

What We Heard Report

PREPARED FOR:

Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia

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2570 Agricola Street
Halifax, NS
902-482-1221
atn-strategies.ca

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1 Introduction

The What We Heard report summarizes community feedback gathered to date, including through email, by phone, and at the in-person public engagement session held on Tuesday, January 13, 2026, in Sackville, Nova Scotia. The session focused on a proposed affordable and mixed-market rental development led by the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia (AHANS).

AHANS is proposing a six-storey rental building near the historic Maroon Hill area in Sackville. The building is expected to include 81 units, made up of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, with three barrier-free units, and a small ground-floor commercial space. The project mixes affordable and market-rate housing, allowing for the lower-cost affordable units to be supported by the modestly priced market units. The development has been designed with careful attention paid to environmental components, strategic site design, and measures intended to lessen visual and noise impacts on the surrounding community.

This engagement process is part of AHANS's commitment, as a mission-driven non-profit housing provider, to involve local residents in the evolution of the project. By sharing clear information and inviting questions and ideas early, AHANS aims to ensure the development reflects local priorities, mitigates potential impacts, and delivers a multitude of benefits for both future tenants and the surrounding community.

2 Engagement Approach and Methodology

The January 13 session was designed primarily as an information-sharing open house, where community members could learn about AHANS, the proposed development, and how the project fits within the site and surrounding area.

To reach local residents and stakeholders, AHANS and its partners used a mix of targeted and broad outreach tools, including:

- **Direct mail-outs** to nearby residents and businesses.
- **Email notifications** to people who signed up for updates through the project engagement website (www.engageatn.ca/ahans).
- **Social media outreach**, including posts on AHANS's Instagram and LinkedIn accounts, as well as Facebook advertisements targeting the Sackville / HRM region.
- **Outreach and ongoing engagement** with African Nova Scotian community members and organizations, including follow-up conversations beyond this session.

2.1 Session Outcomes

The January 13, 2026 session was held as an in-person, drop-in open house at the Sackville Heights Junior High cafeteria from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Approximately 60 community members attended.

The session aimed to:

- Provide clear, accessible information on the development, affordability model, and key design considerations, including environmental and site-specific measures.

Facebook Ads and Metrics

Two paid Facebook ad campaigns were additionally used to promote the session and drive traffic to the project information page.

Across the two ads:

- **13,700** accounts reached
- **37,000** total views
- **1,040** click-throughs to the landing page

Engagement was strongest among women, particularly in the 45–64 age range, and the ads were geographically targeted to the Sackville / Middle Sackville area of Nova Scotia.

- Answer questions and hear initial concerns related to issues such as water availability, traffic and infrastructure, affordability and tenant profile, and accessibility.
- Gather early input on how the project can reflect and respectfully commemorate the history of the Maroon Hill community and contribute positively to the local neighborhood.

Throughout the session, attendees were able to engage with representatives from AHANS and Passive Design Solutions, the architectural firm responsible for building design, and visit the information stations provided. These stations provided a description of AHANS and its role as a non-profit housing provider, the development concept and site layout, environmental and net-zero features, efforts to minimize visual and noise impacts, details on preservation of the wetlands and natural buffers, community path and transit ideas, and commemoration of Maroon Hill.

3 Summary of Key Themes and Considerations

This section provides an overview of the main themes and considerations that emerged from participant feedback at the January 13, 2026 engagement session as well as written submissions received throughout the engagement period. It summarizes sentiments of support, concerns about local impacts, and opportunities for partnership identified by community members. More detailed input is presented in Section 4 according to specific topic area.

The overall outlook of those who attended the session was positive with regard to affordable housing, though many had significant concerns about local impact to their day-to-day through increasing traffic, water demand, and further developments in the area. Many participants expressed support for affordable housing in principle and saw value in AHANS as a long-term, non-profit provider, while also raising strong concerns about the cumulative impacts of this regional growth.

Stormwater and flooding were dominant issues for many attendees, which included fears about worsened basement flooding, groundwater changes, and impacts on nearby properties. Participants and groups such as the Sackville Rivers Association emphasized the importance of protecting the adjacent wetland, controlling construction runoff and sediment, and using strong erosion and silt control measures, with specific suggestions such as retention ponds, sedimentation controls, tree retention and oil-grit separators.

Another main concern was traffic congestion on Sackville Drive and local side streets, school capacity issues, and potential issues with water pressure and municipal servicing. Many felt that new housing is being added faster than upgrades to roads, sidewalks, transit, and schools, and desired clear information on traffic studies, infrastructure capacity, and how the municipality will respond to cumulative growth in the area.

Key questions from participants revolved around understanding what “affordable” means in practice, what rent levels will be, and how affordability will be maintained over time. There was repeated need to explain the mixed-market model (meaning that approximately 30% of units will be deeply affordable while the other 70% will offset the affordable units at a modest market rate), as well as why the building needs this proposed scale, and how rents will be kept relatively low. Some comments reflected stigma and concern about who would live in the building, which required clarification that this is not a high-needs supportive housing site but a mixed-market rental community for working people, seniors, families and others.



Importantly, African Nova Scotian participants emphasized interest in local hiring and procurement, providing community-appropriate space, and some level of priority for local residents as tenants, indicating a willingness to be constructive partners. Finally, there was also strong interest broadly in accessible unit and building design, and in community-serving amenities such as maintaining and formalizing the existing path, improving walkability, and supporting local groups to participate in environmental and community benefit work.

4 Feedback by Theme

This section provides further detail about the feedback and concerns from participants about the proposed development, grouped by key topic areas. It reflects the conversations had at the January 13, 2026 session as well as written or email submissions received by AHANS and ATN Strategies representatives.

4.1 Traffic, Access, Schools & Municipal Infrastructure

Increasing traffic on Sackville Drive and nearby streets was a major theme. Participants described existing congestion, difficulty exiting side streets, and concern that this and other area developments will further slow travel and complicate evacuation. They asked whether traffic studies will be done and how cumulative impacts from multiple projects will be considered. Additionally, comments were made about the speed of cars on Sackville Drive – some residents felt that traffic had gotten too fast in the area and were concerned that an increasing number of cars may worsen this issue. One attendee suggested that this may be addressed through placement of traffic lights near Melham Drive to encourage drivers to slow down.

Residents also questioned whether local schools, roads, sidewalks and water infrastructure can support additional households. Some highlighted that nearby schools are already at or beyond capacity and that infrastructure, including sidewalks and roadways, should be improved before adding more housing. Participants asked for more information about planned traffic studies, infrastructure upgrades, and how the municipality will respond to growth.

4.2 Stormwater, Flooding, Groundwater & Insurance

Stormwater and flooding was raised as a prominent concern, with participants expressing worry over existing basement flooding and fear that the new building could worsen these problems, including for homes both uphill and on the far side of the marsh. Tenants thus worried about their home insurance premiums rising or the potential for insurers to drop their coverage. Residents also noted a reduction in water pressure when new buildings are constructed and questioned whether existing systems can handle additional development.

Residents emphasized the need for clear, public information about water management and requested specific measures such as on-site water retention ponds sized for large storm events, sewer holding tanks, robust sedimentation and erosion control, silt retention to prevent runoff to the Little Sackville River, tree retention, and oil-grit separators.

4.3 Affordability, Rents & Tenant Mix

Participants showed strong interest in what “affordable” means in practice. They asked about rent ranges, how affordability will be maintained over time, and the balance between subsidized and market units. Many were keen to understand more about the mixed-market model, inquiring as to why 30% of units are deeply affordable versus those at market rate, why the building needs to be its proposed size, and how lower operating costs support lower rents. Questions were also raised about rent escalation, with some seeking assurances that rents would not increase aggressively year-to-year.

Some comments reflected stigma and concern about who will live in the building, with some expressing fear that this would be associated with visible poverty, drug use or “problematic behavior”. Staff clarified that this is not a

permanent supportive, high-needs or harm-reduction site, but a mixed-market rental building intended for working people, retirees, families and some residents who may have experienced homelessness. This explanation appeared to offer significant clarification, while some, including seniors, expressed strong interest in moving into the building to access more affordable rents while staying close to family in the Sackville area.

As part of the January 13 session, AHANS invited participants to indicate what they felt would be realistic “average affordable rents” for different unit types. Based on several submissions, the average suggested rents were approximately:

Unit Type	Average Assessment of Affordability
Bachelor	\$497
1-Bedroom	\$761
2-Bedroom	\$1,022
3-Bedroom	\$1,296

While this input allows AHANS to better understand local expectations, affordable rental rates for the project are ultimately tied to CMHC and provincial data for the region, and market rents are planned at the low end of the local market. As a result, the responsibility for setting rental rate parameters lies primarily with CMHC and related policy frameworks rather than with AHANS alone.

4.4 Accessibility & Universal Design

Accessibility was a notable point of discussion, particularly from seniors hoping to see affordable options for themselves or peers. Attendees with lived experience of mobility challenges, including wheelchair users and families where multiple members use wheelchairs, emphasized the importance of genuinely accessible unit layouts and building features. Participants responded positively to accessibility being treated as a core part of the design rather than an add-on, and encouraged AHANS to ensure units and common spaces work well for people with a range of mobility needs over the long term.

4.5 Considerations for the African Nova Scotian Community and Commemoration of Maroon Hill

African Nova Scotian elders and community members, including from Lucasville and the local school community, participated actively in the session. Some questioned whether the project was truly “for them” or simply another development in their area. Through discussion, several key interests and requests emerged:

- Homeownership opportunities moving beyond rentals: Participants expressed a clear preference for pathways to ownership, noting that being limited to rental housing does not meet long-term aspirations for Black families in the area. While homeownership falls outside AHANS’s current mandate, attendees emphasized the importance of relaying this to government and partners.
- Employment and procurement: Community members who operate construction and related businesses explicitly asked whether AHANS would hire local African Nova Scotian trades and contractors. They encouraged AHANS to embed local hiring and procurement expectations into procurement and RFP processes, similar to a community benefits approach. Feedback suggested that funding support for local African Nova Scotian and Indigenous groups and companies to carry out environmental or other community-benefit work would be a meaningful way to share project benefits locally.

- Community space and local prioritization: Participants were interested in community-appropriate space that can support African Nova Scotian organizations and activities, as well as a degree of priority for local residents in accessing units, while ensuring that units are actually filled rather than held vacant. With the understanding of this development as an affordable, mixed-market, non-profit development with reasonable rent ranges, several attendees expressed active interest in living in the building.

Participants also stressed the importance of respectfully commemorating the historic Maroon Hill community on or near the site. They indicated that commemoration should be developed in direct collaboration with African Nova Scotian community members rather than as a symbolic afterthought. The engagement session included a dedicated station on commemoration, where early ideas were shared, with the understanding that more detailed conversations will be needed to identify appropriate approaches (such as interpretive elements, naming, or programming) that reflect the history and ongoing presence of African Nova Scotian communities connected to Maroon Hill.

4.6 Environmental & Site Design Considerations (Wetlands, Buffers & Visual Impact)

Participants recognized and, in some cases, appreciated aspects of the proposed site design, such as maintaining a substantial wetland buffer, preserving a large portion of the site as natural area, and situating the building below street level to reduce its apparent height. Some written comments noted support for how the wetland has been buffered and for keeping a generous distance from sensitive areas, with suggestions that a 30-metre buffer be maintained.

At the same time, the Sackville Rivers Association and other residents stressed the ecological importance of the adjacent wetland as headwaters for a tributary of the Little Sackville River that supports juvenile trout and salmon. They emphasized the risk of construction-related siltation and called for robust implementation of and commitment to sedimentation and erosion control plans that can withstand heavy rain, beyond simply having a plan on paper. Residents also raised concerns about runoff control, protection of the Little Sackville River, tree retention, and overall landscape disruption.

4.7 Path, Transit & Community Amenities

The existing informal path through the site and broader walkability were important to many participants. There was strong support for maintaining and formalizing the path to HRM standards, improving connections for pedestrians – namely school kids using the trail for access to school, and exploring a bus stop or pull-off and sidewalks near the site. Attendees asked whether sidewalks on the same side of the site may be added and how construction would impact the existing sidewalk across the street. While some expressed reservations about sidewalks being added in front of the development, others felt that inclusion of additional sidewalk would further enhance the area. Comments also highlighted the value of transit and active transportation improvements in balancing new housing with safe, convenient travel options.

4.8 Relationship to Other Area Developments

A number of attendees conflated this project with other nearby developments which they strongly oppose. Some participants noted being directed to this meeting by provincial channels regarding complaints about other developments. This led to a “proxy” conversation about broader growth in the area and reinforced the narrative that there is “too much development out here,” even when concerns were not specific to the AHANS site. Clarifying the project’s location, purpose and ownership helped some participants can help distinguish it from other proposals.

5 Questions from Community

Participants asked a range of questions seeking clarity on how the project will affect day-to-day life in the area, how affordability will work in practice, and what municipal processes and timelines they should expect. Many questions focused on issues that fall under HRM's or other authorities' responsibilities, prompting requests for clearer information about who is accountable for which decisions.

Key questions included:

- **Municipal infrastructure, traffic & schools**
 - Will a traffic study be done, and how will it account for cumulative impacts from this and other nearby developments on Sackville Drive and side streets?
 - Are there plans to improve roads, sidewalks and transit to match the pace of new housing? Will construction affect the existing sidewalk on the opposite side of the street, and is there a plan to add a sidewalk on the same side as the development?
 - How will already crowded local schools accommodate new families from this and other developments?
- **Affordability, tenant profile & eligibility**
 - What income levels and rent ranges will apply for different unit types, and how will these be kept affordable over time?
 - Who will be eligible to live in the building (e.g., single parents, seniors, widows, newcomers), and how will tenant selection work?
 - How does the balance between affordable and market units function in practice?
- **Stormwater, flooding & groundwater management**
 - How will stormwater and drainage be managed so that flooding does not worsen for downhill properties or homes across the marsh? Can a clear, public breakdown of the stormwater and drainage plan be shared, including how it addresses existing flooding issues and insurance concerns?
- **Process, notifications & staying informed**
 - What are the next steps in the municipal approval process, including public hearings, and how can residents provide formal input?
 - How will residents be notified about potential disruptions to water, power or sewer during construction, and how much notice will they receive?



6 Conclusion and Next Steps

The engagement pertaining to this upcoming development has provided AHANS with a meaningful snapshot of community perspectives on affordable housing, and development-related concerns. While many participants expressed support for additional affordable housing and confidence in AHANS as a non-profit, they also raised important concerns and expectations related to traffic and school capacity, stormwater and flooding, protection of the adjacent wetland, clarity around affordability and tenant mix, accessibility, and the interests of African Nova Scotian communities connected to Maroon Hill. This feedback highlights important risks to be mitigated as well as opportunities for the project to deliver broader community benefits.

Next steps include continuing targeted engagement with African Nova Scotian residents regarding economic participation and commemoration of Maroon Hill, and working with HRM and other partners on issues that fall within municipal responsibility, such as traffic, pathways, and broader infrastructure planning. Residents shall be kept informed about the municipal approval process and key project milestones so that community members understand how their feedback is being considered as the project moves forward.