

AUDIT AND FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE
MINUTES

February 27, 2013

PRESENT: Councillors: Bill Karsten, Chair
Russell Walker, Vice Chair
Mayor Mike Savage
Gloria McCluskey
Linda Mosher
Tim Outhit
Barry Dalrymple
Stephen Adams
Lorelei Nicoll

Guest Councillors: Deputy Mayor Rankin
Steve Craig
David Hendsbee
Waye Mason
Jennifer Watts

STAFF: Mr. Greg Keefe, Director of Finance and Information,
Communications & Technology/CFO
Ms. Martin Ward, Acting Director, Legal Services
Mr. Matt Godwin, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9: 33 a.m. in Halifax Council Chambers, Halifax City Hall.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 20, 2012

MOVED by Councillor Nicoll, seconded by Councillor McCluskey that the minutes of February 20, 2013 be approved as presented. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

MOVED by Councillor Walker, seconded by Nicoll that the agenda, as amended, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

The CAO's budget presentation item was moved to item 9.1.2.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES – NONE

5. MOTIONS OF RECONSIDERATION – NONE

6. MOTIONS OF RECISION – NONE

7. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS – NONE

8. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS & DELEGATIONS – NONE

9. REPORTS

9.1 STAFF

9.1.1 Write-Off Report

The report, dated February 11, 2013, was before the committee.

Councillor McCluskey asked about the large number of small write-offs and Jerry Blackwood, Manager of Revenue, responded that these are recreation accounts from recreation centres and programs. He cannot speak to the details of these cases as this is not in his purview, but Community Recreation Services has advised the funds are uncollectable.

Councillor McCluskey suggested staff consider making an effort to collect funds earlier in the process.

MOVED by Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Walker that the Audit and Finance Standing Committee:

- 1. Forward this report to HRM Regional Council for approval;**
- 2. The business occupancy tax accounts in the amount of \$86,408.37 comprised of \$60,494.95 principal and \$25,913.42 interest as detailed in Schedule 2 be formally written out of the books of account;**
- 3. The general revenue accounts in the amount of \$209,080.76 comprised of \$201,727.73 principal and \$7,353.03 interest as detailed in Schedule 3 be formally written out of the books of account;**
- 4. The real property tax accounts in the amount of \$169,474.03 comprised of \$97,818.89 principal and \$71,655.14 interest as detailed in Schedule 4 be formally written out of the books of account.**

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

9.1.2 Chief Administrative Office – Budget Presentation

Mr. Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer, presented a budget presentation to the committee, which included an overview of his business unit's structure, the services staff provide and the budget. Mr. Butts also spoke to his priority initiatives.

Councillor McCluskey asked if external services included election expenses and the CAO responded that elections are funded through reserves; goods and services are also related. Regarding consultancy, part of these expenses will be explained by Legal Services, but there is a reduction from previous years.

Councillor Outhit asked about the hiring of additional council support personnel and Mr. Butts responded that this issue was discussed at a recent Executive Standing Committee and a recommendation was made to hire additional staff to Regional Council. Councillor Outhit noted he supports the expected 2:1 ratio with respect to staff support.

Councillor Outhit and Councillor Nicoll raised concerns with having a direction related to staff hiring coming to this committee. The CAO responded that there is no weight to this point until it is approved by Regional Council.

Councillor Nicoll asked the CAO about the CAO's prioritization with respect to government relations and what this commitment entails. The CAO responded that this service involves connecting with other levels of government and stakeholders to ensure they understand HRM's priorities and request changes required by the City.

Councillor Nicoll asked about the corporate policy initiative and the CAO noted there is a requirement for greater unity among divisions.

MOVED by Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Nicoll that the Audit and Finance Committee direct staff to proceed to prepare the CAO Business Unit Budget and Business Plan as proposed in the accompanying presentation, incorporating additional direction provided through the committee discussion on February 27, 20123 for inclusion in the proposed HRM 13/14 Budget and Business Plan documents.

Councillor Mosher commended the efforts of Corporate Communications and that HRM is going in the right direction.

Councillor Dalrymple asked about the Province's record of approving requests for changes in legislation and the CAO noted staff have narrowed requests to focus on the Centre Plan. The Province has brought forward legislation pertaining to density bonusing and site plan approval.

Mayor Savage noted the Mayor's Office budget has not increased since last year and his budget will be below \$800,000.00.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED, with Councillor Outhit dissenting.

9.1.3 Finance, Information, Communications and Technology - Budget Presentation

Mr. Greg Keefe, Chief Financial Officer, referenced the additional presentation circulated to Councillors which reviews how staff are addressing Council priorities.

Mr. Keefe turned to his business unit's budget presentation and provided an overview of the business unit and its services. He noted they have achieved cost reductions through compensation and technological changes.

Mr. Keefe noting several ongoing areas of focus including commercial taxes, HRM website redesign, open data, East Port District Energy and changes to printers. He further noted staff will be undertaking a budget consultation process with the public and noted the recommendation to withdraw HRM's annual \$35,000.00 contribution to Standard and Poor rating agency.

Councillor Outhit noted his support for open data and updating the website. He doesn't believe HRM is getting value from the S&P service, but wanted to make sure withdrawing from this service will hurt the City's credit rating. Mr. Keefe confirmed that the rates are sent and borrowing is done through another party.

MOVED by Councillor Outhit, seconded by Councillor Nicoll that the Audit and Finance Standing Committee direct staff to proceed to prepare the Finance and

Information, Communication and Technology (FICT) Budget and Business Plan as proposed in the accompanying presentation, incorporating additional direction provided through the committee discussion on February 27, 2013 for inclusion in the proposed HRM 13/14 Budget and Business Plan documents.

Councillor McCluskey asked how many departments are providing the same services and what efforts are being made to consolidate. Mr. Keefe advised there are only a handful, such as Halifax Libraries and Halifax Water, along with Halifax Regional Police and Fire Services. He noted they are working to consolidate.

Councillor Nicoll asked if his unit is consolidating Human Resources. She also had concerns about withdrawing from Standard and Poor and what the cost to reinstating the service would be. Mr. Keefe advised staff are consolidating HR and it would not be hard to reinstate S&P services. Staff publish information on debt servicing costs on an ongoing basis.

Councillor Watts asked if the new website would be more user-friendly and noted she was glad to see public consultation on the budget. Mr. Keefe advised the website is more user-friendly.

Councillor Walker noted a forthcoming report from the Grants Committee coming to the Audit and Finance and that the status quo with respect to the grants regime is not preferred. Mr. Keefe advised staff are working on an umbrella grants policy to make the process fairer.

Councillor Craig thanked the CFO for overseeing the budget process and asked about what resources he requires to institutionalize internal improvements to make processes more efficient. Mr. Keefe advised that, in ICT, the unit has hired more analysts and his unit has been very fortunate to acquire new talent.

Councillor Hendsbee noted that grants for various groups and organizations will reflect a change to the assessment of their properties and the new grants policy should consider this reality.

Councillor Watts asked about grant funding requests for the Discovery Centre and the YMCA and what the process overall for requesting grants will end up looking like.

Mr. Keefe responded that the grants umbrella policy is being written to address this issue. These two grants specifically came from Council. Staff are not proposing anything new until the policy is finalized.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

9.1.4 Planning and Infrastructure - Budget Presentation

Ms. Jane Fraser, Director, Planning and Infrastructure gave an overview of her new business unit. Her staff are responsible for transportation, the Regional Plan, the Centre Plan, the capital budget, among other priority areas. Her staff are also responsible for environmental and energy policy, along with open space management and managing the Solar City project.

Ms. Fraser noted that the Regional Plan+5 is on target and the Centre Plan will be going into a consultation process soon. Ms. Fraser further spoke to active transportation, economic development, financial stewardship and a new policy for disposal of surplus land.

The business unit expects a \$500,000 surplus driven by staff vacancies and also some savings in property appraisals.

Ms. Fraser noted water quality monitoring is being done through developers and Halifax Water. There is an opportunity for making efficiencies here.

Councillor Outhit noted that residents value lakes in HRM and asked what the risk is and what is potentially being lost by recovering the \$35,000.00 used for testing.

Ms. Fraser noted that the existing program led to staff testing every lake annually. Currently, HRM has good baseline data and an understanding of the health of HRM's lakes. What staff are proposing is, rather than testing annually, that the lakes be monitored on a rotating basis. Particularly, as development occurs, the baseline data will be refreshed. The risk to lake health is low.

Councillor Outhit further asked if staff are expanding capital cost contributions (CCC) to include transit and traffic and staff responded in the affirmative. He further asked staff for an update on changing legislation to expand the capital cost contributions. Ms. Fraser advised that the request was submitted for legislative amendment, but was unsure as to its status.

Councillor Outhit further noted there needs to be funding availability to make the Regional Plan review flexible. If money isn't available for development, similar discussions will have to take place later. Ms. Fraser advised that when the Regional Plan comes forward there will be priority plans, strategies, bylaws and work plan with costing.

Councillor Adams left the meeting at 10:54am.

MOVED by Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Nicoll that the Audit and Finance Standing Committee direct staff to proceed to prepare the Planning & Infrastructure Budget and Business Plan as proposed in the accompanying presentation, incorporating additional direction provided through the committee discussion on February 27, 2013, for inclusion in the proposed HRM 2013/14 Budget and Business Plan documents.

Councillor McCluskey asked if HRM has its own accredited appraiser and Ms. Fraser responded that she has a recently hired, senior real-estate officer. She noted she is pleased to have this expertise, but may still have to seek help externally depending on the case.

Councillor McCluskey asked about the state of repair of Dartmouth Old City Hall and Ms. Fraser indicated it would take a \$5 million investment to bring it to a useable state. There is nothing in the budget for significant improvements.

Councillor McCluskey asked about work being done to Alderney 5 and noted it is quite cold there. Ms. Fraser indicated there are technological challenges but are working to improve this.

Councillor McCluskey asked about how spending is allocated for Regional Trails and Ms. Fraser indicated that the Halifax Regional Trail Association has a budget of \$850,000.00 and funding is allocated for each group.

Councillor McCluskey asked about property disposal and would like to see a list of properties. Ms. Fraser indicated a policy will be coming forward with a disposal methodology.

Councillor McCluskey wanted to know what happened with the money when a park is sold and Ms. Fraser responded that it goes into the general land reserve.

Councillor McCluskey asked where the downtown corridors are with respecting to the business unit's focus and Ms. Fraser noted that funding is for the two library plazas, Main St. in Dartmouth, Sackville Dr. and the Herring Cove Rd.

Councillor McCluskey asked about vacancies and Ms. Fraser noted there are two planning vacancies and staff are taking steps to hire more and an advertisement will be sent out soon for a Chief Planner.

The Mayor asked what the expected cost for the Cogswell Interchange will be and at what time staff expect to start work on the project. Ms. Fraser replied that the request-for-purchase is \$145,000.00 for study and the results will speak to the overall cost for the project. The item will be before Regional Council in September or October and there will be public consultation involved. Any land sold will go to the Reserves.

The Mayor asks about Burnside and if the parcels of land referenced in the presentation are gateway related. Ms. Fraser responded that the effort at the present is to open these areas up for development and ready it for sale.

The Mayor asked about the search for the Chief Planner and Ms. Fraser indicated this is a nationwide search and staff are considering qualifications outlined for this position in other municipalities.

The Mayor also asked about the LED light transition and Ms. Fraser indicated that there will be a report to Regional Council in May outlining the planned conversion. Councillor Karsten asked, after once all the vacancies are filled, if she believes her department will need to hire additional planners to meet expectations. Ms. Fraser responded that this pertaining more to development and her group's responsibility is to make sure the planning process is easy to interpret and apply.

Councillor Dalrymple asked why no funding was listed for the Aerotech Park and Ms. Fraser indicated staff are looking for opportunities in this area.

Councillor Dalrymple indicated that if HRM is not going to invest in the park, HRM should consider discussing with the Airport Authority their taking over the lands to let them develop it.

Mr. Labrecque, Deputy CAO, clarified that staff are limited by what they can do because of capacity and once. Only after these functional issues are addressed can considerations about its future begin. The CAO added that the area around the airport is complex and that staff have met with the Airport Authority to work with them to plan for the future.

Councillor Dalrymple indicated that he supports spending on street-scaping in the hubs, but staff should not forget the visioning exercises done in suburban and rural areas. With respect to water testing, depending on the costs of lab-testing, there may be volunteer groups who would be willing to conduct this testing. He also asked staff about progress on the Shubanacadie Canal.

Ms. Fraser responded that she has meet with the canal commission and that the \$300,000.00 commitment is new money and includes the incline plan. She also indicated staff are considering intersection improvements.

Councillor Karsten and Councillor Walker asked about lake monitoring and Ms. Fraser reiterated that testing is being done now and in the future not every lake will be done every year. Key lakes will be tested.

Councillor Walker asked what the \$350,000.00 is committed to. Mr. Fraser indicated that it is a land analysis to consider potential for development. She noted this is part of the Regional Plan review and it will be carried out in the upcoming fiscal year.

Councillor Walker questioned staff on the organization of budget projections in the documents provided to members.

Councillor Outhit noted HRM has terrific staff in development, but questioned if the only way to expedite the process is getting more people. He noted technological changes could be an option.

Councillor Hendsbee echoed his agreement that negotiations on the Aerotech lands should be begin soon. He also asked, with respect to the street light conversion, if HRM was buying assets from NS Power and Ms. Fraser indicated that they were. Councillor Hendsbee noted that other visioning processes have been done in HRM, including Woodside and Spryfield and that these areas should not be overlooked. He also called on staff to resurrect the street-scaping study for Preston.

Councillor Mosher noted that community visioning endeavours often lead to residents being discouraged because the work they put into the exercise is not realized and only raises expectations. Regarding the Armdale Rotary she asked when work would begin on the area with respect to integrating it into the community and an aesthetic addition to the circle. Ms. Fraser committed to providing this information to the Councillor.

Councillor Karsten indicated his support for Councillor Mosher's comments regarding community visioning.

Councillor Watts spoke to her concern for the disposal of property and indicated her desire to see a clear process before HRM enters into the transfer. Regarding the Centre Plan and the parking strategy, doing this well the first time will ensure congestion is reduced and revenue is generated. She further asked if staff are earmarking funds for the implementation of the regional plan as residents will expect action. Mr. Keefe responded that staff are reviewing reserves and are targeting April 3, 2013 Audit and Finance Standing Committee meeting to address this.

Councillor Craig asked about the future for the Sackville Business Park and Ms. Fraser indicated that there are opportunities to initiate these discussions in the future.

Councillor Mason asked staff if the Centre hubs and corridors will change. He also asked about how many kilometres of sidewalk will be considered during downtown street-scaping. He noted that Councillor Watts asked the Airport Authority to present to the Community Planning and Economic Development Committee with respect to the Aerotech park. Councillor Dalrymple indicated he would like to be notified about this meeting.

9.1.5 Human Resources - Budget Presentation

Ms. Catherine Mullally, Director, Human Resources offered a presentation and report pertaining to the business unit's budget process.

Ms. Mullally provided details on her office's structure, strategic direction and policy, along with a forthcoming dashboard report. She provided background on corporate training taking place across HRM and workplace culture.

Ms. Mullally noted their budget is flat and provided information on cost reduction initiatives which were largely achieved through vacancy savings and she also spoke to

some of her upcoming initiatives such as the People Plan and a promoting a culture of inclusion.

MOVED by Councillor Walker, seconded by Councillor McCluskey that the Audit and Finance Standing Committee direct staff to proceed to prepare the Human Resources Budget and Business Plan as proposed in the accompanying presentation, incorporating additional direction provided through the committee discussion on Human Resources for inclusion in the proposed HRM 13/14 Budget and Business Plan documents.

Councillor Walker asked if there is a proactive attempt to reduce sick days and Ms. Mullally responded that accountability is with each business unit, however, they have met with directors on the issue, provide attendance management policies and protocols, will be working with ICT to give managers better, more regular data and are providing managers with coaching sessions.

Councillor McCluskey asked how many staff are on stress leave and what staff are doing to alleviate stress in the workplace. Ms. Mullally responded that HR often isn't made aware of a staff member's condition. She further noted that staff are committed to prevention through healthy eating programs, a healthy workplace guide and work with business units on workplace culture.

Councillor McCluskey asked if candidates from all backgrounds are subject to the same qualification criteria as other candidates and Ms. Mullally responded that all candidates are considered based on the same criteria.

Councillor McCluskey asked about the use of external services and Ms. Mullally responded that the employee and family assistance program is administered externally, as well as the provision of the online application platform.

Councillor McCluskey asked for information on the safety consultant and Ms. Mullally responded that technological and operational changes are providing the impetus for an adapted support model to prevent accidents.

Councillor Hendsbee asked about the process for filling vacant positions and what the business unit is doing to retain corporate knowledge. Ms. Mullally responded that business units do not fill vacant positions automatically, but business units incorporate business analytics to determine if the vacancy needs to be filled or if it already possesses the required resources. There is no vacancy target. With respect to change management, she noted that HRM has undergone significant change recently and her staff are conducting sessions to address this. They are also implementing a talent management program and directors are meeting on a regular basis to discuss succession planning.

Councillor McCluskey asked if staff are able to work past the age of 65 and Ms. Mullally indicated they are.

Councillor Karsten asked how staff are measuring workplace performance, motivation and morale. Ms. Mullally responded that staff are focusing on employee engagement and are assisting staff to embrace changes.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

9.1.6 Halifax Libraries – Budget Presentation

Ms. Judith Hare, CEO, Halifax Libraries presented to the committee on her budget and noted that there are budget reductions, including through compensation and benefits, vacancies and office supplies.

Ms. Hare further highlighted an immigration program for language training, rural service and service in other underserved communities and the process for the migration of services to the Central Library. She also spoke to some changes related to the management of collections and the process for taking out assets.

MOVED by Councillor Walker, seconded by Councillor McCluskey that the Audit and Finance Committee direct staff to proceed to prepare the Halifax Public Libraries Budget and Business Plan as proposed in the accompanying presentation, incorporating additional direction provided through the committee discussion on February 27, 2013 for inclusion in the proposed HRM 13/14 Budget and Business Plan documents.

Councillor Walker asked about the fate of the Halifax Memorial Library and Ms. Hare noted that the asset is owned by HRM and staff are bringing a recommendation regarding it to Regional Council.

Councillor Walker asked about the possibility of an expansion to the Keshen Goodman Library and Ms. Hare responded that planning for infrastructure will be brought forward after the budget, possibly in June or July.

Councillor Outhit noted HRM needs to do a better job of demonstrating the value provided by libraries to the public and there is a need to better advertise library services. He further asked Ms. Hare about a library in Bedford and Ms. Hare noted they are having discussions about space and referenced the Woodlawn and Tantallen libraries, which involved private sector partnerships.

Councillor McCluskey asked how much the Captain Spry Youth lives services cost and Ms. Hare responded that the cost was \$167,000.00.

Councillor McCluskey asked if there is a duplication of services between Halifax Libraries and the rest of HRM. Ms. Hare responded that the Auditor General is conducting a review now. Halifax Libraries has no legal or accounting staff, but they do have payroll staff.

Councillor McCluskey asked about infrastructure improvements to a number of facilities in Dartmouth and staff responded with spending details, including \$250,000.00 for Cole Harbour and additions to the Dartmouth North Library.

Councillor Dalrymple indicated he will not support this budget item as there is no funding for services in his district. He asked staff if they are waiting to address this gap until after work in other areas is done. Ms. Hare indicated they are planning to do a focus group in the area and that the Province is conducting an investigation into rural services. Regarding the building of a new library, that is up to Council.

Councillor Hendsbee referenced the Cole Harbour Place library and asked staff to consider access to the sidewalk when they consider refurbishments. He was pleased to hear about initiatives at the Black Cultural Centre. He asked about the lack of rural branch hours and that there are alternatives, such as volunteers and other partnerships, to providing staff support at these locations.

Ms. Hare indicated that staff have done all they can with the current budget to maximize hours at rural branches and would like to see hours expanded everywhere. Because of the requirement for specific skills and staff unionization they are hampered when looking at other opportunities.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

9.1.7 Legal Services – Budget Presentation

Ms. Marian Tyson, Director, Legal Services provided a presentation to the committee about her budget. She indicated that her budget is balanced, despite adding some new staff from other business units. She noted there was increase in the use of external resources due to extraordinary circumstances, as well as staffing shortages, but she provided information on some of the steps taken to reduce expenditures, including the higher of more junior lawyers and vacancy management.

MOVED by Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Walker that the Audit and Finance Committee direct staff to proceed to prepare the Legal, Insurance and Risk Management Services Budget and Business Plan as proposed in the accompanying presentation, incorporating additional direction provided through the committee discussion on February 27, 2013 for inclusion in the proposed HRM 13/14 Budget and Business Plan documents.

Councillor McCluskey asked if her staff are doing more work and Ms. Tyson noted that they are taking on more work than they did previously.

Councillor McCluskey asked about external services in 2013/14 and Ms. Tyson noted that the Auditor General's report recommended providing \$250,000.00 for these services.

Councillor McCluskey asked if staff are bringing by-laws together and Ms. Tyson's indicated they are not consistent across HRM and they are taking steps to consolidate. With respect to the hiring of a director, interviews will commence in March.

Councillor McCluskey asked about assessment appeals and she noted they are appealing some federal properties and rely on external assessment services. They have retained Turner Drake to assist with these.

Councillor Outhit indicated he was pleased to see old files are being cleared up and asked about their hiring practices. Ms. Tyson indicated hiring is not complete and is ongoing.

Councillor Outhit noted Regional Council does not manage operations and wanted to know how they can support growing the size of a department. Ms. Tyson indicated that the Auditor General's report contained recommendations they are pursuing and noted some positions are transferred from other places.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

- 9.2 MEMBERS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE**
- 9.3 OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL – NONE**
- 9.4 SUB-COMITTEES**
 - 9.4.1 Grants Committee - NONE**
 - 9.4.2 Investment Policy Advisory Committee – NONE**
 - 9.4.3 Special Events Advisory Committee – NONE**
- 10. MOTIONS – NONE**
- 11. ADDED ITEMS – NONE**
- 13. IN CAMERA**
- 14. NEXT MEETING DATE – March 20, 2013**
- 13. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:43 p.m.

Matt Godwin
Legislative Assistant

INFORMATION ITEMS

1. Upcoming Agenda Items
 - 1.1 Community Facilities Master Plan – Funding Strategies
 - 1.2 Revised Special Events Granting Framework