

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES
MAY 22, 1997

PRESENT: Mayor Walter Fitzgerald
Deputy Mayor Jack Greenough
Councillors Bill Dooks
David Hendsbee
Ron Cooper
Condo Sarto
Bruce Hetherington
Clint Schofield
John Cunningham
Jerry Blumenthal
Graham L. Downey
Howard Epstein
Russell Walker
Bill Stone
Ron Hanson
Stephen Adams
Barry Barnet
Robert Harvey
Peter Kelly
Reg Rankin
Jack Mitchell

REGRETS: Councillor: Gordon R. Snow
Larry Uteck
Harry McInroy

STAFF MEMBERS: Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer
Ms. Jane Nauss, Assistant Municipal Clerk
Ms. Patti Halliday, Assistant Municipal Clerk

Mayor Fitzgerald called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

1. **1997/98 PROPOSED OPERATING BUDGET**

MOVED by Councillors Hetherington and Blumenthal that a request for proposals be undertaken for a Comprehensive Audit of all departments within Halifax Regional Municipality, with the auditor's report to be forwarded directly to Council. Further, that a Committee of Council be established to oversee the Comprehensive Audit process.

Deputy Mayor Greenough stated this Operating Budget was not acceptable to the community of Dartmouth due to possible cuts in essential services. As the Province initiated the amalgamation of the four former municipalities and Metropolitan Authority, it should now *not* abandon the process. Accordingly, Council should cease further Operating Budget deliberations pending the Province taking a stand in this regard.

Mayor Fitzgerald suggested the Province assume at least 50 percent of the amalgamation costs for Halifax Regional Municipality. In response, Deputy Mayor Greenough suggested if the municipality had been treated fairly (as it pertains to having to pay additional costs for Social Services in the amount of \$22 million; the HST; and, amalgamation costs) it would not be in this financial situation.

A brief discussion ensued on the benefits to the municipality of a Comprehensive Audit at this point in time.

Councillor Hanson took his place at the meeting at 10:25 a.m.

Deputy Mayor Greenough assumed the Chair.

Councillor Harvey took his place at the meeting at 10:30 a.m.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Mitchell on the length of time involved to carry out a Comprehensive Audit, Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer, stated this could be a 10 - 12 month exercise; therefore, although it would not solve current budget problems, in the long term, it would prove beneficial. Accordingly, Mr. Meech suggested these discussions cease for the time being, forward the matter of a Comprehensive Audit to the CAO Committee or establish a new Committee, to develop the terms of reference for a Request for Proposals.

Mr. Meech advised that staff was attempting to compile a database of all services offered by the municipality. Further, he noted that reducing staff at the management level would not necessarily assist with budget concerns at this point in time. Council was reminded this was a municipality which covered a vast area and required appropriate staff to run it smoothly. However, Mr. Meech did accept the notion there were problem areas which required attention. In closing, he noted that staff were working on a three-year plan to deal with Operating Budget concerns, and that he would like to provide an overview of the Operating Budget at the next Council Meeting.

Councillor Adams suggested an Audit Committee be established, comprised of a variety of staff (not those at the management level).

Councillor Barnet suggested a new committee be established to deal with the Comprehensive Audit.

Deputy Mayor Greenough stated that the Audit Committee had discussed undertaking a Comprehensive Audit for several departments, however, what was now before Council was considered *more* comprehensive.

Councillor Mitchell suggested that Council be involved with the Comprehensive Audit as this municipality was created without input from Council.

Councillor Downey stated he could not support the Motion on the floor and that Council cannot continue to blame the Province for its current financial problems.

Councillor Hanson suggested that should there be the need for a reduction in staff, that same be dealt with through early retirement or attrition. Further, it was his opinion that residents would be willing to pay increased taxes to maintain their level of service. In closing, the Councillor stated that amalgamation was not working as it should be.

Councillor Rankin took his place at the meeting at 11:10 a.m.

Councillor Stone suggested if Council is not pleased with staff's suggestions for proposed cuts to the Operating Budget, then an alternative must be determined.

Councillor Dooks expressed concern that rural communities were facing an increase in taxes due to the tax structure and an increase in assessments.

Councillor Hetherington requested organizational charts for each Department noting they should now be available. Also, the Councillor suggested the Province be approached to cost-share on the Comprehensive Audit and, that the Audit should be a public document.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

FIRE SERVICES

Commissioner Gary Greene, and Deputy Commissioner of Operations, Mike Eddy; Deputy Commissioner - Support Services - Bill Mosher, and Financial Co-ordinator, Gordon Roussell were in attendance.

Through the use of overheads, Council was advised of the following:

- Fire Station Locations
- Statistics (# of stations, paid personnel, volunteers, emergency responses, and budget figure)
- Organizational chart
- Major issues
- Change in Operating Budget and staff complement (core)
- Budget changes by division
- Operating Budget reduction.

The Mayor assumed the Chair.

Chief Greene stated that a reduction in staff (36) would be proposed as follows:

- Lady Hammond Road Station - 16
- Patton Road Station - 8
- Overall - 12.

Council expressed concern noting it would be difficult to protect the citizens of the municipality with these type of adjustments.

A brief discussion ensued on emergency response times with Chief Greene advising staff was of the opinion that following trial runs, an adequate service was being offered in this regard. Further, that four minutes response time was the rule of thumb.

Councillor Barnet requested detailed analysis on emergency calls received and response times involved.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Barnet as to who would bear the responsibility if the municipality was sued for loss of life, Chief Greene advised that both staff and Council would share in the responsibility.

Councillor Hendsbee took his place at the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Barnet as to the reasoning behind the creation of a hiring list when there may be proposed layoffs, Chief Greene advised this list was initially comprised when a "0" based budget was anticipated. Further, the hiring list is good for three years. Also, as a result of fees involved (\$95.00) the municipality can make \$10,000 on the process.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Kelly if volunteer firemen have first preference when recruitment is taking place, Chief Greene advised that volunteers receive credit at the interview level.

Following a recess at 12:30 p.m., the meeting resumed at 1:30 p.m.