



**HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES  
February 25, 2015**

**PRESENT:**

Mayor Mike Savage  
Deputy Mayor Lorelei Nicoll  
Councillors: Barry Dalrymple  
David Hendsbee  
Bill Karsten  
Gloria McCluskey  
Darren Fisher  
Waye Mason  
Jennifer Watts  
Linda Mosher  
Russell Walker  
Stephen Adams  
Reg Rankin  
Matt Whitman  
Steve Craig  
Tim Outhit

**REGRETS:**

Councillor Brad Johns

**STAFF:**

Mr. Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer  
Mr. John Traves, Municipal Solicitor  
Ms. Cathy Mellett, Municipal Clerk  
Mr. Liam MacSween, Legislative Assistant

*The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.*

*A video recording of this meeting is available: [http://archive.isiglobal.ca/vod/halifax/archive\\_2015-02-25\\_live.mp4.html](http://archive.isiglobal.ca/vod/halifax/archive_2015-02-25_live.mp4.html)*

*The agenda, supporting documents, and information items circulated to Council are available online:  
enter link: <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/150225cow-agenda.php>*

*The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m., and recessed at 12:00 p.m. Committee of the Whole reconvened in at 12:10 p.m. Committee of the Whole adjourned at 1:27 p.m.*

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Councillor Karsten, Chair called the meeting to order in Council Chambers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor City Hall, 1841 Argyle Street, Halifax.

**2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – NONE**

**3. Planning and Development**

The following documentation was before Committee of the Whole:

- A staff recommendation report dated February 25, 2015

Councillor Karsten invited Mr. Bob Bjerke, Director of Planning and Development and Chief Planner to give a presentation pertaining to the Proposed 2015/16 Planning & Development Business Unit Budget and Business Plan.

Mr. Bjerke provided a presentation on the Proposed 2015/16 Planning & Development Business Unit Budget and Business Plan.

Councillor Mosher joined the meeting at 10:05 a.m.

Councillors Hendsbee and Outhit joined the meeting at 10:15 a.m.

Councillor Karsten thanked Mr. Bjerke for his presentation and invited members of the public to come forward and speak on the budget.

**5. Public Participation**

Councillor Karsten called three times for speakers to come forward and speak on the budget. There were no speakers present.

Councillor Karsten requested questions of clarification from Committee of the Whole on the staff presentation.

Councillor Rankin commented that subdivision applications are quite different than that of planning applications which tend to range in complexity. He stated that he is encouraged by the plans to improve service delivery and requested further information with respect public engagement standards for planning applications. He requested further commentary respecting the boundaries of the Regional Centre Plan and inquired if the population trends are indicative of people leaving rural areas for the downtown core.

Mr. Bjerke responded regarding the trend for residential development in the Regional Centre as well as an upswing in multi-unit dwellings outside of the Regional Centre, which is a reflection of market conditions. He advised that there appears to be more interest in higher density units than there has been in the past, and noted that changes to the HRM by design guidelines have assisted in this regard. He further commented that development applications tend to take longer outside of the Regional Centre as more technical work is often required. He stated that Planning and Development is currently working on improving their systems and administration of applications.

With respect to service standards for public engagement, Mr. Bjerke noted that all public information meetings and public consultations are published on the Halifax.ca website. He commented that public hearings for planning applications are advertised in local media as well as posted on the website. He concluded by noting that service standards for public consultation is an area which has been identified by

staff for review to ensure clarity of timelines and to accurately reflect the work that needs to be undertaken for planning application.

**MOVED by Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Deputy Mayor Nicoll that Committee of the Whole direct staff to prepare the 2015/16 Planning & Development (P&D) Business Unit Budget and Business Plan as proposed in the accompanying presentation, incorporating additional direction provided by motion of Committee of the Whole for inclusion in the proposed HRM 15/16 Budget and Business Plan documents.**

Councillor McCluskey requested further information with respect to position vacancies within Planning and Development as well as the “external services” line item in the budget. She requested further information respecting building inspection standards and the notion that HRM is overbuilding. She concluded by asking for further information on parking ticket revenue and whether or not there is a by-law which prohibits feeding parking meters.

Mr. Bjerke stated that the intent of the public engagement policy is to be clear about what type of engagement is being undertaken. He provided the example of the Centre Plan and noted that staff will be actively seeking input from the public to help shape the Regional Centre. He advised that the main goal is to ensure that people will leave meetings with a clear expectation as to the perspective planning policy and application.

With respect to the notion that HRM is overbuilding, Mr. Bjerke stated that demand for infrastructure often comes in cycles and advised that it is the responsibility of the developer to assess the market. In relation to position vacancies within Planning & Development, Mr. Bjerke noted that all vacant positions within the department are being assessed.

Mr. Bjerke commented that he was unsure about a specific By-law regarding meter feeding and would provide that information. He provided a break down on the “external services” line item and noted that it relates to consulting services, contract fees, and legal services.

In response to a follow up question from Councillor McCluskey he noted that the line item within the budget presentation that is identified as “other fiscal” relates to grants for Rural Transit services, while the “other goods and services” line item encompasses office expenses such as training costs and equipment.

Councillor Fisher expressed his opinion that there was a failure respecting the achievement of growth targets identified in the RP +5 project and inquired if there are updated numbers available in this regard. He requested further information about vacancies in the Animal Services Enforcement division and inquired if there is capacity within the budget for education on services related to the Animal Services By-law. He concluded by requesting further information pertaining to the Port Wallis Planning process.

Mr. Bjerke noted that there has been a change in focus with respect to the Regional Planning policy to shift growth to the Regional Centre. He advised that changes in this regard, particularly among the construction industry take time and commented that from his perspective, it is important to examine trending of growth. He commented that numbers associated with growth are trending in the right direction and provided commentary with respect to ensuring that key indicators with respect to growth are in place.

With respect to Animal Services, he noted that staff is located at 7 Mellor Avenue in Dartmouth and commented that there is currently one vacancy within the Municipal Compliance division related to Animal Services. He advised that Municipal Compliance will be a part of the upcoming service standard review for Planning and Development which will identify the staffing levels which are required to provide the best level of service. He further commented on another aspect of the review which involves improving communications to the public regarding all services provided by the department.

In response to Councillor Fisher’s question regarding the Port Wallis Planning process, Mr. Bjerke stated that there has not yet been a public meeting scheduled as the case is still in the technical review phase. He commented that a public information meeting will be scheduled in the near future.

Councillor Hendsbee expressed his opinion that the Planning and Development Business Unit should fill vacancies as soon as possible. He further noted that public engagement for the Functional Road Network should be directed at the communities that it will be serviced by the plan. He inquired about the status of the secondary planning process of the Regional Plan particularly as it relates to Musquodoboit Harbour.

Mr. Bjerke commented that the secondary planning process is part of the overall service standard review. He commented that staff is working to ensure that there is a clear and focus approach to secondary planning to identify improvements and meet targets sooner. He commented that the secondary planning strategy for Musquodoboit Harbour is on the list and noted that staff is working on the file. With respect to the Functional Road Plan, he commented that public consultation is ongoing.

Councillor Karsten clarified from the Chair position that there is a list of Secondary Planning Strategies which has been approved by Council.

Councillor Mason commented that he likes the fact that staffing levels for Planning and Development are under review. He inquired if there has been a delay with respect to hiring major project planners and requested further information on Heritage Conservation Districts as well as the need for more Heritage Planners.

Mr. Bjerke commented that a third heritage planner has recently been hired. He noted that staff is currently reviewing the structure of the Heritage Planning unit and advised that the heritage budget has been restored to original levels to respond to grant requests. He commented that the Barrington Street South Conservation District and Schmidville Conservation District initiation reports are forthcoming shortly.

Councillor Craig thanked Mr. Bjerke for his presentation and inquired about mandatory transfers to Community Services for affordable housing initiatives within HRM. He commented that Regional Council does not have jurisdiction with respect to the by-laws around buildings which are operated by Metro Housing but inquired if there is anything that can be done by Planning and Development to help bring some of the buildings up to HRM standards with respect to maintenance.

Mr. Bjerke commented that there is a recognized gap with the maintenance standards of some of the buildings operated by Metro Housing. He commented that Planning and Development will be working with the province on affordable housing through a collaborative approach. He advised that there are areas which staff can assist and noted an upcoming meeting with Nova Scotia Housing staff whereby a discussion will be held regarding the use of HRM inspectors to help identify deficiencies in public housing units and assess work that need to be done.

Councillor Watts requested information respecting work being undertaken on By-law enforcement and Municipal Compliance standards.

Mr. Bjerke noted that Planning and Development staff will be shifting its focus to ensure that messages surrounding compliance are communicated to the public more effectively by providing more education on the relevant By-laws.

Councillor Outhit expressed concern with potential plans to raise permit and development fees while at the same time attempting to encourage growth. He inquired as to what is being done to incentivize growth in the areas where it is required.

Ms. Bjerke noted that staff strives to ensure that fee structures reflect the current costs associated with development such as staff time, consultant, and technical fees. He further noted that staff ensures that these costs are not covered by the tax payer. He advised that staff will be reviewing the current development application process and advised that the fee structure will not be altered until the review has taken place.

Councillor Dalrymple expressed his disappointment with the removal of planning staff from Acadia centre office in Sackville. With regard to transportation planning, Councillor Dalrymple stated that he is pleased to see advancement within the budget for a rural transit program.

Councillor Rankin left the meeting at 11:30 a.m. for an outside appointment.

In response to a follow up question from Deputy Mayor Nicoll, Mr. Bjerke agreed with her assessment that community planning and economic development is very important in terms of building a city. He noted that staff will be reviewing processes to ensure alignment with benchmarks to ensure that proper planning services are being delivered on behalf of the municipality.

Councillor Mosher commented that she would like to see the boundaries for the Regional Centre reviewed and noted her support for a more robust review to look at public engagement policy. She requested further information respecting the new protocol for the development of telecommunication towers.

Mr. Bjerke commented that the development of a telecommunications tower is a good example of the need for a robust public engagement process especially in communicating that Industry Canada makes the final decision as to where telecommunications infrastructure is placed.

With respect to the boundaries of the Regional Centre, Mr. Bjerke noted his intention to ensure that growth in all areas is developed to an optimum standard. Councillor Watts inquired as to how Planning and Development department will support accessibility over the next year.

Mr. Bjerke commented that much of the work regarding accessibility has been done on building form but less from a regulator aspect. He advised that staff is trying to emphasize accessibility as an important component of planning and development.

Further discussion ensued.

#### **MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

Committee of the Whole recessed at 12:00 p.m. for a short break and reconvened at 12:10 p.m.

#### **4. Halifax Public Libraries**

The following documentation was before Committee of the Whole:

- A staff recommendation report dated February 25, 2015

The Chair invited Ms. Asa Kachan, Chief Executive Officer, Halifax Public Libraries to provide a presentation on the Proposed 2015/16 Halifax Public Libraries Budget and Business Plan.

Ms. Kachan provided a presentation pertaining to the 2015/16 Halifax Public Libraries Budget and Business Plan.

Mayor Savage joined the meeting at 12:29 p.m.

The Chair thanked Ms. Kachan for her presentation and invited members of the public to come forward and address Committee of the whole on the budget.

#### **5. Public Participation**

The Chair called three times for speakers to address Committee of the Whole on the budget. There were no speakers present.

The Chair requested questions of clarification from Committee of the Whole on the staff presentation.

**MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Mason that Committee of the Whole proceed to prepare the 2015/16 Halifax Public Libraries Budget and Business Plan as proposed in the accompanying presentation, incorporating additional direction provided by motion of Committee of the Whole for inclusion in the proposed HRM 15/16 Budget and Business Plan documents.**

Councillor Watts noted that interest in libraries is not dying off but is booming within the community. She provided commentary on a new era for libraries with respect to economic development and service delivery within a community, particularly among new Canadians. She noted that it is encouraging to see a plan for extended library services as well as a commitment to develop a strategic plan.

Councillor McCluskey commented on the great deal of excitement for the new library in downtown Halifax and noted that it is nice to see so many individuals using the public library system. She requested further information respecting the projected funding gap within the library budget and asked for commentary in relation to the line items within the budget identified as “total external services” and “other goods and services”.

Ms. Kachan commented that Library Services staff is working hard to close the funding gap in the budget which was caused primarily by a pension adjustment that was missed in last year’s budget envelope. She noted a slight increase for the 2015-16 budget relating to operating costs of capital but noted that she feels quite confident that staff will be able to close the deficit in the near future.

With respect to the line item for External Services, Ms. Kachan commented that “external services” tend to capture costs related to janitorial, snow clearing and security services. She further advised that “other goods and services” tend to cover costs related to rent, books, and travel.

In response to a follow up question from Councillor McCluskey, Ms. Kachan noted that staff are paying close attention to the Dartmouth North Library and commented work has been undertaken to create closer connection between it and the Alderney Gate branch to enhance service delivery and share resources. She noted that the Dartmouth North Library is tremendously important for community programming and is also within the catchment for a number of close by communities.

Councillor Mason acknowledged Ms. Paula Saulnier, Director of Public Services, Halifax Regional Library who had previously served as Acting Chief Executive Officer for Halifax Regional Libraries, as well as the hard work undertaken by the Halifax Regional Library Board. He requested further information pertaining to upgrades to the Halifax Regional Libraries website.

Ms. Kachan expressed her opinion that the current website underserves libraries in HRM and noted opportunities to improve transactions and promote the services that Halifax Public Libraries have to offer.

Councillor Outhit expressed his support for the proposed plans for the Bedford Library Branch and echoed Councillor’s McCluskey’s comments respecting the Dartmouth North Branch. He commented that libraries do much more for communities than providing books and information. He inquired if there has been any consideration to renaming the existing facilities to something other than a “library” to reflect the community role that they capture.

Ms. Kachan noted that there is an ongoing conversation in regard to Councillor Outhit’s comments within the library community and advised that there are two schools of thought on the matter; to evolve the definition of library and call them something else; or to change the perception of what a library is. She further advised that part of Halifax Libraries strategic planning will address broader communication matters such as this and how to effectively demonstrate the values of Halifax Public Libraries.

Deputy Mayor Nicoll expressed her opinion that libraries provide the public with a welcoming space within their community and requested further information respecting plans for further public engagement.

Ms. Kachan commented that Library staff is currently at the beginning of the strategic planning process. She advised that Halifax Public Libraries will be embarking on a self-study, to determine how its services weigh in with the communities in which they operate among library users and non-library users.

Councillor Dalrymple expressed his support for the budget but noted the lack of a physical library in Sheet Harbour and Middle Musquodoboit. He referenced a commitment at the time of amalgamation to have libraries within these communities and noted that to date plans for libraries within these communities have not materialized. He commended library staff for providing programming to these areas and noted and referenced the \$11,000 line item within the budget to assist in finding permanent office space for library services in Musquodoboit Valley. He noted he would support the budget but would very much like to see plans for a physical library within these areas.

Mayor Savage thanked Ms. Kachan for her the presentation and noted the positive attention that the Halifax Central Library has been receiving from his colleagues across the country. He reiterated the opinion that library services go beyond book transactions and serve a much broader community purpose. He provided further commentary respecting the economic benefits of library in assisting in the retention of key demographics such as young people and new Canadians. He stated that libraries are positive for municipalities and are very good for business.

Further discussion ensued.

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**5. Public Participation**

This item was dealt with earlier in the meeting please refer to pages 2 and 6.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:27 p.m.

Cathy J. Mellett  
Municipal Clerk