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**Halifax Regional Council**

**July 05, 2005**

**TO:** Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Stiekings", written over a horizontal line.

Peter Stiekings, A/Director, Real Property & Asset Management

**DATE:** June 28, 2005

**SUBJECT:** Proposed Scope - Urban Forest Master Plan

## INFORMATION REPORT

### ORIGIN

The Draft Regional Plan and Draft State of the Environment Report both raise the concept and support the development for policy, in the form of a functional plan - the "Urban Forest Master Plan" (UFMP).

### BACKGROUND

Within the HRM context, the "urban forest canopy" includes both public and private trees found in parks, on private property, trees in green belts and those which surround water courses, right-of-way and street trees, and large-acreage stands within parcels to be subdivided for development. The urban forest does not, however, extend to forest industry stands such as wood lots, which befall the jurisdiction of the Province of Nova Scotia.

Council had identified several issues pertaining to the protection and management of HRM's urban forest, including:

1. Legislative authority of municipalities to regulate and manage vegetation on private property in connection with developments, with the exception of resource, forestry-related properties;
2. The NS Power-Tree Easement Policy;
3. The creation of a Steering Committee on July 17, 2001, to investigate the feasibility of installing underground utilities in new developments, which was also tasked by Regional Council on August 28, 2001, to analyze by-laws from other Canadian municipalities that manage private vegetation;
4. A report to Regional Council, entitled "Tree Cutting On Private Lands", July 13, 2004; and
5. Diseases (e.g., Brown Spruce Longhorn Beetle) and weather-related (e.g., Hurricane Juan) threats against the health of the urban forest canopy.

## **DISCUSSION**

Staff are embarking upon an exercise, which intends to recommend means by which city trees (i.e., the urban forest) should be planned and managed over the next few decades. The proposed Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP) is intended to provide this strategic approach to sustaining the urban forest canopy on a long-term basis, and to redress immediate challenges to the health and abundance of urban trees in HRM. There are several issues, risks, and opportunities, which have prompted the need to undertake strategic and operational steps to manage the health and protection of the urban forest - they include:

- 1) the *absence* of a plan to manage and set direction for the future of the municipal urban forest;
- 2) the proposed Regional Plan draft policies prompts for the development of a functional urban forest plan in order to facilitate:
  - a) tree retention prior to subdivision;
  - b) enhancing the urban forest to help reduce impacts of Greenhouse Gas (GHGs) Emissions;
  - c) establishment and maintenance of "riparian" (i.e., watercourse protection) buffers;
- 3) the HRM "State of the Environment Reporting" (i.e., pending) advises use of environmental and more specifically urban forest indicators (e.g., % of urban forest canopy cover) in order to better quantify environmental performance;
- 4) a trend whereby other municipalities have developed and abide by their respective urban forest master plans for the environmental and economic benefit of their constituents;
- 5) the impacts of extreme weather on HRM's urban forest, such as Hurricane Juan, and other significant storms such as "White Juan";
- 6) biological threats, such as Brown Spruce Long Horn Beetle (BSLB), Japanese Beetle, Dutch Elm Disease, among other invasive species and blights;

- 7) conflicts between existing trees and urban conditions, such as narrow rights-of-way, aggressive utility tree-cutting operations, and the lack of appropriate irrigation and soil types;
- 8) the environmental and health benefits of nurturing a healthy urban forest canopy such as air filtering, mitigation of wind effects, erosion abatement, and cooling of the urban landscape, among others;
- 9) the practice of large-acreage clear-cutting practices as a precursor to subdivision development; and,
- 10) helping to preserve trees and promote the planting of new trees on private, urban properties, but excluding wood-lots.

The UFMP is envisioned to entail three (3) primary elements:

- Management of trees on HRM property;
- Jurisdictional and regulatory controls for the protection of trees on private property, more specifically in terms of:
  - subdivision development;
  - cutting on private lands (excluding rural wood-lands);
  - protection of heritage trees; and,
- Redress of utility conflicts.

The UFMP initiative will commence with the development of terms of reference for the project, designation of a steering committee, data collection, and review of HRM's existing tree inventory. Subsequently, an issues analysis, policy options, recommendations, and technical guidelines will be developed. The project phases are intended to be outsourced to consulting firms. These awards will come before Regional Council for approval.

Attachment 1 - Proposed Scope/Outline - Urban Forest Master Plan - proposes a draft table of contents of the UFMP. This table of contents demonstrates the *proposed scope* of the project, the issues requiring redress, and some of the policies and regulations needed. The terms of reference will present the project structure under auspices of which the UFMP document/s will be finalized and upon completion, tabled with Regional Council.

There will also be a program of consultation undertaken to ensure that the public, stakeholders, as well as experts, have an opportunity to participate and provide points-of-view.

Regional Council has also received a request in May, 2005 from Tree Canada to adopt a draft resolution, entitled: "Promoting The Conservation of Urban Forests". This draft resolution is, upon initial review by staff, consistent with the principles of the proposed UFMP. Before making such recommendation, however, staff propose to review the draft resolution against the UFMP terms of reference and have the matter reviewed by the anticipated UFMP steering committee.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

Capital funds of \$150,000 to support the UFMP project were approved by Regional Council through the Capital Budget process. Project funding is initially anticipated to be used to update HRM's urban tree inventory to more accurately reflect changes to the canopy over the past decade. Other uses for remaining funds will be identified during initial project stages by the steering committee.

**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**

None.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: **Proposed Scope/Outline - Urban Forest Master Plan**

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/agenda.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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Financial Review :

  
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## ATTACHMENT 1

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### Proposed Table of Contents Denoting Scope of Urban Forest Master Plan

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**Note:** The following proposed Table of Contents is a reflection of the issues, which the Urban Forest Master Plan is intended to address.

#### **Draft Table of Contents**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Terms of Reference
- 1.2 History
- 1.3 Other UFMPs
- 1.4 Background (Regional Planning, State of Environment)
- 1.5 Methodology

#### **2.0 Benefits of Trees**

- 2.1 Community Character/Scenic Quality/Economic Benefits
- 2.2 Infrastructure
- 2.3 Social Benefits
- 2.4 Environmental Impact
  - 2.4.1 Storm Water Retention
  - 2.4.2 Air Quality
  - 2.4.3 Microclimate and Temperature Regulation
  - 2.4.4 Soil Retention
  - 2.4.5 Wildlife

#### **3.0 Challenges and Opportunities**

- 3.1 Climate
- 3.2 Urban Conditions
- 3.3 Disease
- 3.4 Utilities, Construction, & the Economics of Burying Wires
- 3.5 Invasive and Undesirable Species
- 3.6 Storm Events
- 3.7 Fragmentation of Natural Stands
- 3.8 Resources - Financial and Human

#### **4.0 HRM Urban Forest Inventory - (Species, Location, Size, Health)**

- 4.1 Municipal-Wide Urban Forest Canopy
- 4.2 HRM-Owned Trees

- 4.2.1 Street Trees
- 4.2.2 Park Trees
- 4.2.3 Natural Forest Stands
- 4.3 Analysis
  - 4.3.1 Canopy Cover
  - 4.3.2 Species Distribution
  - 4.3.3 Health Assessment

## **5.0 Strategies**

- 5.1 Strategies and Goals
- 5.2 Creating Conditions for Successful Tree Growth
- 5.3 Desirable Planting Locations
- 5.4 Public Education, Consultation, and Outreach

## **6.0 Administration and Legislation**

- 6.1 Incentives versus Regulation (amend existing Tree By-law)
- 6.2 Regulation of Privately owned Trees
- 6.3 Heritage Trees and Areas
- 6.4 Partnerships
- 6.5 Committees
- 6.6 Resources - HRM, Third Party and Alternative Funding Sources
- 6.7 Structure and Implementation
- 6..8 Maintenance Program
  - 6.8.1 Municipal
  - 6.8.2 Privately Owned Lands
  - 6.8.3 Budget

## **7.0 Technical Manual**

- 7.1 Tree Planting
- 7.2 Pruning and Maintenance
- 7.3 Recommended Tree Species
- 7.4 Construction guidelines
- 7.5 ROW Guidelines