




HRM's Governance & District Boundary Review



Phase 1 – Governance
August 3, 2010

The map displays the geographical layout of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) with various districts outlined in blue. Each district is labeled with a number, such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22. The map also shows major roads, water bodies, and surrounding areas like the Bay of Fundy and the Atlantic Ocean.



Background

- Boundary Review is required by the MGA and HRM Charter every 8 years
- HRM's last major boundary review was conducted in 2003 with a decision by the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUARB) in 2004
- Only minor revisions in 2007 prior to the 2008 municipal election
- At that time CBRM and HRM were directed by the NSUARB to undertake a major boundary review, including review of the size of Council, to be submitted to the NSUARB by December 31, 2010



Background -Council's role

Why is Council asked to make the decision on the size of Council...?

- The legislation and previous ruling of the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUARB) have made it clear that Council has the legislated responsibility to determine the appropriate governance model and therefore size of council in the municipality.

It is the Board's view that the Legislature's clear intent, as expressed in the Act, is..it is not only entirely appropriate but in fact necessary for Municipal Councils to make this decision, subject to the review of the Board. Par 63 2004 Decision of the NSUARB

The board envisions a two-stage process: 1st stage evaluating the governance model for the municipality, 2nd stage to develop the specific district boundaries

- Both stages require public consultation and appropriate consideration by Council



Phase 1 - Approach

- Council adopted a phased approach (as recommended by the NSUARB) to Boundary Review
 - Phase 1 –Governance review including size of Council
 - Phase 2 – Revision of Boundaries
- October 2009 struck Committee of Council – as per motion of Aug'09
- Late 2009 Committee considered various governance models & implications of those models on decision making, public input, representation & legislative change required
 - Board of Governors Model (approx 8-10 districts)
 - Regional Model (approx 13-15 districts)
 - Modified Status quo (approx 18-23 districts)
- The Committee considered those models in light of the guiding principles provided by Council in the August 2009 motion.
 - Regional Council be of a size appropriate to decision making of a regional nature, and
 - Regional Council be of a size that supports a Community Council structure appropriate to community decision making
- Based on that direction the Board of Governors model was not advanced to public consultation as it did not meet the stated objectives.



Phase 1- Approach (continued)

- Staff were directed by the Committee to prepare a presentation to provide the public with
 - An overview of the boundary review process
 - HRM's current governance structure
 - Population patterns that might impact boundary changes
 - A number of high level options for increasing, decreasing or keeping Council at it's current size, along with possible impacts of the changes (Regional and Modified Status quo scenarios/ 15-26 districts and Community Councils)
 - And, to seek out the public's views on the role of Councillors, Community Councils and Regional Council
- And to provide as many means as possible for the public to access the information and provide input.



Phase 1- Approach (continued)

Input through:

- Survey of Regional Councillors
- Citizen Survey of over 2,400 residents (Thinkwell citizen survey) regarding their views on the role of Councillor and Community and Regional Council
- Committee held 7 public meetings which had a total attendance of approx 400 with 72 speakers
- Posting on HRM web site
- Received 47 questionnaire responses and 12 written submissions on line or to the Clerk's office
- Would have liked to see more response, good feedback from those who did participate, received more response than in any previous review.
- The consultation was thorough, open, and encouraged residents to get engaged – and many did and continue to do so



Phase 1- Results

- Was there consensus on a particular option?
 - No, nor has that been the case in any previous review of districts and Council size.
- There are always divergent opinions and different views
- There are themes and trends



Phase 1- Results

Role of Councillor

- Congruence between views expressed by Councillors and results of Thinkwell Citizen Survey
 - 86% of respondents agree or agree strongly it is important for Councillor to deal with issues important to the local community
 - 84% of respondents agreed or agree strongly it is important that Councillors deal with issue of importance to the entire region
 - 80% agree or agree strongly that it is important that their local Councillor resolve specific issues they have with HRM services
- Residents expect a great deal from their local Councillor
- Local community representation is important to many residents
- Councillors view district and regional representation and contact with constituents as important parts of their role. They may differ on how best to achieve those outcomes.
- The challenge for Councillors in as large & diverse a region as HRM is to be accessible and responsive to their constituents and to also deal effectively with district and regional issues.



Phase 1- Results

Council effectiveness

- A relatively consistent theme across public consultation.
- Not necessarily linked to council size
 - Increased focus by Regional Council on issues of regional importance
 - Decreased parochialism/more regional focus at Regional Council
 - More effective methods of garnering and considering input by residents/having residents voices & views considered
- An issue for Council's ongoing consideration
- Committee has recommended that Council consider the use of a "consent agenda" which is used by other municipalities, boards & committees to pass all items that are not considered to be contentious in one omnibus motion at the beginning of the agenda.



Phase 1- Results

Role of Community Councils

The 2004 decision of the UARB noted that

“ the Community Council approach has become an essential feature of the governance structure of HRM” .

- During public consultation the importance of having local issues addressed locally was expressed by many residents.
- There was no consensus from residents as to whether community councils should have more or less powers.
- There are limits to Regional Council’s ability to delegate authority to Community Councils currently under the Charter.
- Committee members felt strongly that enhancing the powers of Community Councils is key to a more effective Regional government and more effective citizen input into decision making and that enabling changes to the Charter should be pursued with the Province.
- The Committee also felt that a minimum number of Councillors should sit on Community Council and, that the number of Community Councils be set at four (4).



Phase 1- Results

District Representation

HRM is a large and growing region.

- Councillor will represent about 18,000 residents/14,200 voters- up from about 16,000 residents/ 12,400 voters in 2006.
- Over ½ current districts don't comply with UARB requirement to be within +/- 10% average population/voters
- HRM will require boundary adjustments prior to the 2012 election just to keep pace with growth
- With 20 districts each Councillor will represent about 20,500 residents/16,300 voters
- With 20 districts there will be a reduction of one district on the peninsula of Halifax, the eastern portion of the region will go from six to five districts and the areas of Sackville, Bedford & Hammonds Plains & Tantallon will require realignment resulting in the third reduction
- All districts will be effected however the most significant boundary changes will occur in those areas.
- The larger the change in number of districts the greater the impact on district boundaries

Phase 2

Once Council decides on the number of districts staff will work over the summer to revise districts boundaries and bring the specific boundary changes back for consultation in the fall



Phase 1- Results

Size of Regional Council

- There have been divergent opinions expressed both by residents and Councillors in regard to the size of Council
- No significant/majority call to reduce Council to the point where the overall governance structure of HRM would change to a more Regional model (below 18 districts)
- There are certainly voices who would like to see a reduction in Council size
- There were a number of residents and members of Council who feel that debate and decision at Regional Council can be improved by a reduction in the size of Council without reducing to a size where it may jeopardize effective local representation



Committee Recommendation

- The recommendations of the Governance & Boundary Review Committee “on balance” address the findings of the public consultation and current views on governance within HRM.
- That is:
 - A Regional Council that addresses regional issues and is large enough to support a community council structure that can address matters closer to communities, and that provides adequate representation to voters and residents within a growing Region.
- The recommendations also provide procedural and legislative changes that will address the desire to make Council and Community Councils more effective.
- Is it the correct approach to achieve those governance outcomes?
 - That is for Council as a whole to determine.



Recommendations

1. Seek amendments to the HRM Charter that will allow Halifax Regional Council to delegate general authority to Community Councils for local matters, with the intent that the delegation of this authority evolve over time.
2. Approve in principle the vesting of authority in Community Councils for the establishment of area rates for enhanced services deemed by Halifax Regional Council to be local, if the necessary amendments to permit this are made to the HRM Charter
3. Approve the adoption in principle by Halifax Regional Council of the use of Consent Agendas, with the goal to achieving greater effectiveness at Regional Council meetings.
4. Approve the reduction of Halifax Regional Council to 20 Councillors plus the Mayor, with four (4) Community Councils each comprised of five (5) districts.