

Rooming Houses in Halifax

POLICY & LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

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ABBREVIATIONS

MPS: Municipal planning strategy(ies)

LUB: Land use by-law(s)

HRM: Halifax Regional Municipality

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rooming houses in Halifax are disappearing yet little else is known about the current state of this affordable housing option (Bousquet, 2013). A rooming house is a building in which the landlord rents sleeping rooms as individual rental units and tenants share kitchen and bathroom facilities. A “lodging house” is essentially the same although is often treated separately in Halifax planning documents. As an affordable housing option in Halifax, rooming/lodging houses are important.

The Halifax municipal government suggested rooming houses as a research topic for students in the Dalhousie Planning program. The objective of this project is to understand the legislative and policy context of rooming houses in the Halifax Regional Centre to produce recommendations about how these documents can better govern rooming houses. The ultimate goals of this research are to lay a foundation for further investigation into rooming houses in Halifax and inform the development of the new Halifax Regional Centre Plan. Two qualitative analysis methods were used to analyze the relevant by-laws and planning strategies for their implications for rooming houses: *comparative analysis* of the by-laws and *compatibility analysis* of the municipal planning strategies.

The analyses led to three recommendations for Halifax: 1) coordinate definitions and regulations about rooming houses and lodging houses in all planning documents for the Regional Centre so that they are consistent and clear, 2) permit rooming/lodging houses in more land use zones throughout the Regional Centre, and 3) simplify the license renewal process to operate a rooming house. The second and third recommendations only stand if the City decides to promote rooming houses as a strategic affordable housing option while the first remains important regardless.

The compatibility analysis revealed that the Municipal Planning Strategies for the Regional Centre support rooming houses through their goals of providing affordable housing options, mixed-use housing, and increasing density. Rooming houses also have the potential to help Halifax accomplish certain goals and policies from the strategies: increasing density, preserving the character of neighborhoods, protecting the historic heart of Halifax, providing affordable housing options, providing mixed-use housing, and increasing transit and active transportation usage.

The findings about the compatibility of rooming houses with the planning strategies are encouraging although not conclusive; much more research is needed. With a foundational understanding of the by-laws and policies governing rooming houses in the Halifax Regional Centre, the City can move forward with further research to determine whether or not rooming houses are a form of affordable housing worthy of their endorsement.

2 INTRODUCTION

Housing is a basic need for Halifax residents. In order for the City to provide housing to all residents, there must be affordable options for those with lower incomes. Rooming houses are an affordable housing option. A rooming house is a building that rents rooms as individual rental units and usually the tenants share common facilities such as washrooms, kitchens, and/or living rooms. In Halifax, licensed rooming houses must have locks on the bedroom doors, according to the main regulating document for this housing type, By-law M-100 (HRM, 2008). “Lodging houses” are the same in purpose and operation although are often treated separately in Halifax planning documents. Research on rooming houses in Halifax is important for one major reason: rooming houses are an affordable housing option and therefore important for the City’s general sustainability. This project originated from a list of research suggestions from the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). Little is currently known about rooming houses other than that their numbers are falling.

Sustainable development works to meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (World Commission on Environment & Development, 1987). A basic need of both current and future generations is housing. In Halifax, homelessness and shelter use continue to demonstrate the need for more affordable housing options. Housing-related issues such as affordability are the most commonly cited reasons for homelessness in Halifax (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2005). Rooming houses are an affordable housing option in the city and, unfortunately, their numbers are dropping. There were 153 rooming houses in 2007 but as of 2012 there were only 25 (Bousquet, 2013). Two examples of recently closed rooming houses are one closed in 2013 on Sackville Street (Bousquet, 2013), shown in Figure 1, and another closed just this Fall on Gottingen



Figure 1: Closed Rooming House on Sackville Street

Street (G. Wanzel, personal communication, November 17, 2014).

Researching rooming houses, as an affordable housing option, is well-supported by the newly revised Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (Halifax, 2014). The regional plan is interested in promoting “housing diversity and affordability” by using secondary planning strategies to enhance housing

affordability and social inclusion (p. 57). They suggest “identifying existing affordable housing and development of measures to protect it” (Halifax, 2014, p. 58). This report considers the role of secondary planning strategies and presents recommendations for how rooming houses can be protected by policies and regulations. The following is another supportive provision from the Regional Plan: “Where Provincial strategies or programs are made in support of affordable housing, HRM may consider means to further or complement such strategies or programs through its programs, policies or regulations” (Halifax, 2014, p. 58). The fourth point in the regional vision statement also demonstrates general support of research into affordable housing options: “The Regional Centre's cultural vitality is rooted in its diverse population and accordingly it will strive to be an open, safe, affordable, accessible and welcoming place to people of all walks of life” (Halifax, 2014, p. 77). Rooming houses may be a means by which Halifax can achieve this vision.

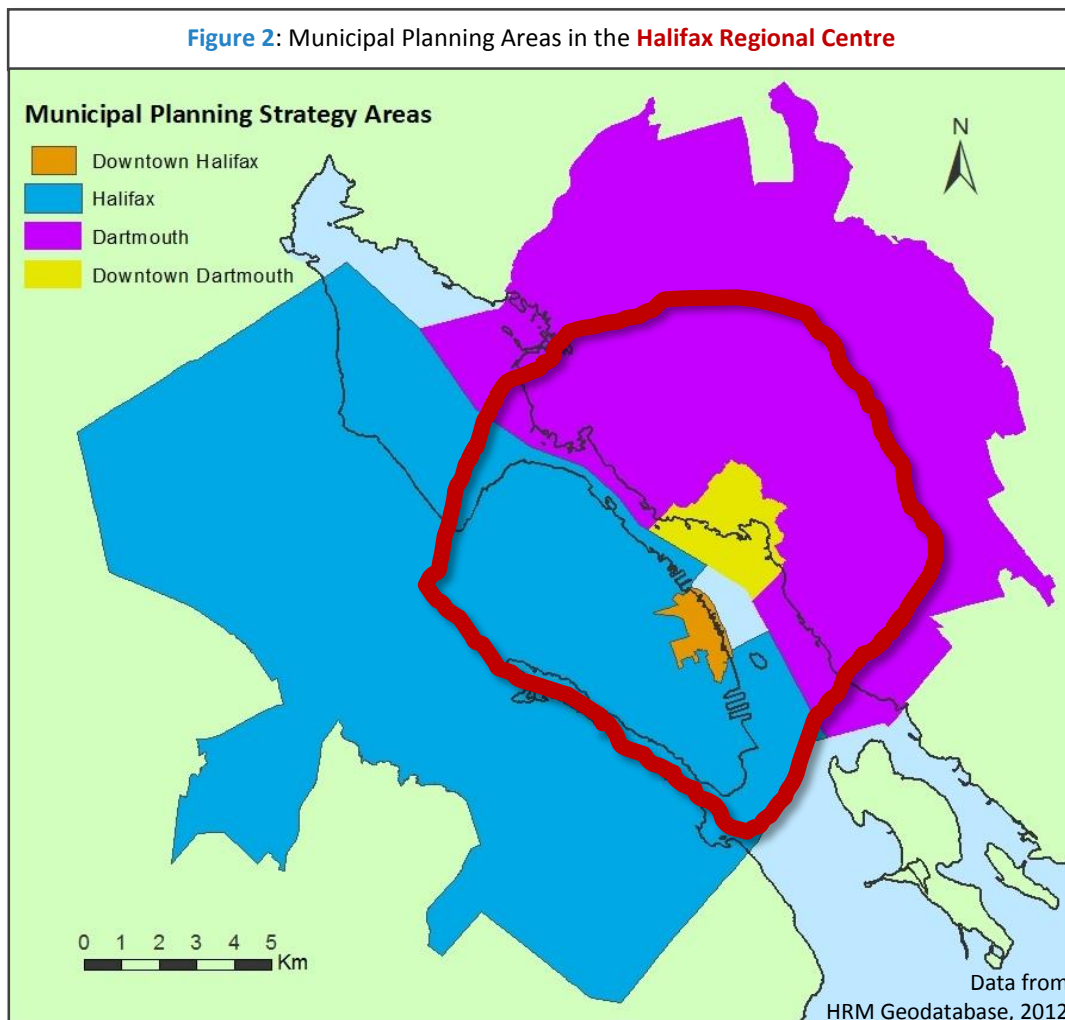
Objective

The objective of this project is to understand the legislative and policy context of rooming houses in the Halifax Regional Centre to produce recommendations about how these documents can better govern rooming houses. The ultimate goal of this research is to lay a foundation for further investigation into rooming houses in Halifax and to inform the development of the new Halifax Regional Centre Plan.

Methods

Two qualitative analysis methods are used in this report: 1) *comparative analysis* of the by-laws and 2) *compatibility analysis* of municipal planning strategies (MPS). The comparative analysis compares the definitions and regulations from five by-laws. The compatibility analysis, done only for the MPS, considers how certain goals and policies in the plans support rooming houses while also exploring how rooming houses could support certain goals in the plans. Compatibility analysis is a more effective method for analysing the planning strategies than the comparative analysis because so little is directly said about rooming houses in the plans. The MPS analysis is enriched with discussion of the connection between current zoning in certain areas with the feasibility of certain planning policies and goals.

The by-laws and plans governing the Regional Centre of Halifax are the focus of the analyses. Figure 2 shows the Regional Centre which includes the Halifax Peninsula and Dartmouth within the Circumferential Highway (HRM, 2012-2015). The Centre is currently divided into four separate planning areas, each with its own land use by-law (LUB) and planning strategy, also shown in Figure 2. The city intends to create a Centre Plan to manage the Regional Centre in a unified way.



The following by-laws govern the Halifax Regional Centre:

- *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008)
- *Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-Law* (HRM, 2014d)
- *Land Use By-Law: Downtown Halifax* (HRM, 2014f)
- *Land Use By-Law for Dartmouth* (HRM, 2014e)
- *Land Use By-Law for Downtown Dartmouth* (HRM, 2014g)

The four central municipal planning documents are as follows:

- *Municipal Planning Strategy: Halifax* (HRM, 2014c)
- *Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy for Downtown Halifax* (HRM, 2014a)
- *Municipal Planning Strategy for Dartmouth* (HRM, 2013a)
- *Secondary Planning Strategy for Downtown Dartmouth* (HRM, 2014b)

The objective of this analysis is to make policy recommendations to not only improve these existing documents in how they govern rooming houses but also inform the development of the new Regional Centre Plan. To create even more informed recommendations for policies, the project presents a brief snapshot of the existing knowledge gleaned from secondary sources about rooming houses in Halifax.

Report Structure

The snapshot of rooming houses in Halifax is the first part of this report. The next portion is the central piece of the project: the analysis of the legislative and policy context of rooming houses in the Halifax Regional Centre. The by-laws are discussed first, followed by the MPS. The last major section, “Moving Forward”, contains the products of the research: recommendations for governing documents, conclusions, and suggested future research directions.

3 SNAPSHOT OF ROOMING HOUSES IN HALIFAX

Understanding of the current rooming houses situation in Halifax is limited. According to Metro Non-Profit Housing Association (2013), the most recent report on the physical and social conditions of rooming houses in central Halifax was published in 1995. Almost 20 years later in 2014, information about the conditions of rooming houses in Halifax definitely deserves updating. One Halifax rooming house was found advertised on Kijiji on November 19, 2014 (see Figure 3). The advertisement is a one of few readily available examples of the nature of rooming houses as an affordable housing option today. The owner provides tenants with a furnished room that includes a mini-fridge, hot plate, and microwave and has a shared bathroom (Kijiji, 2014). The advertised price for a room is \$400 per month. Another rooming house in Downtown Halifax known by a fellow planning student on Barrington Street was called “Barrington House” in September of 2013 (see Figure 4) (E. Williamson, personal communication, November 19, 2014). Yet, as of November 19, 2014, it no longer operated under that name and it is unclear whether the house still functions as a rooming house.





A search for rental rooms/shared rooms in the Halifax Core on a rental search website called rentdonkey.ca (2014) produced 164 results. Available single or shared rooms have the highest concentration on the Halifax Peninsula and their prices range from 100\$/month to \$1100/month. The majority cost between 500\$ and 600\$ per month. These advertised units are not necessarily rooms in licensed rooming houses but are being used in the same way as rooming houses. The search results are likely showing some rooming, lodging, and boarding house room rentals along with apartment tenants advertising for another roommate. What these search results tell us is that there are people interested in renting out units in the way rooms in rooming houses are rented.

The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2006) published a report that profiles residents of rooming houses in Canada. They did not use examples from Halifax but rather from several other Canadian cities: Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Winnipeg. Even though their findings do not speak to Halifax rooming houses directly, they offer general ideas about who may be their tenants. The most common residents are single, middle-aged Canadian-born males. Students and recent immigrants are also becoming more common users of rooming houses. The representation of students in Halifax may be higher than the average for Canada because of the significant presence of post-secondary educational institutions throughout the City. The approaches used in this study as well as those used in the Winnipeg (Distasio, Dudley, & Maunder, 2002) and Toronto (Hwang, Martin, Hulchanski, & Tolomiczenko, 2003) studies could serve as models for future research on rooming house resident profiles in Halifax.

Support for affordable housing comes from various bodies in Halifax. There are multiple organizations either directly or indirectly supporting rooming houses as they promote affordable housing in Halifax. The following are some connected organizations:

- Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia (2014)
- Metro Non-Profit Housing Association (also known as Halifax Housing Help) (2013)
- Public Good Society of Dartmouth (2010)
- Ark Outreach (2014)

More organizations can be found listed on the Halifax website (2014) under the subtitle “Non-Profit Housing Organizations Working to Develop Affordable / Supportive Housing”. The province has a Rooming House Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (Rooming House RRAP) that offers landlords of rooming houses financial assistance with repairs based on number of bed units provided (Housing Nova Scotia, 2014). An overview of community and governmental support for rooming houses in Halifax is another valuable avenue of future study.

4 POLICY & LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT OF ROOMING HOUSES IN HALIFAX

This section provides an overview of the content of Halifax by-laws and planning strategies relevant to rooming houses using comparative analysis and compatibility analysis. It begins with an overview of relevant content from the by-laws followed by discussions of each by-law to elaborate on specific content. The discussions offer interpretation and critique while presenting *recommendations*. The recommendations are also summarized in the final major section of the report entitled “Moving Forward”. Municipal planning strategies (MPS) are addressed after the by-laws by considering how the plans support or create barriers to rooming houses while considering how rooming houses could help Halifax accomplish goals from the plans.

4.1 BY-LAWS

Figure 5 displays the definitions and regulations for rooming houses from the five by-laws regulating the Halifax Regional Centre and acts as the main reference point for comparative analysis. Regulations which specify zones in which rooming houses are permitted are emphasized in yellow in Figure 5. According to the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008), if any provisions from any by-laws contradict one another, the provision that enforces “the higher standards to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the general public shall prevail” (p. 1). This by-law is mainly concerned with protecting the health and safety of those living in certain housing types while the four other by-laws considered are land use by-laws (LUB) for specific areas.

Figure 5: Halifax Regional Centre By-Laws Governing Rooming Houses

| Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law (HRM, 2008) |
|--|
| Definition(s) |
| Rooming, Boarding, & Lodging House: “means any building in which three (3) or more rooms providing occupancy are rented for remuneration [(payment)] as separate units of residential accommodation whether or not meals or kitchen facilities are provided, but does not include apartment buildings or multiple unit dwellings as defined by various Land Use Bylaws of the HRM or a hotel licensed under the <i>Hotel Regulations Act</i> or an institution licensed under the <i>Homes for Special Care Act</i> or any other general or special Act.”(p. 2) |
| Regulations |
| Guiding regulation: “The owner shall maintain the rooming, boarding and lodging house in a clean, secure and sanitary condition at all times” (p. 8). |
| General regulations (p. 8): Landlords must... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain an ambient indoor temperature of 20 degrees Celsius • provide locks on doors, clean kitchen facilities, and at least one bathroom per six tenants • prohibit more than two tenants per room and usage of kitchen/bathrooms for laundry |
| Topic-specific regulations (with highlighted provisions) (pp. 8-10): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • life safety provisions (hand rail & laundry room standards) • interior walls, ceilings, & floors (minimum regulations for waterproof surfaces & prohibiting certain states of repair such as warped boards) • bathrooms (must be private, have a lock, have a common corridor if shared by multiple tenants, & be well-ventilated) • kitchens (minimum space & facilities) • sleeping rooms (minimum space & may only serve single purpose as a sleeping room) • electrical (minimum # of outlets) • windows (minimum size) |
| Other regulations (pp. 10-11): standards for fire safety and sleeping room door requirements |
| Licensing regulations (pp. 11-12): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All rooming houses in Halifax must be licensed under this by-law. • Outlines application and approval process • License is valid for 1 year after approval. |
| Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-Law (HRM, 2014d) |
| Definition(s) |
| Rooming House: Can be a range of housing types, from a single family house to a larger house containing four separate dwelling units, as long as each whole structure has a minimum number of bedrooms that correspond with the number of dwelling units within the house. For example, in a single family house, there must be at least six bedrooms for it to be a rooming house. For a house with three dwelling units there must be at least nine bedrooms in the entire house. See page 11 for definition with precise numbers of sleeping rooms. |
| Lodging House: "means the whole of dwelling house comprised of a single dwelling unit in which four or more bedrooms are rented on an individual basis and/or secured through means such as locking devices, and may contain common rooms such as a living room" (p. 7). |
| Multiple Dwelling: "shall include an apartment house, boarding house, and lodging house" (p. 8). |

| |
|---|
| Regulations |
| Rooming and lodging houses are permitted in Multiple Dwelling (R-3) Zones (p. 72). |
| There are additional regulations about population density & open space for rooming and lodging houses that apply in an R-3 Zone (p. 77-78). |
| Rooming & lodging houses are not permitted in the Brunswick Comprehensive Development District (p.112). |
| Land Use By-Law: Downtown Halifax (HRM, 2014f) |
| Definition(s) |
| none |
| Regulations |
| "Residential uses" are permitted in the most common zone in this area, Downtown Halifax Zone (DH-1), which presumably permits rooming houses (p. 18). |
| Land Use By-Law for Dartmouth (HRM, 2014e) |
| Definition(s) |
| Rooming House: none |
| Lodging House: "means a building or part thereof in which sleeping accommodation is provided for remuneration in not fewer than three nor more than eight rooms, with or without meals, but does not include a hotel licensed under the Hotel Regulations Act or an institution licensed under the Homes for Special Care Act or any other general or special act. (As amended by By-law C-657, Feb 2/89)" (p. 5). |
| Regulations |
| Section 29D lays out regulations for lodging houses (p. 27): |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lot requirements (frontage, sides, area, rear, coverage, landscaping) • specifies 8 sleeping rooms as maximum number • minimum 1 parking space per sleeping room & no parking in front yard. |
| Lodging houses are permitted in the following zones: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple Family Residential Zone - Medium Density (R-3) • Multiple Family Residential Zone - High Density (R-4) • General Business Zone (C-2) • Massage Parlour Zone (C-4) • Multiple Family Residential Zone (MF-1) • General Commercial Zone (GC) |
| Section 34(6) states, "Buildings used for lodging house uses shall comply with the requirements of the Lodging House By-law of the City of Dartmouth. (As amended by By-law C-657, Feb 2/89)" (p. 50).* |
| Land Use By-Law for Downtown Dartmouth (HRM, 2014g) |
| Definition(s) |
| Rooming House: "means a building or part thereof in which sleeping accommodation is provided for remuneration in not fewer than three nor more than six rooms, with or without meals, but does not include a hotel licensed under the Hotel Regulations Act or an institution licensed under the Homes for Special Care Act or any other general or special act" (p. 9). |
| Lodging House: none |
| Regulations |
| Rooming houses are permitted in the Downtown Business District Zone (p. 37). |

*Lodging House By-Law (C-657) was repealed by the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008).

Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law

This by-law provides provisions about living condition requirements in boarding, lodging, and rooming houses in sections 21 to 32, which are summarized in the above Figure 5. A press release in 2001 about this by-law, referred to often as the “By-Law M-100”, says that its purpose is to give more power to the HRM to make sure certain housing types are appropriately maintained (Halifax website, 2001). The press release indicates that rooming and lodging houses are the main target for improved regulation. A strong point of this by-law for rooming and lodging houses is that the standards should effectively protect at least the physical health and safety of occupants. Key pieces of information from the by-law are the two enforcement sections about licensing requirements and penalties. A license is only valid for 1 year from the day it is approved (HRM, 2008, p. 12). Penalties for nonconformity with any part of the By-Law M-100 can be financial or require a certain amount of jail time.

A provision from the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008) that may be discouraging landlords from applying for rooming house licenses is provision 31(5) that states that a “license shall be valid for one (1) year from date of issuance” (p. 12). Landlords have strategies to avoid licensing such as neglecting to put locks on bedroom doors. It may be that prospective rooming house landlords in Halifax do not think it is worth the trouble to run a legal rooming house if they must reapply every year. The initial application process requires landlords to submit a particular application form with the associated fee that includes the following information: applicant’s name and address, rooming house address, representative agent who is a permanent resident of NS if the landlord lives out-of-province, maximum number of occupants and rooms, number of bathrooms, location and capacity of dining rooms, and two identical floor plans with measurements and room designations (p. 11). The application is submitted to an inspector who will issue the license if all requirements are met. The requirements to renew the license of a rooming house licensed the previous year are slightly less demanding in how the floor plan is not required again as long as the “application states that there has been no change in number, location, size and use of the rooms in such premises since the time of issue of the former license” (p. 11). The rest of the application process must still be completed to reapply.

Recommendation: To increase the likelihood that landlords will make the effort to have their rooming houses licensed, the city could consider creating a more simplified, stream-lined license renewal process. In considering this option, the city should conduct consultations with rooming house landlords to understand their perspective on licensing regulations. An option to simplify license renewal is to only require the landlord to resubmit the first two items required in the initial licensing process (name and address of the applicant and the address of the rooming house) with a statement that says no other

aspects of the house described in the initial application have changed. Another simplification option is for the by-law to extend the amount of time for which a license is valid, perhaps to 2 years; however, before this option is undertaken, the city should conduct internal consultation with staff involved in regulating rooming houses to understand the rationale behind the current licensing and enforcement process. Staff to consider consulting are those in the Department of Planning and Development involved in managing building standards.

Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-Law

The *Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-Law* (LUB) (HRM, 2014d) raises multiple issues with ambiguities in regulations and definitions of rooming and lodging houses. The LUB is the only one in the Regional Centre that actually separates the definition of a lodging house and rooming house. Unfortunately, the separation does not add clarity. The by-law says a rooming house can be a range of housing types, from a single family house all the way up to a larger dwelling house containing four separate dwelling units (HRM, 2014d, p. 11). Each specification has a minimum number of bedrooms that correspond with the number of separate dwelling units within the house. For example, in a single family dwelling house, there must be at least six bedrooms for it to be a rooming house. For a dwelling house with three dwelling units there must be at least nine bedrooms in the entire house. Why the minimum numbers were chosen for each number of dwelling units is unclear. The definition does not say anything about minimum numbers of residents and/or renting regulations. Interestingly, the definition for a lodging house in the LUB is much more straightforward: it is a single dwelling unit with at least four bedrooms which are rented as single rental units and can have common areas for tenants such as a living room (HRM, 2014d, p. 7).

The main difference between the two definitions is that lodging houses have a smaller number of sleeping rooms while rooming houses have six rooms or more. Another distinction problem is whether a single dwelling unit building with six sleeping rooms should be considered a lodging house or a rooming house. It is also unclear why a lodging house, boarding house, and an apartment building are all considered Multiple Dwellings in the Peninsula LUB but a rooming house is not (HRM, 2014d, p. 8). Lodging houses and rooming houses serve the same purposes and are governed by the same regulations in the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008).

Recommendation: Ambiguities and similar purposes indicate that the Peninsula LUB must clarify the definition of these terms. One option for clarification is to use one term and one unified definition that combines the concepts of lodging houses and rooming houses. A second option is to make more concrete distinctions between the two terms. For instance, lodging houses may be treated more as inns or hostels

in which the length of stay is very short while rooming houses may imply longer term residential arrangements; the difference between the two would be defined by the length of time tenants reside in the building.

A useful association made by the Halifax Peninsula LUB is how it connects certain types of student housing, including fraternity and society houses, to rooming and lodging houses, specifying that a house with more than three tenants should comply with the rooming, lodging, and boarding house regulations of an R-3 Zone under this by-law (HRM, 2014d, p. 107-108). This association is useful in Halifax because, as a university city, the population contains a large portion of students. Over 30,000 students attended the 6 universities in Halifax (Greater Halifax Partnership, n.d.). Rooming houses as an option for student housing is another use the City could promote. They may be especially appealing to students who have no previous connection to Halifax, such as those from outside the area, because they would not need to know anyone before arriving in the city in order to have affordable accommodations off campus. A common practice for university students in Halifax is for a group of acquainted individuals to rent a house together but this is hard for someone coming from away to arrange before arriving at school if they do not know anyone. Promoting rooming houses as a form of off-campus student housing would be a good way to provide students with more options other than expensive on-campus residence. Currently, Dalhousie University does not mention rooming or lodging houses in their overview of average apartment rental costs on their off-campus living webpage (Dalhousie University, 2012). However, the city must consider the impact of promoting rooming houses as student housing on specific neighborhoods as some residents oppose such buildings because they perceive them as disruptive or hazardous. Research on perceptions of rooming houses among Halifax residents is a valuable future investigation.

Land Use By-Law: Downtown Halifax

The Downtown Halifax LUB (HRM, 2014f) says nothing about rooming or lodging houses. The by-law has some regulations for multiple unit dwellings but, as stated by the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008), rooming and lodging houses are not considered a multiple unit dwelling by Halifax by-laws. Downtown is home to many university students since the two largest universities, Dalhousie University and Saint Mary's University, as well as NSCAD University, are located either in or very near the Downtown area. If the city is going to begin promoting rooming houses as an affordable housing option for students, the same sort of regulation connecting student houses and rooming houses seen in the Peninsula LUB (HRM, 2014d) could be added to this LUB. The zoning here is largely the Downtown Halifax Zone (DH-1) (see section 7(1) and zoning map on page 43) which allows "Residential uses"; its

openness to diverse residential uses means it is presumably also open to rooming houses (HRM, 2014f, p. 18).

Land Use By-Law for Dartmouth

Lodging houses, but not rooming houses, are defined and regulated by the Dartmouth LUB (HRM, 2014e). It incorporates the advice of the Dartmouth MPS (HRM, 2013a) to make the maximum number of sleeping rooms per lodging house eight. An extra provision from the Dartmouth LUB, not yet seen in the other LUBs concerning rooming, lodging, or boarding houses, requires one parking space per sleeping room. Their definition conceptualizes lodging houses slightly differently from other LUB, with more of a bed and breakfast idea. Their definition means that some buildings, those with six or more sleeping rooms, would fall into the category of rooming house if under the Halifax Peninsula's LUB (HRM, 2014d), while those with six rooms or less would be considered lodging houses on the Halifax Peninsula. This is not necessarily a problem since the areas are currently regulated by separate LUBs but if the City intends to make a Centre Plan that governs the Regional Centre in a consistent, unified way, these differences will have to be resolved.

Another issue in coordination is seen in how the Dartmouth LUB (HRM, 2014e) mentions in section 34(6) that the "Lodging House By-law of the City of Dartmouth" is still governing lodging houses in Dartmouth (p. 50). The Lodging House By-law was repealed in section 33(1)(d) of the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-law* (HRM, 2008) (p. 12). The Dartmouth LUB should therefore be updated to reflect this change in legislation by removing the references to the repealed Lodging House By-Law.

Recommendation: In the development of the Centre Plan, the city should either **(1)** establish a consistent point of distinction between lodging and rooming houses (perhaps up to six rooms is a lodging house and more than six rooms is a rooming house) or **(2)** choose one definition with one term for all that rooming and lodging houses currently mean (for example, refer to all buildings that rent three or more sleeping rooms as lone rental units as simply a lodging house). Since the Dartmouth LUB and the Dartmouth MPS both have specific sections pertaining to lodging houses, perhaps the best universal term for the concept in the Regional Centre would be "lodging house". All by-laws and MPS governing this type of housing in the Regional Centre should be updated to reflect whatever changes the City chooses to make. References to the repealed Lodging House By-Law should also be removed from the Dartmouth LUB and MPS.

Land Use By-Law for Downtown Dartmouth

The definition of a rooming house in the Downtown Dartmouth LUB (HRM, 2014g) contradicts the definition in the Peninsula LUB (HRM, 2014d). Rooming houses in Downtown Dartmouth are defined as

having between three and six sleeping rooms available for rent while, on the Peninsula, these room numbers describe their definition for a lodging house while a rooming house must have six or more sleeping rooms. Each document governs a different part of Halifax so this is not currently a problem of conflicting regulations but it is a problem of inconsistency in regulations within the Regional Centre. The legislation governing each part of the Regional Centre must be consistent, not contradictory, as the city develops the new Centre Plan.

The Downtown Dartmouth LUB (HRM, 2014g) is also not consistent with its closest neighbor, the larger Dartmouth LUB (HRM, 2014e), because it only defines and regulates rooming houses and says nothing about lodging houses directly. The Downtown Dartmouth LUB should be coordinated with the wider Dartmouth LUB so that they are either using the same term or are using two different terms that are clearly distinct from one another. Currently, the difference between the two terms between the two LUBs is a maximum of 6 rooms in rooming houses in the Downtown Dartmouth LUB and a maximum of 8 rooms in a lodging house in the Dartmouth LUB. The definitions are identical aside from that distinction. This leads to confusion as to the real difference between the terms. The city should clarify the difference between the terms with a clear rationale behind the distinction and simplification of definitions. The Downtown Dartmouth LUB and the Dartmouth LUB are both well-coordinated with the overarching *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008) in how their respective definitions match with its definition; they just need to be coordinated with each other and with the other LUBs within the Regional Centre.

4.2 PLANNING STRATEGIES

The four municipal planning strategies (MPS) governing the Halifax Regional Centre are each analyzed separately in this section. The only MPS that directly mentions rooming or lodging houses is the Dartmouth MPS, yet all four strategies are still connected to rooming houses. Given the lack of direct references to rooming houses among the planning strategies, this section primarily contains an analysis of the content of the MPS for their compatibility with rooming houses as a housing type in the regional centre rather than conducting a comparative analysis as done for the by-laws. The analysis shows that rooming houses can help Halifax achieve several goals and policies expressed in the four planning strategies while the plans also support rooming houses in a number of ways. The zoning of strategic locations within the areas covered by each MPS is also analyzed in each discussion to offer further understanding of where rooming houses are currently permitted within the regional centre and what adjustments could be made concerning rooming houses that would be consistent with municipal goals.

Although zoning is part of the LUBs, it is considered in this portion of the report because discussing zones in how they relate with the four MPS offers a more integrated understanding of how these two types of governing documents currently control rooming houses in central Halifax.

Municipal Planning Strategy: Halifax

The Halifax MPS (HRM, 2014c) governs parts of the former City of Halifax. Rooming and lodging houses are never directly mentioned in the plan, yet certain policies are compatible with rooming houses. This section of the report begins with the city-wide objectives and policies and then considers policies within specific planning areas governing space on the Halifax Peninsula. Recommendations for future and current policy and associated legislative adjustments are made here but will also be summarized in the “Moving Forward” section of the report.

City-Wide Objectives & Policies in the Halifax MPS

A supportive piece from the city-wide portion of this MPS is the Residential Environments objective: “The provision and maintenance of diverse and high quality housing in adequate amounts, in safe residential environments, at prices which residents can afford” (HRM, 2014c, p. 6). Another general policy support could be that the city promotes infill housing and housing rehabilitation in an effort to avoid major disruptions to neighborhoods and their residents due to large scale redevelopment (HRM, 2014c, p. 8). Rooming houses do not generally require large scale redevelopments, nor even major renovations, which would make them a fairly easy type of housing for house rehabilitation. The only work required for the landlord would be to ensure that the building meets all of the basic health and safety requirements from the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008). Policy 2.8 (HRM, 2014c) indicates that the City supports affordable housing options like rooming houses:

The City shall foster the provision of housing for people with different income levels in all neighbourhoods, in ways which are compatible with these neighbourhoods. In so doing, the City will pay particular attention to those groups which have special needs (for example, those groups which require subsidized housing, senior citizens, and the handicapped). (p. 8)

Rooming houses are a good option for the City to incorporate different income levels in all neighborhoods. A potential barrier from the general policies and objectives is that the City seeks to maintain the character of stable neighborhoods if possible (p. 7). For instance, an area zoned for only single-family houses prohibits their conversion into rooming houses. On the other hand, rooming houses could be supportive of the goal to preserve the character of stable neighborhoods if the area is zoned for multiple unit residences because rooming houses can be made out of multiple housing types.

Area-Specific Objectives & Policies in the Halifax MPS

Smaller planning strategy areas covered by the Halifax MPS in the Halifax Peninsula have different levels of openness to rooming houses. The specific strategy areas covering the Peninsula that have separate regulations in the Halifax MPS (HRM, 2014c) are the South End, the Peninsula Centre Area, Peninsula North, and Quinpool Road Commercial Area.

The **South End Area Plan** has two main goals within its residential objective: maintaining a mix of family-type housing and non-family housing. Family-type housing excludes rooming houses. Other goals in the South End Area Plan are more compatible with rooming houses. The plan permits various types of infill that could allow a formerly single-family house to become a rooming house, such as renovations of the interior and of additions to the sides and backs of buildings (p. 53). As with the general policies for all of the Halifax MPS area, rooming houses can also help the South End accomplish its objective of maintaining the character of residential neighborhoods because they do not generally require significant redevelopment. But an important factor for the city to consider before permitting a rooming houses in this area is how the type of people rooming houses tend to attract will impact the character of neighborhoods. Public consultations should be considered.

Rooming houses in the South End area would be an especially helpful option for student housing because they are so close to two major universities. At present, however, an overwhelming majority of the South End Area Plan is zoned for single family dwellings (HRM, 2014h). According to the Peninsula LUB (HRM, 2014d), rooming houses are only permitted in Multiple Dwelling (R-3) Zones. Strict limitations on where rooming houses are permitted may be part of the reason so many landlords operate unlicensed rooming houses near the universities. Part of the area is zoned as a Single Family A zone which permits single family houses that can lodge or board no more than three boarders or lodgers (HRM, 2014d, p. 53). This does not permit entire rooming and lodging houses but it is a step toward having more affordable housing options in Halifax. The area found mainly within Barrington, South, Wellington, and Inglis Streets is already largely zoned to accommodate rooming houses because many parts of it are Multiple Dwelling Zones (HRM, 2014h).

Recommendation: If the City decides that they want to promote rooming houses as an affordable housing option, they could consider adjusting the zoning in this area in the following ways: 1) rezone parts of the predominantly single family zones on the South-Western portion of the South End to have some Multiple Dwelling Zones or 2) changing the Halifax Peninsula LUB to allow rooming and lodging houses in more zones than only Multiple Dwelling Zones such as the General Residential Zone. The city must take care in considering the first option by conducting community consultation about which specific streets in the

South-Western part of the peninsula would be most opened to rooming houses. For instance, residents on a street that already contains many houses that essentially operate as unlicensed rooming houses for students would probably be more opened to having legal rooming houses in their neighborhood. Other streets with mainly single family homes will likely be very resistant to having rooming houses in their area.

The **Peninsula Centre Area Plan** shares the goal of promoting family housing. Unlike the South End, their residential goal does not also include having a mix of non-family housing. Promoting the goal of accommodating family housing is not particularly supportive of rooming houses. This area, still close to universities and on many bus routes to the major employment areas of the Peninsula, would also be a key strategic location in which to promote rooming houses. The area currently only has a handful of lots zoned as Multiple Dwelling Zones (the only places where rooming houses are permitted on the Peninsula) and these are located around Coburg Road near Dalhousie University.

Recommendation: (1) The City could rezone the area directly across from Dalhousie University from its dominant current General Residential zoning to include more Multiple Dwelling zones. Although this does not support the specific Peninsula Centre Area Plan’s residential objective of providing family housing, it would support the Peninsula’s overall policy of providing housing for all income levels. The rest of the Peninsula Centre Area is dominated by either General Residential or Single Family Dwelling zones which accommodate family housing as desired by their residential objective (HRM, 2014h). **(2)** Another optional change the City could make to support rooming houses would be to allow rooming houses in General Residential Zones in the Peninsula LUB. This zone already allows building types that can accommodate rooming houses such as duplexes and buildings containing no more than four apartment units (HRM, 2014d, p. 56). Allowing legal rooming and lodging houses in this area should not have major impacts on the character of the structures in the existing neighborhoods but would open multiple other areas of the Peninsula to the possibility of hosting rooming houses.

Peninsula North Area Plan’s Residential Environments objective is supportive of rooming houses: “Stable residential communities in Peninsula North that offer a variety of housing types to meet the needs of a range of income and age groups” (p. 169). A lot of the policies in this area are focused on strengthening the residential character of the area. Policies mainly promote the conversion of houses in certain neighborhoods to make more intensive residential use. Rooming houses could support the intensification goal while also being a way to convert houses into affordable housing options without drastically altering the character of a neighborhood. The Area Plan even has a specific area that is designated in a way that could be especially accommodating to rooming houses: the area bounded

between Cogswell, Robie, Barrington, and North Streets, which includes Gottingen Street and Uniacke Square (p. 169 & p. 171). Provision 1.1.4 and 1.4.1 both state that in this location “housing options for all income levels will be encouraged; developments that address the needs of surrounding community and help promote neighbourhood stability shall also be encouraged” (HRM, 2014c, p. 169 & 171). The location already contains several Multiple Dwelling zones which permit rooming houses. Another specific location that could be especially open to rooming house development is the former Dave’s Bottle Exchange located at 5784 Charles Street because provision 1.9 allows exceptions to its local zoning by saying it can be made into a mixed use commercial and multiple unit residential building (p. 174). A new rooming house could be placed in this location as the multiple unit residential building.

Recommendation: If the City chooses to promote rooming houses using their policy powers, the previous suggestion of allowing rooming and lodging houses into General Residential zones would greatly expand location options for rooming houses not only in the Peninsula North Area but all over the Peninsula. The General Residential zone (R-2 zones) uses are also permitted in Neighborhood Commercial Zones (RC-1 zone), Residential Minor Commercial Zone (RC-2 Zone), and High Density-Residential / Minor Commercial Zones (RC-3 Zone).

Quinpool Road Commercial Area may also be accommodating to rooming houses. Its overall objective is to continue to promote mixed-use commercial-residential development (p. 207). Rooming houses are compatible with this objective because they can easily be located above ground-level commercial units. One specific site permitted to be of larger size than the current zoning is 6112 Quinpool Road; among many other provision, 2.9.1 (g) stipulates that the mixed-use building must provide “a mixture of residential unit types and sizes” (HRM, 2014c, p. 212). Variety could be contributed to by several rooming-house type units. Their current zoning does not allow rooming houses but this could change if the City allows them to be part of General Residential zones. This would help accomplish the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy’s goal of providing housing for all income levels.

Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy for Downtown Halifax

Like the Halifax MPS, the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPs) never mentions rooming or lodging houses directly yet some of content is still relevant to this type of housing. Currently, the Downtown Halifax area is almost entirely zoned as Downtown Halifax zones (DH-1) (HRM, 2014f). Although rooming houses are never directly mentioned in the *Design Manual* (Halifax, 2014a), they are presumably permitted in this area because the LUB simply states that residential uses are permitted in this zone (HRM, 2014f, p. 18). When outlining current trends in downtown, the MPS says

Halifax is undertaking an analysis of affordability issues, homelessness, and other related social issues (HRM, 2014a, p. 2). The analysis could lend support to the wider realization that rooming houses are needed. The plan targets promoting affordable housing types as well as mixed-use housing types. Both of these goals support rooming houses. The plan even offers some bonus zoning as incentive to build certain affordable housing types. The Land Use Framework for Downtown Halifax indicates fairly high levels of support for rooming houses. The plan will work toward achieving residential population growth targets by “removing previous density limitations and encouraging a broad mix of unit types, housing affordability, and amenities to support downtown living” (HRM, 2014a, p. 14). A guiding principle that could be particularly supportive of rooming houses as a housing type option is a Living Downtown principle:

Create a living downtown through distinct neighbourhoods while supporting the creation of new residential opportunities including desirable high-density neighbourhoods with a variety of housing choices that are supported by high quality community, streetscape and open space amenities that are open year round. (HRM, 2014a, p. 6)

The principle of promoting more high density neighborhoods with a variety of housing choices could be especially supported by the conversion of existing buildings into rooming houses. Rooming houses help increase density by having higher numbers of individuals occupy the same space that, if used as an apartment for a single family, may otherwise be less densely populated. They also do not generally require large scale renovations that disrupt existing neighborhood structures.

The plan communicates the vision to support the distinct character of Downtown Halifax. As just mentioned, rooming houses do not require major disruptions to neighborhood structures; their design requirements can even be compatible with the structure of many heritage property houses in the area which would help preserve these important pieces of Downtown character. As long as the house conforms to the requirements for a rooming/lodging house (such as have three or more rooms available for rent as single units and can provide at least one bathroom for every six tenants), the external character of a heritage house can remain untouched. This also helps accomplish the third of the city’s ten aspirations for the Halifax Downtown: to have a protected and vibrant historic heart.

Finally, rooming houses could also support the tenth aspiration in the DHSMPs: to have a transit and active transportation oriented downtown. The residents of rooming houses are likely to be those with lower incomes, including students. Lower income individuals and students are less likely to own a vehicle and more likely to rely on public transit and active transportation options because these are more affordable mobility options. Statistics Canada (2007) found that Canadians without access to a vehicle use

public transit twice as much as those with regular access to a vehicle. If rooming houses are located downtown, these transportation options can also be more convenient due to the lack of parking and slow-moving vehicular traffic. Promoting rooming houses will also mean promoting the population growth of a certain demographic that is likely to use public transit and active transportation.

Municipal Planning Strategy for Dartmouth

Unlike all other Central Halifax MPS, the Dartmouth MPS (HRM, 2013a) not only specifically mentions lodging houses but has a section devoted to lodging houses on page 30. The strong similarities between definitions of lodging and rooming houses means that the lodging house section of the Dartmouth MPS is an important policy piece for rooming houses. Lodging houses are officially recognized by the plan as an important part of housing in Dartmouth. The Dartmouth MPS (HRM, 2008) makes the same argument made throughout this report about the capacity of lodging houses to contribute to certain City housing goals when it says, “This type of housing helps to fulfill the City’s objective of providing mixed housing stock in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of people in all income groups” (p. 30).

Recommendation: The same recommendation made for the Dartmouth LUBs stands for this MPS as well: any choices the City makes that create consistency in the Regional Centre for the definition of lodging and/or rooming houses should be carried over into this MPS. The reference to the Lodging House By-Law (found on page 30 of the Dartmouth MPS) should be removed since the by-law was repealed by the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008).

The plan also has several policies specifically speaking to Lodging House regulations. Policy H-8 says that Council will change the Land Use By-Laws about lodging houses (or rooming houses) from the current maximum 15 sleeping rooms to a maximum of 8 sleeping rooms per lodging house (HRM, 2013a, p. 30 & p. 35). As seen earlier, the current Dartmouth Land Use By-Law has incorporated these changes. The purpose of this amendment is meant to make a lodging house more compatible with adjacent buildings. Policy H-9 summarizes the specific zones in which lodging houses are permitted in Dartmouth: “R-3, Multiple Family Residential Zone - Medium Density; R-4, Multiple Family Residential Zone - High Density; C-2, general Business Zone; C-4, Massage Parlour Zone; MF-1, Multiple Family Residential Zone; and GC, General Commercial Zone” (HRM, 2013a, p. 35). Allowing lodging houses into multiple different zones makes this part of the Regional Centre much friendlier to lodging houses than the Halifax Peninsula.

Recommendation: The City should conduct a review of the current zoning in other central LUBs (especially the Peninsula By-Law) and consider which other zones could add rooming and lodging houses as a permitted use without compromising the existing uses of that zone. They could use the current inclusive

zoning in the Dartmouth LUB as a model to understand which types of zones can easily include lodging and rooming houses.

Secondary Planning Strategy for Downtown Dartmouth

Like the two Halifax plans, the Downtown Dartmouth MPS (HRM, 2013b) never directly mentions rooming or lodging houses. Also like the Downtown Halifax MPS (HRM, 2014a), increased residential density is a goal for Downtown Dartmouth. The plan promotes low and medium density houses in Downtown neighborhoods and high density in the waterfront area. The typical house type for rooming houses could fit into the low, medium, or high density neighborhoods. More rooming houses could relate to one of their goals: “Enhanced Image and Safety” (HRM, 2013b, p. 12). They harken to Jane Jacobs’ (1961) famous idea of “eyes on the street” by purposely attracting more people to the downtown for residential and business purposes as a way to enhance safety. Rooming houses could increase the number of eyes on the street since they could increase the population. On the other hand, as housing geared toward lower income individuals they may not be initially perceived as enhancing Downtown Dartmouth’s image. An investigation of the social and political perceptions of rooming houses in Halifax is an important avenue of future research.

Currently, rooming houses are only permitted in the Downtown Business District Zone (DB) (HRM, 2014g). These zones are located in the central portion of Downtown Dartmouth, near King’s Wharf, and make up approximately one fourth of the total area. Most of the area is zoned as Downtown Neighborhood (DN). A DN zone does not currently include rooming or lodging houses in the list of permitted uses yet does permit various other types of developments, such as multiple unit dwellings, by site approval and development agreements. The goal in this zone “is to protect the integrity and character of existing residential neighbourhoods by limiting the type, scale and design of new development, renovations, and home based businesses” (HRM, 2014g, p. 30). As already discussed, including rooming houses as a permitted use in these zones would help maintain the character of the downtown because they do not require significant renovations.

Recommendation: The City could consider adding rooming houses as a permitted use in DN zones if they decide to endorse rooming houses as an affordable housing option.

5 MOVING FORWARD

What does the research mean moving forward? The findings are meant as a starting point in understanding rooming houses in Halifax to spur further investigation and improvements. In this section, future research directions are suggested followed by the compiled recommendations and then final conclusions.

Future Research Directions

The most pressing need for future rooming house research in Halifax is to understand their current conditions, since the last study of this kind was published nearly 20 years ago (Metro Non-Profit Housing Association, 2013). Understanding the conditions of Halifax rooming houses is another foundational step to creating appropriate and helpful governing policies. The objective of such a study could be to determine the advantages and risks of the housing type to help the City decide how they should manage this housing type and whether or not they should promote this housing option. Much information is needed, including numbers and locations of current rooming houses, profiles of rooming house residents, and an overview of current organizations working to support rooming houses. Another important dimension to understand is the public and political perceptions about rooming houses. Surveying general public perspectives could reveal further barriers to rooming houses in the form of social stigmas which, in turn, would help planners, developers, and landlords interested in promoting rooming houses navigate the politics of creating new rooming houses. Investigations into the economic benefits and drawbacks of running a rooming house would also be valuable research, especially for understanding the apparent reluctance of landlords to run this type of housing. This could show whether or not there are incentives for landlords to get their rooming houses licensed. Optional approaches for this substantial study are interviews with landlords and surveys of current residents. The study may take significant detective work because of the possibility that some apartments are operating as rooming houses without a license. In order to conduct research, Halifax could use the Winnipeg (Distasio, Dudley, & Maunder, 2002) and Toronto (Hwang, Martin, Hulchanski, & Tolomiczenko, 2003) studies as models.

A best practice review is another valuable avenue of future research to inform Halifax rooming house policies. There are many possible solutions to rooming house problems Halifax may discover such as owner-as-rooming-house-resident policies, financial incentives, and rooming houses as a strategic form of student housing. A candidate for best practice analysis is British Columbia Housing's (2014) single room occupancy hotels initiative. A model and reference for a rooming house best practice review could be the best practice in rooming houses study already done by Calhoun Research and Development (2011). This

publication could be a tool the City can use to update policy before they can take on their own best practice review.

Another interesting but less pressing avenue of future research is an investigation of potential positive contributions of rooming houses to general wellbeing in Halifax. Possibilities include the benefits of community living. Strong, positive, community living could lead to increased levels of happiness, social capital, and could help areas feel safer if more people are acquainted. The higher number of individuals this will bring to some areas could also enhance safety by increasing the number of eyes on the street (Jacobs, 1961). The possibilities for future rooming house research are vast.

Recommendations

The research led to recommendations for governing documents that have been seen throughout this report and are summarized as three major recommendations here. The first is the most important because it applies whether or not Halifax decides they want to promote rooming houses as an affordable housing option. The second two are important if the City, after further research, decides rooming houses are a viable affordable housing option that they wish to more intentionally promote in Halifax.

1 | Coordinate definitions and regulations throughout all planning documents governing the Halifax Regional Centre, starting with a consistent definition of a rooming house.

The current definitions in the by-laws governing rooming and lodging houses in the regional centre are not well coordinated. The concepts are defined in multiple ways, some contradictory and many overlapping. Granted, the LUBs are governing different areas so some discrepancies in numbers are due to varying goals between areas but these variations should be reflected in the regulations, not the definitions. If the City is going to establish a unifying Centre Plan that will regulate rooming houses in a consistent way, coordination is needed. The following are two options the City can consider to create a consistent concept of rooming houses in the Regional Centre: 1) combine the existing definitions of rooming and lodging houses by choosing one term (either “rooming” or “lodging”) to refer to a single definition of the type of housing or 2) establish a clear and justified difference between the two terms that is applied consistently through all documents. The City could look to the definition in the *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008) for a more straightforward, consistent definition. Whatever changes are made should then be reflected in all current and future by-laws and MPS. The coordination of definitions and regulations could take the form of a comprehensive revision of rooming house by-laws. Another consistency-making change is to remove references to the repealed Lodging House By-Law from the Dartmouth Land Use By-Law (HRM, 2014e) and the Dartmouth MPS (HRM, 2013a).

2 | Permit rooming and lodging houses in more land use zones in the Regional Centre.

Zoning in Dartmouth (HRM, 2014e) and Downtown Halifax (HRM, 2014f) is open to rooming houses. The two other zoning areas (Halifax Peninsula and Downtown Dartmouth) are unnecessarily restrictive. The following are suggested zones that could add rooming/lodging houses as permitted uses which would significantly improve the Regional Centre's hospitableness to this type of housing without drastically impacting the types of housing already permitted in these zones: "General Residential (R-2) Zone" in the Peninsula Land Use By-law (HRM, 2014d) and the "Downtown Neighborhood (DN) Zone" in the Downtown Dartmouth Land Use By-Law (HRM, 2014g). The R-2 zone on the Halifax Peninsula already accommodates types of housing that are compatible with rooming houses, from single-detached houses to small apartment buildings with up to four units. Interestingly, the Peninsula LUB's (HRM, 2014d) definition of a rooming house is already set up to allow rooming houses in the R-2 Zone in how the definition specifically says that rooming houses can only be in structures ranging in size from a single dwelling unit up to a building with four dwelling units (what is akin to a house containing 4 apartments). Additionally, R-2 zone uses are permitted in several other zones which means this one zoning addition would significantly open up the Peninsula to rooming houses. The City could use the Dartmouth LUB (HRM, 2014e) as a model to make these decisions. Allowing them in the DN zone in Downtown Dartmouth would make the entire Downtown Area of the Regional Centre more consistent in its openness to rooming houses. Rooming houses are allowed all through the Halifax side of Downtown while they are only permitted in a small portion of Downtown Dartmouth.

3 | Simplify the license renewal process to operate a rooming or lodging house.

The *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008) requires landlords of rooming and lodging houses to reapply for their operating license every year. The reapplication process is only slightly less demanding than the process to get the first license. To encourage landlords to use their dwelling units as rooming houses, the City could consider 1) making the reapplication process more streamlined by reducing the amount of information required or 2) by extending the length of time for which a license is valid (e.g., maybe for 2 years instead of 1). Consultation with rooming house landlords and with municipal staff involved with regulating rooming houses should be undertaken in considering this recommendation (see pages 11 and 12 of this report for more details).

Conclusion

All LUBs for the Halifax Regional Centre have definitions and regulations for rooming or lodging houses except for the Downtown Halifax LUB (HRM, 2014f). All of the contents require an update to create consistency, especially if they are going to be used to inform a unified Regional Centre Plan. The *Standards for Residential Occupancies By-Law* (HRM, 2008) has good requirements for rooming houses that protect the physical health and safety of tenants. The heavy responsibility the by-law places on rooming house landlords may be one of the reasons for falling numbers of licensed rooming houses in Halifax. Nevertheless, the requirements are reasonable standards of living which means the City will have to find other ways to make rooming houses an attractive business for landlords if they decide they want to increase the numbers of this affordable housing option.

The compatibility analysis revealed that the Municipal Planning Strategies are compatible with rooming houses in several ways. The most important and clear support from the Strategies is from the goal to provide affordable housing options. The Halifax MPS (HRM, 2014c) seeks to provide a mix of family and non-family housing in the South End Area which could also support the wider development of rooming houses if the current zoning were adjusted. Stated goals of mixed-use housing in Downtown Halifax (HRM, 2014a) can also support rooming houses because they can easily be located above ground-level commercial space. The goal to increase density may be supportive as well.

Rooming houses also have the potential to help the City accomplish the following goals from the municipal planning strategies:

- Increasing density (Downtown Dartmouth; Downtown Halifax)
- Preserving the character of neighborhoods, especially in downtown areas (Downtown Dartmouth; Downtown Halifax; Halifax)
- Protecting the historic heart of Halifax (Downtown Halifax)
- Providing housing options for people of all income levels, especially affordable housing (Dartmouth; Downtown Halifax; Halifax)
- Providing mixed-use housing (Downtown Halifax)
- Increasing transit and active transportation usage (Downtown Halifax)

Each of the potential connections could become separate projects for future research. More in-depth explorations and explanations of how rooming houses could contribute to each of the above goals are found in the “Planning Strategies” section. To summarize, rooming houses support the goals because they help increase population density in multiple forms of housing without large scale redevelopments that disrupt the existing structures.

The findings for rooming house and MPS compatibility are encouraging although not conclusive. Rooming houses have the potential to be strategic affordable housing options but must first be better understood. With a foundational understanding of the by-laws and policies governing rooming houses in the Halifax Regional Centre, the City can move forward with further research to determine whether or not rooming houses are a form of affordable housing worthy of their endorsement.

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