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Item No. 1
Audit & Finance Standing Committee
February 20, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of Audit & Finance Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Brad Anguish, Director of Parks & Recreation

Original Signed

Greg Keefe, Director of Finance & ICT/CFO

Original Signed

Eddie Robar, Director, Halifax Transit

DATE: February 2, 2015

SUBJECT: Discount Coupon System for Senior Citizens

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

August 7, 2012 Motion of Halifax Regional Council:

12.1 Councillor Smith

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Barkhouse that Regional Council support a staff report, to be provided to Regional Council before or during the next 2013/2014 budget deliberations, regarding the implementation of a \$200 per year discount coupon system for Senior Citizen residents in HRM over the age of 65. This discount program would have no cash value and would be available for these residents to purchase short term HRM recreational programs or access to public transit. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Section 79 (1) – The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for (k) recreational programs; and (o) public transportation services.

BACKGROUND

On August 7, 2012, Regional Council passed a motion requesting staff to prepare a report regarding the implementation of a \$200 per year discount coupon system for senior citizen residents in HRM over the age of 65. The discount program was to have no cash value and would be available for these residents to purchase short term HRM recreational programs or access to public transit.

The following initiatives are either already in place or underway which seniors can take advantage of relative to transit and recreation:

Transit

Transit passes, tickets and fares are available to seniors (65 years of age and up) at a reduced cost.

Seniors can travel free of charge on Tuesdays, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and after 6 p.m., on regular bus and ferry services, including Community Transit.

On April 1, 2014, Regional Council approved a low income transit pass pilot program, for a maximum of 500 participants, whose annual family income falls below the HRM low income indexed value (currently \$31,000) and who are not eligible for transportation reimbursements through other programs, including the Provincial Employment Support and Income Assistance Program, and allow those participants to purchase monthly adult Halifax Transit passes, including Metro Link and Metro X, during the six month pilot program at a 50% discounted rate. This pilot project will be implemented pending the adoption of a Transit Fare By-law which is being developed by Legal Services' staff.

Recreation Services

Parks & Recreation currently offers a 25% discount to seniors (age 55 and over) for most programs, including aquatic and fitness memberships, at our 32 HRM owned and operated facilities. Programs exempt from this discount are those with significant supply costs (such as pottery) or those already designated as a "senior" program where the cost is already reflective of the discount.

Parks & Recreation also offers discounted/no-charge rentals to several senior groups who operate out of facilities owned and operated by the Municipality.

Halifax also has 36 community recreation facilities operated by Community Boards that offer a variety of programming. Some of the programming is targeted specifically to seniors, while other programming does not have a specific target, but rather is offered to all participants. Examples of some of the programming specifically focussed to seniors includes: Chair Yoga; Healthy Heart and Strong Body; Aqua-fit; Seniors in Motion; Zumba Gold; Circuit Training; and Senior's Walk. These programs are all offered specifically with seniors' needs in mind. In addition to specific programming, pricing at the regional facilities considers seniors' needs. Discounts are provided to seniors in both annual membership and daily rates. Annual membership rate discounts range from 17% to 35%. Prices for daily facility usage or specific programming also tend to be lower for seniors by a range of 20% to 50% when compared to regular adult pricing.

Other programs available in HRM which seniors can take advantage of include:

Snow Removal Services

The snow removal program is available to seniors (65 years of age or older) and persons with disabilities, provided they reside in a single dwelling home that they own or rent, and their total gross household income of all people living on the premises does not exceed \$30,000. This program is not available to landlords.

Property Taxes

Homeowners are eligible to apply to HRM for help to pay their property taxes through a payment plan, a property tax rebate, or deferral of property taxes. These programs are available to all homeowners with a combined household income of \$32,000 or less a year.

Dog Licenses

There is a seniors discount on the licensing fee for “regular” dogs for individuals 65 years of age or older.

Seniors’ Home Safety Program

Seniors (55+ years) living in private residences in Halifax, Dartmouth and the communities extending from Bedford to the Sambro Loop are eligible for free home safety evaluations as part of the Seniors’ Home Safety Program.

DISCUSSION

As provided in the background section of this report, Halifax already provides substantial recreation and transit discount programs. Implementing a \$200/year discount coupon system will incur significant administrative handling costs and would serve to distort existing facility revenues, program pricing, and service levels throughout the region.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

None required.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/standing.php>, 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.
