

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

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HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
MINUTES

December 8, 2009

PRESENT:

Mayor Peter Kelly  
Deputy Mayor Brad Johns  
Councillors: Barry Dalrymple  
David Hendsbee  
Lorelei Nicoll  
Gloria McCluskey  
Darren Fisher  
Bill Karsten  
Jim Smith  
Mary Wile  
Jerry Blumenthal  
Dawn Sloane  
Sue Uteck  
Jennifer Watts  
Russell Walker  
Debbie Hum  
Linda Mosher  
Stephen Adams  
Robert Harvey  
Tim Outhit  
Peter Lund  
Reg Rankin

REGRETS:

Councillors: Steve Streach  
Jackie Barkhouse

STAFF:

Mr. Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer  
Ms. Mary Ellen Donovan, Municipal Solicitor  
Ms. Cathy Mellet, Acting Municipal Clerk  
Ms. Christen MacDonald, Acting Municipal Clerk  
Ms. Barbara Coleman, Legislative Assistant  
Ms. Sheilagh Edmonds, Legislative Assistant

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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 9.38 a.m.

**2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES - November 10, & 17, 2009**

**Minutes of November 10, 2009**

**MOVED By Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Blumenthal, that the minutes of November 10, 2009 be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED**

**Minutes of November 17, 2009**

Correction: Councillor Hendsbee advised that on page 12 of the November 17, 2009 the minutes do not truly reflect his comments. It should read: "Councillor Hendsbee . . .and why they are only . . . importance of Council to have an appeal process to deal with some cases before they go through a costly judicial court process." He further noted that he had added that liens could be levied and licences could be suspended or revoked.

**MOVED By Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Blumenthal, that the minutes of November 17, 2009, as amended, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED**

Councillors Nicholl, Karsten, Smith, Hum, Mosher entered the meeting at 9:45 a.m.

**3. HUMAN RESOURCES FRAMEWORK**

- A presentation entitled Human Resources Framework was before Council.

Mr. Dan English, CAO, HRM, advised Council that today's presentation is to provide Council with some overall strategic context. Staff will be presenting an update on the Council Focus areas that were chosen by Council last year over the next few Council sessions. He noted today's Council's Focus area will be Governance and Communications. He indicated that staff will not will not be seeking decisions today only feedback.

Ms. Cathi Mullally, Director, Human Resources provided the presentation to Council noting that people are the greatest resource of HRM. She reviewed the challenges that HRM is facing saying that other employers in other sectors are facing the same challenges. She reviewed what Human Resources is doing to recruit and retain its employees.

Councillor Sloane entered the meeting at 10:30 a.m.

Ms. Mullally clarified that although in five years 59% of senior staff are eligible to retire, this does not mean that 59% of senior staff will retire. She advised that HRM needs to look at what services they intend to offer and what they need to deliver those services. Ms. Mullally provided information on initiatives within HR to recruit, promote and retain employees. Succession planning is critical to the organization. Further, developing the talent and promoting from within is one way to optimize HRM's investment in its people resource.

The question was asked as to what steps are taken when an employee is leaving HRM. In answer to a question, Ms. Mullally indicated that a retention team would meet with an individual. Her department is continually researching to see what other municipalities and corporations are doing to recruit and retain their employees in an effort to match or better what other employers are doing. She advised that although her department tries to do everything possible to retain an employee, this is not always possible due to budgetary restraints, or due to the employee's goals in life.

Councillor Adams circulated a handout regarding a proposed committee composition. This committee would provide the forum for frank, open and honest discussions without the fear of reprisal about what employees like about their jobs, what could make it better, and how to make HRM a better place to work.

**MOVED By Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Blumenthal that Regional Council request a staff report on the implications of forming a Committee of Council to provide input from grass roots front line employees to determine how to make the employee's job better and for HRM to be a better place to work.**

Councillor Adams clarified that this would be a committee reporting to Council. Ms. Mullally advised that each business unit has a senior consultant who seeks out this type of feedback routinely.

Mr. English advised that should Council request this report, that staff would address the issue of whether Council has the authority to do what is being asked of them.

#### **MOTION PUT AND PASSED**

Discussion ensued with the following highlights outlined:

- HRM is looking at a number of avenues to increase the diversity within HRM's organization
- HRM is creating an environment where HRM embraces the talents that individuals bring to the table
- HRM is looking at a number of partnerships to determine how best HRM can hire from diverse groups so it can be a win-win situation.

- HRM is partnering with African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal Community Partnership Program
- because of the labour competition, the new staff may be demanding more money than the senior people that are leaving
- online exit interviews are being developed so that an actual interview does not need to take place
- HR is trying to create an environment that encourages the employee to be empowered and engaged in decision making
- 82% of HRM work force is unionized so their pay levels are negotiated through collective agreements
- terms of employment such as flexibility is also worked out in the collective agreement
- within the non union environment, HRM is aiming to pay their employees P50 which means that 50% of the municipalities would be paying more than HRM but that 50% would be paying less.
- the Director of Finance and the Director of HR have been meeting bi-weekly to seek ways to address the cost of salaries and service delivery
- the levels of absenteeism have decreased
- an attendance support coordinator and a health team have been put in place to ensure that employees are at work and are well
- HRM shows no discrimination in regard to age
- consultants are used where HRM does not have the specific expertise that is needed
- consultants can reduce costs where a very focussed piece of support information is needed
- there are some areas in which HRM struggles to find fully qualified staff, one area being financial consultant.
- HR is aware of these positions and is working with business units around recruitment.
- HRM is promoting itself to the universities offering as many intern positions as fiscally possible

Mayor Kelly left the room at 10:30 a.m. and Deputy Mayor Johns assumed the Chair.

Discussion further ensued with the following highlights outlined:

- respect in the work place is an environment that HRM wants to promote
- Council has endorsed a Code of Conduct which emphasizes respect for one another.
- a Values and Ethics handbook has been developed for staff

Mayor Kelly rejoined the meeting and assumed the Chair at 10:56 a.m. Deputy Mayor Johns took his seat in Council

Discussion ensued.

- HRM needs to maximize its training dollars and an annual review is undertaken.
- HRM offers training to its employees in various ways
- When HRM invests significant dollars to train an employee, that employee is asked to sign a contract that should they leave HRM they would need to repay a portion of their training costs
- Work locations are determined by business needs and what HRM must do to meet those needs; however, HRM tries to be as flexible as it can.
- HRM needs to communicate its HR plan to employees

In response to a question from Councillor Lund, Mr. Philip Townsend, Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management, advised that currently HRM has no LEED Certified Professionals in the organization. LEED Certification is a professional standard for Energy and Environmental Design. Normally HRM is not involved in the construction design drawings of a development, therefore, the LEED Certified Professional would be part of a design team that HRM hires.

#### **4. 2010/11 FINANCIAL FORECAST**

- A presentation entitled Economic Overview by Mr. Fred Morely, Executive VP and Chief Economist, Greater Halifax Partnership was before Council.
- A presentation entitled HRM 2010/11 Forecast - Planning for Change, Seizing Opportunities, Safe Guarding our Future.

Mr. Fred Morley, Greater Halifax Partnership, advised that Canada has not been impacted by the recession to the level that has been experienced in the USA. HRM and the rest of Nova Scotia has seen even less of an impact than the rest of Canada.

He indicated HRM has a balanced economy, one of the best across the country which helps to protect it against recession. This is being noticed by the rest of the country and around the world. HRM is supporting the rest of the Province and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Economists predict that there are still risks. HRM will see dips in the recession. Provincial and Federal budgets will present risks in their need to deal with their deficits. Cuts to their respective budgets and tax increases will indirectly affect the budgets of HRM. Other risks factors will be the price of oil and how well the US economy is faring.

HRM needs to be mindful of such things as the new Nova Scotia Wetlands regulations and the economic impact that may bring. Developers have indicated that these regulations will

have an impact on the pace and type of development they will be able to undertake. Land sales for business parks could be impacted.

In closing, Mr. Morely noted that HRM's Standard & Poor's rating has increased. He advised that HRM needs to continue to show good fiscal management.

Ms. Cathy O'Toole, Director, Finance, provided the presentation to Council. She reviewed with Council the assumptions that staff are working with. She further reviewed the different types of budgets with its cost drivers. She noted that new to this year's budget is the implementation of PSAB 3150 which is a new standard for asset management. It will shift \$10 -12 million from the Capital Budget to the Operating Budget. This is a presentation change only and will not result in an increase to taxes.

She advised Council on the Reserve budgets maintaining that the Snow and Ice budget for 2010 and 2011 should be fine providing there is no need to withdraw from the reserve in 2009. Solid Waste Reserve and the Strategic Growth Reserve will need to be replenished. Other reserves are holding stable.

With regards to taxation, she indicated that last year an interim solution was put in place for transit. She advised that staff will be looking at the continuation of this interim solution for transit. She noted that the Tax reform debate will be coming back to the Committee of the Whole in January. Regardless of which direction Council decides on respect to taxation, the issues of sidewalks will need to be addressed prior to budget approval for 2010/11.

In conclusion, Ms. O'Toole advised that HRM needs to be PSAB 3150 compliant and maintain a steady course though the economic downturn. HRM needs to maximize the use of infrastructure funding, modify the debt strategy, and consider the budget as a tool to support Economic Strategy and Immigration Strategy. Further HRM needs to safeguard its future by continuing to focus on Asset Management, Regional Plan priorities, and Multi-Year Financial Strategy/Fiscal Health.

Ms. O'Toole concluded her presentation saying that she is not predicting a deficit for 2009/2010.

The meeting recessed at 11:57 a.m.

Council reconvened at 1:05 p.m.

## **5. CORPORATE PLANNING FRAMEWORK**

Mr. Brad Anguish, Director, Business Planning and Information Management addressed Council advising that, as per the normal process each year with the Business Plan and

Budget, the first step is for staff to address Council to ensure that they fully understand Council's priorities and focus areas, and that progress on the Plans are being made as expected, and are also meeting community expectations.

Mr. Anguish then turned the presentation over to Mr. Ed Thornhill, Manager of Service Transformation who provided an overview of the Corporate Planning Framework previously adopted by Council, and of the proposed budget timelines for the coming year.

The proposed timeframe for the upcoming budget process was noted as follows:

- February 16, 2010 - Fiscal Framework (subject to delivery of the Assessment Roll to HRM)
- April 6, 2010 - Tabling of the Budget and Business Plans
- April 20, 2010 - Budget Debate
- April 27, 2010 - Budget Approval

**6. COUNCIL FOCUS AREAS UPDATE:**

• **Governance & Communications**

Ms. Jennifer Church, Managing Director, External and Corporate Affairs, and Ms. Cathy Mellett, Acting Municipal Clerk provided a review of the Communications and Governance Focus Areas, respectively, and of the progress that has been made to date in these areas.

A discussion ensued and Ms. Church, Ms. Mellett, and Mr. Anguish responded to questions. The following comments were noted:

- Publishing information like the street clearing priority list for snow removal is very helpful – have received positive feedback from residents.
- Recent polling results from the Bedford Sackville area in regard to communications around the sewage treatment plant issue indicate that there should have been earlier and better communication.
- Work needs to be done on the messaging around the Tax Reform issue as a lot of incorrect information has been presented in the media.
- The Municipality should consider entering into the concept of 'open data' and making HRM's data accessible to residents.
- The Councillor's newsletter is no longer sufficient as a means for Councillors to get information out to their residents; Councillors need additional methods to communicate and get feedback from their residents.
- Concern was expressed that there are times that Councillors find themselves in conflict with the corporate message that goes out on an issue; it was suggested that it would be helpful if an advisory person could be made available to assist the Councillors in these situations.
- It was suggested that training be provided to members of Council on social

media.

- The Municipality needs to develop a long term strategy for the promotion of HRM, with a strong emphasis on the positive aspects.
- There needs to be recognition that not everyone owns a computer or wants to access information online; however, most have television, and perhaps it is time for the Municipality to have its own TV channel.
- It was noted that in Europe, some municipalities put out their own magazine.
- A suggestion was put forward that the Municipality could buy a page in the Chronicle Herald to be used to communicate its message directly.
- It would be helpful for Councillors to have communications assistance in preparing their newsletters and in developing their webpage to be more informative and engaging for the residents of their own particular districts.

## 7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 2:31 p.m.

Cathy Mellett  
Acting Municipal Clerk