

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PROPOSED 1999/2000 OPERATING BUDGET) MINUTES FEBRUARY 24, 1999

PRESENT:

Deputy Mayor Larry Uteck
Councillors: Gordon R. Snow
David Hendsbee
Ron Cooper
Jack Greenough
Condo Sarto
Bruce Hetherington
Clint Schofield
John Cunningham
Jerry Blumenthal
Graham L. Downey
Sheila Fougere
Russell Walker
Barry Barnet
Robert P. Harvey
Peter J. Kelly
Reg Rankin
Jack Mitchell

ABSENT:

Mayor Walter Fitzgerald (Regrets)
Councillors: Bill Dooks (Regrets)
Harry McInroy (Regrets)
Bill Stone (Regrets)
Stephen D. Adams

STAFF MEMBERS:

Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Ms. Patti Halliday, Assistant Municipal Clerk

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Deputy Mayor Uteck called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

1. 1999/2000 OPERATING BUDGET

Discussion of the 1999/2000 Operating Budget began on Monday, February 22, 1999. Deliberations continued today, commencing with Fire Services.

i) Fire Services

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Fire Services. At a later point in the meeting, Mr. McLellan agreed to provide all members of Council with the summary sheets to which he was referring. The overall change in the Fire Services budget from 1998-99 was a 6 percent net increase.

Responding to a question from Councillor Blumenthal regarding an auxiliary fire service, Fire Chief Eddy stated staff is currently exploring this with the Union, who are supportive of it.

Councillor Blumenthal suggested money proposed to be allocated to the Councillors for capital projects could be transferred to the Operating Budget and used to hire more personnel in protective services. Mr. Meech noted a capital funding allocation is a one time expenditure. If this allocation is transferred to the Operating Budget, this will become an on-going cost. With respect to the Sale of Land account, by legislation it is only permitted to be expended for capital expenditures.

Councillor Kelly stated the volunteers in the Bedford community are prepared to take over service at the fire station after 6:00 p.m. and on weekends, which would save approximately \$150,000 - \$200,000 for HRM. Fire Chief Eddy responded that the 24 hour shift is established in the contract for the core firefighters. He suggested an option may be for the station to become fully volunteer or to be designated as a non-core station, but this would require a legal opinion. Councillor Kelly requested that designating the station as non-core be put in the "parking lot" for further discussion.

In response to concerns expressed by Councillor Kelly regarding allocation of training funds for paid and volunteer firefighters, Fire Chief Eddy explained the process of selecting participants for the various training opportunities.

With respect to alarm systems and false alarms, Councillor Schofield noted these are often activated by storms. Also, patrons of hotels and motels sometimes pull the alarms unnecessarily causing a number of false alarms. The Councillor requested that staff clarify

whether or not the owner of the hotel or motel will be charged for these false alarms under the new by-law.

Responding to concerns expressed by Councillor Barnet regarding fire station relocations in future capital budgets, Fire Chief Eddy responded there is a detailed four stage fire station relocation plan which will be made available to Council and senior staff in the near future.

Councillor Barnet raised concerns regarding the formula used to calculate how increases to the Fire Services Operating budget are allocated to the constituents utilizing stations located in the core and non-core areas. Councillor Barnet stated before amalgamation the same rate was paid no matter where a resident lived, and this is what the residents want to have done now. The Councillor stated the formula currently being used places all increases on the rural area. Although staff provided a verbal response, for clarification purposes, it was agreed that staff would prepare a written response next week for Council providing an explanation of this formula.

Councillor Cooper suggested, in the future, more explanation should be included in the budget document with respect to changes in FTE's, such as transfers from other divisions, such as was done in Fire Services with the transfer of clerical staff from Fire Administration to other cost centres.

Councillor Sarto inquired about the major factors in determining the minimum total complement of firefighters. Fire Chief Eddy replied complement is determined from experience and risk level, and not by any specific minimum standards. He noted some of the standards set by outside agencies to determine this are too high. Later in the meeting, Councillor Hetherington also questioned standards for a minimum staffing complement, suggesting there should be some sort of policy in place. The Councillor requested that, in the next few months, staff provide a comparison of other municipalities with respect to this issue.

(Councillor Hendsbee took his place at the meeting at 10:05 a.m.)

Councillor Downey suggested that fire inspections of buildings, such as senior complexes, be undertaken on a regular basis, such as every three to six months. Fire Chief Eddy replied an operational plan was recently completed, and the goal is to step up activities in all areas so these buildings will be targeted for inspection by operational staff rather than fire inspectors.

Responding to a question of Councillor Mitchell regarding the financial impact on HRM of the Swiss Air disaster, Mr. Reg Ridgley, Acting Director of Finance, replied staff is

preparing a billing for Swiss Air and will be looking to them to help alleviate some of these costs.

Councillor Hetherington inquired about the square footage of the Fire Services office space in Alderney Gate. Later in the meeting, staff advised the area equaled 9,000 square feet and the base rent is \$103,140 per year, with operating costs of \$121,596 for a total cost of \$224,736. Responding to a suggestion of Fire Chief Eddy that one of the proposed new fire stations to be constructed could also house Fire Administration, Councillor Hetherington suggested the Eric Spicer Building could be considered as a location for Fire Administration.

With respect to the anticipated revenue from the alarm by-law, Councillor Hendsbee stated he would like to have a breakdown of residential and commercial alarms, as well as the frequency of calls, for both Fire and Police Services. Fire Chief Eddy replied there is a presentation scheduled for Council with respect to alarms. With respect to the anticipated revenue from this by-law, Mr. McLellan advised the estimated amount of \$1.1 million is still under review, and staff will be providing more information to Council before Second Reading of the By-Law. Mr. Meech noted the real objective of the by-law is to change behavior rather than to generate revenue.

Councillor Hendsbee inquired if the 911 center was to move from its current location in Bedford, would it be considered as a potential location for Fire Administration. Fire Chief Eddy replied this would be a realistic option.

In response to a question of Councillor Kelly regarding exploring the 12 hour shift in the next contract negotiations for Fire Services, Fire Chief Eddy replied staffing flexibility will be examined.

Responding to a question of Councillor Cooper, Mr. McLellan stated next year Fire Services, as well as other departments, will have to respond to service requirements and standards which will be introduced by the Program and Service Review Committee.

Councillor Cooper suggested Council needs to have a presentation regarding Fire Services with respect to station consolidation, auxiliary service, and volunteers to provide a clear direction of the future of this service.

There being no further questions, Deputy Mayor Uteck thanked Fire Chief Eddy for his comments.

ii) Police Services

Mr. McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Police Services. The overall change in the Police Services budget from 1998-99 was a 2.3 percent increase.

Responding to a question of Councillor Blumenthal inquiring if Police Services recovers costs from Eagle Security when officers have to cover crosswalks when crossing guards are absent, Police Chief McKinnon replied the charge of approximately \$20-21 per hour is recovered in these instances.

Councillor Blumenthal suggested if there were more special constables more revenue would be generated, possibly providing sufficient funding to hire additional police officers.

Councillor Kelly expressed concern with the proposed Operating Budget for Police Services not complying with a motion passed by Council in December 1998 to hire an additional sixteen police officers. Deputy Mayor Uteck noted Council also passed a motion to hold the line on budget increases and tax increases, noting Council will ultimately need to decide which course it wants to follow. Police Chief McKinnon reviewed the breakdown of the current complement of 392 sworn personnel, noting eight of the sixteen additional staff have already been hired; and, based on this proposed budget, only four more will be hired. Police Chief McKinnon noted the complement number will fluctuate throughout the year depending on retirements, secondments, LTDs, etc. Discussion continued regarding the Police Services complement, and it was agreed that this item would be placed in the "parking lot" for further discussion.

With respect to RCMP outside policing, Councillor Walker suggested it would be beneficial to have a breakdown of each depot rather than just four lines in the budget book. Police Chief McKinnon replied due to time constraints and other demands on the RCMP they were not able to present this material in time for this budget presentation. However, it is his understanding from Superintendent Stan Ferguson that next year's presentation will contain more detail.

Councillor Walker suggested next year's budget book should contain more detailed information regarding staff complement in various departments to provide a clearer picture of the actual level of staffing.

RECESS

At this time, an hour recess was taken at 12:10 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 1:10 p.m. Councillor Blumenthal was no longer present and Councillor Rankin took his place at the

meeting at 2:20 p.m.

Superintendent Stan Ferguson responded to questions of Councillor Hendsbee regarding the RCMP budget. Councillor Hendsbee stated he hopes there will be opportunities to make municipal contributions to organizations outside the urban core for partnership arrangements with respect to Neighborhood Watch, Citizens on Patrol, Victim Services, etc.

With respect to Page 22 of Volume 1 of the Proposed Operating Budget, Councillor Hendsbee noted the statement regarding the brokering of RCMP services is incorrect as there are areas within the core area policed by the RCMP as well.

In regards to the mounted unit, Police Chief McKinnon noted a cheque has been received from a private sponsor in the amount of \$8,700 which will offset the operational costs of this unit. This is an additional revenue item to the budget book.

Responding to a question of Councillor Cunningham regarding the recent rotating strikes by the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Police Chief McKinnon stated there is potential for additional overtime costs due to the strikes, but every effort is being made to reduce costs.

Councillor Schofield suggested there should be more funding provided for crosswalk guards. The Councillor also suggested the Regional Museum of Cultural Heritage building in Dartmouth should be used as a community police office. Chief McKinnon stated it is staff's intention to look at moving the office currently located in the Dartmouth Shopping Center to the museum property, but arrangements are yet to be finalized.

Responding to a question regarding staffing and Y2K problems, Chief McKinnon stated indication has been given to the unions that all vacation leave will be canceled from December 27 - 31, 1999 and, potentially for the months of January and February 2000. However, a grievance has been submitted regarding this issue. Superintendent Ferguson stated RCMP leave is canceled from December 27, 1999 to March 31, 2000.

In response to a question of Councillor Kelly, Chief McKinnon clarified the breakdown of the Police Services complement.

Mr. Meech, in response to a question of Councillor Kelly, stated the revenue achieved from the false alarm by-law will be allocated to Police Services, Fire Services and Corporate Services. Based on future experience, this allocation may be adjusted.

(Councillor Rankin took his place at the meeting at 2:20 p.m.)

Councillor Walker inquired about the RCMP call center staffing complement and operating costs. Superintendent Ferguson explained the breakdown of staffing in the RCMP complement of 163.5. Concerns arose regarding the breakdown of costs for the call center, and it was agreed that this item would be referred to the "parking lot" for further clarification.

Deputy Mayor Uteck thanked Police Chief McKinnon and Superintendent Ferguson for their responses to questions raised by members of Council.

2. REGIONAL OPERATIONS

i) Works and Natural Services

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Works and Natural Services. The overall change in the Works and Natural Services budget from 1998-99 was a 7.5 percent decrease.

Responding to a question of Councillor Cunningham, Mr. John MacKay, Director, Works and Natural Services, clarified that the level of winter maintenance at Point Pleasant Park is being reduced, however, the park will not be closed. Mr. Stephen King, Manager, Works and Natural Services, advised the Public Gardens will be opening mid-May and closing after Remembrance Day, which is the traditional season of a few years ago.

Responding to a question of Councillor Kelly, Mr. Alan Brady, Manager, Wastewater Treatment, advised there will be some additional revenue in the amount of \$15,000 - \$20,000 this year with respect to waste water treatment.

In response to a question from Councillor Cooper, Mr. MacKay stated in this year's budget, FTEs are being allocated to the actual cost center where the work was completed. In previous years, the FTE was assigned to the cost center where the majority of the work was done.

(Deputy Mayor Uteck left the meeting at 2:45 p.m. and Councillor Rankin assumed the Chair.)

Councillor Downey expressed concern with street patching, particularly on Brunswick Street. Mr. Phil Cochrane, Manager, Streets and Roads, explained the problem may be with crack sealing lifting, which will be rectified in the spring.

Responding to a question of Councillor Kelly regarding sports fields, Mr. MacKay stated

staff does not yet have the details of the fields that will be affected, and this will be done in consultation with Recreation. Mr. King noted the fields may be downgraded to a Level D or D- rather than actually being physically closed. With respect to playground closures, communities will be consulted to determine if there are any alternatives.

Councillor Walker suggested a higher quality of paint should be used this year for street line painting. Mr. MacKay replied a quality control program is currently being drafted.

With respect to layoffs, Councillor Walker requested further information be provided as to the actual number of people affected.

Councillor Hendsbee suggested the degree of street lighting in the urban core should be reviewed for possible savings.

ii) Engineering and Transportation

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Engineering and Transportation. The overall change in the Engineering and Transportation budget from 1998-99 was a 23.6 percent decrease.

On behalf of Councillor Dooks, Councillor Hendsbee raised a question regarding the crosswalk in Musquodoboit Harbour. Mr. Kulvinder Dhillon, Director, Engineering and Transportation, stated the light installation will need to be channeled by staff through the Province as this a provincial road.

iii) Business Operations

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Business Operations. The overall change in the Business Operations budget from 1998-99 was a 14.3 percent decrease.

Councillor Hendsbee requested that Council be provided with a complete schedule of all fines, fees and fares that are charged by HRM. Mr. McLellan replied this can be provided, and if there are any concerns, staff can review the issue with Council.

With respect to the hazardous waste reductions and limitations, Councillor Hendsbee suggested this should be reviewed, and suggested HRM should work with DOE to utilize some of the recycling depots as temporary drop-offs for hazardous household waste.

In regards to Access-a-Bus service, Councillor Kelly requested that this item be placed in

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the “parking lot’ for further discussion with respect to boundaries for eligible users of the service.

Responding to a question of Councillor Walker regarding tipping fees, Mr. Brian Smith, Director, Business Operations, stated it is proposed that the tipping fee at Otter Lake be increased to \$106 per tonne as of April 1, 1999, and this is reflected in the revenue estimates. Mr. Smith noted Council deferred a couple of transit reduction issues a week ago, and these items will be put in the “parking lot” for further discussion.

Councillor Schofield expressed concern with the cleanliness of the ferries and the Metro Transit building, and stated he would like this issue revisited some time in the future.

Councillor Fougere expressed concern with the proposed fare for companions of Access-a-Bus users and requested that this item be placed in the “parking lot” for reconsideration.

(Deputy Mayor Uteck returned to the meeting at 3:20 p.m. and assumed the Chair.)

In response to questions raised by Councillor Barnet regarding Route 83, Mr. Brian Taylor, Manager, Metro Transit, stated proposed changes to Routes 15, 83 and 84, as opposed to a fare increase, are items currently in the “parking lot” for further consideration.

There being no further questions, it was agreed that budget deliberations would continue tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. Councillor Greenough suggested the Program and Service Review Committee could meet tomorrow afternoon, if time permits, to begin the review of the “parking lot” items. Council agreed.

**MOVED by Councillors Sarto and Greenough that the meeting adjourn at 3:30 p.m.
MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Patti Halliday
Assistant Municipal Clerk