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Chebucto Community Council
December 1, 2008

TO: Chair and Members of Chebucto Community Council

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Labrecque".

Mike Labrecque, Director Transportation & Public Works

DATE: October 28, 2008

SUBJECT: Maintenance of Dunbrack Street Rose Bushes

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

At the June 03, 2008 meeting of Chebucto Community Council, Councillor Hum requested an information report regarding the maintenance of the Dunbrack Street Roses that included the following information:

1. The possibility of having regularly scheduled maintenance for the rose hedges on Dunbrack Street; and
2. if staff is unable to meet the time frame for maintenance within a 2 week period by June 30, 2008 they are to utilize the services of a contractor to provide maintenance and weeding of the rose bushes.

BACKGROUND

When Dunbrack Street was constructed, landscape strategies included a turf grass center median, turf boulevards on both sides between curb and sidewalk, and the planting of approximately 9500 linear meters (total center and both sides) of rugosa rose as a hedge. The hedge was to function as an aesthetic green (living) barrier and to help buffer sound and reduce headlight glare and pollution from vehicle traffic. Rugosa rose was chosen for characteristics such as: hardiness; attractive bloom and fragrance; resistance to insects and diseases; and, relatively low maintenance. Mature height for this plant material is typically 60" to 72". Landscape maintenance for Dunbrack Street consisted of regular mowing and trimming (whipping), litter pick up and pruning as required to maintain sight line clearances at cross walks and intersections. Initial maintenance was cost shared with the Province until 1996 when HRM took over full responsibility.

DISCUSSION

A safety audit conducted in 2004 recommended that the hedges between the curb and sidewalk areas be limited to a maximum height of 24" - 36" to provide passive surveillance and pedestrian visibility. The most effective and efficient method of maintaining the roses at the recommended height was through mechanical cutting / mowing. However this would also result in a substantial increase in annual maintenance requirements in the form of pruning, weeding and bark mulching. The ideal time for this is mid to late summer to allow for regenerating growth (the opportunity to harden off before onset of winter. Parks staff estimated that cutting frequency would be every 2 to 3 years, depending on plant response, seasonal growing conditions and actual time of cutting. Mechanical cutting was performed in August of 2005 utilizing a contractor from an online agreement. Vigorous regrowth of the hedging material, due to a favorable back to back growing season in 2006 and 2007 required cutting again in the summer of 2007. The previous outline agreement had expired so the work went to tender, which resulted in the cutting taking place significantly later in the year. It was anticipated that the additional work of fine hand pruning (light standards / fences / signs, etc.) plus weeding and mulching, could be performed utilizing winter work staff as a priority two assignment. Given the winter weather of 2007 /2008 and the time winter works staff spent on priority one tasks (snow & ice functions), the additional work on the Dunbrack Street rose hedges was not accomplished over the winter works season.

Priority work during spring and early summer for parks horticulture staff is: greenhouse and plant / hanging basket propagation; annual bed preparation and planting; and, the planting of a number of speciality carpet beds. This work is typically completed by the end of June or the first week of July, at which time parks crews concentrate on weeding, watering, and shrub bed maintenance. A horticulture crew was then re-deployed to work on the Dunbrack Street rose hedge maintenance (for 12 - 14 weeks) , prior to the fall bulb planting programs.

In response to the question of engaging a contractor to perform the work if parks staff is not able to do so by June 30th, an outline agreement is in place with a landscape contractor to perform shrub bed maintenance. The contract also includes a unit price for rose hedge maintenance and a separate unit price for weeding and applying bark mulch. Given the total length of 6000 linear meters of hedging material on Dunbrack Street, the estimated price to contract out the required work, based on current unit prices would be approximately \$ 145,000.00. Given that the total annual budget for all contract services within Horticulture Services is \$15,000.00 there are insufficient funds to utilize a contractor to complete the work.

Parks staff is sensitive to the fact that there was an expectation to complete the work during the 2007 - 2008 winter works season, therefore, contract services will be utilized to supplement HRM park staff that were re-deployed to this task. Staff has identified the sections between Willett Street and Radcliffe Drive as a priority due to the extensive commercial development and high pedestrian volumes. This section will be completed by utilizing a landscape contractor in combination with HRM staff. Horticulture staff will continue working on the Dunbrack St. roses up to the fall bulb planting program (utilizing the three Seasonal Gardeners hired to water hanging baskets for the various BID's when the hanging baskets are removed in September).

Complying with safety audit recommendations to keep the roses at a height significantly lower than initially designed, has resulted in a considerable increase in demand for annual maintenance requirements that current resources have not been able to meet. Public comment is expressing frustration of the present condition of the roses. Staff is doing their best to work with available resources; however, recognizing that public expectations are not being met. Staff has prepared an annual maintenance plan and budget identifying the additional resources required to provide a level of service to meet both safety audit requirements and public expectations. This is presented as Option 1.

Option 1 - Additional Resources Required To Meet Annual Maintenance Requirements:

To hire and dedicate an additional crew of three (3) seasonal staff plus a vehicle for annual maintenance during the summer months. Maintenance would include mechanical pruning / trimming to maintain the sidewalks' side roses between 24 and 36". This crew would also perform the manual weeding, edging and bark mulching (estimated annual cost of \$ 114,000).

Option 2 - Preferred Option:

To remove the rose bushes along each sidewalk utilizing winter works staff. Top soil would be installed immediately following removal. The area would then be sodded or seeded in the spring of 2009. The center row of roses would remain and allowed to grow to its natural mature height. Annual maintenance of the center row would consist of pruning of dead canes and sapling removal (estimated annual cost of \$10,000).

Street tree planting would then commence in the spring or fall of 2009, pending funding approval. Spacing would be 50' on center for a total of approximately 300 trees (cost of \$120,000). The goal would be to complete the planting project in one year, however, if resources do not permit it will be spread over two years.

Option Two is recommended as the preferred option for the following reasons:

- ▶ A sustainable safety solution for pedestrians.
- ▶ Preserving a turfed lawn area and planting a canopy of street trees maintains the original intent of enhanced landscape function and beautification.
- ▶ Grass mowing and litter control will be more efficient with the curb side roses removed .
- ▶ Best investment of tax dollars.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Option One would require an increase of \$114,000 annually (to hire additional seasonal staff in order to meet safety audit requirements and service delivery expectations for maintenance).

Option Two would require a one-time Capital Funding in the amount of \$ 120,000 to complete the street tree planting project. It could be phased in over two years, pending available resources. The removal of the sidewalk rose bushes would be completed by in-house staff during winter works, as a priority two task. Winter works positions are funded through current operating business plans of Municipal Operations and would not require additional funding.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

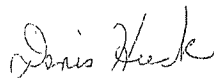
This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ATTACHMENTS

N/A

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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Report Approved by: _____
Denis Huck, Manager, Municipal Operations, 490 - 4673