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Item No. 9.1.3
Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee
May 14, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Bob Bjerke, Chief Planner and Director, Planning & Development

DATE: March 3, 2015

SUBJECT: Blue Dot Campaign

ORIGIN

Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee, February 5, 2015, 8.3.1 Blue Dot Campaign

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Environmental legislation is primarily a federal and provincial government authority.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee not forward a recommendation to Regional Council to consider a declaration of support for an Environmental Bill of Rights.

BACKGROUND

On February 5, 2015 the David Suzuki Foundation provided a presentation to the Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee titled: The Right to a Healthy Environment. At the end of the presentation a request was made for Halifax to consider supporting the Blue Dot Campaign, and specifically for: *A municipal declaration of environmental rights is a commitment to decision-making principles that will protect, fulfill and promote the right to a healthy environment.*

DISCUSSION

The notion of supporting a healthy environment is consistent with community objectives, Council Priorities, and the Regional Plan. Halifax policy and governance supports the healthy environment objective. The challenge of supporting an advocacy movement, or the municipal consideration of, is difficult because the final details and implications are not clear.

While the presentation requested the specific declaration, the documentation provided on the Blue Dot website looks for a declaration to support Federal and Provincial government action on an Environmental

Bill of Rights. Further, On October 29, 2014, Linda Duncan, MP for Edmonton – Strathcona, introduced Bill C-634, Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights, as a private members bill. The summary can be viewed at: <http://openparliament.ca/bills/41-2/C-634/> The David Suzuki Foundation has linked the Blue Dot Campaign and the bill on their blog. Staff submit that the ask and the potential perception of secured municipal support differ, making a recommendation to support problematic.

Rationale for not declaring support to the Blue Dot Campaign:

1. Regional Plan already supports a vision of a healthy environment;
2. The implications of altered environmental legislation are not clear; and,
3. The intergovernmental implications are not clear.

Regional Plan: *HRM's vision for the future is to enhance our quality of life by fostering the growth of healthy and vibrant communities, a strong and diverse economy, and sustainable environment.* The principles and objectives of Regional Plan promote and protect the environment. As such, the current approved Council overarching policy supports a healthy environment. The declaration does not enhance or change the Halifax commitment to a healthy environment. Examples of evidence of Halifax Policy support for environmental protection:

- Regional Plan
- Community Energy Plan
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Plan
- Municipal Climate Change Action Plan
- Urban Forest Master Planning
- Watershed Planning
- Greenbelting and Open Spaces Plan
- Active Transportation Functional Plan

Implications of altered environmental legislation: The notion of supporting a healthy environment is consistent with Regional Plan and both community and council objectives. However, the implications of changing environmental legislation are not clear. It may result in increased municipal responsibilities and costs, or costs to the public. A blanket declaration of support for an Environmental Bill of Rights may expose the municipality to new costs or constraints, or create the expectation that Halifax supports a draft legislation when upon review of the details is not satisfactory. With a proposed Bill before Parliament, staff would need to examine the implications of that proposed legislation.

Intergovernmental issues: Halifax Regional Council has provided direction on intergovernmental priorities, which currently include legislative amendments and infrastructure priorities. The undertaking of the establishment of a new environmental legislative framework is substantive, and a recommendation from the municipality for other levels of government to undertake must be done within the context of municipal priorities. Advocacy on Federal and Provincial government legislative issues, particularly those with broad implications on other jurisdictions, are sometimes handled by Halifax representation at and efforts with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM). If Committee and Council wish to pursue support of the Blue Dot Campaign, staff recommend this be done following discussion with FCM and UNSM.

With Bill C-634 currently presented in Canadian Parliament, it appears the matter is clearly a current federal government political matter for Parliament to consider. The David Suzuki Foundation has endorsed the bill which appears to be the foundation for the Blue Dot Campaign.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities: Following completion of the staff review of the proposed resolution, it was learned that at a recent FCM Board meeting that a proposed resolution to support the Blue Dot tour was deemed not within municipal jurisdiction for comparable reasons to those outlined in the staff report. The FCM review further highlighted the gravity of participating in a quasi-constitutional amendment.

Summary: The presented desired outcome of supporting a healthy environment is consistent with municipal policy and priorities. The campaign has been successful in building momentum with almost 70,000 Canadians signed up and 26 municipalities. Staff could recommend declaring support for a healthy environment, as it is already enshrined in municipal policy. Staff cannot recommend advocating for an Environmental Bill of Rights, as a means to achieving the healthy environment objective, without further detail and ability to provide advice, or expectations, on implications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to the recommendation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There is no Community Engagement proposed with this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Both the Blue Dot Campaign and the Regional Plan support protection of a healthy environment.

ALTERNATIVES

- Alternative 1: It is recommended that Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee not forward a recommendation to Regional Council to consider a declaration of support for an Environmental Bill of Rights. **RECOMMENDED**
- Alternative 2: Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee may choose to forward a recommendation to Regional Council to consider a declaration of support for an Environmental Bill of Rights.
- Alternative 3: Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee may choose to forward a recommendation that Regional Council refer the matter to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and / or the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities for deliberation.

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.

Report Approved by:

Original Signed

Richard MacLellan, Manager, Energy & Environment, 902.233.4846
