



Halifax Regional
Trails Association

Proposal for Recreational Trails Program

**Proposal:
HRTA 17A**

**Prepared for:
Halifax Regional Municipality**

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1 Overview

Halifax Regional Trails Association (HRTA) is pleased to submit this proposal for funding to launch a new Recreational Trails program to meet a requirement identified by the communities of Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). This proposal is the outcome agreed upon during a meeting with HRM Parks and Recreation (Parks), HRM Transportation and Public Works (TPW), and HRTA.

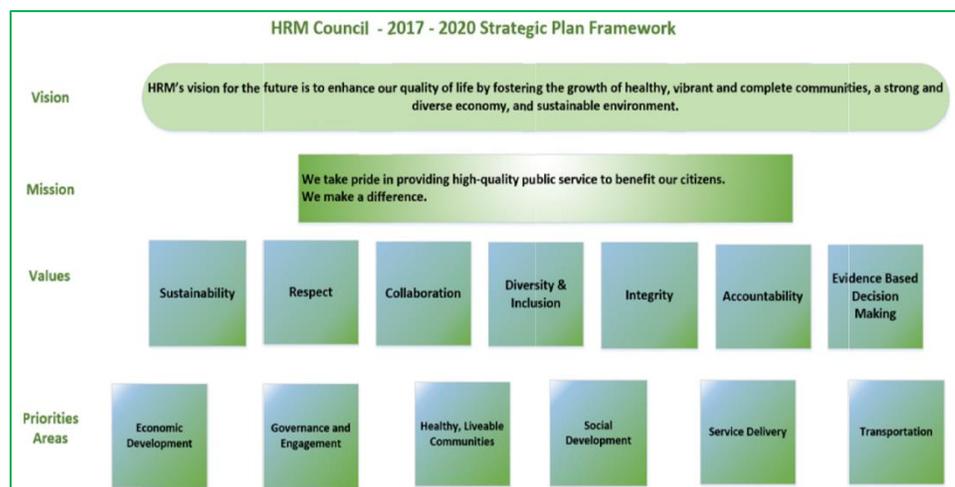
HRM Parks and TPW support trails development in HRM under their respective mandates. These developments are implemented through HRM direct delivery of trails development or through HRTA member community development initiatives.

HRTA provides a strong community development model to HRM for Active Transportation (AT) Linear trails through TPW. An annual budget is allocated to the development of AT trails used for connecting communities to each other or to take residents to destinations such as work, school, or to go shopping.

HRTA proposes to extend this successful model for AT Linear trails to Recreational trails which addresses an identified need by communities in HRM. Trails outside of Municipal parks used solely for recreational purposes are not currently funded by HRM. These recreational trails could be loop trails or destination trails to access features of interest such as waterways, look-offs, cultural and historical areas of interest, ecosystems like wetlands or old growth forests, or could be mountain biking trails. HRTA has conducted a preliminary assessment of the need for recreational trails among its members. That assessment showed a gap of approximately 110 km of recreational trails under the mandates of the HRTA members that do not have access to HRM funding. HRTA is requesting additional funding to support the implementation of the community development model for these trails.

This proposal highlights how a community development model for recreational trails is an integral part of Council’s six Priority Areas in its Priority Outcomes plan for 2017 – 2020. HRTA is already engaged with HRM in delivering trails for transportation purposes. HRTA will demonstrate that expanding that relationship to include recreational trails supports economic development, healthy and liveable communities, and social development. HRTA’s governance structure is already closely linked to HRM contractually with a relationship that has been in place for over a decade. HRTA will significantly leverage HRM resources in the service delivery of recreational trails as already demonstrated with the existing community development model used for AT Linear trails.

The proposal is for a pilot program for an initial year with a follow on 5 year plan





for implementation of community developed recreational trails. The objective of the pilot program is to demonstrate the value of the community delivery model for recreational trails to HRM. The stated objectives of the pilot program include identifying and maximizing available leveraged funding through collaborative ventures, demonstrate governance and management processes of HRTA that already meet HRM accountability requirements to execute projects with public funds, increase levels of community engagement in the decision making process, and the ability of HRTA members to support trails sustainability.

The pilot program request is \$250,000 for FY 18/19. Implementation of the full program is estimated at \$1 million annually. The final amount of the full program will be determined by the end of the pilot program.



2 Halifax Regional Trails Association

HRTA is an organization of community-based volunteers who assist and support community trail groups to develop, build, maintain, and promote a system of interconnecting Active Transportation and other trails in HRM. In 1997, the Halifax Regional Development Agency commissioned the Regional Trails Report and five community groups began construction in 1998 according to the community development model. In 2000, HRM council agreed to adopt the community development model for all trail building and the number of groups increased to the present twenty-three member groups. HRTA was incorporated under the Nova Scotia Society's Act in 2006, but prior to that worked as a collaborative group to promote and enhance trails in HRM. HRTA has over 20 years as an Association of community trails groups in HRM.

From St. Margaret's Bay on the West to Musquodoboit Harbour on the East, the existing, planned, and concept trails cover all kinds of recreational experiences from wilderness, backcountry, rails to trails, and suburban and urban trails. HRTA holds scheduled meetings at locations hosted by different trail groups in HRM with a hike on a local trail planned before the meeting. Meetings are planned a year in advance and the schedule is posted at <https://hrta.ca/wp/meeting-schedule/>. HRM TPW staff regularly attends these meetings. HRTA would welcome HRM Parks as a partner at these meetings.

Halifax Regional Trails Association Goals:

- Develop Regional Strategy to link an integrated network.
- Lobby for adequate trail legislation i.e. Trails Act.
- Maintenance Committee – Goal of permanent sustainable maintenance plan with an ultimate goal to deliver safe, quality trails.
- Sustainable Capital and Operational Funding Committee with an ultimate goal to support an integrated trail system.
- Develop a strategy to raise awareness of the multi-faceted benefits of a regional Trail System in HRM with an ultimate goal to provide healthy, active communities.
- Develop a Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

Members of HRTA represent trail groups within HRM who share common goals of trail development and trail enjoyment. HRTA is committed to a cooperative effort to maximize the realization of such goals.

Membership criteria includes:

- have legitimate community support
- have trail development as one of its mandates and core goals
- be developing trails in HRM
- be a registered society under the Societies Act
- be members in good standing of Nova Scotia Trails

HRTA is a coalition of 23 community trail groups across HRM with 20 years of experience building and maintaining trails in collaboration with HRM. A full listing of HRTA member groups can be found at <https://hrta.ca/wp/members/>. Collectively, HRTA groups include over 10,000 members and volunteers.



HRTA groups are active in the community:

- planning, designing, building and maintaining trails
- organizing trail events, community cleanups, guided hikes and bike rides
- outdoor education opportunities such as 'leave no trace' practices
- building partnerships with Girl Guides, Cadets, Young Naturalists, Hike Nova Scotia, Mountain Bike Halifax, Bicycle Nova Scotia, numerous schools and minor athletic associations

HRTA member groups can leverage funding from diverse private and public sources and community volunteer labour. Collaboration with HRTA provides HRM with trails in many more communities and at a lower cost than if the trails were developed by HRM alone.

HRTA has an established relationship with HRM to manage funding from TPW and allocates this funding to community groups for planning, design, construction and maintenance of linear active transportation trails. During the past two years HRTA has evaluated proposals totaling \$2.8 million for AT Linear trails with leverage of an additional \$3M. During FY 17/18 HRTA managed or supported a combination of community developed or HRM direct delivery trails with a total budget of \$1 million in HRM funding.

HRTA has accomplished this through:

- consultations with HRM TPW,
- a Capital and Maintenance funding application process that is vetted by HRM,
- applications reviewed against published evaluation criteria by the Capital Committee or the Maintenance Committee as appropriate,
- committee generated recommendations for funding that are reviewed and approved by the HRTA Board consisting of all 23 member groups, and
- delivery to HRM TPW staff for final review and submission to Council as part of TPW's overall budget submission.



3 Recreational Trails

3.1 Classes of Trails

There are two main categories of trails:

- Active Transportation (AT) trails that make connections between where people live and where they work, shop, access transit, access services, and attend school – sometimes called AT Linear or Connector trails



Linear Active Transportation trails funded by municipality now

- Recreational trails that provide healthy living or educational experiences by encouraging hiking, mountain biking, increasing awareness of ecosystems, exceptional views of landscape, education in cultural or historical sites, or simply greater enjoyment of nature.



Community development model 'recreational only' trails not covered by an established municipal funding process

HRM currently funds AT Linear trails through TPW. TPW provides directly delivery (i.e. HRM designed, constructed, maintained) of bike lanes or sidewalks, and sometimes trails that form a connected active



transportation network. In addition an annual budget is allocated for community delivered trail systems. These trails are delivered through the network of HRTA members. This process has been working well with major benefits that accrue to residents of HRM and visitors to our region. Through HRTA, HRM has access to an organization with significant reach in the region. Over the past twenty years, HRTA has demonstrated an ability to manage significant HRM trail funding budgets.

HRM currently supports Recreational trails in Municipal parks such as Point Pleasant Park, Shubie Park through the Parks mandate. Parks provides a direct delivery model for developing and maintaining trail infrastructure in these municipal parks. An annual budget for community-delivered recreational trails is not available. This gap is the subject of this proposal.

The following sections describe the economic value and existing demand for recreational trails.

3.2 The Value of Recreational Trails

Recreational trails provide economic, social, health and environmental benefits to their communities.

Economic benefits of recreational trails include attracting tourists, residents and businesses to a community and increased general spending for trail-related activities.

A 2016 Economic Impact Study of the Rum Runners Trail showed the significant impact this 119 km trail from Halifax to Lunenburg is having on building the economy in the region. The study combines quantitative data from counters placed along the trail with qualitative surveys of trail users. The counter data collected from July to October 2016 tracked 98,435 users. The survey data collected results from 901 of these users (Gardner Pinfold, 2016).

The study looked at trail-related spending such as accommodation, transportation, food and beverage, and recreation. Through a rigorous analysis, the study concluded that residents and visitors spent \$4.2 million (90% confidence level) during the study period (Gardner Pinfold, 2016). This was direct spending, i.e. spending that would not have occurred if the trail had not existed.

An economic impact study of mountain bikers using the 311-km network of singletrack trails in Squamish, British Columbia (pop. 20,000), found that visitors using the trails spent \$9.9 million in 2016, up from \$2.3 million in 2006. The trails supported \$3.4 million in wages in Squamish in 2016. In addition, 82% of locals using the trails said that the trails are “important” (20%) or “very important” (62%) in their decision to live in Squamish (Western Mountain Bike Tourism Association, 2017).

“Trails are the most desired community amenity that homeowners seek when buying a new home.” (National Association of Home Builders, 2008. In University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, 2013).

People of all ages prefer to live near parks with access to trails. According to a 2015 survey by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) in the U.S., home buyers in all age categories (“Millenials” to Seniors) rated proximity to parks with access to trails among their top three most-wanted amenities (National



Association of Home Builders, 2016). This is consistent with previous NAHB studies in 2002 (American Trails, 2002) and 2008 (University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, 2013), confirming the lasting value of investing in recreational trails.

Trails influence business location and relocation decisions. Companies often choose to locate in communities that offer a high level of amenities to employees as a means of attracting and retaining top-level workers. Trails can make communities attractive to businesses looking to expand or relocate both because of the amenities they offer to employees and the opportunities they offer to cater to trail visitors (Pennsylvania Land Trust Association, no date).

Building trails for active recreation in communities is strongly recommended by the Center for Disease Control as a means to increase physical activity of residents (Task Force on Community Preventive Services, 2002). Recreational trails provide convenient opportunities for exercise, promoting active living for people of all ages. Recreational trails are a fun way to get kids moving. Active use of recreational trails reduces risk of cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and obesity, strengthens bones and muscles, improves coordination and balance, and improves mental health and mood (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Regular physical activity reduces the risk of Alzheimer’s Disease, dementia and cognitive decline in seniors (Guure et. al. 2017). Municipal investment in community-developed trails will improve the physical and mental health of residents of all ages.

Community-developed trails increase opportunities for social interactions, strengthening social networks and connecting people to their community. By-products of local trail systems include improved self-image and social relationships, reduced crime rates, and a lifestyle encouraging youth to find their entertainment in healthy, wholesome pursuits. Trails may also provide access to historic sites, fostering a deeper cultural appreciation of place (Columbia Valley Trail Alliance).

Recreational trails provide low-impact access to natural areas, promoting appreciation of the environment. Recreational trails can be used for formal environmental education by schools or community groups for persons of all ages. Appreciation for natural environments increases stewardship by the public, resulting in less adverse behaviours such as littering and illegal dumping of waste. Use of trails for recreation can be a “gateway” to active commuting, reducing traffic and improving air quality.

Municipal support of community trail groups will allow them to provide high-quality, sustainable trails that are built by the community, for the community. This will decrease the building of informal trails which may not adhere to high standards of sustainability (Columbia Valley Trail Alliance).

3.3 The Demand for Recreational Trails

In 2013, HRM contracted WSP Canada Inc. to do a Trail Monitoring survey of six popular trails in HRM. Counters were placed under the trails and data were recorded between May 2013 and April 2014. The counters tallied 476,500 users during the year. The data recorded time-of-day and day-of-week and whether the users were cyclists or walkers. The most popular times were mid-day and on weekends indicating that the trails were used mainly for recreational purposes (Connors, M. 2014).



The Rum Runners Trail data surveyed trail users to determine demographic characteristics and reasons for travel. The qualitative survey of trail users was broken down into the various sections of the trail. By analyzing just the suburban Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea (BLT) section, the data can be extrapolated to other suburban areas of HRM.

50,600 users were counted on the BLT trail during the survey period. The survey responses revealed that only 6% of resident users were using the trail to commute. The rest of the resident users were using the trail to improve their health (73%), socialize (12%) or to experience the scenic views (10%). Visitors were using the trail for pleasure (33%) or because they were visiting friends or relatives (67%). The vast majority of users were Nova Scotia residents living within 5 km of the trail (48%) or greater than 5 km (50%). Only 2% of users of this section of the Rum Runners trail are from other Canadian provinces (Gardner Pinfold, 2016).

Demographic data revealed that users on the BLT were in the following age categories; 50-69 (37%), 35-49 (34%), 19-34 (13%) and over 69 (10%). Given the demographic shift happening now with more Baby Boomers retiring, the category of retired persons using the trails will only increase.

Development of the Halifax Green Network Plan included a thorough public consultation process in which the residents of Halifax identified recreational trails as an “Important Value”. Municipal investment in recreational trails is consistent with the values of Halifax residents (O2 Planning + Design, 2015).

Anecdotal information from the HRTA group members report that the number of users on all the trails has increased. For example, the Friends of McNabs Island, which organizes guided nature and history tours of the island park and historic site, report that tickets sales for boat trips to the island have significantly increased in recent years and guided tours sell out quickly.

3.3.1 Recreational trails not currently funded

HRTA did a survey of our member groups to ascertain which groups had trails within their region that were not currently funded because they were considered “recreational” trails by HRM. Nine groups responded stating that there were approximately 110 km of trails that were ready to build or repair.

These recreational trails represent a variety of trail classes, from single track bike trails to front country trails and two-way connector trails. Many of these trails travel through countryside or woodlands and lead to historic sites, waterways or scenic vistas. Some of these trails are on municipal land, whereas others are on provincial land. None of them are eligible for funding under HRM’s TPW Capital Trails Program because they are not considered active transportation commuter trails to get residents to school, work or to go shopping.

3.4 The Fit with HRM Priority Areas

3.4.1 Economic Development

The recreational trails proposal strongly supports the **Economic Development** priority of the Strategic Planning Framework. The Rum Runners economic impact study (Gardner Pinfold, 2016) clearly shows the economic benefits of trails in our region. Economic benefits also include encouraging the **entrepreneurial**



spirit as businesses in close proximity to trails prosper. A good example of this sort of innovative entrepreneurial business is the Bike and Bean located in the historic French Village Train Station beside the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails section of the Rum Runners Trail. This section of trail is extremely popular with residents and visitors. The survey indicated that trail users spend 10% of their trail related expenditures in close proximity to the trail. This sort of economic activity is responsive to the needs of the community as the Bike and Bean also serves as a community hub.

Many of our spectacular recreational trails are in rural parts of HRM. The recreational trail in Musquodoboit Harbour for example, was built when municipal trail funding included funding for scenic loop trails such as Admiral Lake and look-offs such as Gibraltar Rock. These trails managed by the Musquodoboit Trailways Association bring **economic viability to rural communities** supporting the priorities of the Strategic Planning Framework.

Recreational trails are excellent venues for heritage and cultural activities. Many recreational trails pass by historic sites and monuments. For example, the trails within the Cole Harbour Parks and Trails region tell the story of the Poor Farm where marginalized people were sent during hard times. And trails on McNabs Island meander past numerous historic sites and 19th century military fortifications that protected the Port of Halifax. Recreational trails are often frequented by artists and photographers who value stunning scenic views which help to seed creativity.

Cultural activities such as heritage tours or events held in parks attract local residents and visitors to our region. For example, the heritage tours on McNabs Island last year brought thousands of visitors to the island to learn more about the history of Canada. Recreational trails that showcase scenic coastal hikes or striking landscapes offer a tourism destination that **bolsters the creative economy and the vitality of the region**.

3.4.2 Healthy, Liveable Communities

Recreational trails near coastal areas demonstrate the very real impacts of storm surge, coastal erosion and climate change. This is a teachable moment for everyone who walks a coastal trail. Recreational trails also bring residents and visitors closer to nature. Trail users can act as citizen scientists monitoring storm impacts and sea level rise. Trail restoration projects present opportunities for **leadership in environmental risk management**. Properly built recreational trails can reduce environmental degradation, trampling and compaction of the forest floor in parks. Trail users are channeled to use trails rather than wandering through woodlands or over sensitive dunes creating their own pathways. Properly designed and managed recreational trails are a sustainable way to protect our woodlands.

Recreational trails provide excellent venues for **recreation and leisure** activities in line with the strategic priorities of the municipality. According to Saint Mary's University researcher Dr. Hugh Millward, walking is the most common form of recreational activity in Canada (Millward, H., Spinney, J. and D. Scott, 2013). HRTA trail groups all report that the numbers of trail users has increased significantly in recent years. Statistical data (Gardner Pinfold, 2016) and (Connors, 2014) support this finding with close to 500,000 users travelling on the few trails that were surveyed.



There is considerable research into the benefits of recreational trails on **community health** (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). From disease prevention to improving mental health, outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling and walking are proven to improve the well-being of citizens. Building liveable healthy communities is a key priority of the municipality.

3.4.3 Social Development

Providing access to **social infrastructure that enables citizens to fully participate in their community** is supported by community recreational trails. Many trail groups and non-profit organizations hold events and activities on trails and in parks that bring people together to work toward a common goal. For example, the McIntosh Run Watershed Association regularly calls on volunteers to build or restore sections of trail in their community. This builds community engagement and ownership of the community trail among citizens. It is an excellent way to engage youth in protection of our woodlands and waterways.

Community trail groups partner with other organizations to bring them “back to nature” by hosting guided nature hikes along the trails and in parks. For example, Friends of McNabs Island volunteers regularly partner with school and youth groups to provide outdoor education programming and have prepared a school kit in English and French for educators that brings McNabs Island into the classroom (Friends of McNabs Island, 2016).

3.4.4 Governance & Engagement

The Recreational trails proposal builds on an established and proven governance structure at HRTA, and leverages the engagement of 23 community associations throughout HRM. The proposed Recreational Trails program fits with this HRM priority area.

HRTA's governance structure includes an Executive Committee that supports the overall operation of HRTA. Positions are determined through a nomination process and voted in at the Annual General Meeting. The Executive includes the Chair, Vice-Chair (recently Co-Chair), Treasurer, Secretary, and Past Chair. In addition two Members at Large are also part of the Executive Committee and are elected positions.

The oversight of HRM funds for HRTA member projects is accomplished through two committees: the Capital Funding Committee and the Maintenance Committee. Both Committees have extensive experience in fiscal management in accordance with HRM guidelines for the funding application and review/approval process, as well as eligible expenditures and procurement processes. These processes are already in place for AT Linear trails.

The community groups are all members of HRTA's Board and provide engagement into 23 HRM communities extending from Carroll's Corner to St. Margaret's Bay. Community engagement is accomplished through workshops, trails events in the communities, outreach functions to disseminate trails planning information, signage at the trail sites, engagement with schools and local groups/associations, as well as regular meetings of the community trails volunteers.

The entire HRTA organization is executed through an extensive and dedicated volunteer network.



3.4.5 Service Delivery

HRM will be able to better meet the needs of the people it serves through HRTA's community development model for recreational trails. HRTA members are volunteer groups from 23 communities within HRM. The members articulate the needs of their communities through direct engagement. The members leverage taxpayer dollars with Provincial, Federal, other funding sources, and contribute a significant amount of volunteer time to accomplish a larger scope of deliverables than with HRM funds alone. The members lead the process for planning, permitting, construction, and maintenance of trails freeing up valuable HRM resources. And the members report back to HRM (through HRTA or directly with HRM) on their progress.

3.4.6 Transportation

This priority area is significantly addressed through HRTA's community development model for AT Linear trails. The HRTA-HRM process has been working for over a decade on Council's Transportation Priority Area and is now being proposed for recreational trails.



4 Proposal

HRTA proposes a two phase approach to implementing a recreational trails program: a one year pilot program and an implementation phase.

The pilot program is designed to meet the following objectives:

- Define the process for recreational trails
- Implement the process on selected trails
- Define a long term operational program

4.1 Process Definition

A review of existing processes including:

- Trails standards definition.
- Submission process for funding.
- Member and trail section eligibility requirements.
- Review process and evaluation criteria.
- Communications and reporting to Parks.

This task will be performed by HRTA Capital and Maintenance Committees and provided as in-kind support to the pilot program. The full HRTA membership will review and approve the recommendations.

The estimated timeline for completion is February 2018 to April 2018. The estimated level of effort is 50 hours with a value of \$25 per hour. Two meetings with HRM Parks are recommended. The initial meeting will be a scoping exercise to outline the parameters for process definition. The final meeting will be to review the output recommendations prior to distribution to the HRTA Board for their review and approval.

4.2 Implementation Process

The implementation task is designed to develop guidelines for trails costs that will be used for the long term operational program.

Pilot program projects will be selected to include trails from various phases of their life cycles (planning and design, construction, recapitalization, or maintenance) and over several classes of trails (single track, hiking, ecosystem experience, etc.). All projects will undergo the current HRTA process of application, review, ranking, and recommendations for approval. Leveraged funding will be part of the evaluation criteria during this task.

During project implementation attention will be paid to the cost per kilometer during the various life cycle stages for each type of trail, and any unforeseen challenges for HRTA and HRM to address. These will be used to provide rough order of magnitude costs for implementation of an operational program.

HRTA anticipates approximately 6 – 7 pilot trails will be co-funded during this task against a proposed budget of \$225k. HRTA committee time is provided in kind. A leverage of 1:1 against HRM funds is



targeted. However due to the short implementation timeline of the pilot program those trails that fall below the 1:1 matching co-funding will still be considered for the FY 18/19.

4.3 Recreational Trails Operational Program Definition

Pending a successful pilot program, the follow on operational program is anticipated in FY 19/20. Based on a preliminary survey of 9 HRTA members (of a total of 23 members), a rough order of magnitude of \$10M is likely required for a full operational program over the course of 5 to 10 years. A more rigorous business case is required in order to justify the extent of the program, the value to HRM, and budget estimates.

HRTA proposes to contract a consultant through a request for proposal (RFP) process to develop the appropriate business case for long term implementation. The scope of work would include an inventory of proposed trails from all HRTA members, an analysis of the socio economic value of those trails including a cumulative impact, development of guidelines for reasonable cost estimates of planning through to construction of recreational trails, first level trails inventory prioritization and phasing for five year planning, and recommendations for additional sources of funding that HRTA could more effectively access as an association vs individual member efforts.

The RFP, contract award, and project execution is anticipated to be a 6 month process. The RFP scoping and publication would commence in April. The estimated cost is \$25k.

4.4 Program Cost Summary

	Schedule	Cost	Amount requested
Process Definition	Feb – Apr 2018	\$ 1,250	\$ 0
Pilot Program	Apr '18 – Mar '19	\$350,000 - \$450,000	\$225,000
Operational Program Definition	Apr '18 – Oct '19	\$30,000	\$25,000
TOTAL		\$381,000 - \$481,000	\$250,000



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