



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Information Item No. 6
Transportation Standing Committee
March 26, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Maggie MacDonald, Acting Managing Director of Government Relations and
External Affairs

DATE: March 17, 2015

SUBJECT: Accessibility at Municipal Public Engagement Events

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Item 9.3.2 of the December 3, 2014 Transportation Standing Committee meeting, the Accessibility Committee requested that the Transportation Standing Committee request a staff report to develop standards and protocol for accessibility at municipal public engagement events, including examination of best practice standards and protocols that are used in other municipalities.

Item 11.3.1 of the January 28, 2014 Regional Council meeting, report to Regional Council titled *Mayor's Conversation on a Healthy and Liveable Community*, which presented the results of an event from the previous October, included the following recommendation: (Regional Council) Direct staff to include the statement "HRM is a leader in building an inclusive and accessible community for everyone, including persons with disabilities and seniors" within the Healthy Communities Priority Outcomes, along with a Business Plan to support this outcome, for consideration by Council in preparation for the 2015/16 planning cycle.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Sections 34 and 35 of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, regarding the role of the Chief Administrative Officer to draft, review, and recommend policies under the direction of Regional Council.

The Terms of Reference of the Accessibility Advisory Committee sets out the objectives of the Committee, including:

1.1 To facilitate the full participation of all citizens with disabilities in civic and community affairs by ensuring that policies, programs and services do not impose barriers to such participation.

1.3 To work towards the elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers facing persons with disabilities by advising Halifax Regional Council, through the Transportation Standing Committee, on issues and concerns raised by citizens.

BACKGROUND

At the October 20, 2014 meeting of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Committee discussed a community meeting held by a municipal department which was not accessible for an individual using a wheelchair. The Committee approved a motion recommending that the Transportation Standing Committee request a staff report, the motion for which is included in the origin section of this report.

In relation to this request, a team of staff in Government Relations and External Affairs are coordinating the development of an accessibility and inclusion framework for HRM, initiated by the second motion included in the origin section of this report.

DISCUSSION

Accessibility standards for public meetings and events will be considered in the context of ongoing work on the broad accessibility and inclusion framework. Until this work is completed and brought to Regional Council for approval, interim guidelines for ensuring accessibility at public meetings will be developed and circulated to staff. The guidelines will provide staff with factors for consideration in areas such as choice of location, style and medium of invitations and notices, accessibility of materials related to the meeting, and operational access at the meeting site. In addition, HRM facilities and other community facilities regularly used for public meetings will be assessed to generate a list of accessible sites to hold public meetings.

As noted by members of the Accessibility Committee, setting specific standards for accessibility at meetings and events may be difficult because “accessible” can have different meanings depending on the type and degree of disability, and some services can be expensive and/or challenging to book because of availability. Factors could include ensuring the physical location of the meeting has door openers, ramps, and rails for those using wheelchairs, walkers or canes. In addition other accessibility factors such as accessibility of materials or procedures for requesting additional interpretation services (as required) need consideration in the guidelines.

The accessibility and inclusion framework will be informed by a jurisdictional scan of practices in other Canadian municipalities and an inventory of existing activity in HRM, and will include development of standards and outcomes and a system for regular progress reporting to Regional Council. Global themes being explored as the basis for the framework are being aligned with best practices in other jurisdictions, as well as proposed provincial accessibility legislation. These themes include Client/Customer Service, Employment, Transportation, Built Environment, Information and Communication, and Strategic Planning and Oversight. Development of the framework is in the early stages. As the Accessibility and inclusion framework is developed, consultation will be undertaken with the Accessibility Advisory Committee. The report to Council in response to the second motion will provide further detail and recommendations. Overall, the framework will provide the foundation for municipal policy and governance in relation to accessibility and inclusion.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific financial implications as a result of the material included in this report. However, there may be costs associated with providing enhanced accessibility and services which need to be captured in subsequent reports and business unit budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is comprised of eight volunteer citizen members and two members of Regional Council, plus staff liaison members from a number of HRM business units including

Halifax Transit, Operations Support, Human Resources, Recreation Services, and Halifax Regional Police. Meetings are held monthly and are open to the public. Minutes, agendas, reports and other information on the AAC are posted on the HRM website.

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 Prepared by: Paul Johnston / Coordinator of Corporate Affairs, 902.490.6616
