

# HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

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## HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

April 13, 2010

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

REGRETS: Councillor: Debbie Hum

STAFF: Mr. Wayne Anstey, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer  
Mr. Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer  
Ms. Mary Ellen Donovan, Municipal Solicitor  
Ms. Sherrill Murphy, Acting Municipal Clerk  
Ms. Melody Campbell, Legislative Assistant  
Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant

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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Kelly called the meeting to order at 10:09 a.m.

**2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES - March 23 & 30, 2010**

**MOVED BY Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Fisher that the minutes of March 23 & 30, 2010, as presented, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**3. UPDATE 2010/2011 BUDGET - HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- A presentation, HRM's Most Valuable Asset - Our People was before Council.
- A presentation, Making Tough Decisions, Finding Efficiencies, was before Council.

The Workforce Adjustment Toolkit was distributed to Council.

Mr. Dan English, Chief Executive Officer, introduced the presentation to Council. Mr. English stated that HRM has a dedicated, professional staff throughout the Region. He urged Council to refrain from comments related to staffing as the budget process continues, as these comments may impact the engagement of HRM's employees and the success of the organization. He noted that HRM has a collective goal to be the Employer of Choice and that HRM should keep a collective focus on that goal.

Councillor Watts entered the meeting at 10:14 a.m.

Councillor Barkhouse and Councillor Hendsbee entered the meeting at 10:15 a.m.

Ms. Catherine Mullally, Director, Human Resources, provided the presentation HRM's Most Valuable Asset - Our People to Council.

Councillor Mosher entered the meeting at 10:24 a.m.

Councillor Sloane entered the meeting at 10:25 a.m.

**4. UPDATE 2010/2011 BUDGET PROCESS**

Ms. Cathy O'Toole, Director of Finance, presented the presentation, "Making Tough Decisions, Finding Efficiencies", to Council.

The Committee of the Whole recessed at 11:01 a.m.

The Committee of the Whole reconvened at 1:40 pm.

Mayor Kelly provided clarification of the In Camera session held earlier in the day advising that all personnel issues, including discussions on HRM's workplace plan as it relates to the budgetary program and service review, will be dealt with In Camera.

Discussion ensued on the 2010/2011 budget process.

Staff provided the following information in response to comments/concerns raised by Members of Council:

- HRM employs 3500 persons and has 900 volunteer firefighters
- 82% of HRM employees are unionized
- 50% of HRM's operating budget (\$282,000,000) is based on salaries/wages and benefits
- the Collective Agreements include a workforce adjustment tool to assist the organization meet its service delivery requirements
- the proposed list of service reviews before Council would be part of the \$6.5 million revenue (parking meter/tipping fee increases) that would, if approved, reduce the \$19 million efficiencies under consideration
- Council would determine the time frame for when each of the proposed efficiencies would take effect; the time frames are outlined in the staff report
- increasing Capital Cost Contributions is being considered as part of the proposal for Council's consideration

Councillor Mosher entered the meeting at 1:50 p.m.

- a comprehensive list of all suggestions/proposal in regard to program and service review efficiencies will be provided to Members of Council
- it may not be possible for the municipality to impose a stall tax for big box stores when private property is involved
- the \$30.4 million budgetary gap facing Council is a result of the four following risk areas that had been highlighted to Council over the years: 1. Aging Infrastructure - the operating budget increased as the capital budget was increased; 2. Economy - growth has slowed some of the benefit derived through development; 3. Assessment Cap - 33% of the municipality is capped; 4. Rate of Inflation in municipal price index operating budget - items commonly purchased such as asphalt and steel are increasing more than the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- combining the Greater Halifax Partnership and Destination Halifax is being reviewed jointly with provincial government staff
- selling the parking garage is not a viable option at this time as it is a revenue generator

Councillor Uteck expressed concern with the impact on downtown businesses of fee service increases and tax hikes considering that the province will also be increasing the GST.

In response to a question by Councillor Fisher, Ms. O'Toole confirmed that his request for a list of surplus HRM buildings/lands is being compiled in an Information Report to be before Council within the next month.

Councillor Fisher noted that parking at big box stores is not free as the parking area is paid for through the property tax with the municipality mandating the minimum number of spaces per development as well as the requirement that the parking lots be

maintained including snow removal.

Councillor Mosher suggested that the HRM staff complement be maintained with consideration given to the following:

- option for early retirement
- split job descriptions for morning/evening work to reduce overtime costs
- review of the management structure including salaries
- review technology requirements to determine what is essential in regard to cellphones/blackberrys/computers (laptops with docking stations vs a laptop and desktop computer)
- review whether professional fees are paid when the designation is not required for the job
- review staffing costs in relation to the creation of new business units
- review the cost of promotional items purchased by HRM for give-aways
- consider a one year moratorium on training
- review funding of employee Christmas party
- review the need for distributing an annual calendar to residents.

Councillor Mosher explained that HRM had to be efficient and review its core business in order to best utilize its resources to serve the public.

Councillor Sloane noted that it was time for municipalities to start lobbying other levels of government for equilisation through the fuel tax or part of the HST.

Councillor Blumenthal suggested that HRM utilize its own employees rather than hiring consultants/contractors.

Ms. O'Toole noted that proposed snow clearing service changes and contract services are part of the list for Council's review. She explained that two regional Capital Cost Contributions (CCC) have already been implemented for Solid Waste and Waste Water with another under consideration for transit. Recreation services are under consideration for inclusion at a later date.

Councillor Karsten suggested that the list to be distributed to Council also be made available to the public.

## **5. SERVICE REVIEW**

### **(I) Visitor Information Centres**

- A report dated March 26, 2010 was before Council
- A letter dated April 13, 2010 from Ms. Darlene Grant Fiander, Tourism Industry of Nova Scotia (TIANS) President, was circulated at this time.

Ms. Catherine Sanderson, Senior Manager, Financial Services, assisted by Mr. Michael Ryan, Manager, Visitor and Customer Service, Business Planning and Information Management, presented the report.

**MOVED BY Councillor Rankin, seconded by Councillor Lund that Halifax Regional Council:**

- 1. Commence transition planning to close (or not open) the urban VIC's and the Sackville VIC in 2010;**
- 2. Establish an MOU or Service Level Agreement with Destination Halifax, including specific consideration of partnering with the Regional Tourism Industry Association to operate Rural VIC's;**
- 3. Undertake and complete a detailed review of Culture and Heritage aspects of the Rural VIC's linked to museums by December 2010, in consideration of future HRM support.**

Councillor Rankin commented that there was no avoiding the necessary reality of service reductions in an effort to make an appreciable dent in the \$14 million budget gap.

Councillor Sloane expressed concern with making a decision without all the information required to formulate an informed decision such as; the role of Destination Halifax and its future in regard to tourism and its relationship with the Greater Halifax Partnership. She also noted that the VIC located at the Halifax Port Authority Cruise Pavilion was crucial in regard to providing service to the annual visiting cruise ships.

Mr. Brad Anguish, Director, Business Planning and Information Services, advised that use of the VIC's has been declining and staff are proposing that Destination Halifax become involved in regard to visitor information services, however; Destination Halifax is not currently involved with the VIC service.

Councillor Streach commented that Council had to start making decisions on savings; the staff recommendation would save \$266,000. Considering the declining trend in the use of VIC's, and; considering that tourism was under the provincial mandate, it was time for the municipality to move away from duplication of services and let the province take care of its mandate.

In response to Councillor Uteck, Mr. Ryan explained that staff was not recommending closure of all VIC's at this time due to the heritage/cultural attachment to the rural area VIC's.

The meeting recessed at 3:18 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 3:37 p.m.

Councillor Lund advised that he was in support of the motion, however; his residents were requesting that the Cruise Pavilion VIC remain open during the transition phase. A transition phase was requested while consideration was given to transferring responsibility to Destination Halifax. He noted that Tantallon had been anticipating this action and has been discussing alternatives such as electronic kiosks. The Tantallon VIC is portable and will be taken to the Hubbards area for use as a gift shop. He

requested that Community Development be involved with the process of relocating the VIC service to a library or a cultural/heritage aspects of the communities.

Councillor Walker noted that HRM should be finding ways to promote itself and draw more tourism to the area. He expressed concern with closing the Cruise Pavilion VIC and relying on someone else to promote HRM.

Councillor Smith acknowledged support for the motion as most people research their trips online. He suggested partnering with service stations who could give out free information, such as maps, provided by HRM.

Councillor McCluskey acknowledged support of the motion and suggested that the \$400,000 line grant currently provided to Destination Halifax be eliminated for a further saving.

In response to a question by Councillor Streach regarding partnership opportunities for operation of VIC's, Mr. Ryan confirmed that the Bi-centennial Theatre VIC was operated by a Regional Tourism Industry Association (RITA) that received funding from various sources including provincial support and membership fees; HRM provides \$5,000 in funding.

Deputy Mayor Johns advised that he was in support of the motion as cuts were necessary and staff have recommended an appropriate proposal. He noted that he has requested a meeting with Destination Halifax and Mayor Kelly to be held on April 22<sup>nd</sup> as Destination Halifax has expressed interest in considering a variety of roles currently filled by HRM including one or two of the VIC's that may be sustainable.

Councillor Outhit expressed his support for the motion while cautioning that not everything could be done solely electronically. He suggested that locations such as the Scott Manor House in Bedford might provide tourism information for distribution to visitors. He requested that something creative be done with the Moirs Mill building in Bedford upon removal of the VIC to ensure a good use for the building.

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

##### **(ii) Burial Services**

- A report dated February 25, 2010 was before Council

Ms. Catherine Sanderson, Senior Manager, Financial Services, assisted by Mr. Brian Phelan, Superintendent, Parks and Open Spaces, presented the report.

Mr. Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer, resumed his chair at 4:01 p.m.

**MOVED BY Councillor Rankin, seconded by Councillor Karsten that Halifax Regional Council expand burial services - plot provision and interment through amendments to the Cemetery By-Law and/or Administrative Order and include**

**additional columbarium services as per the detailed recommendations in the staff report dated February 25, 2010.**

Councillor McCluskey expressed concern with being in competition with private industry. She advised that she was not in support of the motion nor with the building of columbariums.

Councillor Smith requested assurance that if the service was contracted out that there would be good response time should there be situations such as vandalism noting that he would prefer to retain an onsite HRM Supervisor. He requested that something be done to make the Mount Herman building more profitable as it was currently a burden to the taxpayer to maintain.

Councillor Blumenthal advised that he was in favour of the recommendation noting that he wanted people to be taken care of and for HRM to recover its costs. He noted the need for an onsite Supervisor due to the disturbing increase in vandalism to cemeteries.

Councillor Hendsbee commented that he did not want the service to be a cost burden to the residents nor did he want HRM to overcharge people.

Councillor Fisher acknowledged support for the motion on a cost recovery basis rather than a profit making system.

Mr. Phelan provided the following information in response to comments/concerns raised by Members of Council:

- if a previously purchased plot were to be sold and returned to HRM, HRM would refund the current municipal value minus the administration fee
- HRM does not own the Old Burial Grounds (Camp Hill) but does have a partnership with the Society to provide some horticultural services around the monument.
- the genealogy fee is charged when staff are requested to do research on someone's family history as it requires staff time to review the maps and visit the sites
- abandoned cemeteries are a provincial mandate.

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

Cathy Mellett  
Acting Municipal Clerk