HALIFAX
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

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Halifax Regional Council
Committee of the Whole
December 6, 2005

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: _____
                 Carol Macomber, Acting Director, Recreation, Tourism & Culture

DATE: November 30, 2005

SUBJECT: **Building Strong Communities (Community Context)**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN:

On October 11, Council approved a list of Council Focus Areas. Staff committed to return to Council with status report on each item and a suggested approach to further action on the item. Discussion was to include an analysis of current initiatives, issues, options for resolution, capacity and implications.

BACKGROUND

Council has recently indicated focus areas it wishes to address. These include (in no particular order):

Regional plan ·   Community relations
Transit   Youth
Infrastructure   Community recreation
Traffic   Community development
Public safety   Economic development
Tax Reform
By-law enforcement

Staff committed to preparing a document on each of these focus areas for Council discussion and

direction at a Committee of the Whole meeting. Specifically, staff committed to describing its understanding of Council's concerns, what is currently being done in each of these areas, the issues impacting these areas, options for addressing these issues, and the implications of pursuing these options.

DISCUSSION

Issues related to communities are significant and varied, and there is not enough funding available to address all the concerns raised by Councillors, the public and staff. The discussion paper attached is an introductory overview of a Building Strong Communities approach to addressing community issues. This paper lays the framework for those Council priorities which require the development of community-based solutions - youth, public safety, by-law enforcement, community relations, community recreation, community development, and economic development. Staff will follow-up with reports for each of these individual focus areas that specifically highlight the issues and options Council may wish to consider.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct budget implications as a result of the material discussed herein.

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

There are no recommended alternatives

ATTACHMENTS

Building Strong Communities (Community Context) Background and Discussion Paper

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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HALIFAX
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

COUNCIL FOCUS AREA

BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES
(COMMUNITY CONTEXT)
Background and Discussion Paper

December 6, 2005

1.   BACKGROUND

Steady growth of HRM's economy and population combined with rising expectations of residents has increased the demand for high quality municipal programs and services. Furthermore, the national and international profile of HRM continues to grow, creating both challenges and opportunities to take advantage of this trend. In conjunction with these issues and opportunities, there is growing pressure on HRM to address issues at the community and neighbourhood level, placing even more demand on resources.

In the face of these challenges, HRM must strengthen its role as a champion for community issues as they are vital economic drivers, integral to building "pride of place" for citizens, and essential to building partnerships and strengthening the municipality. In addition, community-based activities provide a focus for individuals and families of all types to become involved in their communities and to contribute to the quality of life in the place they choose to live. While HRM cannot control the volume of growth and expectations, the municipality must respond effectively and logically to the increasing demands of communities and citizens.

Since amalgamation in 1996, several major region-wide projects have been initiated to ensure consistency across the former municipal units which now comprise HRM. Examples of these projects, many of which are now nearing completion, are Harbour Solutions, Regional Plan, Cultural Plan, Policing Strategy, Integrated Dispatch, and Economic Strategy. Many of these regional projects are ready to be implemented at the community level and to do so requires community-based approaches. Council and communities are directing staff to refocus time, energy, and resources on identifying community needs and developing the best approaches to addressing these needs.

There is a growing momentum for change in HRM. Citizens want to address the problems that face their neighbourhoods and are looking to the municipality for leadership. HRM is well positioned to provide this leadership at the community level but needs to redefine business practices so that the municipality can more effectively respond to the issues facing individual communities and neighbourhoods.

2.   COUNCIL FOCUS AREAS

On October 11, Council approved a list of Council Focus Areas it wishes to address. The focus areas that require community-based solutions and relate to the Community Context concept presented in this paper are (in no particular order):

Public safety	Community recreation
By-law enforcement	Community development
Community relations	Economic development
Youth	

Staff have committed to return to Council with a detailed status report on each individual item and a suggested approach to further action on the item. This paper addresses broad approaches to attaining the community outcomes required to address all of these issues collectively.

3.   PRINCIPLES

Experience to date have provided some direction on draft principles to be used in moving forward with community-based decision-making. These principles can be further developed, refined and/or implemented through a process of research and consultation. Some potential examples of principles include:

- Community and Citizen Focus - all citizens have a stake in ensuring that HRM is a great place to live, work and play;
- Innovative and Effective Partnerships - partnerships and collaboration lead to better, stronger community programs and efficient use of resources;
- Citizens and Communities as Drivers of Change - ongoing and meaningful input is required regarding program and service provision, development and use of facilities, resource allocation, etc;
- Relationship Building - building relationships between government, citizens, and community groups is a powerful tool for social change and ensures better coordination of resources;
- Community Action - involving citizens through action based community initiatives is an effective way of engaging in civic issues;
- Community Stewardship - communities need to help develop and own solutions to their issues;
- Council Advocacy - Councillors are well positioned to act as advocates for issues in communities throughout their Districts.

4. RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION

Gathering information through a series of targeted research and consultation activities is essential to the development of action plans that accurately identify and address community issues. Key research and consultation activities in this area include:

(1) Existing Consultation Records

Several existing sources of information can be drawn upon to gauge public needs and formulate action oriented and effective future strategies for community-based problem solving. Council and residents have provided excellent feedback in recent consultation initiatives such as the Regional Plan, Cultural Plan, Economic Strategy, RTC Youth Engagement Strategy, HRP Town Hall meetings, Corporate Scorecard, and Council Focus Areas.

(2) Further Community Consultation / Community Visioning

Existing feedback needs to be enhanced by future consultation. These efforts should be linked to the process of implementing regional initiatives. For example, the first phase of Regional Plan implementation requires a community visioning process to design and conduct public consultation in key geographic areas which will inform the creation of community planning strategies. The intent of this process will be to gather public information for use in formulating design objectives, planning strategies, and future directions that are tailored to different communities and/or centres throughout HRM.

(3) Best Practices

In addition to consultation efforts, HRM can draw from existing initiatives that are highly successful in the area of community consultation and program design. Initiatives such as the Community Response team, the Community Relations / Crime Prevention (CR/CP) unit, Capital District, enhanced use of Council as a focus group, and Youth LIVE provide best practices from which to draw examples of what works.

(4) Areas for Improvement

In addition to successes, there are several pressing community issues that need to be addressed. Often, these issues arise because of gaps in the delivery of programs and services at the community level. These gaps need to be identified and then prioritized accordingly, in conjunction with residents and community stakeholders. Some examples of current issues and gaps include inconsistency in the operation of community centres; volunteer burn out; and the need for a community stewardship component in the development of programs, services and by-laws.

(5) Research and Policy Needs

In concert with the identification of issues and gaps, needs in the area of research and data required to inform decision-making must be clearly identified and understood. Sound

research and information collection on best practices and trends within HRM and from other jurisdictions will inform decision-making. Some potential areas to be explored include trends in crime and crime prevention at the community level, budget and business planning processes and structures, levels of citizen engagement / participation, community development models, program and service integration models, and municipal organizational structures.

5.   ACTION STATEMENT

Staff will take the information and guidance suggested by Council during the Council Focus Area sessions and return with an action plan and associated strategies to address community issues and build stronger communities throughout HRM.