



The Development Boom in Downtown Halifax

Mixed-use and Commercial Development in Downtown Halifax



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Community Design, April 10, 2017



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Jill Grant for her overwhelming support and guidance through the research and writing process. Thank you to Mary Ann Martell for all the transcribing of the interviews. Thank you to all the interviewees for their time and efforts. I would also like to thank Patricia Manuel for additional guidance.

Executive Summary

Halifax, Nova Scotia has been characterized as a growing urban center. As people move to Halifax there is a demand for development, especially in the downtown because of its older demographics of retirees, young students, and young professionals. Today more people are wanting to live in downtown: its convenience and amenities attract those young professionals and retirees. With this increase of population, change in cultural of interest in living in the downtown, Halifax's market has been accommodating the demand. As a result, new developments are under construction in the downtown. To understand the development boom downtown there is a need to study what has been built since 2009, and the commercial uses of the developments coming to downtown. The research question that motivates this thesis is *How has the 2009 Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPS) influenced development of mixed-use and office commercial developments built in downtown Halifax?*

I used a mixed method approach in conducting my research which included a policy analysis, field observations, and 11 interviews with brokers, planners, councilors, a developer and an architect. The mix of methods used are drawn together to formulate the results of the project. The results showed 21 development have been produced or are still under construction in Halifax's downtown since 2009. 11 of the developments started since 2009 are complete, 10 developments are not finished yet. Out of the 21 developments only five have office commercial developments. Sixteen mixed-use developments have been built or are under construction, clearly showing the higher demand for residential mixed-use development over office commercial developments. The interviewees revealed trends happening in the downtown and how the plan influenced development and the kinds of development happening in the downtown. A common finding is that the downtown is seeing an increase in development for about 2-5 years now. Halifax's downtown currently has a demand for residential with retail commercial at the ground level, but no more demand for office commercial developments. Another trend mentioned is that the downtown plan is requiring ground floor commercial space in new developments even when there is no demand for retail spaces in the downtown. Some opinions mentioned that there can't be retail on every ground floor, there will be too many vacant spaces.

Many agree that the 2009 plan did allow for more development to occur in the downtown, but other factors have influenced the increase in development in the downtown. These factors include

low interest rates, demographics, increase in population, and the shipbuilding contract. The research mentions several trends around Halifax's downtown and the recent development that has been taking place over the past few years. The observations show exactly where and how many developments have been built or started since the 2009 downtown plan was implemented. The final results provide new information on what exactly is being developed in Halifax's downtown, what kinds of developments are they, and considers whether there is room for more development to continue.

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Introduction

Downtown Halifax is seeing an increasing number of new developments in recent years. Halifax implemented the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPS) on October 24, 2009 (DHSMPS, 2009). The boundary of Halifax's downtown is referenced in the DHSMPS (see figure 1). This plan has been seen as an open door to the increase in development in Halifax's downtown. DHSMPS has led to questioning what is being developed over these past few years, and why has there been a significant increase in development in Halifax, especially in the downtown core. The DHSMPS, seeks to provide "a downtown 'precincts' approach ... to co-ordinate, focus and direct land uses, development, public investments, and cultural planning strategies" (DHSMPS, 2009). The plan provides focus on only the downtown area, which allows for specific goals in developing the Halifax's downtown. The DHSMPS also has numerous policies that encourage growth and development in the downtown. Understanding what commercial spaces and buildings are built, what is under construction downtown can help to inform Halifax's future development and growth, and the possible impact of the DHSMPS. The types of commercial spaces that will be documented in the study include at grade commercial in mixed use developments, and office commercial developments. Numerous plans and documents relate to Halifax's downtown such as the Draft Center Plan, the DHSMPS, and development approvals that affect commercial development. Understanding how the DHSMPS influences commercial development downtown is the major goal and purpose for this study.

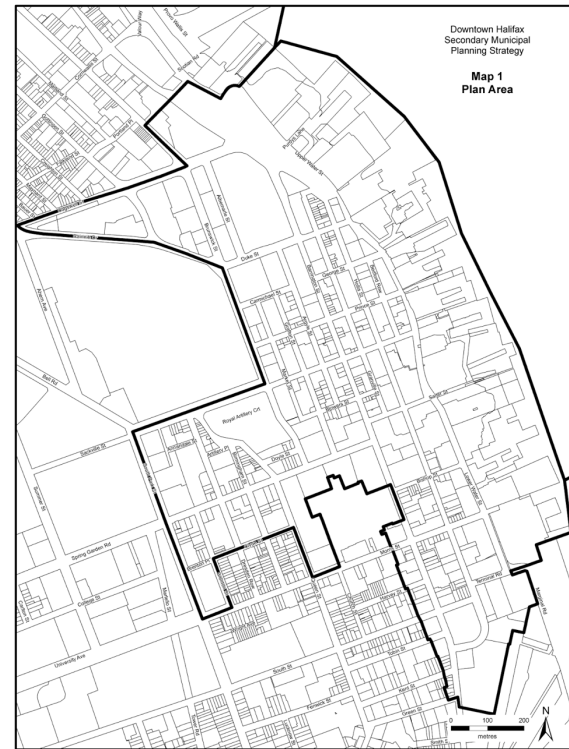


Figure 1 Downtown Zoning Boundary
Halifax Regional Municipality (2009). *Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy* Halifax, NS.
https://www.halifax.ca/planning/documents/Downtown_Halifax_MPS.pdf

Research Purpose

Halifax's downtown is currently seeing a lot of new construction with projects like the Maple, the Nova Centre, and the Roy. The main objective of this study is to determine the number of office buildings, mixed-use residential-commercial spaces built since 2009. To look at the trends

associated with the developments in the downtown. The research seeks to investigate the influence of the 2009 downtown plan on office commercial and mixed-use residential with commercial at grade developments in Halifax's downtown. Also, to understand what additional factors have influenced the increase in development in the downtown.

Research Question:

How has the 2009 DHSMPs influenced the development of mixed use (residential with commercial components) and office commercial developments in Downtown Halifax?

Sub questions

- Where are new commercial spaces located downtown, and what type of uses (residential mixed use or office commercial) do they include?
- What types of use occupy the spaces?

Literature Review

With the boom of development in Halifax's downtown since the 2009 downtown plan there is a need to determine how the plan has influenced commercial development. No one has assessed commercial development downtown in Halifax in recent years. This makes an inventory that will provide Halifax planners and developers the knowledge of how much has already been built in the way of commercial spaces timely. As Halifax continues to develop more plans to further improve the city's future growth, there is a need to understand what changes have been made to the plans and how these plans are influencing the city. Millward & Winsor provide some context and background to how Halifax's downtown and its business district looked over 20 years ago. Grant (2002) provides a context into what planning practices influence mixed-use development in the article, "Mixed Use in Theory and Practice: Canadian Experience with Implementing a Planning Principle" (Grant, 2002). In recent years, there has been a change in development planning; the idea of residential and commercial mixed use has become the ideal or norm in cities throughout Canada (Grant, 2002). Grant found that in some cities mixed use worked well, while in other cities it did not work as well.

Millward & Winsor discussed the change in location of major retail districts in Halifax between 1911 and 1993. They mapped retail stores, businesses, and other commercial spaces, and then determined where and when the business districts changed. Millward & Winsor discuss the Central Business District (CBD) as the commercial and business center of the city: this is where most of the commercial offices, retail, and other and business are located. They inventoried the number of stores in downtown Halifax that sold goods and services, and locations of retail sites. Initially in 1911, Barrington Street was the primary business district but by 1993 Spring Garden became the primary business district downtown. Millward & Winsor found that the shift in the Central Business District also had an influence on what and where new developments would be developed. It has now been 23 years since that study, which means the Central Business District could have changed again. Millward & Winsor also noted the location where businesses moved over the years, which reflected development growth. Millward & Winsor noted that CBDs change in location over the years. They also noted the influence the CBD has on other developments, referring that CBD has been associated with development in locations in close proximity to the CBD. The article provides a background for what studies have been done in Halifax and commercial spaces such as retail and the central business district. Has also notes some trends around development patterns that are associated with the downtown and the CBD.

Other Cities Examples

A study done in the United States is Zhu's paper on Commercial Real Estate Capital in the Restructuring of Downtown Baltimore that "investigates the role of commercial real estate capital in the process of reshaping downtown Baltimore" (Zhu, 2001, 73). A trend that the study discovered was "A reconfiguration of downtown office location patterns began with a subsequent changing ownership of properties" (Zhu, 2001, 77). "Large institutional capital disinvested from out of fashion buildings in the old CBD and invested in water-front Pratt street/Inner Harbor" (Zhu, 2001, 77). Another finding discovered that "property booms benefit prime locations more than others, and that property slumps hurt secondary properties more than premier properties" (Zhu, 2001, 79). Zhu found that due to neighboring cities such as Washington and Philadelphia, Baltimore's city centre office function has been overshadowed, resulting in many old office buildings in the downtown vacant pushing their tenants to the suburbs (Zhu, 2001, 79). Furthermore, the new location of the Inner Harbor brings people, tourism, and entertainment to an area of Baltimore's city. Zhu discussed how "institutional real estate capital has shifted from the

old CBD to the new waterfront, as Fainstein and Fainstein (1983, p.247) believed that ‘heavy private investment in formerly declining urban centers occurs when the relative future value of the core is enhanced’” (Zhu, 2001, 79). The results found that downtown Baltimore is increasingly becoming a marginal regional center of financial industries (Zhu, 2001, 79). Zhu finds that Baltimore’s problem of larger cities affecting those mid-sized cities nearby is affecting commercial office development.

Alexander and Tomalty’s article on Smart Growth and Sustainable Development: Challenges, Solutions and Policy Directions is a study conducted in BC on urban sprawl and promoting more compact and livable development patterns (Alexander & Tomalty 2002, 397). Some of the findings suggest that the density of communities is aligned with efficient infrastructure and reduced automobile dependence (Alexander & Tomalty 2002, 403). The study also looked at issues in different areas around BC such as Kelowna, North Vancouver, and Nanaimo. They were chosen to show a range of different densities, “illustrate some trends and challenges in implementing Smart Growth, and positive initiatives that might be replicated in other parts of the province.” (Alexander & Tomalty 2002, 404). They made recommendations for communities that had high unit densities but had low ratio of jobs to employed labour force, forcing people to drive long distances to get to work and other services and amenities. The study recommends municipalities build complete communities where people’s needs could be met close to home (Alexander & Tomalty 2002, 405). Referring to developing developments in downtowns to encourage less urban sprawl and more density or compact living developments, such as mixed-use developments. Allowing that idea of creating living and working communities in the downtown.

Mixed-Use & The Planning Process

New developments these days tend to be mixed-use developments having some sort of ground level commercial space. Grant (2002) provides a context into what planning practices influence mixed-use development. In recent years, there has been a change in development planning; the idea of residential and commercial mixed use has become the ideal or norm in cities throughout Canada (Grant, 2002). Grant (2002) deals with mixed use theory and practice in nine Canadian cities, including Vancouver and Toronto. Grant found that in some of these cities mixed use worked well, while in other cities it did not. A policy promoting mixed use buildings, allowing people to live and work in the same area, is encouraged throughout Halifax’s downtown. Halifax’s

Draft Centre Plan encourages land use policies like “mixed use buildings with active uses at grade ... on main streets” (Halifax Draft Centre plan, 8). With policies forcing developments to have commercial spaces at grade level, the question is who is using these spaces and are they all being used.

To follow the theme of mixed use and planning, Grant & Perrott discuss the process of mixed use planning in suburban developments in three cities: Calgary, Surrey, and Markham. They asked “What challenges does planning face in trying to achieve the desired mix of commercial uses?” (Grant & Perrott, 2011, 178). The challenges Grant and Perrott discovered were trying to plan for commercial spaces and the risk of overbuilding. Their article used interviews as one of the methods. After conducting interviews, they used discourse analysis to decipher the trends and opinions found. Both articles by Grant provide a context of what type of studies have previously been done on planning and mixed-use commercial development, and the patterns.

A different article on “Mixed-use development and financial feasibility” by Rabianski, Gibler, Clements, & Tidwell discusses mixed-use development because of their growing popularity. The article looks at different elements that contribute to mixed-use developments, such as: costs, site synergy, local economy, and market factors. Mixed use has become more popular and with increased amount of mixed use developments they add more value compared to single use developments (Rabianski, et al., 2009). One factor discovered from mixed-use developments is that retail tenants may be willing to pay higher rents because of the increase of pedestrian traffic from the multiple uses from the development (Rabianski, et al., 2009). Another important element that influences mixed-use developments is the location of the development (Rabianski, et al., 2009).

Some locations of developments are going to be more successful than others because of foot traffic, and other services. Additionally, local economy is an important factor to consider, if the market of the community or city will influence the development (Rabianski, et al., 2009). The synergy of the site is another essential aspect for mixed use developments. The uses on the site need to complement, be compatible and mutually supportive to the existing area, as well as the mixed-use development (Rabianski, et al., 2009). Rabianski, Gibler, Clements, & Tidwell additionally noted that there needs to be a balance of night and day activity so that the development doesn’t shut down all at once (2009). The site needs to work all throughout the day: essentially, there needs to

be a mix of uses such as restaurants/ bars, office, retail, residential. Incorporating most of these would then satisfy the balance of different uses throughout the day.

Development in Halifax

Grant and Gillis's article "The Twisted Sisters: Disputing Iconic Urban Design" examines the dispute around a development in Halifax known as the Twisted Sisters case (Grant & Gillis, 2012). This project was approved by Council to be developed even though it exceeded the as-of-right height limits by over 200 feet. Although the project never got built, there was a lot of public dispute on the project. In the end, it helped to develop the new Downtown Plan implemented in 2009. The development was proposed to be a mixed-use development with a common four level podium and two towers of 27 stories each (Grant & Gillis, 2012). The development was approved by council, even though the Heritage Advisory Committee voted against the project and advised council to reject the project (Grant & Gillis, 2012). In contrast to those who were against the development, some organizations (such as Fusion Halifax) were in favor and argued that the project would encourage a vibrant downtown, attracting young people (Grant & Gillis, 2012). Grant & Gillis's article discussed that even though there was lots of debate about the development, the dispute on the Twisted Sisters project was used in the end as a lesson for the new downtown plan that was then implemented in 2009 (Grant & Gillis, 2012). Grant & Gillis said "Twisted Sisters case revealed the persistent use of some planning theories and ideas along with the deployment of new planning, design, and development notions" (Grant & Gillis, 2012). This example of a proposed development that went through the development process and was approved, doesn't necessarily mean that the project is going to be developed. Similar cases exist of proposed developments that were approved, even if they were considered good developments, still didn't get built.

Tim Bousquet discussed the development or the lack of development in the Halifax's downtown in his article "Downtown's missing buildings" (2008). The article highlights a few developments that went through the approval process, but never got built. He also discusses one proposed development that council rejected. Bousquet then goes on to discuss the challenges commercial development faces in Halifax's downtown. Bousquet mentions the Twisted Sisters development and the Keith's development and explains how both these projects had a lot of resistance from the Heritage Group (2008). Bousquet also discussed some of the issues around commercial development in relation to Halifax's downtown. One problem he identifies is, Halifax doesn't have

a lot of head offices for major companies, so there is less demand for office space downtown (Bousquet, 2008). Another factor on office developments in the downtown is that developers are not willing to take a lot of risk on projects and banks are not giving out money unless developers can show good quality tenants who will lease the space (Bousquet, 2008). The article drew on interviews and real estate analysis. The interviewees agreed that one way to sustain developments and obtain new developments is to ensure workers are kept locally, and then the firms will follow (Bousquet, 2008). The idea is that workers bring firms, firms increase rents, higher rents inspire developers to build new buildings, which results in more development in Halifax's downtown (Bousquet, 2008).

CBC News article "Halifax's major construction has almost tripled in value over a decade" illustrates just how significant the increase in development has been especially on Halifax's downtown. Halifax has seen an increase in development especially in the downtown as this CBC news article "CBC new analysis of a decade worth of development permits confirms the Halifax core is in the midst of a building boom" (Ward, 2016). The article highlights a few themes or trends that are happening in terms of development in the downtown. One factor is that the value of developments has almost tripled from 2006 to 2015 (Ward, 2016). A culture shift has been an influential factor behind the growth. More young people, single people, and retirees are moving to the downtown, which is a large reason for the development boom (Ward, 2016). Another factor is that developers are taking advantage of a market that started in the larger cities in earlier years, while Halifax's market is allowing for the increase in development now (Ward, 2016). Additionally, in 2011 the shipbuilding contract was also a major factor that kicked off the regions building boom starting in 2012 (Ward, 2016). Finally, with all this construction going on in the downtown in recent years there are some complaints, including the fact that sidewalks are closed for months, historic buildings are being replaced with new buildings, and the city is becoming out of touch (Ward, 2016). Some people tend to not like to change, especially when there is a lot of changing happening all at once.

The literature review provides a context of the types of studies that have already been done related to commercial, mixed-use developments and planning processes. The literature review reveals some gaps in knowledge around commercial uses in Halifax's downtown. There is also a gap in terms of what developments have been built in recent years that have commercial components. studies relating to commercial development in major downtowns and planning policies, practice,

and implementation are missing a Halifax context. There is room for a study of what is happening in a midsize major city such as Halifax on how commercial development is influenced by planning policies such as a new downtown plan.

Approach

After conducting the literature review, it is apparent that there is little literature on Halifax's downtown and influences regarding development in the recent years. The literature also in most cases is out dated and lacking those fine details. Providing a fuller study to fill any gaps in literature on commercial and mixed-use development in Halifax's is the reason for doing this study. In providing a deeper, stronger study on Halifax's downtown, I will be studying "*How has the 2009 DHSMPS influenced the development of mixed use (residential with commercial components) and office commercial developments in Downtown Halifax?*" Answering the question, I will show the types of office commercial and mixed use residential/commercial developments that have emerged in Halifax's downtown since 2009. I will also look at the influences the DHSPMS has had on Halifax's market and its role in the increased developments in the downtown. From collecting data and analyzing what trends and patterns have impacted Halifax's downtown I will then bridge that gap in the literature, providing a more extensive study on Halifax's downtown.

Methods

Objectives:

- To document the location of the new commercial spaces that have been developed since the DHSMPS was approved
- To study the type of uses in commercial spaces (eg. Retail, office space).
- To document and analyze trends in built form downtown (eg. mixed-use residential-commercial, commercial office).
- To discover how many of these new commercial spaces are occupied

- To discover the ownership trends in the downtown, looking at who owns these new developments in the area.

I started by conducting a policy analysis. This consisted of reviewing the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy, Downtown By-law, and the Downtown Design Manual to look for policies that influence or impact commercial developments in the downtown. When reviewing planning documents, I looked for policies related to commercial developments, requirements for ground floor uses, uses that are permitted, mixed use requirements, and any restrictions pertaining to commercial/mixed use developments in the downtown. After collecting the data, I analyzed the results to find trends. I illustrate what the plans and policies say about what is permitted, required and encouraged for new developments in Halifax's downtown.

Next, I conducted field observations. This involved walking through the study area. I walked around downtown, taking photographs, documenting the location of buildings of interest on a GIS map that I created in Arc GIS using the HRM database. Photographs are used to reference different developments in the downtown and their current state. While conducting my observations I brought a check list that I used for each of the developments that I found. The check list consisted of the development name, location, use, types of space, occupancy, ownership, number of storeys, under construction or completed. This allowed me to compare developments and analyze the findings from the observations. Additionally, it showed how many developments are finished and how many are under construction, and how many are commercial office developments compared to mixed use developments with ground floor commercial space. The GIS map illustrates locations of the office commercial developments and mixed use developments.

The final method was interviews with planners, developers, councillors, architects and brokers. For this method, I and three other students conducted interviews. As a group, we submitted an ethics review application allowing us to conduct interviews and received conformation allowing us to move forward with the interview process. Collectively we conducted 11 interviews: three with planners, three with councillors, three with brokers, one developer, and one architect. The interviews allowed us to collect interviewees' opinions of development in Halifax's downtown. The elements that were covered through the questions asked in the interviews that dealt with my

topic were around commercial development in the downtown, the downtown plan and its effect on developments, mixed use development patterns, and vacancy issues. Our recordings from the interviews were transcribed and uploaded for us to conduct our discourse analysis. I read through the interviews and highlighted certain words; commercial, retail, office, development, downtown, and policy to allow me to pick out themes and findings from the interviews. I then read through each of the transcriptions after coding them and highlighting important sections. I looked for recurring trends from the transcriptions and compared them to see who is saying what. I looked to see if planners are saying the same things as developers and architects for example.

From the mix methods approach that I used to conduct my research my results were drawn from the field observations, policy review, and interviews conducted with professionals to answer my research question. I drew the results from my field observations to illustrate where the mixed- use and office commercial developments were located in the downtown and the details on each development. From the policy review I highlighted certain policies pertaining to commercial development to better understand why certain developments have commercial spaces in their developments. The interviews showed certain trends on the development in the downtown and different patterns that can be seen throughout the downtown. The results further discussed what has come out of the mix of methods used, and show cased findings of patterns and trends happening in Halifax's downtown in terms of all the development going on.

Limitations

A limitation I have was the interviews conducted were based on professional's opinions not factual data. The results from the interviews were based on planners, brokers, councilors, a developer, and an architect's opinions on related topics to the development in the downtown. The results from the professionals therefore, were not factual based limiting the legitimacy of my results.

Another limitation is my observations conducted provided the data for which developments have been developed since 2009. Since the developments noted and documented are based on my personal observations with some research, I could have missed some developments that could be added to the list of developments from 2009 to present. Additionally, more developments may

have started after I conducted my observations, leaving some developments in early stages of construction out of the study.

Results

The downtown has seen a lot of new developments over the past few years. The following results will explain, and show where these developments are located, the types of developments, and the uses of the developments. The findings will also mention how the DHSMPS has influenced the development occurring in the downtown since the implementation of the plan in 2009. The interviewed professional's opinions will show trends and patterns from those interviews to better understand common themes happening in the downtown from all the development.

From observing what's been built in the downtown since 2009 I have found and documented 21 developments. These developments consist of mixed-use residential with commercial at grade and commercial office/hotel developments. The data collected for each development includes the location, type of development, type of uses, occupancy of commercial spaces, and if construction is completed or not. I then compiled all the data into a table to analyze trends across the developments found (refer to the appendix A for more detail list of each development). The data showed:

- 11 developments have completed construction
- 10 developments are still being constructed
- 16 of the 21 developments are mixed-use residential with commercial at grade

From the observations and the data collected on the developments in the downtown I produced a GIS map illustrating the location within the downtown (see figure 2). The map also shows the portion of mixed-use versus commercial office developments. There is a clear trend of mixed-use residential with commercial at the ground floor happening in Halifax's downtown over the past few years.

With the addition of the results from the observations I discovered themes that I pulled out of the interviews. I discovered major themes that were discussed in the interviews by the different professionals including brokers, councillors, a developer, an architect, and planners. In many cases, more than one professional mentioned related trends on topics, from that I grouped those major trends together under major themes around commercial development, and the downtown plans influences.



Figure 2 **GIS Map**

Commercial Office/Retail

As new commercial office and commercial retail developments come to the Halifax downtown market, more options and space are available. The professionals interviewed mentioned that when these new office developments come to the market tenants are moving from what is now a B class building into the new A class buildings (see table 1). B class buildings refers to a building with average rents for the area, but don't compete with A class at the same price, while an A class building refers to the most prestigious buildings in the area competing for above average rent prices

(BOMA International, 2017). Even though new A class commercial spaces are being built in Halifax's market no new tenants are coming into the market here. As a result, tenants are moving from older buildings or B class buildings to newer A class building, leaving those older B class buildings vacant in many cases.

- BR1-M: *If better established or larger companies can move into the new spaces, where that's good for the economy. The older and startup businesses can't rent these new spaces.*
- C3-M: *You get your class A right, and people will gravitate maybe towards that and move out of what used to be class A will become class B*
- P2-M: *Cost of renting commercial or retail space in a brand-new building is too expensive for those businesses like mom and pop shops. They can usually occupy older buildings.*

Table 1 Effects of New Office/ Retail Spaces

While some of these larger companies can move into these newer spaces, the smaller start-up businesses or older mom and pop shops usually can't afford the A class retail, or office spaces that are coming on to the market. This means that these new A class commercial spaces are only going to be leased if there is a larger established company looking for a high-end office space. As one planners mentioned the cost of renting brand-new commercial or retail spaces won't be feasible for those mom and pop shops or start-up businesses, so they will usually occupy the older B class buildings, or stay where they are already located (see table 1). The similarities mentioned by a broker, planner, and councillor who all discuss the trends on the new commercial spaces coming to Halifax's downtown market. As *table 1* indicates, with more commercial retail or office spaces being built in the market there is a potential problem for Halifax if no new tenants are coming to the market.

P2-M: *Office space is a big problem in Halifax. And it's interesting because actually when you think about what's been built in the downtown under the new Downtown Plan, a lot of it is actually office space, even though the market for office space has been pretty terrible for basically the whole time.*

D1-M: *Not much opportunity in office building here the market is saturated.*

Table 2 Office Developments

In interviewing different professionals, a consistent trend everyone mentioned was there is no more demand for office developments especially in the downtown. As a developer mentioned, there is no opportunity in office developments in Halifax's downtown because the market is saturated (see table 2). While its evident that there is no demand for office developments in Halifax's downtown, one planner mentions that a lot of what has been built since the 2009 DHSMPS is office space. Since 2009 the downtown has seen 5 commercial office developments or developments with office components. These include the Nova Centre, TD office tower, TD building on Spring Garden Road, RBC Waterside, and Barrington Espace. While some of these developments are smaller spaces, others like the Nova Centre, and the TD office tower are much larger developments. As a planner mentions the market has been pretty terrible since the downtown plan in 2009, and these developments still had gone ahead and built more commercial office space in Halifax's downtown (see table 2). As a result, some of these developments like the TD tower has had a hard time leasing some of the office space. Lack of demand for new office developments is a clear trend mentioned by the professionals interviewed.

Ground Floor Commercial

Another major theme discovered from the discourse analysis is the trend of commercial retail spaces on the ground floor of these developments in the downtown. Both mixed-use residential developments and some office commercial developments like the Nova Centre are providing commercial retail space on the ground floor of the developments. Ground floor commercial spaces are a major trend associated with mixed-use developments in Halifax's downtown. As *table 3*

states ground floor residential units don't sell, or resell well, so as a broker mentions, so put businesses down there because then the space has better possibilities. From a market stand point a developer mentions commercial uses at the ground floor are much more marketable space because people don't want to live at street grade (see table 3).

BR1-M: *Condos on the ground floor don't sell very well, and they don't resell very well. So, put a business down there.*

BR3-M: *Ground floor retail is going in these properties because they think mixed-use products are most acceptable to planners and perspective tenants.*

P2-M: *Retail at ground floor because people want to see coffee shops and mom and pop shops in the neighborhood.*

D1-M: *Retail at grade is more marketable space than it's as residential, because people don't want to live at street grade.*

Table 3 Why Retail on the Ground Floor

Additionally, there's a trend that is mentioned by a planner, that retail is being implemented to the ground floor of developments because of the idea that people want to see coffee shops and mom and pop shops in the neighbourhood. Providing these commercial spaces to the development, along with services to those residents who live above will help to create that neighbourhood feel for the people living in the development and close by. Mixed-use developments with ground floor retail are being proposed because developers believe that mixed-use is what planners and potential tenants want. As a result, ground floor commercial retail is being seen in all those developments in the downtown as a broker mentioned in *table 3*. A planner, brokers, and developer in *table 3* mentioned similar opinions on trends of ground floor commercial spaces and as to why they are being built in each development in the downtown.

Market factors are not the only influences for ground floor commercial spaces in the downtown. The results from the interviews revealed that there is more to the reasoning behind producing ground floor commercial retail spaces in the developments (see table 4). Multiple professionals mention because the policy requires commercial uses on the ground floor of developments it is a

major factor as to why developments continue to put commercial on the ground floors. The professionals in *table 4* mention how developments in the downtown require commercial on the ground floor. A broker mentions by requiring developers to put retail on the ground floor, policy is requiring too much retail space in a market that cannot support coffee shops on every ground floor in the downtown. This can be problematic because then there can be a number of vacant spaces with what a broker describes as a “brown paper problem”, meaning windows covered in brown paper to cover the vacant retail spaces on the street level.

<p>P3-F: <i>Development in the downtown requires kind of a mix of uses. It requires that commercial base with residential on top.</i></p> <p>B3-M: <i>When you legislate that a developer has to do retail on the ground floor of a building than you might be legislating way too much retail in the market, and you’ve got that brown paper problem.</i></p> <p>A1-M: <i>Ground floor requirement for development. Publicly accessible use, is how they refer to it. So as long as the public can get in to do something that’s okay.</i></p>

Table 4 Commercial Requirements

From reviewing the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPs), the Downtown Land Use By-law, and the Design Manual I discovered three policies relating to the requirement for developments to incorporate ground floor commercial uses. According to policy 5 from the downtown plan (DHSPMS) retail and other commercial uses at street level are required on the designated pedestrian-oriented commercial streets which are Barrington St and Spring Garden Road.

While *table 4* illustrates what the professionals mentioned about the requirements for ground floor commercial uses on every ground floor, policy 5 from the DHSMPs states that commercial at grade is only required on the

Policy 5 *HRM shall designate Barrington Street and Spring Garden Road as primary pedestrian –oriented commercial streetscapes and establish requirements for retail and other commercial uses at street level (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2009).*

designated pedestrian-oriented commercial streets. In addition to policy 5 in the downtown plan policy 18 is another policy of interest. According to policy 18 providing public accessible amenity space is considered public benefit in exchange for a height bonus for a development. This policy suggests that developments that are receiving height bonusing are providing ground floor commercial spaces in exchange for the extra heights to their developments.

This may be the requirements that *table 4* may be referring to. These developments are getting extra heights to their developments and in exchange are required to provide commercial uses on the ground floor. Looking at the Downtown Land Use By-law Design Manual in comparison to what *table 4* mentions, that ground floor commercial uses are required on all street fronts.

From the Design Manual in accordance to the design guideline 3.1.1 pedestrian-oriented commercial, states that grade related commercial uses are permitted and encouraged on all street fronts. It also states that while those uses are permitted and encouraged they are not required on all street frontages in the downtown, only on designated pedestrian-oriented commercial streets. From reviewing the downtown plan and the land use by-law it is clear that there are set principles established regarding what the downtown wants to see in these new developments that are being produced. Ground floor commercial uses is what is encouraged throughout the downtown. In

3.1.1 Pedestrian-oriented Commercial

Grade related commercial uses such as retail stores and restaurants are permitted and encouraged on all streets in the downtown to enhance the pedestrian environment. Pedestrian –oriented commercial uses are encouraged but not required on all remaining street frontages (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2009).

Policy 18 *HRM may consider a variety of public benefits when assessing site plan approval applications seeking a height bonus in exchange for the provision of public benefit, in accordance with the bonus zoning provisions of the Halifax Municipality Charter. HRM shall establish provisions in the Land Use By-law to guide negotiations of appropriate public benefits including:*

(b) the provision of public accessible amenity space; (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2009).

accordance to policy, the only area in which ground floor commercial uses are required, are on those designated pedestrian-oriented commercial streets, Barrington St and Spring Garden Road.

As *table 4* and the policies discussed mention ground floor commercial requirements for new developments in the downtown, *Table 5* consists

of a planner, councillor, and a broker discussing their opinions on requiring commercial uses on every single ground floor in the downtown.

As one broker mentions, Halifax's market can't support a café on every single ground floor in the downtown so requiring commercial on the ground floor of every development isn't something that should be required. Similarly, a planner mentions the same notion that by forcing developers to produce commercial spaces on the base of the development when there is no demand for those spaces doesn't make sense for Halifax's market. Simply just because there is room for more supply does not mean there is demand. The results found in *table 5* suggest that while policy may be requiring developers to produce those commercial uses on the ground floor, it might not be the best idea to require that much commercial use while the market has no demand for it.

C3-F: Don't believe that there is a base to support commercial on every single main floor in the downtown. Mixed-use is really important but to actually mandate it or say that it has to be I think is problematic

BR3-M: From my perspective, I don't think that anybody should legislate having retail on the ground floor. Halifax's market can't support a café on the ground floor of every building.

P1-M: We're forcing people to produce commercial space that there is no demand for.

Table 5 Opinions of Policy Requirements

As discovered from review the plans and policies regarding development in the downtown, it is evident that the policies set in place encourage commercial use at grade but don't necessarily require it from a policy stand point. Professionals from *table 4* suggest that commercial uses at grade are a requirement throughout the entire downtown streets, design guidelines clarify that only the designated pedestrian-oriented streets are required to have those commercial uses at grade. Therefore, the rest of the downtown street frontages are permitted and encouraged to have commercial uses at the ground level but are not required.

Development Boom in Halifax

As almost all professionals interviewed noted, Halifax's downtown has seen an increased in development in the past few years. From the discussions with a developer, planners, and councillors, some mentioned major trends and reasons why the downtown has seen an increase in development. The most common factor mentioned by the professionals interviewed was interest rates. As one councillor mentions, because interest rates are so low, developers are using these years to build a lot, even if they're over supplying. Other big factor mentioned in *table 6* are demographics, and the market preferences. One planner brought up the idea that there's a trend happening in Halifax's downtown, where more people are interested in living in the downtown. The type of people interested are retirees, who want a smaller place with lots of amenities within walking distances, and less want to own their own place anymore. More people are moving into the urban centre of Halifax, people from rural areas around Nova Scotia, as well as international migration into Halifax. As Halifax grows and the interest in living in the downtown increases, more developments are needed to supply the demand for downtown living.

D1-M: *I would say low interest rates and demographics. People moving to Halifax international migration into Halifax and people are moving to Halifax from within Nova Scotia.*

P2-M: *I think the plan had influence, but it also benefits from very good timing in terms of political opinions towards development, in terms of demographic trends and changes in the market preferences, and certainly not least of all is just sort of macro-economic factors – interest rates capital flow.*

C1-M: *Important factor is that interest rates are very low, the development community has been using these years to build a lot capacity, whether that capacity is immediately needed or not.*

Table 6 Factors Contributing to Development

Another factor that some suggest has played a role on the increased in development is the implementation of the downtown plan (DHSMPS). A planner and councillor both gave their opinion regarding the trend of the downtown plan as a factor that has influenced more development in the downtown. *Table 7* indicates that in the opinions of professionals, new planning policy has

allowed for the increase in development that has been happening in Halifax’s downtown. Another planner agreed in *table 6* that the 2009 downtown plan has influenced the increased in development in the downtown. Additionally, a councillor mentioned that the plan allowed the downtown to absorb more development that it would have without the 2009 downtown plan put in place.

P1-M: *I think the 2009 policy has opened up the potential for development. The new planning policy has facilitated the development that has occurred.*

C2-M: *I think the downtown plan enabled us to absorb more of the development downtown that we would have otherwise.*

Table 7 The DHSMPS Effects

As a result of the interviewees opinions regarding the increase in development in Halifax’s downtown, the DHSMPS, interest rates, demographics, and market preferences all contributed as important factors facilitating this increase in development happening downtown over the past few years.

The Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy

The 2009 downtown plan as mentioned in *table 7* has contributed to the increase in development that transpired in the downtown. The major trend from the interviewees reveals the DHSMPS has provided better clarity around what requirements developments must have to be approved and built downtown. As a councillor mentions, the downtown plan set out stability to the development community and the public on what can be built (see *table 8*). Similarly, a planner mentions that the plan provided requirements for the built form, and clarity for height restrictions (see *table 8*). The plan additionally has facilitated through the approval process a streamlined development process, where people are getting their buildings approved. This suggests that there is a trend for developments getting approved faster and easier than before the downtown plan was set in place. As one planner mentioned “since the 2009 plan there have been more buildings built in the downtown than in the previous 30 year”. While other interviewees might not agree with this statement, the results indicate a considerable amount of developments have been built and continue

to be built since 2009. Some of these trends around the change in policy, and the plans intentions are considered to be a major influence to this large increase in development.

A1-M: *It brought some kind of real planning control to the design.*

C3-F: *The downtown plan set out stability to the development community and the public about what could be built.*

P2-M: *The plan framework now is very clear in terms of how much height you can have, what the built form sort of requirements are.*

Table 8 DHSPMS Results

Developers in the Market

Finally, findings mentioned by some of the different professionals involved developers and the market. As one developer mentioned, there's a development community in Halifax's downtown and they have figured out ways to develop in the downtown at lower costs by basically working together (see table 9). Once one crew is done their work at one development, they moving to the next development down the road. For example, once the excavators are done one project, they move down the road to the next. This excludes the problem of competition between different crews and bidding wars in a small area.

Another result stemming from the interviews brought forward that developers base their developments on what the market needs. Consequently, developers usually look at vacancy rates, unit prices, lease up periods, all which determine the type of development that will best suit the site. As one broker mentioned, developers are starting to predict what the community would like to see built (see table 9). As more development takes place in the downtown, it is evident that these trends mentioned in *table 9* are occurring, and developers are becoming more strategic in their designs and uses in their developments. Targeting specific uses for their developments based on the market, and based on what they believe future tenants want, is what some developers do when planning their developments.

D1-M: *I think there's a development community here that's gotten sort of more sophisticated and has figured out how to drive costs down.*

P2-M: *What gets delivered to the market is generally what the developer thinks the market needs. Respond to things like vacancy rates, trends in prices for condo units, trends in lease up period. Starting to see developers anticipate what the community would want to see in their buildings.*

BR2-M: *Developers build based on what he sees the market needing, right and where things are going.*

Table 9 Developers and the Market

These five major themes commercial office/retail, ground floor commercial, development boom in Halifax, Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy, and developers in the market, all discuss major trends relating to commercial uses including office, and retail spaces in the downtown. They also mentioned trends and relating to factors that have led to the increase in development in the downtown over the past few years. The influences of the DHSMPS has resulted in development through its policy's and change in planning framework. The 9 different tables have shown the opinions of different professionals interviewed to further understand what trends are happening in the downtown related to commercial uses and the downtown plan. Comparing what the different interviewees discussed on trends and opinions they had on the downtown changes, commercial uses, the DHSMPS's influence, and market factors role in the development in the downtown, provided the study with a good story of what has taken place in Halifax's downtown in terms of development.

Discussion

To come back to my research question of *how has the 2009 downtown plan influenced the development of mixed use residential/commercial and office commercial developments in downtown Halifax?* The DHSMPS has played a role of some sort in the development of mixed-use and office developments happening in the downtown since 2009. As shown in the results the

downtown plan as some professionals mentioned allowed the downtown to produce more developments. With the implementation of the plan it has provided more clarity for developers and the public in regard to certain elements such as permitted building height, requirements around built form, as well as the approval process for developments. From the results the DHSMPS was not the only contributing factor that has influenced development in the downtown. Results indicated that the increased development in Halifax's downtown is the result of low interest rates, demographics, and market preferences. All these factors played a role in the development boom happening in the downtown. As multiple professionals across different field professions all mention the same trends of low interest rates and demographics, suggesting that these are the major influences that have resulted in the increase of development in Halifax's downtown. Halifax's increased population has seen people moving to the urban center from rural areas of Nova Scotia, as well as people migrating internationally. The increased interest of both young adults and retirees moving to the downtown has also been a big contributor and can be a contributing factor for the demand for residential mixed-use developments that are being produced in Halifax's downtown right now.

The findings give a better understanding of what is being built in the downtown, what has been built since 2009 and what factors have influenced development in the downtown. The results have shown that most of the developments downtown are mixed-use buildings with commercial uses on the ground floor. This is not surprising because the higher vacancy rates for office spaces in Halifax causes no demand for office developments in the downtown. The Nova Centre as one developer mentioned will "suck up" any demand for office space for the next while. Although there is no demand anymore for commercial office development right now, in 2009 when the downtown plan was implemented, office developments were being built such as the expansion of the TD building, TD office building on Spring Garden, and the Waterside RBC development. This suggests that there was some demand for office space closer to when the DHSMPS was implemented in 2009. Additionally, retail space has been questioned by some of the professional interviewees as to whether ground floor commercial uses, such as retail should continue to be produced in new developments in the downtown. Some of the expert interviewees mentioned that while these mixed-use residential with commercial retail spaces at grade are in demand, and those retail commercial spaces at grade are required by policy, and marketable factors, there is no demand for those spaces usually. It's interesting to find out that planners and councillors mention

how ground floor commercial uses are required; forcing developers to put in this type of use when they know it's going to be difficult to find tenants to lease those spaces. Comparing what some of the professionals mention in *table 4* above to what the policies are saying such as policy 5, it's interesting to see that professionals mention that developers are required to produce those commercial ground floor uses on every street in the downtown, even though, policies from the DHSPMS and the Design Manual only indicate that those commercial uses on the ground floor are only required on the designated pedestrian-oriented streets or Barrington and Spring Garden. This indicates that there may be other factors forcing developers to be putting in these commercial spaces in their developments. The factors could include that's what developers want in their development, or think that's what their future tenants want, or the fact that they can't sell units on the ground floor, making commercial uses more marketable for the developer. Another idea could be that developers believe their developments will be approved easier if they include commercial spaces on the street level. I believe there are other influences and factors to consider contributing to developments including ground floor commercial spaces, creating this abundance of street level commercial spaces.

The combined results have shown mixed-use developments are what the demand in Halifax's downtown is calling for, and as a result that's what's being produced. Halifax's downtown has no demand for office space and currently in some developments still struggle to fill vacant office space. As new mixed-use developments are produced developers include ground floor commercial spaces as a result of a mix between market factors, and policy requirements. Developers have started to produce developments based on what future tenants want to see in and around the development, as well as consider the market factors, and what people require in a development. The DHSMPS has been a considerable influence to the increased development, but in some regard market factors contributed more to the development boom that Halifax's downtown has been experiencing over that past few years.

The findings from the research provide a good story into what has been developed since 2009 in Halifax's downtown, the influences the DHSMPS has had on developments, and some external influences on the increased development in the downtown. The literature on Halifax's downtown and all the recent development that it has been seeing in recent years is something that is missing from the literature. This research provides a full catalog of what developments have and are being developed as of 2009, the type of development, and the uses in the development. These details of

the developments can be found in appendix A. The literature is lacking around Halifax's downtown and the recent changes since the 2009 DHSMPs was implemented. The results of the conducted research can therefore bridge that gap, providing an update study on Halifax's downtown.

To link the results from this study to the literature such as Tim Bousquet article "Downtown's missing buildings" (2008) where he discussed the development or the lack of development in the Halifax's downtown. The results from this study clearly indicate that Bousquet's literature no longer stands and that the lack of development in Halifax's downtown is no longer the case or a problem. The literature from CBC News article "Halifax's major construction has almost tripled in value over a decade" illustrated just how significant the increase in development has been especially on Halifax's downtown. This study can be linked to Wards literature where she mentioned how Halifax's downtown has seen a culture shift that has been an influential factor behind the growth. More young people, single people, and retirees are moving to the downtown, which is a large reason for the development boom (Ward, 2016). I found similar trends from my findings, and what my research adds is a more in-depth, and fuller understanding of why the downtown has grown in terms of development and factors, as well as influences that have contribute to the increase in development in Halifax's downtown.

Linking the research and results back to the literature reinforces that my study has not only updated and provided a better understanding of what's happened in Halifax's downtown, but also provided more results and reason as to why the downtown has seen such an increase in development.

Conclusion

As Halifax's downtown has seen increases in development there is need to understand what developments have been produced. In 2009, the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPs) was implemented and since that plan has been implemented the downtown has seen a lot more developments being produced. My purpose for the study was to investigate the question: *How has the 2009 DHSMPs influenced the development of mixed use (residential with commercial components) and office commercial developments in Downtown Halifax?* From the research collected results indicate that Halifax's downtown has seen a number of developments produced since 2009. The DHSMPs changed the planning framework, and policies allowing and

encouraging development in Halifax's downtown. As a result, the downtown has been increasing, with a total of 21 developments were found to be built and or under construction. With all the development happening in the downtown other market factors played a large role in facilitating more growth to the downtown. With all the development happening trends start appearing, such as mixed-use developments, the lack of demand for office commercial developments, and the issues around commercial ground floor retail spaces. While the downtown seems to grow, while there's a demand for mixed-use residential, there's no demand for office commercial. The study's results showed that the downtown plan had influenced a portion of the increase in development, but market factors also have been a driving factors in the increase in development in Halifax's downtown.

As development continues to occur in the downtown, recommendations for further research is suggested. Looking at other indicators, influences, patterns or reasons why developments continue to produce commercial spaces on ground floors and in some cases office spaces in developments when it is evident that there is no demand for such spaces in Halifax is needed. Looking further into development agreements would be beneficial to see how many of the developments produced are under development agreement, and their approval process.

The research provides Halifax with an updated study of what developments have and are being produced in the downtown, but it also speaks on how commercial spaces are involved with this process, and the trends that are being seen in this development boom. The different opinions and themes that came out of the interviews give a better sense of what people in the professional environments are seeing and their opinions on what is happening with the changes to the downtown. From the results and information gathered from the study it provides the community and professionals some insight into trends that are working and some issues that are arising due to the development boom.

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Appendix A

The chart below consists of the 21 developments in Halifax's downtown since 2009, found from the observations conducted through the research. The chart illustrates each of the developments including a photo of the developments, as well as other details on each of the developments that was used to analyze and develop the study's findings.

The Development Chart can be found on the next page.

	Development Name	Location	Type of Use	Use of Space	Occupancy of Commercial Space	Ownership	Number of Stories	Finished Construction
	The Maple	Hollis St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail		Southwest	25	No
	The Wallis	Hollis St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail			7	No
	Nova Centre	Argyle St	Mixed -Use	Office, Retail, Hotel, Convention Centre				No
	The Pavilion (YMCA)	South Park St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail		Southwest		No
	The Doyle	Spring Garden Rd	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail		Westwood Group	7	No
	The Pearl	Gottingen St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail			9	No

	Queens Marques	Upper Water St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail/ Public space		Armour Group / Waterfron t Developm ent		No
	The Roy	Barrington St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail		Starfish Properties	22	No
	The Dillion	Market St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail		Mosaik Properties	8	No
	The Alexander	Lower Water St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail		Killam Properties	21	No
	Vertu Suites	Birmingham St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail	Pete's Fine Foods		8	Yes

	The Trillium	South Park St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail	Pre-amble Footwear, Thum, Humani-T Café, Hali Kids	WM Fares Group	19	Yes
	VIC Suites	Hollis St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail	Piatto, Chocolatier, Studio 21,		10	Yes
	Hampton Inn	Brunswick St	Mixed -Use	Hotel, Retail			16	Yes
	Waterside (RBC Office)	Hollis St	Mixed -Use Commercial	Retail, Office	RBC Office, RBC Bank		9	Yes
	TD Office Tower	Barrington St	Commercial	Office	TD Bank, TD Office		21	Yes

	TD on Spring Garden	Spring Garden	Commercial	Office	TD Bank, TD Office		4	Yes
	Barrington Espace	Barrington St	Mixed- Use Commercial	Office, Retail	Urban Outfitters, Barrington Steakhouse & Oyster Bar, Verb Interactive	Starfish Properties	5	Yes
	Mary Ann	Clyde & Birmingham St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail	The Port (NLSC)	WM Fares Group & Banc	9	Yes
	Brunswick Heights	Brunswick St	Mixed- Use	Residential/ Commercial Retail	2 Crow Brewing		17	Yes