

Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee
February 7, 2013

TO: Chair and Members of Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee

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SUBMITTED BY: _____
Jane Fraser/Director, Planning & Infrastructure

DATE: January 11, 2013

SUBJECT: Consideration of Support for Atlantic Wood Works

SUPPLEMENTARY RECOMMENDATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee, Item 5.2, January 10, 2013.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

HRM Charter: 59, Policies (3) In addition to matters specified in this Act or another Act of the Legislature, the Council may adopt policies on any matter that the Council considers conducive to the effective management of the Municipality.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee:

1. Acknowledge the request from Atlantic Wood Works to consider wood materials as a viable construction material in future municipal construction projects that provides demonstrable economic, social, and environmental benefits and is supported by the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities Resolution;
2. Receive and accept the industry submissions from the concrete associations; and
3. Not make a further policy recommendation on this matter to Regional Council.

BACKGROUND

Established in 2007, North American Wood First is a Natural Resources Canada program aimed at increasing the use of wood in non-residential construction (schools, health care facilities, retail establishments, etc.) throughout Canada and targeted areas of the United States. Until 2011, Wood First was renewed under the Canada's Economic Action Plan 2009, and was granted another year of funding in the June 2011 budget. Since 2007, Regional and Local Wood First programs have emerged across Canada. In our region, Atlantic Wood Works is a program of the Maritime Lumber Bureau. Across Canada, Provinces and Municipalities have adopted Wood First policies and legislation. The Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities adopted a supportive Wood First resolution at the Fall 2012 Conference.

Following the reception of the request from Atlantic Wood Works to ensure staff considers locally produced lumber in future municipal building construction projects, staff prepared a recommendation report offering a guideline to be administered through design consultant solicitations to consider wood, subject to financial and performance criteria. Prior to submission of the Recommendation Report, staff informally consulted with a number of environmental, architectural, building code, and construction subject matter experts to verify and obtain unanimity on merit. At a time where support of the Nova Scotia forestry industry has been very visible, with our colleague municipalities in Nova Scotia suffering extreme economic hardships and Provincial government working on options for remedy, a guideline to ensure future consideration of wood in construction seemed reasonable.

Upon tabling of the staff report, a variety of submissions to the Halifax Regional Municipality were received from the concrete industry. The submissions and industry response were profound.

DISCUSSION

With a standard practice of building new construction to LEED Silver standard (or higher), and holding those same standards for sustainable building recapitalization, the Halifax Regional Municipality is exemplary in the manner in which it constructs and recapitalizes facilities. Examples of the municipal efforts related to construction can be viewed at: <http://www.halifax.ca/facilities/>

Further to the standard green construction practices, new facilities are subject to community consultation to ensure the facility meets and reflects the needs and ambitions of the community at large.

With these two facts in place, and considering the divisive nature of the industry response, there is not a need for a policy instruction, or continued deliberation of such, with respect to wood or concrete.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no impacts to the Operating or Project Budget from this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This report resulted from an industry submission and a competing industry counterclaim.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Both the wood and concrete industry is claiming the environmental high ground. While the concrete industry is identified as the second leading contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, and wood is accepted by the International Panel on Climate Change as a carbon sink, local company Carbon Cure Technologies (<http://carboncure.com/>) has invented a carbon neutral concrete block that is being marketed around the world, bringing exceptional environmental, social, and economic benefit to the community. As such, improvements and variations in manufacturing, harvesting, and logistics activities alter the environmental product impact of the materials, rendering a wholesale judgement impractical at this point.

ALTERNATIVES

1. The Committee may instruct staff to make a policy recommendation which would require a fulsome assessment of the various claims and counter-claims made by the respective industries.
2. The Committee may make a policy recommendation based on the information received without staff assessment.

Both of these alternatives will prolong a topic that has become divisive and not constructive.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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Report Prepared by:

Richard MacLellan, Manager, Energy & Environment, 490-6056
