs that support building complete communities.

I am pleased that the draft SP has made human-scale and pedestrian-oriented design a key objective, as well as creating safe, attractive, and accessible public spaces for people of all ages and abilities. Designing our roads for our most vulnerable road users improves road safety for everyone.

What are some of the proposals that you would change? What would you change and why? (Please be as specific as possible.)

3.3 SITE ACCESSIBILITY is very light - would be nice to have stronger language bringing forward best practices.

4.2 PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLIST SAFETY AND COMFORT -very weak language with "shall consider" instead of shall"

4.3 PUBLIC TRANSIT is super brief and doesn't mention bus-rapid transit. Once again none of the strategies expand on hiring more transit operators to implement The Rapid Transit Strategy and identified four Bus Rapid Transit Routes and three new ferry routes

3.5 PARKING AND DRIVEWAYS

Policy UD-12 has updates to the Land Use By-law shall establish parking and driveway requirements. Instead of allowing for reduced parking minimums and regulating surface parking lots, we get rid of parking minimums altogether.

Getting rid of parking minimums can reduce costs, promote alternative transportation, and lead to more efficient land use and affordable housing.

As we all know, driving in this city low-key sucks. The city's plan to fix this is something called the [Integrated Mobility Plan](#). In your own words please describe what this plan aims to achieve and how it aims to achieve it.

We don't solve congestion by building more roads; we solve it by offering people viable, attractive, and safe alternatives to personal vehicles. The Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP), introduced in 2017, was progressive with its vision to prioritize moving people and goods rather than just cars. The IMP uses the "inverted triangle" approach, prioritizing those most at risk—pedestrians, cyclists/scooters, transit users—and then cars. It was meant to help us rethink and redesign our transportation system and communities, a challenging but necessary endeavor that cities around the world are undertaking.

The IMP is significantly behind many of its timelines, partly due to COVID-19 and subsequent labor shortages. However, if HRM had been more ambitious and had stronger political will, the IMP could have been implemented much more quickly. Cities like Montreal and New York managed to complete ambitious overhauls in less time and with greater population challenges.

Council needs to be more ambitious, less scared to remove parking, and less concerned about NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) objections. People generally resist change. The IMP will make driving more difficult in the short term until we culturally shift towards alternative modes of transportation.

If you believe the IMP is a good plan, please explain why you think it has not been as successful as its ambitions. How do you hope to change this?

I think the IMP is a good plan—its principles and priorities are progressive and essential for the city's sustainable growth. It's also the only way to address traffic congestion effectively: by encouraging people to use alternatives to cars.

However, the implementation has not been fast enough. Seven years later, it hasn't kept pace with the growing population. While many projects are underway, it typically takes 4-5 years for a project to move from functional planning to construction. I would like to see an increased budget for tactical pilots to establish a temporary, "better than now" network.

Additionally, I would like to see the development of a Phase 2 of the IMP that expands its scope to include more areas of HRM.

I also believe staff should be more empowered to make unpopular decisions that genuinely improve safety. Specifically, our current bike network design places bike lanes along quiet parallel streets rather than main roads. This design forces cyclists to use unsafe crosswalks at intersections with main streets. Main roads are better suited for bike lanes as they offer signalized crossings, reducing risk. However, businesses along main roads often oppose bike lanes due to concerns about losing parking, leading to delays and suboptimal designs. It is unfair for businesses to dictate transportation design to such a large extent.

In the North End, I would like to see the interim bridge bike lane and the “hole in the fence” implemented, with the full flyover completed within the next 4 years. I would also support creating a connection to Africville for walking and cycling.

Furthermore, I would advocate for a municipally subsidized e-bike and scooter share program. While companies are bidding on this, a truly affordable system will require government subsidies to make it accessible enough to shift away from car culture and ensure equity.

I also propose implementing a municipal speed limit of 30 km/h with photo radar for speeding and red light enforcement, though the current Provincial acts prohibit this. This would also reduce the need/biases of having police officers enforcing speeding.

Lastly, we need a functional transit system. The quickest and most cost-effective way to achieve this is by hiring and retaining more bus drivers, ensuring they receive living wages and good working conditions. I have met with the Transit Union representative and believe that HRM staff should listen to drivers when making decisions.

If you believe the IMP is a bad plan, please explain your preferred alternative.

n/a

Over the past few years the city has taken a "[managed encampment](#)" approach to people living outside. Before saying whether or not you agree with this, please

describe, as best you understand it, why city staff are recommending this approach.

City staff are recommending this approach because people ARE living in tents in Halifax. There are genuine concerns around the safety of those living in tents, including risks such as fires, poor hygienic conditions (e.g., lack of access to bathroom facilities and clean water), and inadequate access to heat and electricity. Managed encampments allow support workers to locate and assist those sleeping rough, helping them access support services and get onto shelter and housing lists. Additionally, if individuals in tents experience medical emergencies, their locations will be more accessible to paramedics.

As outlined in the Strategic Opportunities to Address Homelessness, HRM's long-term goal is a no-encampments approach, which would involve having adequate affordable housing and shelter spaces. However, refusing to acknowledge the reality of people living in tents doesn't help anyone. By failing to manage encampments, we place those living rough in even more dangerous situations.

If you would do anything different, what would you do and how would you do it? Please limit your answer to things possible with municipal powers.

- More multi-year funding to support orgs like MOSH, Adsum, food banks, shelters
- Redesignating parade square as an encampment
- More funding for outreach services
- Non – police mental wellbeing de-escalation staff
- Safe injection and needle disposal sites & putting them near where people are using

The city of Halifax is undertaking some pretty substantial police reform. Can you please describe what the city is doing and where it is in the process?

I'll be honest - this is one issue that I'm still brushing up on. As always, when I'm digging into something deeper - I reach out to my networks and try to get multiple opinions. I have meetings set up next week with a police officer and a prof from Dal.

From the Coast reporting I know that a big part of the reform is creating a new commissioner of Public Safety - which will hopefully lead to better decision making with public input being heard.

I look forward to discussing this more once I've had time to inform myself.

Would you do anything differently around police reform? If so, what and why?

I would love to see a mental health response team that uses de-escalation and support tactics and not uniformed officers.

Halifax has a long and difficult history with racialized police checks and has a long way to go with restoring trust with BIPOC communities.

In my many years working in advocacy and the arts - I've learned a lot about collaboration and building trust. Trust is a two way street and it's not a one off - we need to show up over and over again and prove ourselves as worthy of being trusted. This isn't just about the police but all government relationships. Too often I've sat in on stakeholder meetings with staff who aren't trained or prepared for the hostility and distrust of the African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaq and newcomer communities - so instead of building trust with the city and actually doing more harm to our relationships. Educating staff and giving them de-escalation training and tools would be a great start.

And finally, what is your primary goal should you be elected? How do you plan to achieve it?

My campaign slogan is "Let's get moving". And I mean it. There are no silver bullets, just complex and difficult crises. So we need to start chipping away at those with the tools and the power available.

I think that there is a lot of time wasted by council members who don't read staff reports (or even the executive summaries) and show up to meetings unprepared to make decisions. This isn't as sexy of a campaign slogan - "I promise to do the job above the bare minimum".

I also feel like a lot of Councillors are scared of making unpopular decisions - and push things off by requesting staff reports. I'm fine with making the right decision even if they aren't popular - I already get hate mail in my role at the EAC. I am committed to effectively balancing the representation of my district residents' voices and their community concerns while taking decisive leadership on critical issues.

I also know that progress is better than perfection and that being on council means being part of a decision making team. So to make changes we need the majority of the council to be on board. Over the many years of working in advocacy and the arts, I've learned how to collaborate with people who don't hold the same views as me and find steps forward.