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Halifax Regional Council
December 14, 2004

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Dan English, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 6, 2004

SUBJECT: Parking - Grand Parade

ORIGIN

This report originated with a presentation and petition which were tabled with Council on May 18, 2004 advocating for the removal of parking within the Grand Parade.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

- 1. Explore the long term program for the Grand Parade including future vehicular use, in the context of an overall site management and enhancement plan for the Grand Parade to be undertaken during 2005.**
- 2. In the interim, direct the relocation of dedicated Councillor /staff parking from the Grand Parade to an alternate municipal property on the former Birk's site to be effective April 1, 2005.**

BACKGROUND

As recognized in the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy, Grand Parade is the symbolic and historic centre of Halifax and has served as the central public gathering place since the founding days of the community. Surrounded by the Citadel, City Hall, St Paul's Church, Province House and the harbour, Grand Parade is the historic and civic axis of Halifax.

The issue of parking in the Grand Parade has been a longstanding matter of public debate. Previous reports dating back over the past several decades have presented options for Council to limit or control parking within the Grand Parade. The most recent report tabled with Council on May 13, 2003, presented a thorough review of the existing practices with respect to parking in the Grand Parade. This report reviews the issue in the context of proposed enhancement plans for the Grand Parade and provides options for Council's consideration.

Previous Studies

Several previous studies have addressed the issue of vehicular access to the Grand Parade. A 1989 Open Space Study explored various concepts to "reduce the impact of vehicular traffic while maintaining occasional ceremonial and service access to City Hall and St. Paul's Church". As a result of this study, design improvements were implemented to better define and make more functional the public space within the Grand Parade, while still allowing for limited access for vehicles. Similar enhancements were recommended for Province House and the waterfront.

More recent studies have advocated the removal of dedicated parking from both Grand Parade and Province House on the basis of urban design considerations and feedback from the public. These include the 2000 Halifax Waterfront Open Space and Development Plan report, the Capital District Urban Design Project, and Public Facility Needs Study which were tabled with Council in spring of 2004.

Current Parking/Access Requirements

As outlined in a previous report to Council dated May 13, 2003, Grand Parade is presently used by the following groups for parking and/or vehicular access:

- St Paul's Church requires parking for the Rector provided in City Hall Plaza, accommodation for access for ceremonial vehicles during weddings and funerals in St Paul's Plaza, and parking for elderly and disabled parishioners for Sunday morning services. This practice originates from the closure of St. Paul's Hill Street located in front of the church in the 1970's and incorporation of these lands into the Grand Parade.
- Councillors and senior staff are permitted to park in City Hall plaza at the north end of Grand Parade. Parking is currently provided for the Mayor (2), 23 Councillors, the CAO (2) and the Deputy CAO. On Council evenings, limited staff parking is permitted in the Civic Plaza for safety reasons. This includes the Municipal Clerk, Councillors support office, and staff and media attending Council.

- Service access for maintenance crews is permitted on an as needed basis including snow and ice servicing and landscape maintenance.
- Access is required for staging for special events including both municipal events and approved community use.

Parking limitations

Over the past several decades, Council has directed many efforts to enhance Grand Parade and further limit vehicular access:

- Following a 1977 plan, a former street named St. Paul's Hill was removed and the land reclaimed as public open space.
- In 1995 following recommendations of the 1989 Open Space Design Study, improvements were implemented to limit and separate parking from pedestrians through formal delineation of the Grand Parade into three distinct districts: City Hall Plaza, Civic Plaza, and St Pauls' Plaza.
- In 1997 Council implemented new parking regulations restricting the times and numbers of vehicles.
- In 1999 Council created a formal entrance to the City Hall Plaza from the North end of Argyle Street eliminating the need to travel through the Civic Plaza to access City Hall.
- In 2003 Council rejected an option to install a card reader gate at the Argyle Street entrance to control and enforce illegal parking in the Grand Parade. Council rejected this option because of public concerns about the inappropriateness of exclusive access to the Parade Square.

DISCUSSION

With a centralized City Hall and an active civic space, there will continue to be a need for some degree of vehicular access to Grand Parade. The issue will be one of balance, how to accommodate pedestrians which are the dominant users of the space, with the civic and ceremonial needs for both City Hall and St. Paul's Church.

Management Plan for Grand Parade

The longer term issues related to programming and use of the Grand Parade (including vehicular use) should be examined within the framework of a broader plan of enhancements for the space. Council has approved under the Capital Budget for 2004/05 to undertake a Management Plan for Grand Parade following recommendations in the Capital District Urban Design Project. Under this plan, guidelines will be developed to ensure future improvements reinforce the ceremonial importance of this space. Staff is in the process of establishing a terms of reference and anticipates the project will be launched in the new year. The project will involve stakeholder and public consultation and will be scoped to address:

- Programming and use of Grand Parade and recommended guidelines to reflect its historic character and ceremonial importance (including an analysis of vehicular use)

- A design enhancement/ amenity plan that reinforces its historical integrity and importance as major pedestrian space,
- A heritage interpretation program,
- Horticultural guidelines addressing appropriate plantings, maintenance practices, and retention and sustainability of trees and other planting
- Opportunities to expand its year round use,
- Linkages with other civic uses (e.g., Province House) along the George Street corridor which is the historic and civic axis of Halifax.

The proposed enhancement and management plan provides a solid foundation for considering the longer term issues related to parking, vehicular access, and future programming of the Grand Parade. It also provides an avenue to explore linkages with the Province in relation to parking at Province House and opportunities for further enhancements to both of these symbolic civic spaces.

Alternate Parking Options

In the interim, should Council wish to further limit dedicated parking with the City Hall Plaza portion of the Grand Parade, several short term options exist for alternate parking. These options include designated on-street parking or dedicated parking in existing (municipal and private) parking facilities near City Hall.

Dedicated on-street parking was not seen as a viable option because of the potential detrimental effects on nearby businesses from the loss of convenient short term parking. A scan of surrounding parking facilities eliminated the two immediate facilities (Scotia Square and Prince George) due to concerns about late evening access.

The most suitable option recommended for the short term because of its visibility and convenience, is the municipally-owned surface parking lot located on the former Birk's/Truscan site at the corner of George and Barrington Streets. This lot has adequate capacity to accommodate parking currently permitted in the Grand Parade. Presently, space is leased out on a short term basis to monthly parkers, but could be made available should Council favour this option. The cost would include the loss of future parking revenues. These "opportunity costs" are estimated at approximately \$43,200 annually exclusive of HST. It should be noted that this would only be an interim solution as this site is currently under consideration for potential redevelopment of a provincial office building. A longer term strategy including potential linkages and opportunities between HRM and the Province would be developed in the context of the Grand Parade Management Plan.

If it was the wish of Council to proceed with this option, these opportunity costs would have to be identified in the upcoming budget process for 2005/06. Under this option, it is recommended that vehicular access to the Grand Parade be maintained for visitors, ceremonial/special events, and maintenance purposes on an as required basis.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

A relocation of current parking in the Grand Parade to the former Birk's/Truscan site would result in a loss of municipal revenues of \$43,200 annually, which should Council direct this to occur, will be identified in the budget for 2005/06. Funds are approved in the 2004/05 capital budget to undertake a Grand Parade Management Plan.

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.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council could defer the decision to further limit parking in the Grand Parade until the completion of the Grand Parade Management Plan.
2. Council could direct staff to explore the recommended relocation of parking within this budget year (2004/05). At present no funds have been identified in the 2004/05 budget for this purpose.

ATTACHMENTS

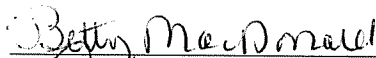
None.

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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