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Halifax Regional Council

June 24, 2003

*July 8, 2003*

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

**SUBMITTED BY:**

*Dale MacLennan*  
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Dale MacLennan, Director Financial Services

**DATE:** June 19, 2003

**SUBJECT:** **Malfunctioning Parking Meters**

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## INFORMATION REPORT

### ORIGIN

This report is a result of recent public inquiries regarding parking meter problems and a request for information from the April 22, 2003 Meeting of Halifax Regional Council. Councillor Mosher requested a staff report regarding the on-going problem of malfunctioning parking meters particularly in the downtown area. The information requested is to include the policies regarding the timeliness of meter repairs, how long it should take for a meter to be fixed, equipment required and provided to make repairs, and the policies with respect to parking tickets and malfunctioning meters.

In addition, Councillor Warshick requested that the report also address the possibility of having parking meter heads reversed to provide easier access during the winter months when winter parking makes it difficult to reach the meters.

This report will review the recent activities that have caused problems with the operation of parking meters, the corrective actions that have been initiated to resolve the problems and will address the specific information requested by Council.

## **BACKGROUND**

There are currently 1,900 parking meters located in the Halifax Regional Municipality. On November 28, 2000, Council approved RFP 00-061 Meter Conversion/Replacement Project for the purchase of 1,800 electronic parking meter mechanisms and software. The project was completed in two phases with the replacement of 700 units in fiscal 2000/2001 and 1,100 units in fiscal 2001/2002.

The new meters replaced mechanically operated meters which had become obsolete. The new electronic technology provides increased flexibility with options for cashless transactions, multiple rate structures, multiple coinage acceptance and critical auditing and usage information for improved management of on-street parking.

There are currently eight Parking Enforcement Officers that enforce meter violations in the Halifax/Dartmouth area. Financial Services, through the Parking Ticket Office, manages the service contract with the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires for on-street parking enforcement. There are three Ticket Reviewers in the Parking Ticket Office that manage the adjudication process for parking ticket complaints. Customers have the ability to request a formal review of the parking ticket issued. The request can be made at any Customer Service Centre or through the Parking Ticket Office. The results of the review are available within seven business days. If the customer is not satisfied with the results of the review process, they have the option of appearing in Provincial Court to dispute the parking ticket.

The location and number of parking meters is under the direction of the Traffic Authority of the Halifax Regional Municipality and the maintenance of parking meters is under the direction of Financial Services through the Parking Ticket Office. There is currently one Parking Meter Technician who manages the daily maintenance. Additional part-time resources are used for peak periods when required.

## **DISCUSSION**

Recent media inquiries have identified concerns regarding the reliability of parking meters within the Municipality. With the implementation of the new electronic meters and the related software for management of the parking meters, we have been able to quickly identify recent trends in maintenance requirements for the meters. One trend that became evident, in January 2003, was the impact of vandalism. While there has always been some level of vandalism with the parking meters, there has been an increase in the magnitude of this problem over the past five months.

With the ability to track occurrences through specific problem codes, we were able to identify areas where higher rates of vandalism were being experienced. Several measures have been initiated to address this issue:

In late February, we requested the support of Police Services. Meetings were held with staff of the Street Crime Unit to review detailed information on the problem areas. Through the efforts of the Street Crime Unit, a suspect has been apprehended and charged with theft and vandalism. As a result, we have experienced a decrease in reported vandalism. Police are aware of the significant operational impacts caused by meter vandalism, and continue to monitor the situation.

At the same time, we consulted with other Municipalities and our meter supplier regarding improved technology for securing meters and reducing vandalism. As a result we implemented a pilot project in one of the zones where an increased level of vandalism had been identified. New locks with special anti-tampering devices were installed. By tracking maintenance problem codes through the new meter system, we were able to identify a significant decrease in meter problems in that area. While we had planned to replace all locks over the next two years, we have now advanced the replacement program and will complete the installation of new locks in a majority of meters over the next month.

While we attempted to manage the increase in meter problems through our regular maintenance program, other operational activities have caused a significant increase in workload, resulting in recent delays to the response time for meter repairs. Over the past six weeks, several priorities have been completed including: 1) the installation of 100 parking meters around the Public Gardens that had been removed in the Fall of 2002 to help alleviate parking problems for local hospital staff, 2) the installation of 11 new parking meters in downtown Halifax, 3) the removal of 19 parking meters to accommodate sidewalk cafes in downtown Halifax, and 4) the replacement of batteries in all parking meters as required for preventative maintenance.

With the completion of the above noted activities, we have been able to focus on repairing the remaining vandalized meters. Additional resources have been allocated to this initiative and the expected completion for meters to be operational is June 27, 2003. The lock replacement program will follow immediately.

It is important to note that the recent problems are not related to the new electronic meters. In fact the new meters with the associated activity and reporting software have been instrumental in tracking the early identification of maintenance problems and assisting in formulating the program initiated for resolution.

Another item that has received recent attention relates to a customer's inability to park at a meter that is not operational. To provide for more clarity regarding Parking Meter By-Law P-500 and to explore options to provide flexibility in managing enforcement for these circumstances, we will be forwarding By-Law P-500 to the By-Law Rationalization Committee for review. In addition, we will be initiating discussions with the local business communities to seek their feedback on strategies for improved on-street parking.

The following will address the specific points, as requested by Council:

*1) Timeliness of meter repair*

Meter problems are reported to HRM staff in several ways. Over 95% of problems are identified by the Parking Enforcement Officers during their daily patrol of meter routes. In addition, the Coin Collectors report problems during their meter collection activities and the general public will also report their experience with problem meters either through the ticket review process or by direct feedback to HRM staff.

The meter problems are logged and forwarded to the Parking Meter Technician daily. The normal practice is for the Technician to investigate the problem and have the meter operational within one business day. As previously identified, the recent issue with meter problems has impacted our ability to meet this standard. There are currently about 125 of the 1,900 parking meters that require maintenance due to vandalism.

*2) Equipment required and provided to make repairs*

The recent meter conversion/replacement project included the replacement of the internal mechanisms and related software for parking meter management. The existing meter housings and locks were not replaced. Included in the RFP was a pricing agreement on parking meter parts, such as housings, locks, vaults, caps, cans and electronic components. An inventory of spare parts required to support regular maintenance is maintained. Our supplier has the ability to meet special part orders when required.

*3) Policy with respect to parking tickets and malfunctioning meters*

If a parking ticket is issued and the customer deems that the parking meter is not functioning properly, a review can be initiated through the Parking Ticket Office. The adjudication process will consist of a review of historical maintenance information of the meter in question and a check of the meter by the Parking Meter Technician. If it is determined that the meter is defective, then the ticket will be cancelled. In addition, customers who have inserted money in parking meters without receiving metered time, have the option of requesting a review and will receive a refund if the circumstances warrant.

*4) Having parking meter heads reversed during winter months*

During winter months it may be difficult to access parking meters depending on snow conditions and the timing of snow removal around the meters. It would not be possible to reverse the meter heads as this would restrict access for the Coin Collectors and would cause difficulties for the Parking Meter Technician to perform maintenance when required.

In conclusion, we are confident that the recent events are being addressed with our ability to direct activities and implement initiatives for resolution. While our program for improved management of parking meters continues to develop, we believe we have the tools and systems that will allow for enhanced management of on-street parking. Staff will be monitoring this situation and will report back to Council on progress and results.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

Some of the solutions noted above will require expenditures that were not planned but will be managed within the 2003/2004 Operating Budget of the Revenue Division.

**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.

**REGIONAL PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

None

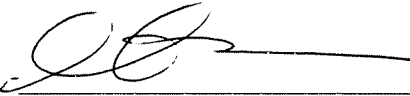
**ALTERNATIVES**

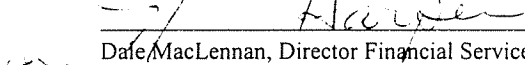
None

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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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