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Item No.
Community Planning and Economic Development
March 26, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of the Community Planning and Economic Development
Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed
Maggie MacDonald, Acting Managing Director of Government Relations and
External Affairs

DATE: February 23, 2015

SUBJECT: Centre de la Francophonie

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Item 8.3.1 of the October 9, 2014 Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee meeting, the committee recommended that staff provide a report on the Centre de la Francophonie project and explore ways the Municipality can explore and assist on the project.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

HRM Charter, Section 79 (1) (av) respecting grants and contributions.

BACKGROUND

The Executive Director, of the Conseil communautaire du Grand-Havre, President and Vice-Chancellor of l'Universite Sainte-Anne, and CEO of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) provided a presentation at the October meeting of the Community and Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) to outline their joint effort in creating a Centre de la Francophonie. The goal of the presentation was to raise awareness of the project and highlight the potential benefits to the City. The presenters noted that the project is in the early stages of concept design.

DISCUSSION

Project Description

The proposed project entails developing a Francophone Centre in downtown Halifax which would include a new CSAP school, a Halifax campus of l'Université Sainte-Anne, and a community centre. At this stage, the centre is anticipated to include gymnasium space; an art gallery; a café-bistro to provide a venue for local Acadian and Francophone performers; theatre space that could be shared by the school, university, and community; and a book store. A site has not yet been identified, but the desired facility would consist of considerably large square footage and be located on the Peninsula.

Proponents

The following three primary partners are working on the concept:

- The Conseil communautaire du Grand-Havre acts as a spokesperson for the Francophone community in Halifax, establishes partnerships, and offers programs and services to the Francophone community and Francophiles.
- The Conseil scolaire acadien provincial is Nova Scotia's French language public school board, which has twenty-two schools throughout Nova Scotia, including six in Halifax.
- L'Université Sainte-Anne is Nova Scotia's only French language post-secondary institution, and has currently has two satellite sites in Halifax.

Project Rationale

During the presentation to CPED and in subsequent meetings with staff, the proponents have cited the following as primary rationale and expected benefits of the project:

- There is demand in Halifax for a venue to host year-round French cultural activities;
- A demonstrated commitment to bilingual communication and services could enhance attractiveness of Halifax to bilingual / francophone conferences, events, businesses, individuals;
- The lease with the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) for Sainte-Anne's Halifax campus on Walnut Street has expired. The University leases a second site on Dresden Row which it has outgrown. Sainte-Anne and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education agree that the University has growth potential in the Halifax area and are seeking options for relocation and expansion;
- CSAP has experienced growth in Halifax and a recent study of the student population has indicated that a French school on the Halifax peninsula would have a projected enrollment of approximately 400 P–12 students. The CSAP board has formalized a request to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development for a new school in this area;

In terms of French demographics / resources, Halifax currently has:

- 12,000 Francophone and 46,000 bilingual citizens;
- 6 French schools with 2,700 students;
- Two satellite sites of the Université Sainte-Anne campus;
- More than 20 francophone organizations;
- 58 HRSB schools offering French immersion to 8,000 enrolled students.

Project Scope

The project is in the early stages of development. The proponents have scoped high level concept and design. The preliminary estimate is a 140,000 square foot, \$14 million facility, development and execution of which is expected to be 5 to 10 years in duration.

Other Potential Partners

Aside from the three project partners, the group has had discussions with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regarding school siting; Canadian Heritage, which has funding programs available for Francophone organizations; the Nova Scotia Community College regarding potential partnership in the facility (there are currently no NSCC programs provided in French); and the Halifax Regional School Board regarding existing schools which may be due for closure.

Potential HRM Role

At this time, no formal request for funding or specified support has been made to the municipality from this group. If a specific request is made by the project proponents, staff will make recommendations based on municipal priorities, existing policy direction and budgetary considerations. Areas in which the proponents may approach the municipality for support at a future date include assistance in identifying and/or securing a site and possible partnering on gymnasium / community centre and theatre space if the project moves forward.

Until the project is fully scoped and funding is confirmed, the proponents have requested some indication of support from the municipality for the concept in order to help secure the participation of other partners. At the February 3, 2015 Regional Council meeting, Council endorsed a request by Councillor Fisher to have the Mayor write a letter of support for the project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the material in this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As noted above, the three project partners represent the francophone community in HRM and will engage relevant stakeholders as the project progresses.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.php> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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