

HALIFAX & WEST COMMUNITY COUNCIL
MINUTES

December 2, 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Linda Mosher, Chair
 Councillor Waye Mason, Vice Chair
 Councillor Jennifer Watts
 Councillor Russell Walker
 Councillor Stephen Adams
 Councillor Reg Rankin

STAFF: Mr. Liam MacSween, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. in the Community Room of the Canada Games Centre, 26 Thomas Radall Drive, Halifax.

2. TABLING OF ANNUAL REPORT

The following documentation was before Halifax and West Community Council:

- A staff report dated November 25, 2013

MOVED by Councillor Adams and seconded by Councillor Mason that Halifax and West Community Council Table the Annual Report. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair called three times for anyone wishing to speak on the annual report, there were none.

MOVED by Councillor Adams and seconded by Councillor Mason that the public participation for the annual report be closed. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – NONE

5. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

There were no additions/deletions to the agenda.

MOVED by Councillor Walker and seconded by Councillor Mason that the agenda be approved as presented. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

6. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES

6.1 Status Sheet

There were no updates to status sheet. Councillor Mason requested further information with respect to anticipated completion times for outstanding status sheet items.

7. MOTIONS OF RECONSIDERATION – NONE

8. MOTIONS OF RESCISSION – NONE

9. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS – NONE

10. HEARINGS – NONE

11. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS & DELEGATIONS

11.1 Correspondence – NONE

11.2 Petitions

11.2.1 Councillor Walker

Councillor Walker submitted a petition signed by 20 parents who live in the neighbourhood of the Saint Andrews Community Centre, 3380 Barnstead Lane, Halifax advocating for playground equipment to be installed on the property of the Community Centre.

11.3 Presentation

11.3.1 Presentations – 2014/2015 Budget Consultation Presentation

The Chair invited Mr. Bruce Fisher, Manager of Fiscal Policy & Planning, and Ms. Barb Wilson, Budget Coordinator, to deliver their presentation.

Ms. Wilson explained that HRM has begun the 2014-2015 budget process, with the intent of approving the budget by April 1, 2014. As a first step, HRM will identify working assumptions to set the parameters of debate. Next, each business unit will be invited to Committee of the Whole to discuss priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. Staff, with the input received, will then prepare a proposed budget to be debated at Regional Council.

Ms. Wilson showed a pie chart of HRM's total expenses for 2013-2014. She noted that the total amounted to \$824 million, but of this, approximately \$147 million went to the Province for education, housing and corrections. The balance was \$677 million.

Ms. Wilson then provided a break-down of the municipality's expenses. She explained that Transportation & Public Works is the biggest line item in the budget, followed by Transit and Police Services.

In terms of revenues, she indicated that approximately 60% of revenues come from commercial and residential taxes. Other revenue streams include deed transfer taxes, federal and provincial transfers, development permits and bus fares. Approximately of 15% of HRM's revenues come from non-tax sources.

Ms. Wilson described the distribution of total property tax, showing that it ranges from \$944 to \$3,984 per single family home. The average homeowner, she continued, pays \$2,100 or less. The average commercial tax rate is \$3 per square foot.

Ms. Wilson noted that there are many opportunities for residents to get involved in the budget process. They can:

- Ask questions and provide comment at Community Council meetings

- Ask questions and provide comment at upcoming Committee of the Whole meetings
- Fill in a comment card
- Use the online budget allocator

She encouraged residents to visit shapeyourcityhalifax.ca to test the budget allocator, which allows them to increase or decrease line items of the budget. In each instance, the allocator identifies the implications of shifting resources from area to another.

Mr. Fisher provided a demonstration of the online tool.

Ms. Wilson clarified that the tool allows residents to allocate \$366 million of the municipality's \$677 million budget. This portion represents the services that residents use on a daily basis, such as sidewalks, roads and transit. She also noted that when residents complete the allocation, they will be asked to include their postal code and identify whether they are residential or commercial taxpayers.

Ms. Wilson drew attention to other resources on shapeyourcityhalifax.ca. They include:

- Videos about the budget process
- Videos about the budget of key business units
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Short surveys

Responding to a question from the audience, Ms. Wilson explained that comments submitted via the budget allocator are sent to staff and not made public. However, comments posted on the main page of shapeyourcityhalifax.ca are for public consumption. She also indicated that the budget allocator will remain active for a while.

The Chair asked if there were any questions before Mr. Fisher began his portion of the presentation.

Councillor Watts wished to know how residents without internet access can participate in the budget consultation process.

Ms. Wilson replied that those without internet access can:

- Get a copy of the Budget FAQ brochure
- Fill out a comment card
- Attend Committee of the Whole
- Submit their comments to their Councillor
- Write to staff directly

To these, she added that budget presentations have been held at all three Community Councils.

Councillor Watts asked when the budget allocator will be taken down from the website.

Ms. Wilson replied that the website and budget allocator will remain active for a number of months.

Councillor Adams, referring to pages 1 and 9 of the Budget FAQ brochure, thanked staff for including comparative data on tax rates. Both pages show how HRM taxes compare to those of other North American municipalities. He asked staff to clarify if the average tax per household - \$2,500 – includes funds that are transferred to the Province.

Mr. Fisher replied in the affirmative.

Councillor Adams wished to know if funds earmarked for the Province stay in HRM.

Mr. Fisher replied that most of the funds go to the Halifax Regional School Board.

Councillor Mason indicated that much, but not all, of the money stays in HRM.

Councillor Adams asked staff to compare commercial rates in Bayers Lake to rates downtown.

Mr. Fisher replied that the base commercial rate is the same in both locations. The only exception is Business Improvement Districts.

Ms. Wilson, responding to a question from the audience, indicated that Committee of the Whole meetings begin on December 18, 2013 and will run until March 26, 2013. Each meeting will be at City Hall and focus on a different business unit.

There being no further questions, the Chair invited Mr. Fisher to proceed with the second part of the presentation.

Mr. Fisher explained that the first step in the budget process is to create a working estimate. This takes into account a host of indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product, the inflation rate, the employment rate, home values, and the number of new homes being built. The working estimate usually takes 5 months to complete.

The next step, he continued, involves setting parameters. HRM must determine, for instance, its debt targets. Currently, the debt is \$1,400 per home which is relatively modest. At the provincial level, debt exceeds \$14,000 per home. Parameters must also be set for tax increases. It is HRM's current position that tax rates will rise at the same rate as inflation.

Mr. Fisher explained that when both of these steps are complete, HRM has a good picture of what is going on. For instance, it has revealed that HRM will have a shortfall \$17 million in 2014-2015. This means the organization will need to find efficiencies to bring costs down.

The third step is Committee of the Whole. At these meetings, Councillors and the public will have an opportunity to ask questions and comment on the budget of each business unit. Mr. Fisher reminded the audience that they could also participate by using the online budget allocator and submitting comments to Councillors and/or staff.

The Chair thanked Mr. Fisher for his presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Councillor Rankin drew attention to the pie chart on p.4 of the Budget FAQ document which breaks down municipal tax dollars by service type. He wished to know if the chart took into account:

- The portion of the operating budget allocated for debt repayment
- Supplementary expenses
- The portion of the residential tax that goes to the Province

Mr. Fisher replied in the affirmative to the first question, noting that the chart provides a clean picture of the budget. As for the second, he indicated that supplementary expenses account for 4-5% of the budget, though it drops every year. Finally, he noted that approximately 1/3 of residential taxes go to the School Board.

Ms. Wilson added that in 2013-2014, supplementary expenses represented \$18 million.

Councillor Mason observed that the projected revenue growth per household is 1.3% per household.

Mr. Fisher replied that the projected increase of 1.3% is for the average residential bill and based on forecasts that may change.

At this time, the chair invited residents to come forward with their questions.

Mr. Bob McDonald of Clayton Park wished to know if the budget assumed that HRM will cover the cost of servicing all future developments. He hoped this was not the case as he supported downloading some servicing costs to developers. Our HRM Alliance, he noted, was of the same opinion.

Mr. McDonald also asked if there is a line item in the budget for the acquisition of privately-owned lands for Blue Mountain Birch Cove Regional Park. He recommended that \$2-3 million be set aside each budget cycle so the municipality could uphold its promise to develop the park.

Mr. Fisher replied that developers tend to pay for infrastructure, and that Council is currently discussing whether regional development charges should extend to transit. He noted that the tax system does not vary by area, but that development charges (absorbed by homeowners) and home values do.

As for Blue Mountain Birch Cove, he indicated that he would find out how much is budgeted for parks and what it covers.

Mr. Karim Burkes of Clayton Park noted that Northcliffe Recreation Centre closed a few years ago and was replaced by the Canada Games Centre. While the new centre offers good amenities, its fees are 3 or 4 times higher than those of other HRM facilities. He cited as an example a basketball camp, which costs \$145 at the Canada Games Centre and \$28 at Basinview Community School. Canada Games Centre fees, he added, are even higher for non-members. As a result, he enrolls his children in recreation programs in other neighbourhoods even though the Canada Games Centre is closest to his home. He believed this to be unfair to residents of Clayton Park. He also noted that the Centre's financial statements are not online.

The Chair agreed that transparency and affordability are important, especially given that the Canada Games Centre is an HRM-owned facility.

Mr. Fisher indicated that HRM uses a number of models to deliver recreation program. This in part explains price variation. He agreed to follow-up with Community & Recreation Services staff to learn more about this issue.

Ms. Wendy McDonald of Clayton Park agreed with Mr. Burkes, noting that the trail association of which she is a member must pay over \$100 to book meeting space at the Centre. Meanwhile, down the street, Halifax West High School is underutilized in the evenings. She believed the Community School model, adopted in other parts of HRM, worked well and was disappointed that it had not been applied to the local high school.

Next, Ms. McDonald raised concerns about HRM's internal and external communications. She felt the business units worked in silos and that the municipality could do better job informing residents about services and special projects. She also expressed concern over by-law enforcement and crosswalk safety. She noted that accidents involving pedestrians and cars – incidents that occur weekly – do not help efforts to promote walkability.

Mr. Jerry Post of South-End Halifax noted that HRM has taken important steps to promote accessibility, but that even more can be done to assist people in wheelchairs, the elderly and young families with strollers. To this end, he recommended that the activities of the Accessibility Advisory Committee focus on macro-level planning, such as the development of bylaws and standards, as well as micro, community-based planning, like in the hospital district. To bring greater visibility to the cause, he recommended that Accessibility Improvements become a line item in the budget, with \$1 million set aside per year over 5 years.

Mr. Post also saw potential in raising more revenue via development fees. He was of the opinion that when HRM agrees to increase a developer's property rights, then the

municipality should be compensated for the increased value of the development. Additional funds raised could be put into a fund for affordable housing.

Mr. Phil Pacey of Yukon Street expressed concern over the proposed Convention Centre, describing it as a drain on taxpayers. He noted that a consultant had reviewed the documents filed by the World Trade & Convention Centre (WT&CC) and found that attendance estimates were overblown. This means the Centre will not bring as many people and as much revenue as originally thought. Moreover, WT&CC staff hoped to bolster international attendance yet data shows that international attendance at Canadian trade shows is trending down, not up. The Auditor General of Nova Scotia described WT&CC's plan as overly simplistic, indicating that it does not take into account the stagnant convention market. The public, too, is concerned as evidence in a recent survey. It found that residents do not want public money used for this project.

Mr. Pacey objected to the \$378 million invested by HRM and the Province on this project. He did not believe the Convention Centre was a public benefit as it will only cater to 1% of visitors. Furthermore, this 1% will be subsidized by taxpayers in the amount of \$1,000 per head. By contrast, taxpayers pay \$2 each to support the work of Destination Halifax.

He asked that HRM follow the advice of the Auditor General and seek an independent opinion.

Councillor Adams asked Mr. Fisher to clarify how much money HRM is putting towards the Convention Centre.

Mr. Fisher replied that the project is not affecting existing residential and commercial taxpayers. The risk is being borne by the project, not by the project. No HRM funds have been put towards the project. However, taxes collected by the site will go back to the Convention Centre.

Councillor Rankin acknowledged that there is no HRM money in the project. However, HRM, as a shareholder, will be exposed to any future debts of the Convention Centre. He stated that the municipality also assumes the risk of taking over the old Convention Centre.

Mr. Brian Gifford of Summit Street explained that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) had prepared an Alternative Municipal Budget in 2012. He felt that many of 65 recommendations warrant careful consideration, including:

- The CCPA's 6 sustainability principles
- Replacing property tax with a municipal income tax. He noted that municipal income tax is common in Northern Europe and has been instituted in Manitoba. He believed it to be more equitable. Such a change would require provincial approval.

- Negotiating the end of revenue transfers to the Province. He noted that the timing may be right to do this as the provincial government will soon be leading a comprehensive tax review.
- Establishing an HRM Atmospheric Fund. He saw this as a nice complement to Solar City and other emission reduction projects underway.

Mr. Gifford submitted his notes to the Clerk and recommended that Councillors and staff read through all 65 CCPA recommendations.

The Chair called three more times for speakers. There being none, it was **MOVED by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Rankin that the budget consultation be closed. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

The Chair thanked everyone for their comments and encouraged them to participate in upcoming Committee of the Whole meetings.

12. REPORTS

12.1 Staff – NONE

12.2 MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY COUNCIL

12.2.1 Councillor Mosher – Herring Cove Road Traffic Concerns

Councillor Mosher requested that Councillor Mason, Vice-Chair take over as Chair for discussion of this item. Councillor Mason assumed the position of Chair.

Councillor Mosher noted concerns expressed to her from residents with respect to safety on the Herring Cove Road. She cited traffic counts conducted by Stantec Consulting on the Purcell's Cove/ Herring Cove Road merge for the Purcell's Cove Servicing Feasibility Study. She stated counts were taken on a typical day and noted that the level of services provided were very poor, that there were no bike lanes, and long queue lines. She commented that residents in the area are getting frustrated with these traffic concerns.

MOVED by Councillor Mosher and seconded by Councillor Adams that Halifax and West Community Council request a staff report addressing the work plan and safety measures for pedestrian, cyclist, and vehicular traffic on the Herring Cove Road and the Purcell's Cove Road/ Herring Cove Road merge lane; and that the following information be included in the report:

- a.) A response to the recent traffic study that was conducted as part of the Purcell's Cove servicing study. And;**
- b.) An update on the road networks projects from the Regional Plan, namely, the Herring Cove Widening project.**

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Councillor Mosher reassumed the position of Chair.

13. MOTIONS – NONE

14. IN CAMERA - NONE

15. ADDED ITEMS

16. NOTICES OF MOTION - NONE

17. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Phil Pacey of Yukon Street stated that he would like to put a situation to members of Council with respect to the Convention Centre, whereby the taxes from the property will be paid back to the owner of the property at the end of the year. He noted that every person in the city would want an arrangement such as that, and if it were the case for every person in HRM, the municipality would break down very easily.

The Chair noted that this matter had already been discussed during the budget presentation. She suggested that the speaker circulate his comments in writing to Members of Regional Council.

Mr. Devin MacKay, of Fairview, suggested that more bike lanes should be constructed in Halifax. He noted that bike lanes will help people get out of cars and live a physically active lifestyle. He referenced several cities that he has visited and lived in that use an extended sidewalk bike lane model and inquired if HRM staff has ever considered that option for implementation in the municipality.

Councillor Mason referenced work that has been done regarding the installation of separated active transportation lanes on the peninsula. He stated that there are special issues that arise such as providing adequate room between properties and roadways that challenge the installation of bike lanes, particularly on the peninsula. He noted that HRM is trying to do more in this regard. He stated that the upcoming work on Herring Cove Road could be an opportunity to implement extended sidewalk bike lane designs.

Councillor Watts noted public consultation work that took place in the spring regarding active transportation. She suggested that Mr. MacKay visit the Active Transportation Advisory Committee website and contact her with further suggestions and comments.

Mr. Jerry Post of South-End Halifax noted commented that he lives far away from Otter Lake but supports the residents of that community. He stated that he had attended the community engagement meetings in the 1990's, the result of which concluded in the agreement to locate the Waste Management Facility in the Otter Lake community. Mr. Post expressed his view that he is disappointed with the staff recommendation to extend the life of the Waste Management Facility at Otter Lake as well as shut down the

Front End Processor. He inquired if Halifax and West Community Council had an official position on this matter.

The Chair remarked it is a Regional Council matter, as such Halifax and West Community Council does not have an official position. She further noted that each member of Halifax and West Community Council have the ability to vote on motions at Regional Council.

Mr. Bob McDonald of Clayton Park, requested further information on staff reports that were proposed but do not materialize. He noted three specific occurrences, none of which arose from Halifax and West Community Council. He referenced a petition of 260 signatures that was submitted to request the naming of a lake in South Bedford. He commented that to proceed, a staff report was required and was requested, but nothing has been done as of yet. Mr. MacDonald commented on a second staff report request by Councillor Rankin at Regional Council regarding the possible acquisition of private land to protect a water-lying easement near the Mainland-North Linear Parkway Trail in Clayton Park. He requested further information regarding the status of that report. Thirdly, he noted a motion for a staff report passed in October 2006 at Chebucto Community Council examining a 25 point checklist for trail construction and standards.

Councillor Mosher stated that she will personally follow up on the 25 point checklist for trail construction report request and will follow up with Councillor Outhit with respect to the report request for the naming of the lake which went North West Community Council. She commented that staff deal with a great deal of report requests from Regional Council and Community Councils and do their best to deliver the reports on time.

Councillor Mason stated that the staff report requests from previous Community Councils are on the current status sheet. He commented that he will consult with the Clerk's Office on this matter.

Ms. Wendy McDonald, of Clayton Park noted that she has questions relating to Governance. She stated that Regional Council has decided to go to bi-weekly meetings for 2014 and inquired how that will work for Community Council meetings. She commented that minutes recorded at Community Council meetings lack detail and that status sheet items should be communicated to the public. Ms. McDonald further commented on a lack of community schools in the Clayton Park area. She stated that community schools could be used for programming fostering physical activity and as a venue for community meetings.

The Chair thanked Ms. McDonald for her comments and stated that her suggestions will be passed along to staff.

18. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

The Chair requested that the Legislative Assistant call for nominations for the position of Chair.

The Legislative Assistant asked for nominations for the position of Chair.

MOVED by Councillor Adams and seconded by Councillor Walker that Councillor Mosher be nominated for the position of Chair.

The Legislative Assistant called two more times for further nominations. There were none.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Councillor Mosher was elected Chair of Halifax and West Community Council.

The Chair requested nominations for the position of Vice Chair.

MOVED by Councillor Watts and seconded by Councillor Rankin that Councillor Mason be nominated for the position of Vice Chair.

The Chair asked two more times for further nominations, there were none.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Councillor Mason was elected Vice Chair of Halifax and West Community Council.

19. NEXT MEETING – To be announced

20. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Liam MacSween
Legislative Assistant

