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Item No. 1

**Halifax Regional Council
March 25, 2008**

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Cathie O'Toole, Director, Infrastructure and Asset Management

DATE: March 14, 2008

SUBJECT: Earth Hour - Earth Day Updates

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

- Council Status Sheet - May 1, 2007 Earth Day Celebration
- Staff are providing Regional Council with a snapshot of HRM's participation in Earth Hour (March 29th) and Earth Day (April 22nd) 2008.

BACKGROUND

Earth Hour : March 29, 2008, 8:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Originating in Sydney, Australia in 2007, the World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Earth Hour campaign has now gained global attention. As a result, at 8:00 pm on March 29, 2008, millions of people including some of the world's major capital cities will unite and switch off for Earth Hour.

Earth Hour is about climate change and communicating your emission targets.

Details about the WWF sponsored Earth Hour are available on-line at: <http://www.earthhour.org/>

Earth Day : April 22, 2008

First launched as an environmental awareness event in the United States in 1970, Earth Day (April 22nd) is celebrated as the birth of the environmental movement.

More than 6 million Canadians join 500 million people in over 180 countries in staging events and projects to address local environmental issues.

The mission of Earth Day Canada is "to improve the state of the environment by empowering and helping Canadians to take positive environmental action".

DISCUSSION

Regional Council has taken a proactive leadership approach to a healthy, sustainable, vibrant community endorsing a number of sustainability related plans and strategies over the past few years.

These range from the 25 Year Regional Land Use Plan to Corporate and Community Greenhouse Gas Emission Plans to a comprehensive Community Energy Plan approved in December 2007.

Participation in both Earth Hour and Earth Day provides an opportunity to celebrate HRM's commitment to environmental sustainability and share information on HRM's successful environmental programs.

Earth Hour Activities

Under the lead of the local office of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), HRM has helped provide awareness about Earth Hour through internal notices and externally in an article in the Winter Edition 2008 of the Naturally Green Newsletter, which is to be distributed to HRM households the week of March 24th. The HRM Call Centre (490-4000) also has information available to help direct callers regarding Earth Hour.

To symbolically celebrate Earth Hour, HRM will turn off the lights in the Grand Parade Square and at City Hall from 8:00 pm to 9:00 pm (local time) on Saturday, March 29th.

Halifax Water will, at the same time, turn off the lights at their main facility on Cowie Hill Road and the Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission will turn off the decorative tower lights on the McDonald Bridge.

The WWF will be coordinating as well efforts with a number of local businesses and the community at large as part of the overall local Earth Hour activities.

Earth Hour is about climate change and emission reductions. HRM's everyday efforts towards climate change impacts and emission reduction are detailed in HRM's Climate Change Strategy, its Corporate and Community GHG Plans and Community Energy Plan available on-line at: www.halifax.ca/environment/getinvolved.html.

Earth Day Activities

At the request of Regional Council through Councillor Bill Karsten, District 7, HRM has activities planned to take place on Earth Day, April 22, 2008. This includes Sullivan's Pond Park and Point Pleasant Park.

Sullivan's Pond Park

A tree planting event is planned with some background information as follows:

Background

Trees provide many physical, social and aesthetic benefits to our communities and have been a key part of our local history. Before European settlement, our native people, the Mi'kmaq were the stewards of the land and lived as one with nature. Trees provided food, shelter, and even transportation.

In June of 1749, when Colonel Cornwallis accompanied by 2545 European settlers arrived, their ships not only carried supplies and tools by also plants and small trees which they brought and planted within the palisades of the town. Trees are rooted in our history.

In 2003, Hurricane Juan left considerable damage in its wake including the loss of tens of thousands of trees. Historic Sullivan's Pond was not immune and lost several trees. Sullivan's Pond, part of the Shubenacadie Canal system, was an important waterway for the Mi'kmaq and later European settlers. It is planned to replace some to the trees in the historic area lost to Hurricane Juan, as part of the 2008 Earth Day activities. In 2009, the historic Shubenacadie Canal system and lakes will be host to the World Canoe Championships. Trees are planted for future generations to enjoy, and symbolize community sustainability in its truest form. This seems to be a very fitting way to celebrate the earth (Earth Day).

The Partners

Plans include planting several calipre size native species trees (as selected by Parks and Grounds) each representing one of the HRM based founding partners of the Atlantic Canada Sustainability Initiative (ACSI). The ACSI, launched in 2007, is a grass-roots network of municipalities, businesses, and NGO's that are developing a regional initiative in Atlantic Canada to better understand the challenges and opportunities of sustainability and to move the region toward sustainable solutions making it one of the most sustainable regions globally.

This tree planting on Earth Day will also help celebrate a very successful first year for the ACSI and allow our community partners to reconfirm symbolically their commitment to a sustainable HRM. The HRM based founding partners include: Bell Aliant; HRM; Halifax Shambhala Centre; iNova Credit Union; Jacques Whitford Ltd.; P'Lovers the Environmental Store. The two founding organizations are GPI Atlantic and the Nova Scotia Environmental Network. Trees will be planted recognizing each local group. Concurrent Earth Day Tree Planting ceremonies are being planned in other partner communities around Atlantic Canada (Antigonish, Bathurst, etc.).

Point Pleasant Park

The launch of a community stewardship program for Point Pleasant Park will take place on Earth Day.

Background

Through the generous support of the federal government, the 'Volunteers in the Park' program will bring community and corporate volunteers together with HRM to undertake hands-on work activities that will help to restore and strengthen the Park. Environmental stewards will work in harmony with nature and under the supervision and expertise of parks staff to care for this special place. The "VIP" Program is considered an important piece of planned restoration and management efforts for Point Pleasant Park and a way to allow citizens to give back. Following Hurricane Juan, offers from community to help with the restoration of the park have been steady, however, finding the best means to bring volunteers into the Park has required careful planning. The VIP Program, modelled in part after New York City's Central Park volunteer program, will educate and inform participants about the parks ecology, forestry and cultural significance. Volunteers will be learning and working in a unique outdoor classroom.

Earth Day 2008 presents a timely opportunity to launch and promote the PPP Volunteers in the park program. A communications strategy and volunteer resource kit is currently being developed to inspire citizens, organizations, businesses and key target audiences to participate in scheduled work activities from May to October. Council, residents and community and corporate groups will see more information about the VIP program in the coming weeks and during Earth Day Week.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The Sullivan's Pond Park tree planting is a modest event with the cost of the trees to be covered through the operating budget of the Infrastructure and Asset Management Department.

The Point Pleasant Park "Volunteers in the Park" initiative is being largely funded through the federal government with no budget implications for HRM.

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

N/A

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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