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Halifax Regional Council
August 7, 2007

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "C. O'Toole", written over a horizontal line.

For Cathie O'Toole, CGA, A/Director, Finance

DATE: July 30, 2007

SUBJECT: Steve Subdivision Petition

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

A petition from Steve Subdivision residents was tabled at Regional Council on May 29, 2007 by Councillor Krista Snow.

BACKGROUND

In HRM, the vast majority of those receiving sewage collection and treatment services from the municipality also receive the water service from the Halifax Regional Water Commission (HRWC). However, there are a few areas that receive municipal sewage collection and treatments services who have individual (private) water supplies, e.g. their own wells. Steve Subdivision in Wellington is one such example.

HRM By-Law No. S-100 Respecting Sewer Charges, section 5, outlines how such “Unmetered Users” should be charged for the service. The (Pollution Control) charge shall be based on the average consumption by a similar class of metered users. Currently, the average usage in HRM (for single-family homes) is estimated to be 60 m³/quarter and the rate is \$1.079/m³.

The Pollution Control charge is set out as a region-wide rate, so the same rate is applied to those on small and large sewage collection and treatment systems alike, across HRM. In many cases, this improves affordability for those on smaller, independent systems, since capital costs can be shared across all systems. Similarly, the Harbour Solution project is funded by users on all sewage collection and treatment systems, even if their system will not connect to one of the Harbour Solutions wastewater treatment facilities.

DISCUSSION

The petition from the Steve Subdivision residents requests a reduction of taxes/charges. See the petition, included as **Attachment 1**. The taxes and charges applied to Steve Subdivision are in compliance with Regional Council decisions and policy.

The Pollution Control charge is being charged in accordance with By-Law No. S-100 for Unmetered Users. Currently, the Steve Subdivision residents are being charged \$64.74 / quarter for sewage collection and treatment services, or about \$21.60 / month. Currently, improvements to the wastewater collection system are being studied and an upgrade to the wastewater treatment plant is planned.

The Steve Subdivision is located within the “suburban” tax zone, as approved by Regional Council. The Steve Subdivision property owners are being charged the suburban tax rate, currently \$1.098 per \$100 of assessment. This rate reflects services in the Wellington area and does not include charges for services such as transit or sidewalks. HRM’s Tax Reform project is looking at options to improve the connection between services and taxation for HRM residents.

A response from HRM staff to the specific issues identified by the Steve Subdivision residents in their petition are addressed in the Reply to Petition from HRM staff, included as **Attachment 2**.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

None at this 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

Attachment 1 - Petition from Steve Subdivision residents

Attachment 2 - Reply to Petition from HRM staff

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

Report Prepared by : Andre MacNeil, Financial Consultant, Fiscal Policy, Finance 490-6241

Attachment 1

10460-TA
21448

PETITION

Homeowner of Steve Subdivision
Wellington NS
B2T 1J4

May 2007

We, the Homeowner of the Steve Subdivision are appealing the taxes we are being charged for Pollution Control Municipal taxes for the following reasons:

Our water bill has doubled in the past four years for what reason nothing has improved

We are paying more for services then we are receiving

We don't have sidewalks

Sidewalk lights burnt out and nobody replaces them for a couple of weeks

No city water,

Culvert have collapsed causing water to enter others homes.

Nobody from the City is cleaning the ditches in Wellington

There is no street cleaning

We are all on wells

People throwing their garbage in our yards/ditches the City does not pick up for us

People speeding through the community, no speed signs

No crosswalks

Why are the people of Wellington paying for the Harbour Solution

According to a statement made on 12 April 2006 by Customers Inquiry, the pollution control would be going down by 6%, instead its going up

If we do a follow up of this situation we are paying more then some place in the City,
Garbage is not always picked up as it should be

Our bins are just being thrown away from the property and it's up to us to retrieve it

Mayer's Office
490-4012

Attachment 2

Reply to the May 29, 2007 Steve Subdivision Petition from HRM Staff

This report addresses the issues raised by the residents of Steve Subdivision, brought to Regional Council on May 29, 2007 by Councillor Krista Snow, regarding the Environmental Protection Charge (EPC) and other municipal issues. The following response shows each comment or question raised by the residents in quotes, followed by the HRM staff response to the specific comment or question.

"No city water; we are all on wells."

Response: The Steve Subdivision was developed with individual wells and local sewage treatment system that served a small area of homes. There were no plans to connect the homes to a central water system.

"Our water bill has doubled in the past four years, for what reason?"

Response: Since the Steve Subdivision is not connected to a central water system, the residents are not charged for water service. However, there is a bill that is sent out every three months (quarterly) from HRM through the Water Commission. On this "water bill", only the Pollution Control charge, consisting of the Environmental Protection charge and the Wastewater and Stormwater Management charge, is included.

Since there are no water meters to read, the homes in the Steve Subdivision are billed based on the average HRM household consumption of 60 cubic metres/quarter. This average is based on HRWC's average consumption for its smallest class of meter size, typically used for residential homes. Until early 2006, the average consumption was 64 cubic metres. Since then, reflecting recent declines in water consumption, the average consumption used for billings has been 60 cubic metres (60,000 litres).

In May 2003, the Pollution Control rate was \$0.7828 and now it is \$1.0790 per cubic metre, an increase of 38%. When you take into account the reduced average consumption being charged, the overall Pollution Control charge has increased 29% in the past four years, an increase of about \$5 month.

"Why are the people of Wellington paying for the Harbour Solution?"

Response: The residents of Steve Subdivision are serviced with private on-site wells and by a local sanitary sewer collection and treatment facility. So, why should they contribute towards the Harbour Solutions project when your sewage does not feed into that central system?

It might be technically possible for the Wellington area to be charged its own sewer rate for its own local system. Considering this option, residents would no longer have to contribute towards Harbour Solutions but would be responsible for the costs associated with the local sanitary sewer collection and treatment facility. It has been noted that the Steve Subdivision

system was constructed in the early 1970s, in an era when environmental regulations were very different from today. As with most small wastewater systems, the cost to maintain and upgrade such facilities is quite high, relative to the small number of users. Due to its age and condition, HRM is now planning to renew this sanitary sewer collection system and replace the treatment facility. If Wellington residents had to pay for its replacement on their own, there would be a substantial cost to each household on that system.

However, the way that the Pollution Control charge is structured, residents on sewer systems all across HRM will share in the cost of the Wellington upgrade. Similarly, Wellington must share in the sewer costs elsewhere, including Harbour Solutions. On balance, sharing all costs across all HRM systems benefits all sewer users and places Steve Subdivision in a better position to replace deficient, expensive infrastructure.

“According to a statement made on 12 April 2006 by Customers Inquiry, the pollution control would be going down by 6%, instead it’s going up.”

Response: In the spring of 2006, the estimate of average household water consumption was decreased by 6% from 64 m³ per quarter to 60 m³ per quarter (3-month period). This was done to reflect the trends of reduced household consumption in HRM. However, in the fall of 2006 the rate went up almost 5%. So, by late 2006, the Pollution Control charge was about one dollar lower than it was in early 2006.

“We are paying more for services than we are receiving.”

“We don’t have sidewalks; no crosswalks.”

Response: HRM is one of the few municipalities in Canada that has an urban, suburban and rural tax rate. The Steve Subdivision is being taxed at the “suburban” tax rate. Suburban taxpayers do not pay for several urban style services, including sidewalks and transit service. In the event that a rural or suburban area does indeed have one or more of these services, it is normally financed through an area rate, however, there is no charge on the tax bill (of those petitioning) for sidewalks or transit. Residents of Steve Subdivision may be interested to know that they receive crossing guard services at the local Holland Road Elementary school. Also, they should know that HRM is currently reviewing the functioning of the property tax system. More information is available on our website at <http://www.halifax.ca/taxreform/>.

“Lights burnt out and nobody replaces them for a couple of weeks.”

Response: Streetlight service in this area is contracted by HRM through Emera. Residents may contact our call centre at 490-4000 and we can arrange to have any burnt-out bulbs replaced.

“There is no street cleaning.”

Response: HRM’s standard for rural streets without curb and gutter streets, such as Wellington Drive, Thompson Drive and Mados Drive, is to sweep these streets in the spring of each year. HRM Transportation and Public Works staff will review to ensure these local streets were cleaned in the spring of 2007.

“Nobody from the City is cleaning the ditches in Wellington.”

Response: Cleaning ditches is undertaken on an “as required” basis. If there are ditches in the Steve Subdivision area which residents feel require cleaning, then specific locations should be reported to us (490-4000) and staff will then investigate.

“Culvert has collapsed causing water to enter others homes.”

Response: We have also reviewed our records and have no report of a collapsed culvert in this area which resulted in water entering homes. If residents could provide the specifics of where this culvert is located, staff will be requested to investigate. It is noted that the storm drainage service in this subdivision will be reviewed as part a proposed plan to renew the sanitary sewer collection system in this subdivision.

“Garbage is not always picked up as it should be.”

“Our bins are just being thrown away from the property and it’s up to us to retrieve it.”

Response: Garbage pick-up is made available to all single family homes in HRM, providing the waste is properly placed in an area where it can be picked-up. If garbage is not being picked up, or if the green cart and /or garbage can is not returned to the original location at the foot of the driveway, residents are asked to provide specifics, ie address/date /time, to the HRM call centre at 490-4000.

“People throwing their garbage in our yards/ditches the City does not pick up for us.”

Response: It is unfortunate that garbage is being thrown into private yards by individuals in the community. Residents should know that anyone doing so is subject to fines under HRM by-laws.

“People speeding through the community, no speed signs.”

Response: Wellington Drive, Thompson Drive and Mados Drive are all local streets with a maximum speed limit of 50 km/h as per the Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act. The adjoining section of Highway 2 is posted at 70 km/h. HRM's policy is to erect speed zone signs at the entrance to a subdivision when the speed limit is lower than the major street it is connecting to. Therefore, HRM's Traffic and Right-of-Way Services will ensure that the appropriate 'Maximum 50 km/h' signs are posted on Wellington Drive and Thompson Drive, as well as making sure that 'Maximum 70 km/h' signs are posted at appropriate intervals on Highway 2.