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# Contenu archivé

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# RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION CASE STUDIES

## Municipal Initiatives

### WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

### Halifax, Nova Scotia

### SUMMARY

This is a provincial crown corporation that owns significant waterfront land on Halifax Harbour and oversees its planning and development. It has helped transform the waterfront from a desolate area into a vibrant mixed-use destination and living area.

**Date Implemented:** 1976

**Key Outcomes:** 609 residential units have been built and a further 150 are now under construction with more being planned over the next five years.

### BACKGROUND

The Halifax waterfront has undergone many changes since the late 1960s. While the harbour has always played an important role in the economic life of the area, the advent of containerized shipping, bridge construction, and suburban development shifted the economic and demographic focus away from the city's waterfronts. Decline set in, and derelict docks and abandoned warehouses multiplied along the waterfront.

Aware of the critical importance of the waterfront to the recreational and economic life of the city, the federal and provincial government established a program in the early 1970s to purchase waterfront land and make the improvements needed to spur redevelopment. When the joint program was wound down in 1976, the Province chose to continue the work alone by setting up the Waterfront Development Corporation Limited (WDCL) with a mandate to help bring the waterfront back to life.



Figure 1: Aerial view of the Halifax waterfront.  
Source: Waterfront Development Corporation

### DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

The Waterfront Development Corporation's only shareholder is the Province of Nova Scotia, and it reports to the Minister of the Office of Economic Development. It is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of nine volunteer members appointed by the Minister.

The main objectives of this provincial crown corporation are to rejuvenate the waterfront of Halifax Harbour, provide public access to the urban waterfront and stimulate private sector investment in the area. To pursue these objectives, the Corporation has several instruments at its disposal: it plans the waterfront areas, acquires, manages and develops property and it conducts marketing and promotion campaigns designed to attract the public to the waterfronts.

Over time the Corporation has expropriated and purchased land from private owners to build up its land bank of waterfront properties. At present, the Corporation owns most of the developable land immediately abutting the waterfronts in downtown Halifax, and several parcels in Dartmouth and Bedford (now all part of the amalgamated Regional Municipality of Halifax), for a total of about 13 acres (5.25 hectares).

As for the rest of the land surrounding the harbour, the Corporation coordinates with other government agencies and stakeholders to develop plans for those areas.

Development of lands owned by the Corporation is usually carried out by private-sector developers to whom the Corporation either sells or leases land. For each parcel, the Corporation calls for development proposals and reviews them for compliance with their goals for the waterfront. The WDCL and the selected developer then negotiate an agreement setting out the architectural (building design, quality of materials to be used, public spaces and access to the waterfront, etc.) and financial details of the project.

Because it is a public agency, the Corporation is not constrained to develop land to the highest and best use from a real estate perspective but chooses the uses that will best achieve its public objectives. For instance, in selling waterfront land for new development, the Corporation will favour proposals that guarantee public access to the waterfront and that show a high quality of urban design and architecture. In some cases, the Corporation acts as the developer itself and then rents out the space (largely commercial and warehouse) as a source of revenue.

According to the Corporation's plan, all the land it currently owns will be redeveloped over the next 25 years. This development, the pace of which will be subject to market conditions, will be a mix of commercial, institutional and high-density residential uses and will include parking and a generous amount of public open spaces.

## COMPLEMENTARY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Because the Corporation owns the waterfront land, it can exercise close control over land use and urban design decisions. However, the development championed by the WDCL generally requires approval from the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and is developed in accordance with the City's municipal plan.

The Corporation, in partnership with HRM, has completed a new plan for the Halifax waterfront defining areas of public space, development sites and urban design criteria. This plan, which will govern the next 10-15 years of significant development on the Halifax waterfront, was completed in 2001. The plan calls for infill development on the downtown Halifax lands adjacent to the waterfront and for several additional residential and mixed residential/commercial projects on the waterfront itself.

HRM Council has not yet approved the Plan as negotiations continue over financial issues, in particular, agreement has not been reached on who is going to pay for the open space that makes up an important element of the plan (about 40 per cent of developable land is designated as open space in the plan, which is much higher than the typical 5 to 10 per cent usually set aside).

## STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE

The WDCL uses its own consultation program for planning activities, involving stakeholders and general public meetings. Private developers involved in projects on WDCL-owned land follow the HRM consultation procedures, which include public hearings.

The WDCL has the support of the Downtown Business Commission and tourism organizations. The Urban Development institute also supports the work of the Corporation due to the opportunities it creates for inner city residential development.

From a project developer's perspective, the WDCL serves a valuable role in assembling the lands for redevelopment and in balancing private and public interests in the waterfront. The WDCL provides a clear and consistent framework through its development agreements, maintains and improves the public realm on the waterfront, and insists on a consistently high standard of urban design, material use and architecture across various redevelopment projects.

A segment of the community feels that all waterfront land should be preserved as public space rather than be redeveloped. There has been strong public opposition to some projects, in particular those that block views of existing residents adjacent to the waterfront lands. Among local businesses, opposition to the Corporation's activities is minimal, but occasionally there are complaints when the Corporation engages directly in commercial activities (e.g., leases out too much space, or operates too many fish and chip stands on the waterfront).

The Corporation operates a Web site that offers information on WDCL's history, past projects and commercial opportunities currently available. Development projects are announced through press releases, which are generally covered in the local media.

## IMPACT

Until the 1990s the pace of residential development on the Halifax waterfront was slow: one project of 125 units was built in Dartmouth in 1985, a 250-unit project was realized in 1990 on the Bedford waterfront, and finally a small development of 25 units, also in Dartmouth, was completed in 1998. Over this period, most development under the Corporation's aegis was commercial and institutional.

In the last few years, however, the market for office and commercial development has declined and the residential market has strengthened. These trends

have led the Corporation to increase its interest in residential and mixed-use development and issue calls for residential development proposals for specific waterfront parcels. So far, two projects have gone forward. The first, called Bishop's Landing, is a mixed-used development on the site of a former fish plant and parking lot. This 206-unit residential, commercial and mixed-use development is located directly on the Halifax waterfront and incorporates open and park space that increases and protects public access to the waterfront. The project, shown in Figure 2, was completed in 2002. (Please refer to the case study on Bishop's Landing in Part 2 of this study "Residential Intensification Case Studies: Built Projects".)

The second project involving a 130-unit condominium in downtown Dartmouth is currently proceeding through the approval process. The Sentinel will consist of a 10-storey building along with three-storey townhouses on land that has been vacant for many years. Construction should start in 2003/04 and the project will be completed in 2005/06.

The trend towards residential development is expected to continue for at least the next five years and several more waterfront projects are anticipated, including a 200-unit development in downtown Halifax and up to 300 units over several projects in Bedford, which will be built on fill now being placed in Bedford Basin.



Figure 2: Bishop's Landing  
Source: Southwest Properties

## FINANCIAL ISSUES

The WDCL has a staff of five full-time management, planning and communications professionals and two support staff. There are also three full-time and a variety of part-time staff for property management and maintenance. Consultants on project design, environmental assessment and so on are retained on a project-by-project basis.

WDCL is largely reliant on its own resources but receives some support from the Government of Nova Scotia. Most of the Corporation's revenue flows from the leasing and sale of land and commercial space. Proceeds from the sale of land are reinvested into the waterfront to improve public access and facilities or to upgrade infrastructure, which improves the developability of the land and attracts the public, adding to the vibrancy of the waterfront.

To date, about \$50 million have been spent by WDCL on both sides of the harbour for planning, land acquisition, underground utilities, streetscaping, parking lots, public parks, and demolition of derelict structures. Most of the land along waterfront is contaminated with heavy metals and petroleum from fuel storage tanks and land decontamination costs are usually borne by the private developer. Where piling is required in order to shore up foundations near the water, costs may be shared between WDCL and the private developer.

For the Bishop's Landing project in particular, the costs to the WDCL were high because the development was opposed by neighbouring residents. Over the five years of negotiations and court appeals, the cost in legal and planning fees to WDCL amounted to about \$250,000. Environmental management of contaminated waterfront land and piling cost for the foundation totalled about \$3 million, about \$500,000 of which was paid by WDCL (the rest was paid by the developer and the municipality). The total public cost of Bishop's Landing, including adjacent wharfs and boardwalk systems, was about \$3 million, while the private investment amounted to over \$30 million. In this case the land under the buildings was sold to the developer (for about \$2 million), but the WDCL retained ownership of the public lands (including the waterfront access) and some parking. Revenue from the parking and a percentage of the revenue from the rental of retail space in the project will pay for the maintenance of the public spaces associated with the development. The project will generate more than \$500,000 in tax revenue annually to the HRM.

## EVALUATION

As a provincial crown corporation, the WDCL has proven to be a successful vehicle for assembling waterfront lands, setting high standards for redevelopment on both private and public lands, and maintaining public access to the waterfront. The waterfront is now very different than it was when the WDCL was founded 27 years ago. Whereas before the waterfront was a place best avoided, it is now the centre of attraction for commercial vendors, tourists, festivals, and family gatherings—all within the downtown. The area enjoys a unique mix of historic elements coupled with new developments. Adding to this rejuvenation is the gradually increasing residential population of the waterfront area, which is now picking up speed. It is estimated that development over the next five years will bring a further 1,000 residents to the waterfront.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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#### DOCUMENTS:

Waterfront Development Corporation. 2001.  
Waterfront Open Space and Development Plan.

Waterfront Development Corporation.  
Undated. Corporate Profile.

Waterfront Development Corporation.  
Annual Reports.

#### WEB SITES:

[www.wdcl.ca](http://www.wdcl.ca)  
(Waterfront Development Corporation)

[www.innovativeproperties.com](http://www.innovativeproperties.com)  
(Innovative Properties – developer of The Sentinel)

[www.southwest.ca](http://www.southwest.ca)  
(Southwest Properties – developer of Bishop's Landing)

**OUR WEB SITE ADDRESS:** [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)

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