

**REGIONAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
Wednesday, June 18, 2008**

PRESENT: Mr. Fred Morley, Chair
Councillor Gloria McCluskey
Councillor Krista Snow
Ms. Cheryl Newcombe
Mr. Paul Pettipas
Ms. Bonnie Ryan
Ms. Margo Grant
Ms. Maya Warnock

REGRETS: Mr. Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer, HRM
Mr. Robert Batherson
Councillor David Hendsbee, Vice-Chair

STAFF: Mr. Roger Wells, Supervisor, Regional & Community Planning
Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 3:08 pm in the Helen Creighton Room, Alderney Gate Library, 40 Alderney Drive, Dartmouth. Mr. Morley welcomed the two recently appointed members, Councillor Krista Snow and Ms. Maya Warnock, to the Committee.

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES - May 28, 2008

MOVED by Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Ms. Cheryl Newcombe, that the minutes of May 28, 2008, as presented, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

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

MOVED BY Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Ms. Bonnie Ryan that the order of business, as presented, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES

4.1 Revised Terms of Reference - Quorum

- A copy of the Committee's report to Regional Council, dated June 2, 2008, was before the Committee.

Mr. Morley advised that the report had been deferred by Regional Council at their June 17th session. A further update will be provided at the next meeting.

5. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS

5.1 RPAC Meeting Logistics and Summer Schedule

Mr. Morley advised that the meeting schedule will be kept as close to schedule as possible. Proper notice will be provided for any special meetings that may be required. The number of special meetings will be reduced.

Councillor McCluskey provided regrets at this time for the July 16th meeting.

MOVED BY Councillor Snow, seconded by Mr. Paul Pettipas that the Legislative Assistant forward appointments for the July and August Regional Plan Advisory Committee meetings to all members and that those dates be marked as tentative.

Mr. Wells commented that if an issue arises that is time sensitive, such as an update on the third harbour crossing, one or both of the tentative summer dates will be confirmed.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

6. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS & DELEGATIONS - NONE

7. REPORTS - NONE

8. NEW BUSINESS

8.1 HRMbyDesign - Update (Verbal)

- A letter dated June 12, 2008 from Dale Godsoe, Chair, Urban Design Task Force, was before the Committee.
- A Memorandum dated June 18, 2008 from Andy Fillmore, HRM By Design Project Manager to the Chair and Members of the Regional Plan Advisory Committee, was circulated at this time.

Mr. Andy Fillmore, HRMbyDesign Project Manager, advised that the amendments forwarded to the provincial legislature's spring session were deferred (by the province) to the fall sitting. The delay has provided an opportunity for further public and key stakeholder consultation to ensure the creation of the best possible urban design plan. HRMbyDesign project staff and the Urban Design Task Force have created a new workplan. The complete, revised workplan will be before Regional Council on July 8th for approval and will be forwarded to the RPAC as soon as it is available.

Mr. Fillmore confirmed for Councillor McCluskey that all of Dartmouth, inside the circumferential, will be included in the HRMbyDesign project. He explained that the project has seven phases; the first five phases involved the regional centre, the sixth phase was for the downtown and the final phase (seven) will review and finalize all the phases.

Mr. Paul Pettipas suggested that with respect to the proposed Design Review Panel, the creation of clear guidelines is necessary to ensure a fair and impartial process for the developers and general public. The guidelines would help alleviate concerns with conflict of interest, highjacking and "trade-offs" by special interest groups. The credibility of the entire process will be based on this. Mr. Fillmore responded that the Terms of Reference would address concerns in regard to special interest groups taking over and that inducting enough members into a pool where you drew only five or six at a time would address the conflict of interest issue.

In response to Councillor McCluskey, Mr. Fillmore advised that the membership of the current Urban Design Task Force represents a microcosm of HRM and is quite diverse. The membership includes district members from the regional center (all citizens), two Architects, a Developer, representatives from the Downtown Business Commission, the Heritage Advisory Committee and the Cultural Advisory Committee, for a total of sixteen (16) members.

Mr. Fillmore, in response to Mr. Morley, advised that development of a governmental communications program will be key to having these issues addressed in the legislature. Ms. Jennifer Church, HRM's Intergovernmental & Corporate Affairs Advisor, and Mr. Dan

English, CAO, are working on a Government Relations Strategy. The goal will be to liaise and collaborate more effectively with members of all parties at the Legislature.

Councillor Snow suggested that each Committee member, independently, contact their local representatives to heighten the attention to these important amendments.

MOVED BY Councillor Snow, seconded by Councillor McCluskey that the Chair of the Regional Plan Advisory Committee contact the province on behalf of the Committee to heighten the importance of the amendments related to HRMbyDesign. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Mr. Pettipas agreed that contacting the local representatives will draw attention to the importance of the issue getting through to the fall sitting of the legislature. He stressed the need to contact all three political parties.

Ms. Jacqueline Hamilton, Supervisor of Heritage and Design, Community Development, in response to Councillor Snow, explained that the information was presented to the legislature as four separate bills instead of one piece. Staff will attempt to make clear the inter-relationship of those bills. Regional Council's support in encouraging the province to review this enabling legislation at the fall sitting would be beneficial as staff are only able to provide the facts and are not able to encourage (lobby) the issue with the legislature. HRM's Legal Services and representatives of the downtown business commissions were in attendance when the information was presented at the legislature.

Mr. Morley suggested that information on the various bills be made available to all RPAC members, specifically Councillor Snow, and that he, as Chair, would forward a letter in support of the legislation to The Honourable Cecil Clarke, Chair of the Law Amendments Committee, in regard to the changes being sought. He added that RPAC would like to be provided an update on the Governmental Relations Communication Strategy being developed by Ms. Church and Mr. English.

The Committee requested that the individual e-mail addresses for RPAC members be provided in order for them to communicate expeditiously with each other and staff on this issue. The Chair cautioned that any and all e-mail correspondence is to be considered strictly confidential and not to be shared or copied with external bodies.

Mr. Wells suggested that the HRM communication strategy for this legislation needs to be prepared in a coordinated fashion, and that perhaps the offers of assistance from the RPAC and its members should be channeled through the CAO's office.

8.2 Tax Reform Initiative - Staff Presentation

- A copy of the PowerPoint presentation; Creating a Modern Property Tax System for Halifax, was before the Committee.
- A handout from the recent Open Houses, "The Road to Tax Reform", including five maps outlining the service areas and tax zones for six of the nine proposed service-

based taxes was circulated at this time.

Mr. Andre MacNeil, Financial Consultant, Fiscal & Tax Policy, assisted by Mr. James Stuewe, an MPA intern working on the Tax Reform project, presented the information.

Mr. MacNeil responded to Councillor McCluskey that determining a property owners ability to pay is a challenge and that the Tax Reform Committee has proposed to address this through an enhanced low income rebate. Mr. MacNeil further explained that HRM has developed the first mission statement in the country in regard to a tax system; *"To provide an equitable tax system based on a charge for services provided and ability to pay."* In total, 29 objectives for tax reform have been compiled from research and consultation with the public. The overall effect of the tax reform initiative would be a shift away from an assessment based system to a system based on services provided. There would be nine (9) flat tax rates and relief for lower income owners.

Mr. Pettipas commented that it appears the person who would be paying the most tax under the proposed system would be the owner of a single, detached dwelling in the Regional Centre. Mr. MacNeil clarified that those persons in the Suburban area would pay the highest municipal tax because of the services provided (ie: greater demand on roadways than the Regional Centre). The highest regional transportation rates are in commutershed areas where homes would typically have lower taxes as they would not have services such as hydrants or local transit.

Mr. MacNeil also explained that the question arises of whether or not to retain the Deed Transfer Tax. The Tax Reform Committee proposed that the Deed Transfer Tax was not consistent with a service based approach and should be discontinued which could, economically, be beneficial for young families and/or first time home buyers.

Councillor McCluskey commented that a better method of receiving public comment would have been to hold a public meeting with a presentation by staff and an opportunity for the public to ask questions. She added that most people are still not fully aware of what the tax reform encompasses.

Ms. Margo Grant suggested that there should be some incentive, such as an additional charge, for owners of vacant commercial heritage properties that may be heritage properties to develop / use that land rather than leaving it vacant. Ms. Maya Warnock expressed concern that if heritage property owners were taxed too high they may sell the properties. She suggested some form of tax relief for owners of heritage properties. Mr. MacNeil added that part of the challenge is to identify what can best be done under planning regulations and what can be done through taxation.

Mr. Pettipas commented that trying to find an objective criteria and the fairest solution comes into conflict with the tax burden and ability to pay. It appears that the tax reform issue is getting into the area of income tax and that is a very dangerous predicament. He added that he can see problems arising at Council when they review the objectives as Council will raise the concern that there are many people who are simply trying to maintain

their homes.

Councillor Snow added that if this issue went before Council now, it would most likely be turned down as the majority do not “get it”. She explained that you have to take the time and go through the detail which she was able to do at one of the Tax Reform Open Houses in May.

Mr. Morley, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Mr. MacNeil for his presentation. He summarized that the direction from the RPAC in regard to the tax reform initiatives would be to focus on some of the principles, particularly in connecting the costs to services and what services property owners receive in different areas and the objectives described in Section 5.6.1.1 of the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS).

Councillor McCluskey exited the meeting at 4:51 p.m.

Mr. Pettipas and Councillor Snow suggested that there be clearer titles and examples in the handout to identify Suburban, Rural and Urban areas and suggested that actual community names be used in the examples. Mr. MacNeil clarified that this information was provided on the panels used at the public open houses.

In response to Ms. Maya Warnock on why an apartment building would be charged less for local roads than a single family home, Mr. MacNeil explained that each building would pay a flat rate for fire hydrants and local roads, however; apartments would pay more for regional roads. This was designed to support compact development.

Councillor Snow and Ms. Ryan exited the meeting at 5:00 p.m. Quorum was lost at this time.

8.3 Climate Change (Sea Level Rise) - Staff Presentation

- A copy of the PowerPoint presentation was before the Committee.

Due to loss of quorum, this item was deferred to next meeting.

Mr. Pettipas suggested that when this item returns to the Committee for discussion, that it be the only item on the agenda as there will be some discussion around the issue.

The Committee agreed to hold a July meeting to address the Climate Change (Sea Level Rise) issue as well as any update that may be available on the Intergovernmental Communication Strategy.

9. ADDED ITEMS - NONE

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting is July 16, 2008.

11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Chris Newson
Legislative Assistant