

Info # 1



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Halifax Regional Council  
February 20, 2007

**TO:** Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Sharon Bond Fox  
Paul Dunphy, Director of Community Development

**DATE:** February 12, 2007

**SUBJECT:** Community Visioning - Pilot Project Update

### INFORMATION REPORT

#### ORIGIN

- September 19, 2006 - Regional Council initiated the Community Visioning Pilot Project for the communities of Fall River, Bedford Waterfront and Musquodoboit Harbour.

#### BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Since Council's initiation of the Community Visioning Pilot Project last September:

1. Community Development staff have developed a Community Visioning Tool Kit including resource materials for staff and the Community Liaison Groups (see attachment "A" - *Tool Kit Introduction*);
2. A staff team has been assembled comprised of the Manager of Planning Services, Manager of Community Relations and Events, three Senior Planners, and three Community Developers;
3. Resources to support the visioning project have been committed from HRM's GIS Services, Web Services, and Corporate Communications;
4. Discussions have taken place with the three pilot community Councillors - Martin, Snow and Streach and regular updates on progress provided;
5. Discussions with "community champions" took place to help promote the November 30<sup>th</sup> Kick-Off events;
6. The Community Visioning Kick-Off events were held concurrently in the three pilot communities; and
7. The recruitment and selection of residents for the Community Liaison Groups (CLGs) has been completed.

Over the next 4-6 months, each pilot community will deliver to Council a Vision, an Action Plan and a Community Profile. The community vision will represent a mental picture of what residents want their community to look and feel like in 10-15-20 years. The action plan will contain a detailed list of actions needed to accomplish the vision, including priority ranking and who will lead the action. The community profile will present a snapshot of where the community is now demographically and may contain other information about the community as determined by the community.

### **VisionHRM Kick-Off**

The November 30, 2006 kick-off events provided an opportunity to bring community residents together to obtain information about the visioning process. Attendees participated in round-table discussion and residents were invited to apply for membership on the Community Liaison Groups (CLG). Local musical talent and art displays rounded out the evening.

Advertised using local media, flyers, community signs, mail-outs, emails and word-of-mouth, each kick-off was attended by about 60 people. Since the kick-off events the level of interest has continued to grow. This interest should ensure a good level of citizen participation in the process over the coming months.

### **CLG Recruitment and Selection**

Applications for CLG membership were received at the kick-off events and through December 2006. A large number of applications were received from highly qualified residents committed to their community's future.

An initial screening process was conducted by the Community Visioning staff team using a series of criteria (Attachment "B") intended to bring diversity to each committee. The results of the initial screening were then reviewed with Councillors Martin, Snow and Streach. Following the screening process, approximately 8-12 applicants from each community were invited for a telephone interview and their participation on the committee was confirmed. On Saturday, January 27<sup>th</sup> the three CLGs participated in a day of team-building and training with HRM staff.

### **The CLG and its Role**

The new CLGs for the Bedford Waterfront, Fall River and Musquodoboit Harbour will **guide** and **champion** the visioning process. With support from HRM Community Development staff, each CLG will develop principles around which a visioning process will be developed; guide the development of a community engagement program in order to gain public input on the vision and action plan; and provide advice on specific solutions and actions that reflect local context.

The CLGs' most important task will be to solicit the input of community members on the vision for the community's future. The CLG will guide and shape the process, but it is the community members who, through a range of events and opportunities for input, will make key decisions on the content of the Community Vision and Community Action Plan.

### **How Residents will Participate**

Some who applied to be on a CLG have asked the question, "*How can I participate if I am not on the CLG?*" In response, it is important to discern, the CLGs will guide the process; they will not be a decision-making body. Each CLG will design a process to engage and communicate with all community residents and will work to ensure the vision which is developed, represents the broader community interest.

In February, each CLG began the task of designing an engagement process for the next 4-5 months. The details of each community process will be communicated to Council and residents.

Everyone who expressed interest in participating on the CLG was entered into a contact database for future correspondence. A letter was also sent to all applicants thanking them for their interest and inviting them to participate in upcoming Community Visioning events. It is expected each CLG will be hosting community events beginning in March. Details on upcoming events and other information about the visioning process can be found at [www.halifax.ca/visionhrm](http://www.halifax.ca/visionhrm).

### **Using an Appreciative Inquiry Approach**

The new Community Visioning Tool Kit provides information on selecting approaches to understanding the community, particularly the application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). A process of "appreciative inquiry" approaches the community from a standpoint of strength and value. An overview of the AI model was presented at the recent CLG Team-Building and Training day.

Appreciative inquiry, if used, would focus community conversation on "What if..." type of questions. While AI is not the only way to approach a community process, it is one that has proven itself to generate positive change when dealing with diverse issues and situations. The AI model uses a process of inquiry to discover people's best experiences and use these experiences as a basis for imagining the best possible future. The process is imaginative and creative, but it also devotes considerable energy to designing the processes and structures that will make the imagined future a reality. This imagined future therefore, is not just a fantasy because it is grounded in the experiences of the people involved.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

Funding for this project which is currently **estimated** at about \$30,000 is available in the approved 2006/7 Operating Budget E500-6919.

**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**

Attachment A: Introduction (excerpt) from HRM Community Visioning Tool Kit  
Attachment B: CLG Screening Criteria

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

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Attachment "A"  
Excerpt from HRM Community Visioning Tool Kit

## Part I: Introduction to Community Visioning

"The real voyage of discovery consists not  
in seeing new landscapes but in having new  
eyes" Marcel Proust

Our cities, our communities don't just "happen". Cohesive and successful communities have a common understanding of their values, needs and aspirations. This understanding is often expressed in two distinct instruments of change: a community vision and a blueprint for action as explained in the attached brochure "Imagine Your Community at its very Best".

### 1. HRM Regional Plan – A Context for Community Visioning

In June 2006 HRM completed a 3.5-year process of public consultation, research and analysis resulting in the Council adopting its first Regional Plan. The Plan provides a framework for future growth in HRM in the next 25 years. (see [www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning](http://www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning)).

Only a few months later - in September 2006 HRM Regional Council approved the initiation of a Community Visioning Program in three distinct HRM communities - Musquodoboit Harbour, Fall River and Bedford Waterfront/Mill Cove - as a way to implement and realize the full potential of the new HRM Regional Plan at the local level. The purpose of the pilot project is to test the new Community Engagement process in three different communities.

#### HRM Regional Vision

HRM's vision for the future is to maintain and enhance our quality of life by fostering the growth of healthy and vibrant communities, a strong and diverse economy, and sustainable environment (RMPS S. 1.4.1, p. 13).

Over the next 12 months each of the three communities, assisted by HRM staff, will have an opportunity to develop a Community Profile, a Community Vision and an Action Plan that incorporates a wide range of community interests and priorities for action.

The HRM Community Visioning Program therefore must be informed by the vision, goals and policies of the Regional Plan. Unlike traditional land use planning processes that may be constrained by the *Municipal Government Act*, community visioning can respond to a broader range of concerns and opportunities. The hope is that the process will foster much more meaningful problem solving and action planning by local communities.

## **2. Are there any boundaries around the process?**

There are some limits on the scope of the process, however. The Community Liaison Committees who will be recruited to champion the process and report to Council on its progress. Council will ultimately have to assign resources to implement the vision and action plan.

While community visioning should be informed by the opportunities and limitations of Council discretionary financial decisions, budgetary decisions will not be made.

Secondly, while the process should provide direction on the desired outcomes of policies and regulations, the actual policies and regulations will be developed through subsequent planning processes. There may also be other limits and confidentiality requirements, which should be discussed with the relevant staff and Councillor at the initiation of the process.

## **3. What issues will be addressed?**

A visioning process is not constrained by land use planning legislation. Local community issues will be the focus. They include the look and feel of a community, the creation and management of public places, protection of cultural landscapes, preservation of built heritage, the amount and location of development, diverse housing, transit, the safe movement of cars, cyclists and pedestrians, community greening initiatives, economic and general community development. There may be other burning issues unique to the community that can also be included in the process.

## **4. What will be the relationship between visioning and existing community plans?**

The vision exercises have been designed on the basis of geographic centres established in the Regional Plan. These boundaries will be used as a guide to identify stakeholders and steering committee members, but the boundaries may be refined as the process moves forward. Where there is an existing plan in place, community plan policy directions will be considered in addition to Regional Plan policies and any new issues that may emerge. For example, the visioning process will consider options for diverse forms of housing and will facilitate discussion on where, how much and what type of housing should be encouraged or accommodated. It will not however set specific density minimums and maximums as these will be addressed through regulatory planning.

## **5. How will the community be involved?**

Community Vision and Action Plan will be implemented through HRM business planning, land use planning and the development of community partnerships. The visioning process will be guided by HRM in collaboration with three Community Liaison Groups (CLGs). Part 3 of the Tool-Kit describes in details the proposed structure and function of the CLGs. In addition, stakeholders and the public at large will be asked to participate and interact in a variety of ways to identify strengths and opportunities in their communities. This may include workshops, presentations, community walk-about, larger meetings, surveys and on-line consultation tools.

## 6. What is the role of HRM staff?

As partners, HRM staff and the local committee will determine how they would like to work together. Some possible roles for HRM staff may be to:

- coordinate and facilitate the design and implementation of community visioning process;
- play an active role in the recruitment and training of CLG members and stakeholders;
- assist in the collection and analysis of pertinent data and information;
- provide the best possible professional advice on options for community's consideration;
- broker relationships;
- provide municipal organizational perspective;
- faithfully capture community voices.

## 7. What process will be used?

Each community will determine how it would like to engage the community in the community visioning process. As any consultation process, the community visioning process can be divided into nine general parts or steps:

- Step 1: program kick-off and invitation to apply for a seat on the CLG
- Step 2: forming steering committees;
- Step 3: developing a consultation and communication framework;
- Step 3: completing a community profile and identifying key themes;
- Step 4: hosting public meetings/workshops to:
  - assess the current situation and potential for change,
  - create a vision for the future,
  - identify areas for future action.
- Step 5: forming task forces to report on results of public meetings, study key issues, develop options, recommend actions (additional consultation may be required);
- Step 6: drafting vision statements and plans of action, and
- Step 7: adopting the vision and action plan by a steering committee and Council.

Within this general process there is the opportunity to engage community residents, stakeholders and decision makers in new ways of collective reflection and action that will ultimately result in moving the community towards the desired future.

## 8. What if my community has not been selected?

There is a lot of interest in communities across HRM to initiate community visioning and secondary planning, but only three communities can be fully supported in 2006/07 given available resources. However, HRM Councillors and staff are prepared to provide limited support to those "up and coming" communities not selected for the initial pilot project, but which are ready and willing to lay the groundwork for future engagement. This would provide mutual benefit as communities would develop interest and capacity, learn from the ongoing pilot projects, and potentially produce products (eg. community profiles) that could jump-start subsequent visioning program.

If a community is interested in forming its own steering committee prior to HRM initiating the process but like to eventually become part of HRM business planning, it is important that as a first step the group contact HRM staff to discuss the direction and nature of activities to be undertaken. Although HRM could not support a group financially, some support may be offered. Ideally HRM and the steering group would mutually agree upon a partnering agreement. It will include the scope, responsibilities and expected deliverables of both parties.

**9. What about day to day problems - do we need a vision to solve things like potholes, bike racks and broken street lights?**

It depends. Sometimes the small issues are a symptom of larger problems (e.g. the same bus shelter being broken over and over again) and may require other actions. But, having success with solving the "small things" can go a long way towards making the community feel that the planning process can lead to tangible results.

HRM has an existing process to address the day-to-day issues along with service delivery standards. HRM uses the HANSEN data management software. Any request placed by calling the (902) 490-4000 number or placed on-line through HRM website is entered into the system and assigned a tracking number, which can be used to see what has been done about the request. There are two types of service requests:

- ★ Request for Service
- ★ Request for Information

Your community group may choose one person to "call in" service requests and monitor over time how many issues have been resolved during the community visioning process. Attached is a sample service request form.

**10. Purpose and Structure of this Tool-Kit**

The Community Visioning Program is different from the usual methods of delivering consultation and planning programs. Consequently all participants will have the opportunity learn new approaches to learning about their community and to decision making. This takes time and presents new challenges. This tool kit has been developed to initiate this learning process and to provide some assistance to HRM staff, Councillors and communities on how to engage in this exciting opportunity. It includes guidelines, model terms of reference, model codes of good practice, and possible ways of engaging the public on various issues. It also provides a brief description of key issues and HRM initiatives which may be encountered as part community deliberations.



**Community Visioning Pilot Program Highlights**

**The Process:** new ways of engaging communities in making capital, operating and community-driven decisions about how the community should look, feel and be alike 10-20 years into the future.

**The Planning Period:** The process will take 6-12 months

**The Product:** The process will deliver a community profile, and community vision and a community action plan endorsed by the community, local Community Council and HRM Regional Council.

## **18. Organization**

Introduction – this section provides an overview and rationale for the Community Visioning Program.

Part 1: Introduction to Community Visioning – this section describes the key goals and premises of the Community Visioning program

Part 2: Project Scope and Organization – this section provides background staff report on Community Visioning, lines of communication between the community, the Community Liaison Group, HRM staff and Council, program kick-off presentation, a list of potential issues for the program's consideration including Regional Plan policies.

Part 3: Role of Community Liaison Groups - this section describes the function and structure of CLGs including criteria for membership, expected rules of conduct, effective practices and relationship to HRM staff and Council.

Part 4: Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry and Asset Based Planning – this section provides a brief overview of selecting approaches to understanding the community, particularly the application of appreciative inquiry and asset based planning.

Part 5: The ABCs of community engagement, building a vision and strategic planning – the process of building an inclusive vision, setting goals and objectives.

Part 6: Community profiles – this section discusses the importance of good information to community visioning, where and how to access information, how to handle the information, and how to draw conclusion from it.

Part 7: HRM Strategic Initiatives – this section provides short briefs on HRM's key strategic initiatives (e.g. Cultural Plan, Immigration Strategy, Wind Energy Functional Plan etc)

Part 8: Excerpt of most relevant Regional Plan Policies

Part 9: Issue briefs, discussion papers and options reports – this section will continue to evolve through the visioning process as key issues are identified and options are sought.

Part 10: Sample visions and action plans from other places.

Part 11: Resources

**Attachment "B"**

**Community Visioning  
Screening Criteria  
Community Liaison Group**

Each CLG applicant was screened using the following criteria:

Whether or not they were:

- a resident of Musquodoboit Harbour / Fall River / Bedford Waterfront
- a resident from an immediately adjacent community
- under age 30/ over age 30
- a youth / a senior
- a new resident to their community (less than 5 years)
- a visible minority
- a property owner / a renter
- a business owner (in the community)
- a person with a disability
- a new resident to Canada
- a parent of school aged children

Each person was also screened based on their ability to commit to a **one year volunteer term** and their **availability to spend 10 or more hours per month** on CLG work.

