

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE COUNCIL August 8, 2006

PRESENT:

Mayor Peter Kelly
Deputy Mayor Russell Walker
Councillors: Steve Stretch
Krista Snow
David Hendsbee
Gloria McCluskey
Bill Karsten
Becky Kent
Jim Smith
Mary Wile
Patrick Murphy
Dawn Sloane
Sue Uteck
Sheila Fougere
Debbie Hum
Linda Mosher
Brad Johns
Gary Meade

REGRETS:

Andrew Younger
Robert P. Harvey
Harry McInroy
Stephen Adams
Reg Rankin

STAFF:

Mr. Wayne Anstey, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Ms. Mary Ellen Donovan, Municipal Solicitor
Ms. Jan Gibson, Municipal Clerk
Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 1:19 pm.

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

MOVED by Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Fougere that the minutes of the June 27, 2006 meeting of Committee of the Whole Council, as distributed, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. COMPLEMENTARY/ALTERNATIVE VOTING METHODS FOR 2008 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

- A staff report dated June 8, 2006 was before Council.
- A copy of the PowerPoint presentation was before Council.
- A revised copy of the PowerPoint presentation was before Council.

Ms. Cathy Mellett, Acting Division Manager, Business Planning and Information Management, presented the report assisted by Ms. Geri Kaiser, Deputy CAO, Corporate Services & Strategy, Mr. Bernie White, Municipal Clerk for the Cape Breton Regional Municipality and Ms. Linda Grant, Administrative Clerk Assistant.

Ms. Mellett indicated that due to the large and diverse geographic area in HRM and the increasingly complex ballots, complementary voting alternatives were reviewed by a staff Evaluation Committee. The Committee, comprised of representatives from the Municipal Clerk's Office, Information Services, Legal Services, Business Systems & Controls and Financial Services with Mr. Bernie White, Municipal Clerk for the Cape Breton Regional Municipality serving in an advisory capacity, considered submissions received through an EOI (expression of interest) in regard to the options, risks and opportunities surrounding complementary/alternative voting methods.

Councillor Streach arrived at 1:22 pm.

Ms. Mellett advised that salaries comprise 48% of election costs. The complementary/alternative voting options would be cost effective (reduce the number of polling locations and polling staff), increase access to voters, increase voter participation rates and improve the speed of tabulating and reporting the results (through use of a ballot scanner). She explained that there are three options for Council to consider: 1. Maintain the status quo in regard to Municipal Elections, 2. Adopt a Complementary Voting Option, 3. Adopt an Alternative Voting Option.

Mr. Bernie White, Municipal Clerk for the Cape Breton Regional Municipality advised that Option 1, Maintaining the Status Quo in regard to Municipal Elections, is not a desirable option due to:

- the increasingly complex process and ballots (too many issues at one time - Mayor, Councillor, School board, CSAP, the provincial plebiscite and/or a Special Election).
- the potential for error due to the complexity of the process/ballots
- length of time to report election results - results are tabulated at the end of a long day by exhausted election workers.
- challenges in recruiting polling staff
- frustration of voters due to the wait time to cast their ballots at the polling stations
- increasing costs
- tremendous logistical problems - returning all ballot boxes to be secured in a central location the night of the election.
- more public information required prior to the election regarding the subjects to be presented on the ballots in order to reduce confusion/wait time at the polling stations.
- Concerns noted above and others were raised during an election debriefing to the UNSM (Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities).

Ms. Mellet presented Options 2 and 3 as follows:

Option 2: Complementary Voting Options, to be used solely or in combination with traditional "in person" election day voting at local polling stations, include mail-in advanced voting, telephone advanced voting and/or internet advanced voting.

Option 3: Alternative Voting Options would replace the traditional polling station locations with options such as mail-in ballots and/or "real time" telephone/internet voting (the voter would be issued a PIN number and could vote from their own computer or phone).

- There would no longer be advanced polls or proxy votes.
- Eligible voters would receive a package in the mail for mail-in ballots. She referred to St. John's, NFLD as a model for the mail -in ballot option indicating that it was very successful with positive response from voters (90% of ballots were returned by mail).
- The cost per eligible voter for mail-in ballots would be \$2-3.
- Waterloo and Peterborough, Ontario will be utilizing the telephone/internet option in their fall 2006 Municipal Elections. Currently, there is no jurisdiction in Canada that uses solely e-voting or telephone voting.
- The cost for internet/telephone ballots is estimated at approximately \$3 per eligible voter.

Councillors Kent and Murphy arrived at 1:24 pm.

Ms. Mellet presented staff's recommendation, as per the revised PowerPoint handout, that Council adopt a mail-in only voting method following the St. John's, NFLD model for the 2008 Municipal Elections.

MOVED by Councillor Streach, seconded by Councillor Mosher that Council maintain the current municipal election system while incorporating the complementary internet/phone options.

Councillor Streach commented that he does not want a system that would adversely affect the public. Consideration of an alternative/complementary option is to provide more access to the public not to make our jobs easier or more convenient. He stated that he is not prepared for a mail-in only option and would prefer to maintain the current system while slowly incorporating voting options. Councillor Streach explained, in regard to election costs, that salaries may be considered local economic development, however, he has concerns with paying rent to a facility that may have already received subsidies.

Numerous Councillors agreed that the status quo be maintained while slowly incorporating alternative/complementary options. They also expressed concern with a mail-in only option citing past incidents where election information and Councillors' newsletters had been sent by postal code which overlap municipal districts resulting in confusion to resident's as to which district they resided in and uncertainty as to their representative. Concern was also expressed with the transient population in regard to mail-in ballots and the electoral list. In response to the concerns raised by Council, Ms. Mellet responded that the mail-out would be by electoral list. Ensuring a clean/up-to-date list would comprise part of the work leading up to the election.

Councillor Hendsbee suggested that the electoral process be an evolution and that eventually there be: one Election's Office with trained personnel, one data base for all four elections (Federal, Provincial, Municipal and School Board), similar community boundary lines and use of the same venues. The timing of election day should be a twelve-hour day from 8:00 am - 8:00 pm. He further cautioned moving too quickly to the internet/phone-in options adding that there are concerns with accuracy/security that should first be addressed. Many of the concerns regarding distribution by mail have already been addressed by Canada Post.

Councillor Hendsbee suggested that the motion be amended to remove the complementary internet/phone option and to add the complementary mail-in option. With the agreement of the mover the motion now read as follows: **MOVED BY Councillor Streach, seconded by Councillor Mosher that Council maintain the current municipal election system while incorporating the complementary mail-in option.**

Councillor Mosher commented that her intent was to second a motion to introduce internet/phone and mail-in options not mail-in only. She further commented that the recommendation in the staff report, circulated in the Council packages, has been ignored. She expressed concern that the survey in regard to mail-in ballots, referred to on page 4 of the staff report, was not attached to the report. Councillor Mosher added that Council should not be voting on anything until the data substantiating staff's recommendation has been provided and reviewed by Council.

Without a vote being taken on the motion on the floor, it was **MOVED BY Councillor Mosher, seconded by Councillor McCluskey that the matter in regard to Complementary / Alternative Voting Methods for the 2008 Municipal Elections be deferred to a half-day Council workshop in September 2006.**

Councillor Meade suggested that the Council workshop be held in October 2006 since the model for the internet/phone-in options will be based on the Ontario Municipal Elections scheduled for October.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. APPROACH TO TAX REFORM

- A staff report dated August 3, 2006 was before Council.
- A copy of the PowerPoint presentation was before Council.

MOVED BY Councillor Mosher, seconded by Councillor Sloane that the Approach to Tax Reform matter be tabled to a September Regional Council session to allow for Eastlink broadcasting of the staff presentation and Council debate and; that staff be directed not to proceed further until after the September debate.

Councillor Hendsbee suggested that the audio recording of the Council debate be linked to the web for public access.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 2:32 p.m.

Jan Gibson
Municipal Clerk

