
Halifax Regional Council
16 July 2002

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:


George McLellan, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: 15 July 2002

SUBJECT: Community Response Initiative

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Requests from many Councillors to address graffiti clean up, community cleanliness, littering, illegal dumping, safety and health of the neighbourhoods in their districts.

BACKGROUND

For all of its many strengths and assets, Halifax Regional Municipality faces a number of growing problems - litter, graffiti, vandalism and related aspects of civil disregard and quality of life issues. Both Councillors and citizens have expressed their concerns many times on this issue. Litter is more evident on our streets, roadside ditches, in our neighbourhoods, on our waterfronts and in our parks and other public places. Graffiti is marring the valuable municipal assets, as well as private property. HRM has a reputation in Canada for being a "Smart City" and the new Community Response Initiative will further enhance our reputation as a municipality that is clean, safe and a vibrant place in which to live and work..



Failure to recognize and act on these “around the edge” issues not only jeopardizes our reputation as a community, but it also impacts on our civic pride and our sense of community. The amount of litter picked up from our streets from illegal posters, careless disposal of wrappings and other items, dumping of garbage on rural roads and other reckless acts of trash disposal generates huge costs annually to the taxpayers of HRM. These costs are compounded even more when graffiti and other wanton acts of vandalism are added to the list. Currently, there are many business units within the HRM spending tremendous amounts of time and effort addressing these problems, in addition to providing their core services; but we, as a municipality, cannot do it alone and staff believes we need a more coordinated focus and approach involving community partners.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the Community Response Initiative is to improve and enhance the appearance of our neighbourhoods; promote a clean environment; educate the community on environmental issues and change attitudes towards petty crime, litter, graffiti and safety in our communities. Rather than simply further mobilize HRM business units to engage in a major clean-up campaign over a period of months, a parallel effort has to be made to get a permanent message out to our citizens and their communities that it is also “their” litter, “their” garbage, “their” vandals and ultimately, “their” tax dollars that must be spent to try and clean up the graffiti, property damage and other acts of vandalism. HRM cannot do it alone.

Studies and experience of other municipalities, such as Toronto Region, have shown that if not addressed quickly, unsightly litter and graffiti can lead to bigger neighbourhood problems. There is a concept referred commonly to as the “broken window,” which symbolizes the effort by New York City to clean-up its community. It is based on the premise that if you can stop the small crimes, the big ones will be reduced. Thus, it is about the building with just one broken window pane. If left unrepaired, that broken window sends a silent signal to some that no one in the community has an interest in the building and no one cares about it-- so it's an invitation for some to vandalize and destroy it. This concept-- if extended to littering, graffiti or other acts of wanton vandalism or misdemeanours in the community-- illustrates the value of the community as a whole taking an interest in stopping the small crimes, before they lead to other more serious crimes. It is the level of tolerance that communities are willing to build into the practice of “Broken Windows.” Neighbourhoods, streets and communities that are dirty signal that the community has lost interest, and the problems will only get worse if not addressed. Using the same concept, littering, graffiti, and minor vandalism, if not addressed at the beginning, will transform good properties into derelict ones; good neighbourhoods into slums; and good communities will be taken over by the undesirable elements in our community.

Our communities can help HRM by becoming part of the solution, so that a greater share of the tax dollars spent can be used for more worthwhile projects to enhance our community appearance through other HRM initiatives such as ***Communities in Bloom*** or ***HRM Special Places***. In every HRM community there is a “special place”. Often, it may be a monument and a park at its center, or a bandstand, or church, or the fire hall. It may just be the place where the sidewalk or road widens to provide a view of a cove or a special vista across a valley. These special places are worth protecting and must be protected-- like every other piece of public or private property in a

community. As a result, HRM taxpayers receive greater value for their tax dollar and everyone benefits.

HRM is, therefore, committed to a new role that will engage our citizens and our communities in partnership of volunteerism, corporate sponsorships and other community solutions that will foster civic pride and improve the appearance and quality of life of our neighborhoods. Halifax Regional Council has expressed its desire for such an outcome, and thus, the HRM Community Response Initiative has been developed.

HRM Community Response Initiative:

The *HRM Community Response Initiative* will be working closely with all HRM business units in coordinating and developing programs that motivate community & citizen groups; businesses, merchant associations and residents to make their neighbourhoods cleaner and more beautiful all year round, and to provide them with the information and resources they need to be successful in achieving their goals.

It will have a three-person team headed up by a ***Community Response Coordinator***, Mr. Gary Martin, a former Constable with the Halifax Regional Police Service, who has accepted the challenge to spearhead this campaign. The Community Response Coordinator will strive to build respect for the initiative through partnerships and sponsorships with:

1. Neighbourhood residents
2. Apartment building managers
3. Elected officials (Councillors, MLAs, MPs etc.)
4. Police Services (RCMP, HRP)
5. Business community and corporate sponsors
6. HRM business units
7. Other stakeholder groups

The Coordinator will also work with voluntary neighbourhood “wardens” or community leaders to help resolve ongoing clean up efforts. The Coordinator will work in close cooperation with RCMP, Halifax Regional Police Services, HRM bylaw enforcement and other appropriate business units in ensuring coordinated efforts.

Council has asked that graffiti, littering, illegal dumping and vandalism be addressed. There are other initiatives involving different strategies with various business units. This new Community Response Initiative launch will not compete with other ongoing efforts, but will tie in closely with them. For example, graffiti-busting in the Capital District is one initiative currently underway and involves sponsorships and volunteer efforts of many corporate and citizen participants.

In cooperation with the Halifax Regional Police, RCMP, Capital District Project, public and private sector partnerships and corporate sponsorships, we are implementing a “five “E” approach to deal

¹ Information Report from the Chief of Police dated 1 June 2000 to Halifax Regional Council of 13 June 2000, on Graffiti.

with graffiti, litter and illegal dumping and vandalism. Gary Martin, HRM's Coordinator Community Response, will work with business units, communities and sponsors / partners in listening to their ideas and suggestions and Gary will also mobilize the community directly to affect change. The "five E's" are as follows, Environmental Design, Eradicate, Educate, Enforce and Empower the Community.

Environmental Design - (crime prevention through environmental design) - The use of strategic management and use of shrubs and plants, street and sidewalk design, street lighting, murals, etc. The effort is about long term change. Communities, neighbourhoods, streets, parks and citizen's backyards can be made safer and cleaner by individuals and communities taking responsibility for the environment in which they live. All HRM business units will be involved in supporting this campaign and the Coordinator will be a liaison between the business units and the community.

Eradicate - remove graffiti, clean up litter as quickly as possible. Graffiti must be removed with volunteer assistance or corporate sponsorships / business support. The campaign will work to change public attitudes toward graffiti, litter, neighbourhood safety and the need for a cleaner environment. Littering is everyone's problem. Unsightly litter and graffiti can lead to bigger neighbourhood problems. Part of expecting more responsible behaviour means not tolerating irresponsible behaviour by the few who do not have the community's interest at heart. Through Community Watch lines and other awareness efforts, it is hoped that these irresponsible behaviours will be reported and addressed.

Educate - Graffiti should not be considered art. It is an issue of permission. These vandals can, and should, be prosecuted. The Community Response Initiative will work with the Regional Police and Legal Services to ensure that offenders receive justice. However, a more creative way to approach a solution is through efforts like *Adopt a Street / Adopt a Block / Adopt a Neighbourhood Program*. These programs will be developed further as corporate sponsors or volunteers come onboard. The cost of cleaning up litter, including illegal dumping on rural roads has put a huge strain on the Municipality's ability to supply this, and other, services. HRM is appealing for civic pride and asking its citizens to be partners in addressing this problem. By participating in this program community groups and individuals help the municipality to maximize its funds and available resources and create clean environments which will lead to safer and more livable communities. Additionally, schools, youth and student projects and events will foster a responsible attitude in young people towards the environment by changing attitudes toward littering, graffiti, polluting, etc. This will dovetail with other school education efforts currently underway, through community policing efforts and community strategies such as "Neighbourhood Watch", etc.

Enforce - Graffiti writers tend to be methodical in their approach. However, through an expanded Community Watch (City Watch) line, residents will be able to call and report offenders. The Community Response Initiative will liaise with the Halifax Regional Police, RCMP and /or bylaw enforcement officers who can also play a proactive role in educating the public. Additionally, HRM will conduct outreach efforts to neighbourhood groups, merchant associations, and business districts, non-profit organizations, and residents to encourage them to develop and participate in clean-up and beautification activities. The Coordinator will provide them with the technical assistance and resources they need to be successful.

Empowerment of the community - This is what Gary Martin will be doing. Empowering the communities through partnerships and the Community Response Initiative outlined in this report.

Halifax Regional Police and RCMP are developing strategies to monitor graffiti, as well as gathering intelligence/information to apprehend individuals who break the law by causing property damage and other acts of vandalism.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Start up costs for this initiative for 2002/ 2003 are expected to be approximately \$326,180. Subsequent annual budgets will average approximately \$190,000.

Funds for this initiative will come from the existing 2002 / 2003 Approved Operating Budget accounts. Cost centres where litter, waste material pickup, illegal dumping and bylaw enforcement currently reside, will fund this effort. Funding from corporate sponsorships will also contribute to the effort once the program gets wide-spread publicity and official kick-off by the Mayor and Members of Regional Council.

REGIONAL PLAN IMPLICATIONS

The cleanliness and attractiveness of our individual communities and the spin off from people working together can only enhance HRM as a vibrant and healthy community to live in. This will make HRM attractive to those who want to live, work or invest in the municipality.

ALTERNATIVES

The status quo is unacceptable. A collaborative and coordinated approach with business units and the community we serve has been absent. A community approach to problem solving will be the focus, and while other business units have been working on various efforts, a singular coordinated effort is required now. Also absent until now is the effort to assist and partner with the community in taking ownership and civic pride in clean and crime-free neighbourhoods.

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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