

To: Planning Advisory Committee

Date: April 12, 2017

Submitted by: Brynn Nheiley, Acting Director of Planning & Development Officer

Regarding: **Amendments to the Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-Law with respect to the periphery of commercial zones. - Addendum**

Purpose

Staff propose that PAC **recommend** to Council that these amendments be **approved**.

Summary

Antigonish has a proud heritage that is reflected in its architecture. However, it is clear to see that Antigonish has reached near full capacity of developable lands, particularly with respect to traditional, low-density forms of housing.

There is a strong entrepreneurial spirit in the Antigonish Area, which in many cases lacks appropriately sized commercial spaces to suit their business needs. Some larger commercial spaces throughout our commercial areas have sat vacant for an extended period of time.

Finally, there is broad recognition that the best way to support local business, as well as to provide a wide range of housing necessary to support a diverse population, such as Antigonish has, is to introduce policies which enable and facilitate a wide range of housing types, particularly housing located in walkable distances to commercial districts.

These amendments to the Commercial Periphery designation aim to address each of these considerations in a way that preserves our architectural heritage, facilitates a more flexible range of housing types, and increases opportunity and support for commercial businesses.

In addition to changes to the Commercial Periphery designation, this amendment also consolidates repetitive site plan approval provisions of other elements of the LUB in an effort to facilitate clear navigation of the LUB. In instances where provisions were very similar but not equal, the less stringent provision remained. For example, in some areas a minimum roof slope of 8:12 was required, while in other areas the requirement was 6:12. In this example the 6:12 slope was retained.

This report is an addendum to the report to the Planning Advisory Committee, dated February 13, 2017.

Key details which inform this report are included in the Appendix, including:

- Appendix A: Map of existing and proposed districts; and
- Appendix B: Draft amendments.

Background

A Public Consultation event was held on April 10, 2017. It was attended by 6 members of the general public, 5 councilors (2 of which are also PAC members), and 1 citizen member of the PAC. Comments were given on the following topics for consideration:

- The view was expressed that this amendment broadly increases opportunity
- Increased residential in Commercial Zones:
 - Recent graduates and young professionals lack money and transportation, and prefer a restaurant and bar lifestyle, therefore the ability to live close to downtown is viewed as positive.
 - Benefit of increased walkability to amenities such as parks and the library, as well as businesses
 - Concern that the cost of commercial spaces would increase in commercial cores due to residential encroachment. However, also notion that range of commercial spaces will allow businesses to start-up and grow.
 - Concern that this may dilute commercial presence in existing commercial cores
 - Potential to stimulate redevelopment of under-utilized sites.
 - A sense of safety for families who can live close to daily activities: “family friendly”
 - Viewed as a positive way to stem the loss of retired home owners to smaller homes in the County.
 - Importance of aesthetics emphasized.
 - Existing businesses could benefit from more people living near by
- Commercial uses in Residential Zones:
 - Risks of noise and traffic/parking congestion can be mitigated through limited business hours, enforcement of noise by-law, strictly licensing liquor establishments
 - Risk/benefit of raising value of homes for current owners, thereby impacting affordability of housing close to Downtown
 - Live/work opportunity in the Downtown will increase.
 - The question was raised as to whether this ability will extend outside of the Downtown core.

- Desire for reduced parking requirement for businesses in residential zones to preserve yards.
- Question regarding loss of housing units due to commercial occupancy. Concluded that this was more than balanced by allowing more units in other areas.

Discussion

Social Factors

In general, the public consultation revealed that participants were comfortable with the balance of providing new housing opportunity with the potential loss of traditional housing to commercial use.

Nuisances such as noise were recognized as already having controls through though existing by-laws. Participants agreed that enforcement of these existing by-laws would be crucial to the success of this amendment.

Traffic and parking concerns were balanced with comments that highlighted the live/work opportunities and improved walkability, both of which would reduce traffic and parking demand.

Economic Factors

The proposed amendment was viewed to offer a trade-off of increasing property value for current home owners, while raising the cost of new homes for those looking to buy. However, the addition of higher density housing was viewed as a valuable option for those seeking more compact forms of housing, such as empty-nesters and young professionals.

Adding diversity of commercial spaces was seen as an overall benefit to business owners. However, there was some concern that commercial spaces in residential zones would take away from existing commercial cores. This was generally viewed to be a low risk, as more people living near the commercial cores was seen to increase the market for the business community enough to compensate for the risk.

Environmental Factors

Safety and improved walkability were seen to be significant benefits that would come with this amendment.

Conclusion

Where participants raised significant benefits to this amendment, and also recognized mitigation strategies to address concerns that were raised, staff propose that PAC **recommend** to Council that these amendments be **approved**.