

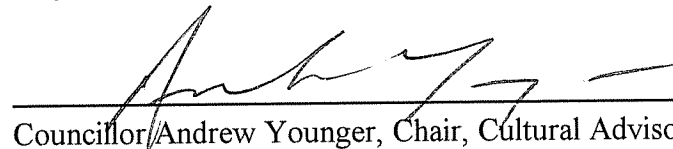
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Halifax Regional Council
June 19, 2007

TO: Mayor and Members of Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Councillor/Andrew Younger, Chair, Cultural Advisory Committee

DATE: June 14, 2007

SUBJECT: Public Art Protection

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Regional Council Meeting of April 24, 2007. The following motion was referred to the Cultural Advisory Committee for discussion and report back to Council:

“That staff provide a report to re-institute the Public Art Committee and to look at recognition and possible penalties for the destruction of public art.”

BACKGROUND

On April 24, 2007 Council referred the issue of Public Art Protection to the Cultural Advisory Committee. A report was requested to specifically address the recognition, protection and penalties for damage and vandalism to HRM's Public Art collection. Subsequently, the matter of a broader HRM Public Art Policy was discussed at the May 2nd meeting of the Cultural Advisory Committee and referred back to staff for completion and recommendation to Regional Council later in the summer of 2007.

Concerns expressed by Councillor Murphy and others, were in response to a rash of incidents where Public Art works were damaged by vandals. These included extensive damage to sculptures on the Halifax Waterfront and Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. In addition, a landmark, privately owned sculpture in the North-end of Halifax was in-advertently demolished by the property owner. This caused stress and concern from neighbours and community who for decades associated the "Red-Man" sculpture as an important piece of Public Art.

DISCUSSION

Graffiti vandalism, and other forms of public property damage, has been an ongoing problem in HRM and Public Art has unfortunately not been spared. Sculptures on the Halifax Waterfront, Halifax Commons, Quinpool Road, and others have been damaged extensively by graffiti vandals and other forms of abuse. Thousands of dollars are spent by the Municipality and private-sector owners of Public Art to clean and restore these important works. While efforts are made to correct damage once it has happened it will be particularly important for HRM to put in place a stronger, more dedicated program for Public Art to focus on the protection and prevention of risk.

Council's approval of a Graffiti Management Plan has resulted in more focussed attention to HRM's Graffiti vandalism problem. Various HRM departments and divisions are working collaboratively to address the range of issues associated with graffiti. A graffiti management task-force has been established to focus on priorities and opportunity areas. The Community Development Department has been implementing various youth-based, awareness, and community art programs to address the root causes of graffiti vandalism to compliment the efforts of Transportation and Public Works and Police in graffiti removal and enforcement. The Task Force, led by HRM's Community Response Team, will be coming to Council with a progress report in the next few weeks.

A strong Public Art Policy and Program will also be essential in maintaining a public art collection that is understood, respected, and celebrated. The fact that HRM does not have a formal Public Art Policy and dedicated program of delivery and maintenance has perhaps added to the problem that we currently face with respect to Public Art vandalism and maintenance. As has been mentioned in recent media articles on the subject, the understanding and appreciation of public art as an important community asset is key to maintaining a collection that is cared for by all members of the community. The Municipality, through its Public Art Program has an important stewardship and leadership role to play in this regard. Enforcement of criminal code laws and by-laws to protect

against the destruction of public property are key, however, awareness is perhaps the most powerful tool we have to protect HRM's public art resources.

The HRM Cultural Advisory Committee and staff are working toward a Public Art Policy and Program and will be coming before Regional Council with recommendations by late summer. The Public Art Policy will include mechanisms to address immediate issues surrounding the protection of Public Art as well as ongoing investment and initiatives to pro-actively build a Public Art collection that engages citizens and communities across the Region.

Some of the key policy and procedures that are being developed to address the concerns raised here include:

- Regular inventory, assessment, and reporting of damage and/or issues including records of public art on private property
- Training and education programs for HRM staff and community to assist in the care and proper maintenance of Public Art
- Promotion and celebration of public art through awareness, information guides, art-walks, and interpretation through signage and print materials
- Broad awareness initiatives to enhance understanding of where public art is located and to engage people in the art
- A public-private program to facilitate and foster the development and maintenance of public art located on private property
- Developing and showcasing a high-quality and diverse collection of public art to enhance understanding and appreciation of art in the public realm and its cultural value
- Design parameters that address the siting of public art to address issues associated with security, proper public viewing and protection
- An appropriate level of funding to properly commission, exhibit and maintain public art including a dedicated maintenance reserve

In terms of enforcement, it is essential that issues are dealt with immediately to instill the message that vandalism to public art is not tolerated in HRM. This is a matter of ensuring adequate resources to effectively respond to situations as they occur. It has been proven that immediate removal of graffiti, for example, deters the vandal from continuing their behaviour. It will also be important in protecting Public Art from vandalism and other forms of damage that ownership of individual art pieces is clear and the responsibility for maintaining the work to a high standard of display is understood.

There are key policy directions and investment initiatives that can be put in place to address the root causes of vandalism and disrespect for public art and public property. It is understood more and more that proactive and creative methods of program delivery will be far more sustainable than enforcement and reaction to problems once they have occurred. Program delivery and enforcement must work hand-in-hand with the aim of reducing the incidents of vandalism to Public Art and other public and private property.

As HRM continues to invest in more public and community art projects our understanding and appreciation of these works will grow. Projects like the Halifax North-Branch Library sculpture (to be unveiled June 28th), community art projects like the Halifax Commons Skate-Park and Pavilion building (to be unveiled June 23rd) and the Bedford Row Mural Gallery to be unveiled July 6th and 7th) will continue to develop community pride and awareness of the value and cultural significance of public art. As HRM's public art program advances, an objective will be to enhance investment in high quality public art commissions that showcase artistic talent and expression. As part of the 2007-2008 budget Council approved an increase in public art funding to enhance ongoing investment in the arts and in HRM's cultural development broadly.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications at this time. Staff and the Cultural Advisory Committee will be coming forward with a complete Public Art Policy and program recommendations in late summer. Budget implications will be outlined at that time.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ATTACHMENTS

None

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

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