

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Brad Anguish, Director, BPIM and Harbour Solutions Project

DATE: 23 March, 2010

SUBJECT: 2010 HRM Citizen Survey Results

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report stems from the Municipality's commitment in the 2009/10 Business Plan to conduct a Citizen Survey, as outlined in the Information Reports to Council of October 21, 2009, and November 20, 2009.

BACKGROUND

As part of the commitment to citizen-centred service delivery, the 2010 HRM Citizen Survey was conducted in January 2010. The survey was designed to solicit citizen expectations and satisfaction regarding HRM services, and will provide Councillors and staff with valuable feedback as we move through this year's planning cycle.

The Citizen Survey is an important element of the Corporate Planning Framework that was reviewed with Council at COW on December 16, 2008. The survey asked questions related to HRM's Community Outcomes, namely:

- A Safe and Welcoming Community;
- Affordable Transportation and Mobility Options;
- Diverse Recreation, Leisure and Cultural Choices;
- Well Planned and Engaged Communities;
- Respect for the Environment; and
- Economic Prosperity.

Benefits of Doing a Citizen Survey:

There are a number of benefits associated with conducting a Citizen Survey:

- Best-practice of leading cities and municipalities to solicit feedback from a random and representative sample of citizens region-wide;
- Enables identification of the variable(s) with the most influence on citizen's perception of HRM, and identification of the main themes most affecting residents quality of life;
- Establishes a performance baseline that will be used to evaluate ongoing HRM performance;
- Provides an assessment of community priorities and need(s), identifies broad community issues, and enables Council and staff to align service delivery to meet specific community and planning needs;
- Results will provide valuable feedback and trends over time to gauge satisfaction with HRM's services;
- Results will help to inform discussions during the 2010/2011 and future business planning cycles, enabling better allocation of resources for maximum community benefit and improved policy decision-making;
- Fulfills a commitment made as part of HRM's Economic Strategy to undertake a citizen survey on a regular basis.

DISCUSSION

The citizen survey was developed in-house, in consultation with HRM business units, and our partners at the Halifax Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Halifax Partnership. The survey was conducted during January and early February, 2010 by Thinkwell Research, a Halifax-based market research firm that was contracted via standard procurement process to conduct the survey on behalf of the Municipality.

In order to inform Council during the current business cycle, Thinkwell Research will present the high level summary of findings from the 2010 Citizen Survey to Council on Tuesday March 23. The executive report is being finalized, and a bound copy of Thinkwell Research's report will be provided to Council following the presentation.

A copy of Thinkwell Research's summary report, a copy of the Council presentation, and the raw tabular data will be made available to the public via the web (www.halifax.ca) following Tuesday's presentation.

Once staff has had an opportunity to review the report provided by Thinkwell Research, we will return to Council within roughly 6-8 weeks with a presentation outlining staff's analysis of the survey results in key priority areas. This analysis, combined with Council's feedback, will be used to inform and guide Budget and Business Planning decisions into the future.

Staff will also review the results with an eye to the current draft 2010/2011 Business Plans and budgets, and incorporate, where possible, citizen expectations and feedback into current planning efforts.

Methodology:

Approximately 23,400 randomly selected households received a letter from the Mayor, including instructions on how to participate in the survey. The Mayor's message welcomed residents to the survey, introduced the process, and outlined the survey completion options and benefits.

Residents had the option of completing the survey online, by mail, or by telephone. This methodology was selected because it was the most cost-effective and timely approach, as well as to reduce the environmental impact associated with doing a large-scale survey. Each household received a unique passcode which allowed them access to the online survey or to identify them if they chose to call Thinkwell Research to request a mail or telephone survey.

The survey contained more than 300 individual questions, ranging in topics from perceptions on the quality of life and feeling of belonging in the community, to satisfaction with and ratings of importance of municipally-provided services, and covered topics such as public safety, the environment, transportation, and recreation, leisure, and cultural opportunities.

The survey also captured a broad range of demographic questions that further allow the analysis of data by segments of the population. Results can be further analyzed across the following demographic categories:

- Gender
- Age
- Length of Time Residing in HRM
- Education
- Own / Rent Home
- Level of Property Tax
- Household Income
- Community Council
- District

Interpreting the Results:

This survey was the largest resident survey HRM has conducted since amalgamation, both in terms of sample size and scope of questions. Typical municipal or city surveys range from 400 to 1500 residents. 2,420 HRM residents completed the region wide survey, representing a completion rate of 10.3%. This response rate slightly exceeded our expected response rate of 10%, and is in line with the expected response rates suggested by other proponents who bid on the Survey RFP.

HRM's Citizen Survey provides the Municipality with feedback and priorities of citizens that is representative of the general population of HRM and is accurate to within +/- 2%, 95% of the time.

The margin of error reported for the results is $\pm 2\%$. This means that, for example, if a result shows that 84% of residents say they are satisfied with Fire Services, the real result lies between 82% and 86% ($84\% + 2\% = 86\%$, or $84\% - 2\% = 82\%$). This is called the confidence interval, and represents the range within which true satisfaction with Fire Services can be expected to fall, 95 times out of 100.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The budget implications will be provided within the context of the 2010/11 Business Planning and Budget process.

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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