

# DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS HALIFAX

## There are better options!

On Sept 7, 2021, HRM Council is being asked to consider Case 20761 (Rouvalis), two towers on the block at the southeast corner of Spring Garden Road and Robie Street (Carlton Block).

An additional proposal, (Case 20218), includes two more towers planned for the **same** single Carlton Block, will **not** be on the public hearing agenda on Sept 7.

We ask: How is it possible for HRM Council and the public to meaningfully consider the development of the Carlton Block and the cumulative impact of four towers - *greater in square footage than the Nova Centre* - in this partitioned way?

### Introduction:

There are good reasons to reject **both** proposals; they will worsen both the current affordable housing crisis by permanently removing 110 affordable units and their high embodied carbon will deepen the current climate crisis. “Densification” is important, but careful planning and design is important to meet the needs of citizens. The idea that “height = good” ignores evidence that shows low-rise distributed density has better outcomes for citizens, affordability and the climate crisis (see: <https://t.co/7vz9oWGk3t?amp=1> and <https://buff.ly/3yE5LZn>)

For decades the city [offloaded the task of providing affordable housing to private developers](#). The result is a full-blown housing crisis. Yet now is not the time to allow approvals of proposals that will make it worse for the most vulnerable.

Given the history and changes of these cases over the years it is worthwhile now to have a bit of a review:

The two proposals are for 28- and 29-storey towers plus penthouses, (increased from 20- and 26-storey as first proposed). They sit directly beside Dexel’s now 30- and 16-storey towers (also recently increased to ~30-storeys). These four towers will loom together over the heritage streetscape of Carlton Street, and involve the **demolition of 12- 14 and approximately 110 affordable, small-scale housing and commercial units**. And yet, these two developments have never been considered **together** in a public hearing.

### Public Transparency:

Our modeling clearly showed citizens the whole picture. [Development Options Halifax](#) (DOH) wants to improve transparency by correcting the power imbalance between the public interest of citizens and the private interest of developers. Among other things, we advocate for using technology to inform the public engagement and improve dialogue around new proposals. Case 20761 (Rouvalis) and the neighbouring Dexel development exemplify the opacity of this process.

Assisted by Hadrian Laing, NSAA Intern Architect, we have methodically tried to open public discussion of the two proposed developments by:

1. Commissioning 3-D drawings of the **two proposals together** for the first time for the public.
2. Developing a 3-D printed model of the developments together to intuitively show what these four towers would look like to the surrounding neighbourhood.

3. Creating visuals of the future streetscape for residents, from angles not in the drawing package
4. Designing a nine-storey in-fill to demonstrate how developers could collaborate to add densification that **adds 550 units and demolishes only 1 existing building.**

(Several cities use 3-D models in this way, and some cities require all new developments to have such models. This is not a novel or expensive idea. Despite our efforts, neither the former HRM Council nor HRM heritage advisory committee have accepted our invitation to examine the model. We have brought a 3D printed model to not one but two public hearings. We trust that you, members of the Council elected in 2020, will make use of our helpful comments and visualizations.

#### Approval process:

These four towers do not reflect the Centre Plan public consultations in June, 2016. Then, HRM staff proposed adding 400 new residents to the southwest Spring Garden Road area. An HRM staff information board displayed choices between two 10-storey buildings or one 10-storey and two five-storey buildings. Another information board described this area as being the second-most constrained for sewage and water of all proposed growth areas.

None of the information considered an already approved 21-storey building nearby by Killam in 2012. The late professor Phillip Pacey informed staff that this building would accommodate 70 per cent of the proposed 400 new residents. The balance could be housed in a five- or six-storey building along with infill or additions. 850+ citizens signed a petition asking HRM council not to approve the proposals or the Centre Plan changes for this area.

We have similar worries about the process leading to the up-coming public hearing for Case 22927 (Chedrawe), a 23-storey building proposed on Robie Street between the 25-storey Shannex and the 20-storey Welford. To date there has been no examination of the cumulative impact of such developments although the population for the three buildings could be similar to the town of Port Williams or Inverness. HRM Staff recommended that this lot be restricted to 6-storeys, but the proposed design is stated for 30 storeys. We have provided a rendering of before and after.

#### Environmental Harm:

Development can address the climate crisis. We are proud to have commissioned a study by Mantle Development, an interdisciplinary climate change strategy consultancy based in Toronto, to do a preliminary assessment of the CO2 emissions associated with the building (not operating) the proposed 16, 20, 28 and 29-storey towers. A conservative estimate found this would be at least 31,000 tCO2e. This is because the higher the tower the more carbon intensive materials (concrete, steel, aluminum and glass) are required per square meter.

By contrast, DOH's smaller 9-storey in-fill option would produce only 40% as much tCO2e because it opens opportunities to use less carbon intensive materials. With careful design and material selection the building can come close to being net-zero. This would also avoid wasteful demolition of an area equal to a 12-storey building. (Note, Royal Institute of British Architects recently asked that all demolitions be stopped for just this reason <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-57756991>). National building codes have not been updated to mandate sustainable building. If these towers aren't required to be environmentally conscious - they likely won't be.

The UN's latest ICPP report on the climate crisis, "Code Red for Humanity," tells us we must immediately act to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Not only are small-scale buildings able to be in-filled, they are often cheaper and **faster to build.**

#### Our Recommendations:

We believe that all opportunities to improve our city with more integrated planning and design must be examined. We aren't about opposing development, we are about realizing better options and raising concerns when there are inconsistencies.

We raise these options again for the public record and ask the following:

1. Stand Case 20761 (Rouvalis) down until it can be considered in tandem with Case 20218 (Dexel). Do not approve Case 20761 (Rouvalis) at present.
2. Make 3-D models a requirement for these and all future developments at the public engagement phase to better express the cumulative impact of proposals for the public and subcommittees.
3. Put a pause on demolition permits which are for affordable units in peninsular Halifax (30% of median income) and clarify rules around affordable housing for any increases in zoning heights. HRM demonstrated with the negotiated 5 extra storeys for the Armoyan proposal, for 10 affordable housing units secured for 15 years, that it does not have to increase heights in the Centre Plan without accomodation.
4. HRM should prioritize conserving, adapting, and adding on to buildings or in-fill as a first course of action - and if demolition is an appropriate last resort, dismantling and re-using materials more effectively - to accommodate the carbon cost, material waste and the damage to the climate, society and the economy that demolition creates
5. Halifax should require a carbon budget for each new development, and to not approve buildings beyond a scale that can be made carbon neutral. This must include benchmarks for what is permissible now, with targets and timelines for what will be permitted in subsequent years, so there is at least a 50% reduction in embodied carbon by 2030.

We respectfully submit these ideas for development options in Halifax.

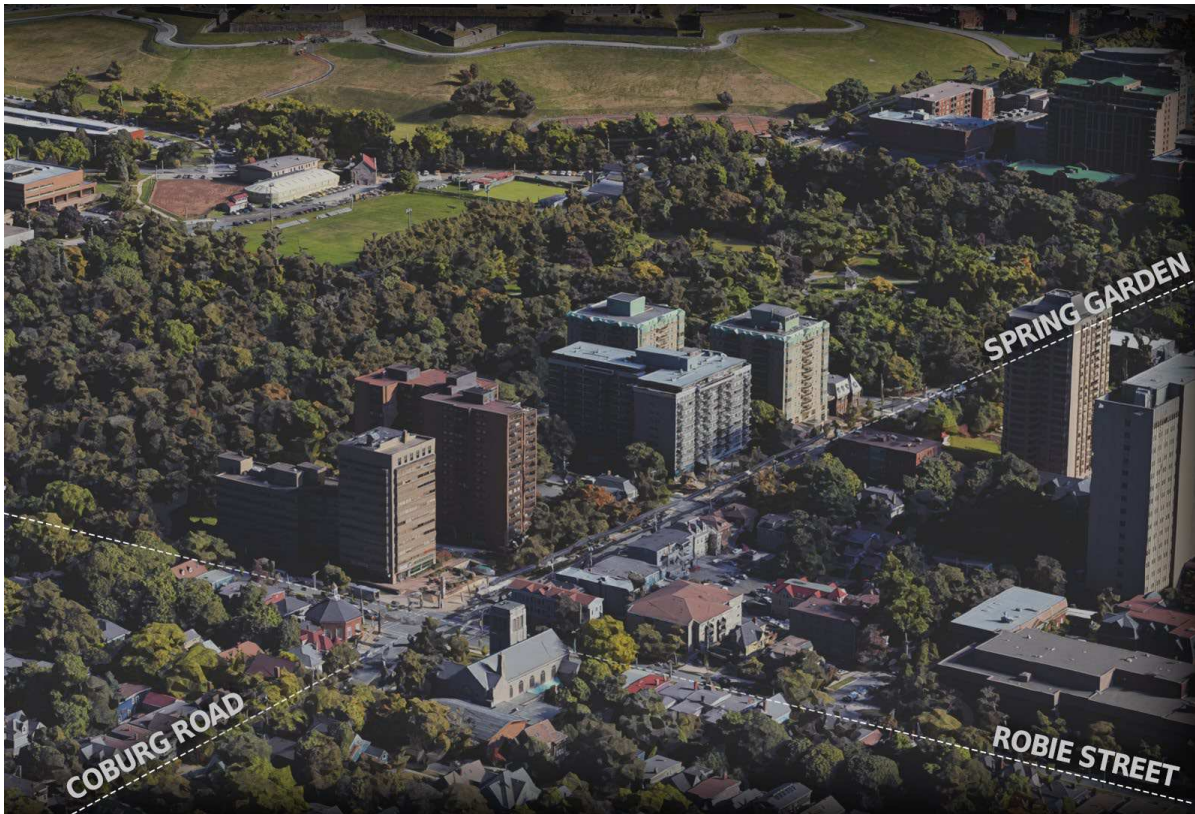
Contributed by Hadrian Laing, [BA, BEDS, MArch] NSAA Intern Architect and Peggy Cameron:

## **DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS HALIFAX**

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Case 20761: Rouvalis 28, 29-storey+ towers are being considered separately from Dexel's Cast 20218 for 2 ~30-storey towers.





Case 22927: proposes adding 23-storeys (orange) in a lot that HRM staff recommended be restricted to 6-storeys.

