

## **Birch Cove / Susie Lakes Area: Questions and Answers**

*In recent weeks, there has been much public interest and media coverage regarding Birch Cove/Susie Lakes lands, located west of Highway 102 in Halifax. In an effort to provide the public with timely and accurate information about current initiatives in this area, HRM staff has prepared the following questions and answers. Please feel free to share this information with others who may also be interested in the Birch Cove/Susie Lakes lands.*

*Please visit the Halifax Regional Municipality website at [www.halifax.ca](http://www.halifax.ca) (Quicklink to Regional Planning - Reports, Studies and Guidelines) for more information.*

### **1. Where are the Birch Cove / Susie Lakes?**

The Birch Cove Lakes are on the west side of the Bicentennial Highway between Lacewood Drive and Kearney Lake Road. A series of lakes - the largest being Susie and Quarrie Lakes are within the upper watershed of lands which drains through Kearney Lake and Paper Mill Lake to Moirs Pond in the Bedford Basin (refer to attached map).

### **2. Is development being proposed for this area?**

Birchdale Properties Inc., representing four property owners in this area (Annapolis Group Inc., Armco Capital Inc., Gateway Materials Inc., and Sisters of Charity), has submitted a request to the Municipality to initiate a Secondary Planning Process to allow for the future development of approximately 500 acres. The lands represented by Birchdale Properties are illustrated on the attached map.

### **3. What is a secondary planning process?**

A Secondary Planning Process provides guidance for the future development of an area through the adoption of land use policies and regulations pertaining to such matters as environmental protection, land use allocations, municipal service provision and phasing of development and services. The process results in the preparation of a document containing land use policies and regulations called a Secondary Planning Strategy.

The process involves extensive public consultation and entails collaboration and negotiation among interested parties including land owners, municipal staff, neighbouring communities and various interest groups. For any development to proceed, a Secondary Planning Strategy must be adopted by Halifax Regional Council. A formal Public Hearing is required at Regional Council before a decision is made.

#### **4. What are the current planning provisions for the Birchdale Properties lands?**

Under the Regional Plan, approximately one-half of the Birchdale Properties lands are designated “Urban Settlement”. Within such areas, central wastewater and water distribution services are intended to be provided to facilitate an urban form of development over the next 25 years (2001 to 2026). The portions of the Birchdale Properties lands designated Urban Settlement are illustrated on the attached map.

An Urban Settlement Zone has been applied within this designation which restricts new development to single unit dwellings on a minimum lot size of 2 hectares (5 acres) provided that the lot has frontage on an existing road and an on-site disposal system can be provided. As there are no existing roads on these lands, no new development would be permitted until such time as a Secondary Planning Strategy is approved by Regional Council.

The Birchdale Properties lands situated within the Urban Settlement designation is one of six sites identified by the Regional Plan as potential areas for new urban growth within the next 25 years, subject to the completion and Council approval of a Secondary Planning Strategy (the Plan identifies this site as “Highway 102 West Corridor adjacent to Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Park”).

The remaining portion of the Birchdale Properties lands is designated and zoned “Urban Reserve” under the Regional Plan (refer to attached map). Within this area, central services (municipal wastewater and water distribution) may eventually be provided, and the primary intent of this designation is to retain sufficient lands to provide an adequate supply of serviceable land beyond the time horizon of the Regional Plan (2026). The Urban Reserve Zone does not allow any subdivision and restricts new development to one single unit dwelling per existing lot, serviced by a well and on-site wastewater disposal system.

#### **5. Does the Municipality have to accept this request and what is it’s status?**

The Municipality is not obligated to initiate Secondary Planning processes upon receipt of a request. This will be a decision of Regional Council, and criteria to guide Council’s decision are set out in the Regional Plan. While several policies are relevant in this regard, perhaps the most important is Policy S-3, which speaks to protecting the fiscal health of HRM and financial commitments associated with servicing new growth areas.

No decisions by Council have been made to date concerning the requests to initiate Secondary Planning processes. A staff report has been prepared in response to the Birchdale Properties request, as well as two other sites for which requests have been made to initiate secondary planning processes. This report has been tabled with the Municipality’s Regional Plan Advisory Committee. A copy of the report can be obtained at: <http://www.halifax.ca> (Quicklink to Regional Planning - Reports, Studies and Guidelines).

The recommendations of staff and the Committee will be forwarded to Regional Council for discussion and decision in early 2010.

**6. Is a regional park proposed in this area and where is it in relation to the proposed development?**

The Province has designated approximately 1,350 hectares (3,336 acres) of crown holdings to the west of the Birchdale Properties lands as a wilderness protection area. This area extends westward from the Birchdale Properties lands to Frasers Lake in Timberlea and includes lands to the north and south (refer to attached map).

It is worth noting that the Province did not designate any privately owned lands as wilderness protection, nor did it acquire any privately owned lands for the purpose of designating them as wilderness protection. It simply placed a wilderness protection designation on lands that it already owns.

Under the Regional Plan, a 2006 study prepared for HRM, NS Dept. of Natural Resources and NS Dept. of Transportation and Public Works titled “Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Assessment Study”, proposed a geographic area for the park (Map 13 of the Regional Plan). The proposed boundary includes portions of publically-owned lands (provincial) of the (now) wilderness protection area as well as considerable privately-owned lands, including portions of the Birchdale Properties lands. The park boundary in relation to the Birchdale Properties lands is illustrated on the attached map.

Through the Regional Plan, publically-owned lands in the area of Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes are zoned “Regional Park”, as stated in Policy E-4. The privately-owned lands within the proposed boundary of the park are designated and zoned “Urban Reserve” or “Urban Settlement”. The reason the privately-owned lands were not zoned “Regional Park” at the time of adoption of the Regional Plan was because, as mandated by provincial planning legislation, HRM would have been required to purchase the subject lands within a one-year timeframe.

**7. How are privately-owned lands to be acquired for a regional park and who will decide what lands will become parkland and what will be developed?**

The Regional Plan indicates that it is the intention, over time, to acquire the necessary private lands within the proposed park boundary (Map 13) for public use. A variety of acquisition methods can be utilized, including provincial and municipal partnerships, as financial resources permit, land trades and conservation easements. At the municipal level of government, Halifax Regional Council will determine what lands become parkland and those that may be developed.

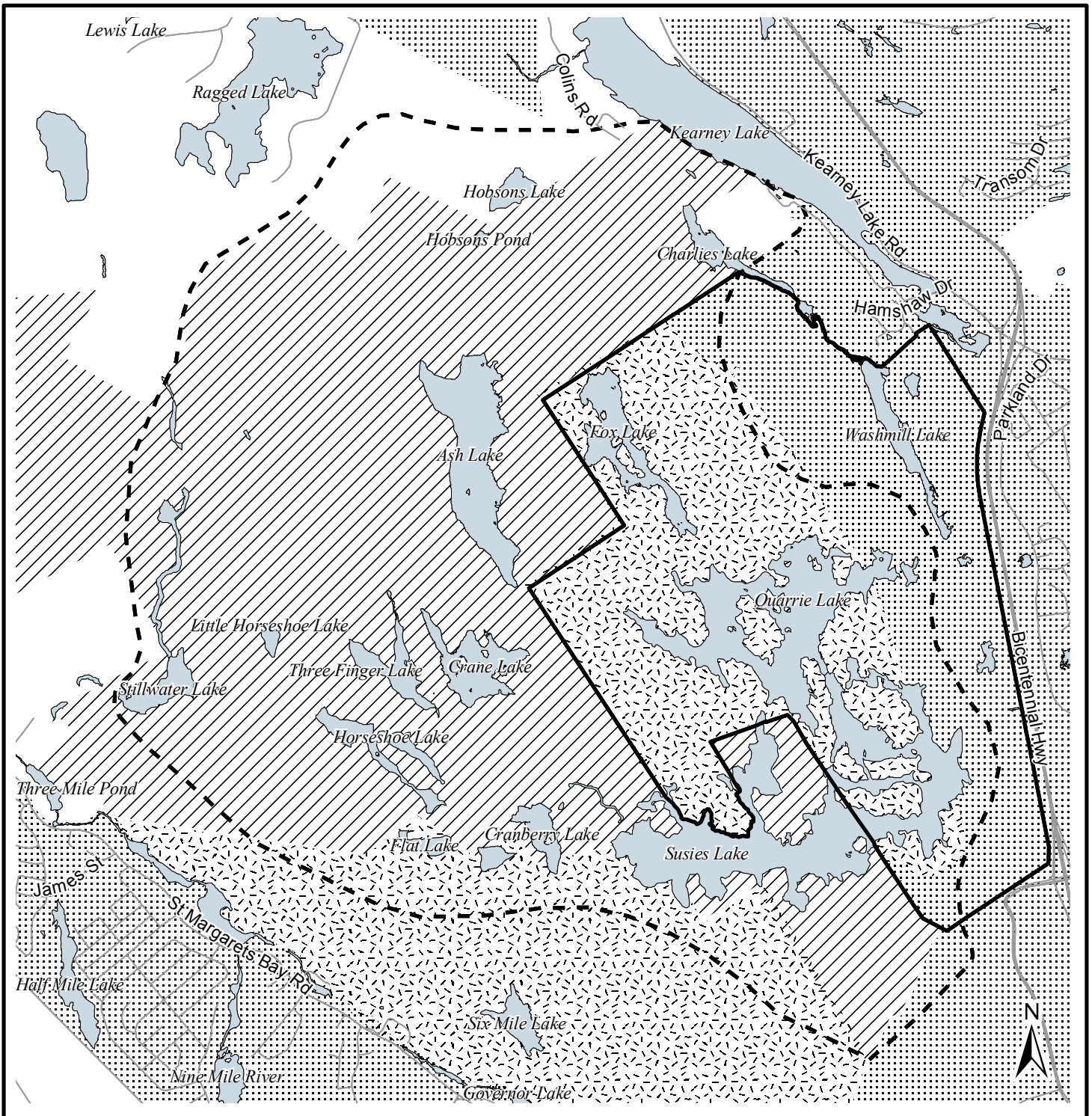
**8. If private lands are acquired for a regional park, what zoning will be applied?**

The Regional Plan states that any lands acquired will be re-designated to “Open Space and Natural Resources” and re-zoned “Regional Park”.






**9. When could development of these lands start?**

No development is imminent. Regional Council must first decide whether or not to initiate Secondary Planning processes at this time. Secondary Planning is typically a multi-year process and ultimately a planning document (Secondary Planning Strategy) will have to be brought to Regional Council for consideration. A Public Hearing must be held before a decision is made. If approved, detailed plans are then brought forward to the area Community Council for consideration, usually on a phase-by-phase basis. Again, a Public Hearing is usually required.

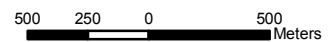
Further information regarding the planning process can be obtained by contacting Paul Morgan, Planner, Community & Regional Planning at tel: 490-4482 or E-mail: [morganp@halifax.ca](mailto:morganp@halifax.ca)



## Highway 102 West Corridor Lands Adjacent to Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes Park

-  Privately Owned Lands (Birchdale Projects Inc.)
-  Conceptual Park Boundary: Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes (Map 13, Regional Plan)
-  Blue Mountain - Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area (Provincial Crown Lands)
-  Urban Reserve Designation (Regional Plan)
-  Urban Settlement Designation (Regional Plan)

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