


**Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee**  
**February 7, 2013**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee

Original Signed  
**SUBMITTED BY:**

 : Pierre Clement, Chair, Dartmouth Lakes Advisory Board

**DATE:** January 7, 2013

**SUBJECT:** Response to Proposed Consolidation of Watershed Advisory Boards in HRM

---

**Summary Recommendations:**

The Dartmouth Lakes Advisory Board recommends that the Standing Committee consider the following:

- 1) Clearly describe the terms of reference (TOR) for the new amalgamated WAB
- 2) The role of reviewing development plans that may impact waterbodies in HRM are a fundamental role and should be part of the WABs mandate
- 3) Invite the present WAB members to be part of the TOR development
- 4) Develop a strategy to involve the community in helping manage their natural water resource.

**Background:**

The volunteer members Dartmouth Lakes Advisory Board (DLAB) have all received letters noting the imminent consolidation of the three HRM Watershed Advisory Boards (WABs) into one advisory body. The DLAB reviewed the motion presented to Council at the Nov. 27, 2012 Regional Council meeting that documents the intent and background used as the basis for HRM staff's recommendation for the amalgamation of the WABs. We are obliged, as the sitting members of a body that has advised municipal councils for the past 40 years, to comment on what we see as a loss of both engagement and commitment to citizen participation in the stewardship of our community water resource.

Times have changed. DLAB was established in 1971 in response to perceived threats to the quality of several of Dartmouth's 27 lakes due to unchecked or monitored development. The Board was created at a time of growth in the city and the establishment of several research related institutions was seen as an opportunity to get highly trained scientists to help advise the city on ways in which development could be implemented while minimizing adverse impacts on the water bodies that are a valued asset in the community.

Riparian buffers, settling ponds, storm ceptors and watershed analyses were among the many recommendations that DLAB has made as part of the development review process. DLABs review of proposed developments and its recommendations to city council was the ‘bread and butter’ work that the Board did at its monthly meetings. The Board was most active in the 1970s and 1980s and the technical expertise provided through Board appointments contributed to research documents on baseline water quality studies, annual ‘walkabout’ lake surveys and the ongoing HRM synoptic water quality surveys. In the later 1990s, and especially since HRM amalgamation, the role of the Board in reviewing proposed development plans has diminished. In 2010 the three WABs were invited to a meeting at the Banook Canoe Club where the Clerk’s Office had a facilitator lead a discussion of the future of WABs. There were participants from each of the WABs and the group came up with several suggestions and reasons why these voluntary boards were important to the delivery of oversight in the development review process. We were also told that the main driver for the changes in board activities and roles was to implement efficiencies and the desire to speed up the development application process to meet developer expectations (from 2 years to 4 months).

In the Watershed Board Analysis (Appendix D) of motion ‘Creation of Community Councils’, Item # 10.1.2 in the November 27, 2012 agenda the information source is based on a COW from 2010 and an in camera meeting of the North West Community Council in May 2012. The reference provided does not mention or refer to the Banook Canoe Club WABs meeting nor reflect any of the suggestions offered.

The analysis does identify the contributions of the WABs in the development of policies that have been have been adopted by HRM and thus recognizes the value of having inexpensive, outside opinion contribute to the direction the municipality is taking in regards to protecting our shared water resources. In fact the recommendation notes: *‘The recommended actions, at the time, with respect to the three watershed advisory boards, were to consolidate and establish a policy advisory group to the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee.’*

The analysis also offers that:

*‘Consolidating the three advisory groups, and enabling work to be executed according to the needs and priorities of Regional Council, or its designated Community Council, will ensure effective effort and achieve desired environmental objectives and continue to ensure that project/application reviews continue to be carried out by a combined Board.’*

Clearly the role of the consolidated WAB in policy advice is an important role but it is unclear how there will be any direct contribution to ‘project/application reviews’ given this capacity has been removed from their responsibilities in streamlining the application process.

DLAB considers the consolidation of the WABs into a policy advisory role minimizes the value of providing the historical and expert oversight on development plans. The ‘corporate knowledge’ that the three WABs were able to provide was founded in having

consulted in plan reviews. The HRM also loses the ‘local’ view of development whereas a central body would be too far removed from what is happening on the ground.

The candidate pool portion of the analysis states ‘*filling some of the current WAB vacancies has been a challenge*’ and it can be argued that keeping the ‘*experts*’ interested requires that the work offered is stimulating. The lack of monthly development application reviews for the members to consider has reduced the effectiveness of the WABs.

Lastly, the DLAB, is also concerned by the lack of a proper proposal of a Terms of Reference for the new WAB. Providing policy advice to the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee seems to be an occasional engagement and does not imply that there would be any regular work that would keep people interested in contributing on an ongoing basis.

In conclusion, the members of DLAB consider the decision to consolidate the three WABs as the further centralization in decision making which will limit the contribution of its citizens through the narrow window of their elected officials. The broad geographic expanse of the HRM suggests that there should be more WABs rather than fewer. Building a greater capacity for members of the community to contribute to decision making should be a goal. Rather than shrinking participation we suggest HRM should consider a way to get people more involved. We believe HRM should hold community meetings to establish a WAB Terms of Reference. In addition, HRM should develop activities that will keep people engaged in water quality issues and thus build an infrastructure that can be called upon for regional expertise by the Municipality when local issues arise.

DLAB further suggests that Regional Council consider inviting existing WAB members to help draft the Terms of Reference for the new WAB.

Pierre Clement  
Chair, Dartmouth Lakes Advisory Board