

## **Councillor's Survival Guide to Safer Streets and Traffic**

Dear 2020 Council Candidate,

Thank-you for offering your candidacy as councillor or Mayor. You will be hearing many concerns from residents during your campaign about unsafe streets - speeding, difficult routes for walking and cycling to school, danger for children playing outside, close-calls on crosswalks, etc.

This comprehensive guide will help you identify relevant campaign topics, issues, policies and powers you can use to effect change. It is also relevant to our journeys as vehicle users, which are often marred by dangerous behaviour and infrastructure.

[HRM Safe Streets for Everyone](#) is an informal citizen-led group set up in 2017 by Martyn Williams due to concerns regarding roads and streets that are not safe, particularly for vulnerable road users. Contributions from you are very welcome - please join us! All our efforts including this Guide are completely voluntary. We do not receive funding from anyone as individuals or as a group. You can also [follow us on twitter](#).



Shelley Ogilvie, Ella Dodson and John Van Gorp help administer the group and are active advocates on safe street issues, also regular cyclists and pedestrians. The group is social-media based, but members have also supported each other to request the resolution of safety issues, and have presented on safe street topics at municipal meetings. We have also organised awareness-raising events like a

Stroll and Roll, and stalls at open street events.

This Guide has been drafted by Martyn Williams (using best possible but not professional knowledge) with input from group members. The views expressed are personal and may not reflect the views of other group members.

Through our advocacy and engagement with group members, staff and leadership, we have learnt a lot about safe streets processes and policies in HRM, and what is preventing more rapid progress towards community roads that are fit for all to use by all. Change cannot happen overnight, but there are many tools and methods that are helping communities like Halifax welcome and accommodate all road users more safely.

“Vulnerable Road User” refers to pedestrians, cyclists, children playing on streets, mobility scooter and wheelchair users, also any kind of motorised/electric bike or scooter. Together, vulnerable road users may often (and should) make up the majority of people using an urban street.

Due to the length of this document, it is divided into several parts.

This email is Part 1 of 3:

1. Who needs safer streets, why, and what can you do about it?
2. What policies support safer streets? Are they working as intended?
3. Provincial roads, School Zones, speed limit reductions, people with unique and significant safety needs, citizen involvement, and campaign ideas.

## **PART 1: Who needs safer streets and what can you do?**

### **1. Why Safe Streets?**

Safe Streets enable more people to enjoy journeys without using a car, especially those who are particularly vulnerable to fast-moving traffic and danger such as children, people with mental and physical disabilities and seniors.

With safe streets, walking or cycling to school becomes less of a concern. Children can play on or near streets and can visit friends

independently. Walking or wheeling to and from the bus stop to get to work is an enjoyable part of our day, not a cause of stress and concern. With safe streets, there is less dependency on car-use, less speeding, pollution-related illnesses, incidents and deaths.

Safe Streets is not about competing interests between pedestrians, drivers, wheelchair users and cyclists. Safer Streets should support everyone to make safe, enjoyable and functional journeys.



There are immense health and economic benefits that come with streets that are fit for use by all - including [busier shopping streets](#) and less personal trauma and costs associated with vulnerable road user incidents, highlighted in this [recent research from Memorial University, St Johns](#).

During the COVID-19 crisis, [people in Canada are looking for transit alternatives](#). Locally, sales of e-bikes, bicycles and other micro-mobility solutions are [“through the roof”](#).

But if every transit-user drives to work instead, our roads will be congested.

Supporting people who want to walk, cycle or use a micro-mobility solution with quick and cheap bike/micro-mobility lane solutions on key routes is vital.

## **2. Who is most affected by unsafe streets?**

Vulnerable road users with disabilities, those who rely on walking, cycling or wheeling for their mobility, regular transit users, children who walk or cycle to school and play independently in their neighbourhood and seniors are all very affected by unsafe streets. They are also less likely to be decision-makers, so their concerns may not be understood though personal experience.



In Halifax we are sadly accustomed to [regular and often serious incidents on crosswalks](#). This isn't inevitable; design and control features can and should provide safety for vulnerable road users, and prevent incidents.

If we want a walkable community, we must assess and improve crosswalks so they're safe for all to use. Paint (when it is visible) and signs alone is not safety - additional features and countermeasures are needed.



Within the peninsula, **up to 50% of residents walk to work and 50% of Halifax residents said they would like to travel by bicycle more** - see the Integrated Mobility Plan. With basic infrastructure in place that makes roads safe to use by everyone, we can have a healthy community that welcomes non-car users.

Outside the peninsula, many people would like to walk or cycle in their community but do not feel safe. By adopting some less expensive adaptations, progress could be made more quickly towards community streets that welcome vulnerable road users. This will be covered further on this Guide.

### **3. Can YOU make a difference?**

Councillors have significant controls and powers over municipal streets, and can propose changes to policies and to relevant parts of the municipal budget too. But this isn't easy - you will be told different things by different people, that certain changes you want "can't happen" because of x, y and z, that issues raised by residents are for police enforcement to address, that there are people who will prevent progressive changes, or perhaps that existing policies and funding will get us there eventually.

The concerns expressed to you by residents in your district will be your inspiration to work closely with them to reform our streets so they are safer to use. As will be explained below, residents need the ability through appropriate policies to reform their local streets. This

“bottom-up/grassroots” approach is increasingly the way that safer streets are achieved in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

#### **4. What controls do Councillors have over streets?**

Council’s powers over Municipal Streets are found in the [Halifax Regional Municipality Charter](#).

There are many provisions in the Charter relating to Municipal Streets. Some key sections and powers vested in Council are as follows:

Section 318(1); **“All streets in the Municipality are vested absolutely in the Municipality”**

A “street” is widely defined under the Charter as follows:

*(bu) "street" means a public street, highway, road, lane, sidewalk, thoroughfare, bridge, square and the curbs, gutters, culverts and retaining walls in connection therewith, except as otherwise defined in this Act*

318(2) **“In so far as is consistent with their use by the public, the Council has full control over the streets in the Municipality.”**

Section 319(1); Council may make by-laws for the protection of streets and may limit the by-law to certain streets, or to certain times of the year, or to both.

319 (3); Council may, by policy, limit or prohibit the use of a mall by vehicles, or classes of vehicles, and may restrict or prohibit parking on a mall.

319 (4) The Council may, by by-law,

- (a) establish a pedestrian mall on a street or any other land owned by the Municipality;
- (b) prohibit any person from using any vehicle or apparatus on a sidewalk in the Municipality;
- (c) prohibit any person from taking or riding any animal on any sidewalk in the Municipality;
- (d) designate any street as a controlled access street;
- (e) regulate or prohibit access to a controlled access street.

321(2); Council may, by policy, appoint a traffic authority for all or part of the Municipality

Council may also;

Section 234; Adopt a municipal planning strategy

Section 281; Adopt subdivision by-laws (which apply to the whole of the Municipality) which;

- Regulate the width of streets
- Regulate or prohibit new municipal streets if in Councils' opinion they are "premature"
- Install trees, sidewalks, bus bays and pathways
- Lay out, pave and construct streets to standards prescribed by the Municipality.

Most crucially, **Councillors have decision making control over our Municipal Budget.** You can propose changes to a draft budget presented to you if you believe that funding for safer streets is not adequate; for example amounts allocated for new sidewalks, crosswalk improvements, traffic calming, road safety plan countermeasures and tactical urbanism.

### **5. What role and powers does the Traffic Authority have?**

The Traffic Authority is an employee traffic engineer, appointed by Council. He/she is not "in charge of our roads" but they do have key decision-making powers and responsibilities relating to crosswalks, traffic signals, road markings, signage, controlled zones and setting speed limits.

The Traffic Authority's powers are prescribed under the Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) - see section 321 of the Municipal Charter.



The Traffic Authority's duties relate to traffic controls and infrastructure set out in the MVA, for example road signage, the establishment of crosswalks, traffic signals, the marking of traffic lanes, the designation of school zones, speed limits, etc.

The Traffic Authority may also establish controlled or specific zones such as bus stops and taxi stands (section 146), passenger or loading zones (section 144), accessible parking zones (section 145) and fire lanes (section 150).

In addition to the MVA, traffic engineering staff refer to guidance published by the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) including a key guide called the [Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Canada](#).

TAC refer to their guidance as a “starting point” for local specialists. They say:

*“TAC guidance defers to the judgement of trained local professionals, as there are local circumstances vary widely and myriad factors that could require approaches or solutions that differ from the “base case” in any instance.”*

For further information from the TAC relating to crosswalk safety issues and infrastructure, please [review this detailed and highly informative email](#) received from Geoff Noxon of the TAC in December 2019.

Thank you for reading this far in the first part of our Guide. The next installment will follow shortly. If you would prefer not to receive it, please reply to this email and let us know.