

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES January 9, 1998

PRESENT:

Mayor Walter Fitzgerald
Deputy Mayor Reg Rankin
Councillors: Bill Dooks
Gordon R. Snow
David Hendsbee
Ron Cooper
Harry McInroy
Jack Greenough
Condo Sarto
Bruce Hetherington
Clint Schofield
John Cunningham
Jerry Blumenthal
Graham L. Downey
Larry Uteck
Howard Epstein
Bill Stone
Ron Hanson
Barry Barnet
Bob Harvey
Peter Kelly
Jack Mitchell

ABSENT:

Councillors: Russell Walker
Stephen Adams

STAFF MEMBERS:

Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer
Ms. Patti Halliday, Assistant Municipal Clerk

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Mayor Fitzgerald called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

1. SOLID WASTE

Mayor Fitzgerald suggested Council approve the Solid Waste budget as the funding has already been allocated or spent. Councillor McInroy expressed concern with “carte blanche” approvals, and questioned if there was any room at all to cut back in this area. Mr. Meech replied the agreement is for a fixed price and the monies, for the most part, have already been spent.

Mayor Fitzgerald clarified comments recently made by the media regarding the cost of sending the compost to Cumberland if the new facility is not ready. The price of \$1 million per month is to send all the solid waste to Cumberland. Therefore, the cost to only send the compost would be much less. Councillor Blumenthal suggested the Dartmouth facility should be used until the new facility is ready.

In response to a question from Councillor Sarto regarding methane gas, Mr. Brian Smith, Director, Business Operations, Regional Operations, stated methane gas is being collected at the existing landfill and is currently used for some heating purposes. The new landfill will not be a methane gas producer as it will not contain organics material.

In fairness to the media, Councillor Greenough clarified the \$1 million was accurate in terms of the question that was posed to him by the press which was “If HRM had to extend the contract to Cumberland, as the Municipality was not ready to collect the solid waste in the manner it proposed, what would be the cost?” The answer given by staff was that it would be \$900,000 to \$1,000,000 per month.

(Councillors Hendsbee, Stone and Uteck took their places at the meeting at 10:15 a.m.)

Mr. George McLellan, Commissioner of Regional Operations, addressed the issue making the following points:

- C The two composting facilities should open at about the same time.
- C If HRM decides to extend the contract to Cumberland, it will be because there is a question of a pool of mixed waste that cannot be dealt with because of the capacity anticipated when the specifications were developed for the FEP. There is some latitude in the capacity of the FEP, but not a lot, because it is very expensive to overbuild it.
- C If the education and communication to the public is poor, and there is a lot of mixed waste delivered to the composting facilities, there will be more mixed waste than can be handled.
- C If the Cumberland contract has to be extended, it will be to handle some mixed waste that the composting and other recycling efforts are not sufficiently mature to handle yet, and that will be well under \$1 million.
- C The price quote of \$1 million is based on the new facility not being used at all.

- C Currently, HRM is paying Cumberland based on assumptions of tonnage, whether it is sent or not.
- C If the new facility is open, the cost being paid for Cumberland, if any, should be 20 percent of the current cost, if the deal can be negotiated.

MOVED by Councillors Hetherington and Mitchell that it be recommended to Council that the 1998/99 proposed Capital Budget for Solid Waste be approved.

In response to a question from Councillor Snow regarding recyclables collection, Mr. Smith stated collection will be discussed during the Operating Budget deliberations, but his recollection is that the urban volumes require weekly recycling collection to keep up with the capacity. Councillor Snow suggested collection should be bi-weekly in both rural and urban areas. Mr. Smith noted in the next several weeks, staff will be reviewing the collection contracts and the new areas with Council, and there will be changes.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

2. REGIONAL LIBRARY

Ms. Judith Hare, Executive Director, Halifax Regional Library, made a presentation to Council, noting there is only one Capital Budget Item for the Library, which is the proposed Central Library project. Copies of Ms. Hare's presentation were circulated to Council. Ms. Hare introduced the remaining members of the Senior Management Team who were as follows: Mr. Al LeBlanc, Finance Director; Mr. John Kitz, Chairman of the Board; Ms. Debbie Nicholson, Systems and Technical Services Director, Ms. Paula Saulnier, Planning and Development Director, and, Ms. Susan McLean, Public Services Director.

Councillor Barnet stated he was not in favour of this project as he believes it is over-scope and scale for a municipality the size of HRM. In response to questions from the Councillor, Ms. Hare made the following points:

- C The current library system is the best in Atlantic Canada, but not when compared to similar sized municipalities in Canada, in such areas as collection size, resources, staff, etc.
- C The closing of the Glendale facility hinges on the vacating of the administration floor of Alderney Gate where the Technical Services Department can be relocated.
- C The \$34 per capita is a 1996 operating cost.

Councillor Barnet asked what the per capital cost would be if it included the approximate \$700,000 additional operating costs. Mr. Kitz replied it would be an additional \$2.10 per capita. Councillor Barnet noted this would increase the per capita cost to above the national average. Ms. Hare replied it would depend on whether or not the average cost rises. Councillor Barnet asked if the national figures could be provided to which Ms. Hare replied they could.

In response to a question from Councillor Barnet, Mr. LeBlanc stated the \$4.00 per square foot is a rate the consultants derived from their expectations.

Responding to a question from Councillor Blumenthal regarding the usage of the Spring Garden Road Branch, Ms. Hare stated the total circulation for Spring Garden Road is 722,967 which is 14.08 items per capita from the catchment area. Councillor Blumenthal asked what would be the impact on the taxes for residents this year if this project proceeds. Mr. Meech responded this figure is not currently available, but the request can be taken under advisement and provided at a later time.

In addressing the issue, Deputy Mayor Rankin made the following comments:

- C When Council approved the \$.5 million last year toward this project, it was aware of the scale of the Central Library and level of commitment required.
- C The proposed project is an HRM issue and district inequities need to be put aside.
- C The alternative to the Central Library is repair costs to the Spring Garden Road Library in the amount of \$9 million. For an additional \$3 million, a new 60,000 square foot building can be achieved.
- C This project provides leverage for an additional \$12 million that would not otherwise be available.

Responding to concerns expressed by Councillor McInroy regarding advances in technology and data exchange, Ms. Hare stated more and more information is available electronically. However, in terms of space, the computer workstations take up a lot of floor room, which needs to be accommodated. There is, and always will be, a strong need for the book. Thus, in a public library setting, both traditional and electronic service needs to be provided.

Councillor McInroy questioned the projected number of visitors to the library and whether or not it is realistic due to the electronic and technological advances. Ms. Hare replied a lot of people do not have home computers and will need to visit the library for access to the materials.

Councillor McInroy asked if there is any way to reduce duplication between school and public libraries and to explore possible partnering. Ms. Hare replied one problem with this is hours of operation as the school libraries are not open in the evenings.

Councillor Hendsbee stated he believed HRM should make some sort of commitment for a new library in the future, but where and when is another question. In addressing the presentation, Councillor Hendsbee made the following comments:

- C HRM should make a contribution of no more than \$5 million, \$1 million per year for the next five years towards a central library.
- C The Library should conduct an aggressive capital campaign.
- C The location at the corner of South and Robie ideal.

- C Partnerships with the universities, hospitals and the Public Archives, need to be explored.
- C A survey of Spring Garden Road businesses should be conducted to show how library patrons are utilizing their services.
- C Information should be provided on any discussions with Dalhousie regarding the land across the street from the Spring Garden Road Library.
- C The possibility of using Alderney Gate as the Central Library and providing another branch elsewhere should be evaluated.
- C The Councillor asked if the Library is prepared to place a surcharge on book rentals to put towards the building reserve.

Councillor Kelly asked if the Spring Garden Road Library was renovated and renamed, would it meet the terms of the trust fund. Mr. Kitz replied he did know, but it would not be within the spirit of the bequest which is for a new named building. Councillor Kelly asked that it be clarified whether or not this would be possible and that this information be brought back to Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Kelly regarding the literacy training programs, Ms. Hare made the following comments:

- C The current literacy programs are fairly minimal.
- C The Library wants to get a strong literacy program going and supported through collections and computer equipment that it does not currently have.
- C The Library is considering the idea of having one branch as the primary location for literacy; however, this is in the early stages of exploration.

Councillor Kelly suggested a small branch location may be less intimidating for users of this service.

If the \$3 million is not received from provincial funding, Councillor Kelly asked from where would the Library obtain this money. Ms. Hare replied the Library would raise its fund raising target to meet this amount.

With respect to other HRM buildings, Councillor Kelly asked if any have been reviewed that could be used to house services that may be taken out of the Central Library. Ms. Hare replied they looked at some buildings; however, having people located in the same location as the staff and programs for which they are responsible is more efficient.

Councillor Kelly suggested asking, and waiting for, a response from the universities regarding possible partnering opportunities.

Councillor Schofield addressed the issue making the following comments:

- C He is not certain that a Central Library is essential this year as he believes the timing is wrong and there are other alternatives to be examined.

- C The percentage of residents living outside the Peninsula area using the Spring Garden Road Branch may indicate an additional branch in one of the outlying areas may be a better solution than enlarging the Spring Garden Road branch.
- C He inquired if there have been discussions held between the universities and the Library regarding combining some services to save money.

In response to the Councillor's comments, Ms. Hare made the following remarks:

- C A lot of people living outside the Peninsula area will continue to use the Spring Garden Road Branch as they work and conduct personal business in the area.
- C There is a difference between university and public library collections. The university collections are more specialized and research oriented. However, talks have been taking place with the universities to determine their plans and if there is anything that can be coordinated with the Library.

Addressing the issue, Councillor Cunningham made the following comments:

- C The Library Board unanimously endorses this proposal.
- C If a capital project is worthwhile, the money should be spent to accomplish it.
- C A library is the basic cultural facility in any community and would be an investment in all of HRM.
- C The cost of not approving this project is about \$10 million.

Councillor Greenough made the following comments regarding the proposed Central Library:

- C He expressed concern with the increase in the Operating Budget this project will create which may negatively impact some branches.
- C The previous approval in principle given by Council of this project was subject to many things such as the amount of funding committed by the Province. Given the population of HRM is forty percent of the total population of the Province, it is reasonable to expect a larger contribution from the Province.
- C Based on the \$4.7 million bequest, the Councillor is prepared to extend the approval in principle to determine the position of provincial funding and to allow further discussion of the site.

Councillor Uteck made the following comments on the matter:

- C Learning is a shared experience, and libraries are not going to go away.
- C A strong central area will benefit all of the HRM.
- C HRM needs to make a commitment to this project before other funding partners will the same.
- C The universities will be using the municipal libraries more often as opposed to residents using their facilities.

Councillor Mitchell spoke in support of the project and Councillor Uteck's comments.

In addressing the matter, Councillor Downey made the following comments:

- C He supports the project, but has difficulty with the location and would prefer the Queen and Spring Garden Road location as it is a focus point.
- C If HRM gives a strong commitment to the project, the Province will most likely provide the funding.

Councillor Stone made the following comments supporting the proposed project:

- C This has been an on-going project with the former City of Halifax and is a necessary replacement for the Spring Garden Road Library.
- C The Central Library will have more modern and technologically advanced facilities and materials that can be used by all residents of HRM.
- C Unless HRM makes a commitment to this region-wide project, no one else will.
- C If the project does not proceed now, it will be lost.

Councillor Cooper suggested maybe the universities should provide some funding for this project if they will be using its resources. In response to questions from Councillor Cooper, Ms. Hare and Ms. McLean made the following comments:

- C The collection cost of \$1.2 million is predominantly for the reference collection. A good percentage of this would be allocated to electronic information.
- C Maximizing the use of electronic resources is one area currently being examined as it increases access to the resources.
- C If the Queen and Clyde site was chosen, twenty parking spaces are being proposed for removal. From a merchant's perspective, in the long term, they would like to see a second tier added to the other parking lot in that area. If the properties owned by Dalhousie and TUNS are not developed, there is opportunity for additional parking on some of those sites.
- C The materials can be accessed through all branches, but there needs to be a central storage place. Branch collections are tailored to the immediate community using that branch.

Councillor Snow spoke on the issue making the following comments:

- C The question that needs to be asked is whether or not the residents can afford this project. The Councillor stated he did not believe they can.

(Deputy Mayor Rankin assumed the Chair at 12:25 p.m.)

Councillor Harvey spoke in favour of the proposal with the following comments:

- C A Central Library will strengthen the branch libraries.
- C The consequences of not going forward with this project are worse than those of going ahead with it.
- C The life span of the asset is much greater than the time to pay off the capital outlay.

At this point in the meeting, Deputy Mayor Rankin acknowledged the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Bruce Holland, Minister of Science and Technology, MLA, Timberlea-Prospect.

Councillor Epstein spoke in support of the project, but expressed the following concerns, noting the concerns will not lead to his hesitation to vote in favour of the project:

- C With respect to interaction and coordination with university libraries, the only area there may be overlap is with adult non-fiction materials. It is important for the Library to demonstrate coordination with the universities and information should be provided on this issue at the Operating Budget discussions, if not at this time.
- C In addition to the Central Library, Councillor Epstein supports the need for new branches in future years in outlying and suburban areas where there is large population growth. Additional materials will also be required.
- C It is important that the Central Library be located on Spring Garden Road.

(Mayor Fitzgerald resumed the Chair at 12:35 p.m.)

In response to questions from Councillor Epstein regarding the site, Mr. Meech stated access can be obtained to the Dalhousie owned property, but the issue becomes at what price.

In response to a question from Councillor Sarto regarding the bequest, Mr. Kitz stated correspondence between the Library Board and the trustees of the estate, and a copy of the will, can be provided to Council.

Responding to a question from Councillor Hetherington, Ms. Hare stated an amount has been included the Operating Budget increase for salary increases due to contract negotiations, but it cannot be guaranteed that it will be enough.

Councillor Hetherington stated he would like to see negotiations between the universities and other levels of government with respect to this project.

Responding to questions from Councillor Barnet, Ms. Hare gave the following responses:

- C The \$4 per square foot figure was calculated by the consultants who have a great deal of expertise in this field. Mr. Kitz added the Board gave serious consideration to this figure.
- C The proposal assumes nothing is being cut or taken from the branches for the new building. The level of support for the library system will not be reduced.

Councillor Barnet suggested it may be helpful to check with other municipalities with Central Libraries, such as Vancouver, with respect to operating costs. Ms. Hare replied

that other municipalities with Central Libraries have been contacted regarding costs and usage. There is data available on this which Councillor Barnet requested be provided to Council.

Councillor Blumenthal stated he will be seeking direction from the residents he represents to determine how they want to proceed with this project.

In response to additional questions from Councillor Cooper, Ms. Hare and Ms. McLean made the following comments:

- C Each branch's budget is based on its needs.
- C There are branches that are not growing and, in fact, are losing ground. Funding may be taken from these branches to smooth out differences in other branches.
- C The outlying branches have experienced an increase in use as a result of a strong infrastructure. A Central Library will increase this infrastructure.
- C The Library is in the process of building service models and looking at a plan for the entire region, and is currently in the process of defining the kind of services and roles required for each branch.

Responding to further questions from Councillor Barnet, the following information was provided:

- C Currently there are 37,935 users of the Spring Garden Road branch.
- C The Central Library would require a 6.7 percent increase to the Library budget.
- C The ratio of branches to population in HRM is very comparable to other similar sized municipalities.

Councillor Barnet asked if there has been any analysis conducted of the usage of libraries compared to softer public services such as recreation, and, if so, could this information be provided. Ms. Hare replied this has been done many times across Canada and this information can be provided to Council.

Responding to a question from Councillor Barnet regarding the Spring Garden Road branch building if it becomes surplus, Mr. Meech replied his first reaction would be to sell the building. He noted the property consists of two lots, one has some restrictions as it was dedicated as a park.

With respect to the total impact of this project on the residential tax bill, Mr. Meech stated it would be around an approximate 1 to 1.25 cent increase.

Councillor Cooper noted the majority of residents will have reduced access to materials if there is not sufficient space or equipment for the branches. Ms. Hare stated every branch has computer access and upgrades to computer equipment are provided each year. However, additional equipment depends on space available at the branches. Dial-up access is also available for those with home computers.

Councillor Barnet asked if history shows visitors to the libraries decrease over time after they open. Ms. Hare stated experience shows the number actually increases, and it is very rare that it would decrease. Councillor Barnet agreed to forward his remaining questions in writing to the Library representatives.

Councillor Sarto relayed some questions conveyed to him by a resident to which Ms. Hare gave the following responses:

- C The Central Library will not change the branches' resources. Each branch will continue to have an annual budget to purchase materials.
- C Reference materials are not being moved from one branch to another or to the Central Library.
- C The coordination and collection of the literacy program may be stored at the Central Library and brought out when needed, but the program will continue to be offered at many of the branches.

This concluded the discussion of the Library Capital Budget.

MOVED by Councillors Blumenthal and Hetherington that the meeting adjourn at 1:25 p.m. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Patti Halliday
Assistant Municipal Clerk