

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES FEBRUARY 22, 2000

PRESENT:

His Worship Mayor Walter Fitzgerald
Deputy Mayor John Cunningham
Councillors: Stephen Streach
Gordon R. Snow
Keith Colwell
Ron Cooper
Harry McInroy
Jack Greenough
Condo Sarto
Bruce Hetherington
Clint Schofield
Jerry S. Blumenthal
Graham L. Downey
Sue Uteck
Sheila Fougere
Russell Walker
Bill Stone
Graham Read
Stephen D. Adams
David E. Merrigan
Robert P. Harvey
Peter J. Kelly
Reg Rankin
Jack Mitchell

STAFF MEMBERS:

Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. Wayne Anstey, Municipal Solicitor
Ms. Vi Carmichael, Municipal Clerk
Ms. Barbara Moar, Assistant Municipal Clerk

Mayor Fitzgerald called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION FUNDING

- A staff report, dated February 18, 2000, prepared by Ken R. Meech, Chief Administrative Officer, regarding the above, was before Council for consideration.
- Extract from January 18, 2000 Minutes, regarding the above, was before Council
- Letters/emails received from residents of the Halifax Regional Municipality regarding the above, were before Council for consideration.
- Folder from The Halifax Regional School Board containing the following documents distributed at meeting:
 - Letter dated February 11, 2000 from Department of Education,
 - Proposal from the School Board
 - Report *Students First*, dated February 21, 2000
 - Allocations of Supplementary Funding 1999-2000
 - Overview of a survey in favour of equity in supplementary funding
 - Presentation by Paul Russell and Alice Moriarty, Home and School Association, Harry R. Hamilton Elementary
 - Questions/Concerns regarding supplementary funding
 - Copy of Presentations from Rick Tully and Alice Moriarty, Inner City Education Advisory Committee

Ms. Stella Campbell, Chairperson, Halifax Regional School Board thanked Council for allowing time for the School Board to speak to Council on this very important issue. Ms. Campbell stated that there are 58,000 young constituents attending over 140 classes in HRM that need Council's support. Ms. Campbell suggested that if these students were here today, that they would be supporting equal treatment for all students attending schools in HRM.

Ms. Campbell pointed out that with the restrictions on supplementary funding the School Board is unable to be fair to all students. Currently, the School Board has to operate under legal guidelines, and spend supplementary funding in the areas in which the funding is raised. Ms. Campbell stated that the only way that this issue can be resolved is for the Board to put forward a reasonable solution and for Council to debate the issue and reach a majority decision.

Mr. Mike Brownlow, Principal, spoke to Council on the public consultation process that the School Board has been going through. He stated that a major system review was being carried out by the School Board. One of the Advisory Committees was to deal with supplementary funding. Involved parents, Board Members, Principals, union representatives, and school board personnel were appointed to this Committee. He pointed

out that an impact analysis was done on supplementary funding, including topics such as accountability, and transparency of the process. Mr. Brownlow stated that it is recognized that education is a provincial responsibility, but Council can choose to make additional funds available.

Mr. Brownlow referred to the public consultation process that was carried out by the School Board. The public expressed a great concern that 58% of school age children in HRM did not have access to these funds. Many parents spoke very strongly on the value and importance of education, and that it not be at the lowest common denominator. Lack of trust was expressed by many people during the consultations, but this was based on lack of information. Affordability was also an issue that was discussed during the public consultation process, but there was a willingness on the part of the parents to pay for direct service. Mr. Brownlow stated that the most significant comment from all parents was the importance of equity for all children in Halifax Regional Municipality, recognizing the difficulty for Council to resolve this inequity. Mr. Brownlow urged Council to support supplementary funding for all students. Mayor Fitzgerald thanked Mr. Brownlow for his presentation.

The next speaker was Gary Hartlen, Principal. Mr. Harlen stated that he volunteered to assist in the debate on supplementary funding because he is the only high school Principal on the School Board who has been an administrator in the former County of Halifax and the City of Halifax. Mr. Hartlen stated that the supplementary funding is not about good or bad schools, but the reality of equity. He believes that all students attending schools in Halifax Regional Municipality, regardless of geography, deserve to have the opportunities supplementary funding provides. Mr. Hartlen summarized the impact supplementary funding has had on students attending Queen Elizabeth High School, and the community. In closing, Mr. Hartlen urged Council to support supplementary funding to provide equity for all students in Halifax Regional Municipality. Mayor Fitzgerald thanked Mr. Hartlen for his presentation.

Mr. David Reid, Superintendent of the Halifax Regional School Board, thanked Council for the third opportunity within the last 8 months to address Council on the issue of supplementary funding. Mr. Reid referred to the documents that were distributed to Council earlier in the meeting. In response to a news release, Mr. Reid stated, for the information of Council, the Canadian Standard for Administrative Service to Boards of Education is approximately 4.3%. In the Province of Nova Scotia it is 3.3% and in Halifax Regional Municipality it is 3.1%. Mr. Reid stated that he wanted to make it very clear that the educational funding received from the Province indicates that the School Board is seriously underfunded, but he pointed out that any reductions experienced in administration would come out of that funding, and would have no bearing on supplementary funding.

Mr. Reid referred to the report from Mr. Meech, stating that it did not take into account the

need expressed by the public in both the former Cities of Halifax and Dartmouth. The public in these former municipalities are very anxious to maintain current levels of funding, to provide current levels of programming and service within these communities.

Mr. Reid referred to the School Board's proposal for a three year plan to achieve equity across Halifax Regional Municipality, with a phased-in schedule. On-going accountability by the School Board would be assured, and it demonstrated to the public and Council in very precise terms exactly how the supplementary funding is being spent. Mr. Reid reviewed the proposal for each of the former municipalities.

Former Region	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>	<u>Year 3</u>
Halifax	.14	.12	.107
Dartmouth	.107	.107	.107
Halifax County/Bedford	.03	.074	.107
Funding	\$19.1M	\$20.7M	\$22.0M

Mr. Reid asked Council to support the following resolutions:

1. To accept, in principle, the concept of equity for students within Halifax Regional Municipality.
2. Establish a system standard rate of taxation for supplementary programs at 1.07.
3. Establish a three-year phase-in for full implementation of the plan.
4. Commence implementation of Year 1 of the plan on April 2000.

Mr. Reid stated that while adjustments are occurring annually, the School Board would give its absolute assurance that there would be no reductions in levels of programs or service to either Halifax or Dartmouth during the period of implementation.

Councillor Hetherington referred to the year 2000 being a municipal election year, and asked if the School Board would be willing to support the idea of a plebiscite on supplementary funding in the October election, and to live with the decision.

Discussion ensued on Councillor Hetherington's suggestion with Mr. Reid stating he had no problem with a plebiscite, but stressed the importance of the question that is asked. For example, *Do you favour equity for all children who attend school within the Halifax Regional School Board?* Mr. Reid felt this was a reasonable question. Mr. Reid referred to the question *Do you favour an increase in your property taxes?* He felt this would not be a reasonable question. Councillor Hetherington suggested that both questions should be on a plebiscite, including what the increase would be.

Councillor Blumenthal stated that he supported supplementary funding, but he had a concern with comments made by Mr. Reid that there would be no reductions in levels of

programs or service to either Halifax or Dartmouth during the three year period of implementation. He questioned what was going to happen in year 4. Mr. Reid responded that the School Board can maintain the levels of programming up until implementation of the plan at .107, and that it would take three years to accomplish that across the school system.

Councillor Harvey stated that he is not in favour of plebiscites. He pointed out that he was elected to make decisions and this is just one of them. He is prepared to make a decision in favour of the Board's proposal without a plebiscite.

Councillor Adams stated that he supported supplementary funding, but he could not support the proposal put forward by the School Board. It is based on a stable assessment and the Councillor does not believe this is going to happen. Councillor Adams referred to the current supplementary funding of 16.9M that is used to provide programming and services to 42% of the students in Halifax Regional Municipality. But, it is being suggested that an additional 5.1M would take care of the remaining 58% of the students attending schools in the former County of Halifax and Bedford. The Councillor stated that this made no sense to him, and he cannot support this proposal. But, Councillor Adams stated that he could support all municipal units going to 14% so that none of the programs are compromised. This could be done over a period of time.

Ms. Campbell responded that she would have no problem with the former City of Halifax staying status quo. But, she believes what is being proposed by the School Board is a reasonable proposal for all regions of the municipality. Referring to the status quo, Ms. Campbell said she had met with all the PTA and advisory councils in her area and asked them to set priorities on where the supplementary funding would best be spent. Ms. Campbell stated that if it really is one municipality and Council represents only one municipality, then there cannot be separate visions, it had to be one vision.

Before continuing with any further discussion, it was agreed to hear the rest of the presentations.

Reading from prepared text, **Mr. Rick Tully** and **Ms. Alice Moriarty**, representatives from the Inner City Education Advisory Committee, spoke to Council on the needs of the four designated inner city schools. These schools are St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay, Joseph Howe, St. Patrick's Alexandra and Rockingstone Heights. They described the role of supplementary funding in supporting the Four Plus Program, Smaller Class Sizes, Education Program Assistant, Additional Vice-Principal Release Time, Specialist Programs, Library Services and Special Classes. Both presenters stressed that the many sources of support provided through supplementary funding are not luxuries. They are essential to make it possible for the School Board to offer equity in education in some of the high need communities within Halifax Regional Municipality.

Mayor Fitzgerald thanked Mr. Tully and Ms. Moriarty for their presentation.

Reading from prepared text, **Mr. Paul Russell** and **Ms. Lynn MacLeod** from the Harry R. Hamilton Elementary, Home & School Association, Sackville gave support from District 19 for the School Board's proposal to provide equity in supplementary funding. Mr. Russell spoke of a survey that was sent home to residents in District 19 and more than 88.3% of the responses are in favour of equity in supplementary funding across the Halifax Regional School Board region.

Referring to a table that detailed how supplementary funding would be used in District 19, Mr. Russell reviewed each of the categories. In closing his presentation, he asked for equity in accessing these resources through supplementary funding.

Ms. MacLeod stated that Smokey Drive Home & School, Millwood Elementary and a number of other schools are also supporting the request for equity.

Mayor Fitzgerald thanked Mr. Russell and Ms. MacLeod for their presentation.

Councillor Kelly stated that he is not opposed to supplementary funding but he needed some clarification on questions/concerns that were sent to the School Board for answers, specifically Question 8 which reads *Does the money raised stay in the district where raised?*

Mr. Reid responded that when the supplementary funding is fully implemented at the end of the third year, it is expected that the money would be spent in Halifax Regional Municipality on an equitable basis. This would be based on decisions made at the school level, with the Principal consulting with the school council and staff. Mr. Reid pointed out that if more money is raised in one community than another, this does not mean that this area would have more money to spend in its schools than another area.

Councillor Kelly referred to Question 9 which reads *Can a contract for services be negotiated rather than mandated?* The Councillor asked if Bedford could meet the intent of paying for what they get. Mr. Reid responded that there are services that are provided in the school that would not be contrary to the intent of the Education Act or the Collective Agreement. Services could be provided by the School Board that would be on a contract basis that would be permissible. Councillor Kelly asked if it was possible for a school to contract out a service and pay for it on an 'as needed' basis. Mr. Reid was unable to respond to that question at this point in time.

Councillor Snow stated that he could bring 100 seniors to a meeting to speak against supplementary funding. The Councillor referred to a referendum that he had sent to 8,000 voters in District 2 asking them questions on supplementary funding, including

comparisons of opportunities available to Halifax students that are not available to County students. Based on a three cent increase in property taxes, the Councillor still received a definite 'No' back from the residents. Councillor Snow said he personally had no problem with supplementary funding, but he believes education is the Province's responsibility. The Councillor stated that based on the number of people telling him not to support supplementary funding, he cannot support supplementary funding for District 2.

In response to a question from Councillor Read, Mr. Reid responded that the figures included school busing for about 1/3 of the student population. Mr. Reid confirmed that if the proposal is accepted that none of the fourteen cents paid by the former City of Halifax would be spent elsewhere during the first two years.

Councillor Uteck expressed her concern with 55/60 pages of stats and figures distributed to Council just minutes before the commencement of a public meeting and debate. The Councillor asked if documents could be distributed in advance of any future meetings. Councillor Uteck said she would not be supporting Mr. Meech's proposal but would be supporting the School Board's proposal which she believes is reasonable. Councillor Uteck referred to Question 3 which reads *How much was spent on maintenance of schools from the former City of Halifax last year?* Councillor Uteck stated this has been a hot issue with the taxpayers of Halifax and Dartmouth, and was pleased to see that the supplementary fund would be budgeted completely separate from the general fund in the 2000-2001 fiscal year.

Councillor Uteck referred to a previous handout at the February 18th meeting *A Shared Vision for Education* raising questions re various items under the *Terms of Reference for the Supplementary Fund*. In Item 10, it states that a minimum amount of the total fund would be established to provide resources to address unanticipated demands, but the amount of the fund is not stated. The Councillor referred to Item 12, and asked how the Exemplary Practice Support Fund that would be created is to be monitored, and who justifies which project is exemplary.

Councillor Uteck referred to Item 8, and asked who would do the checks and balances when the money goes directly to the school Principals. Referring to an earlier presentation to Council, Mr. Reid had stated that Halifax Regional Municipality had one of the highest dropout rates in the country. The Councillor asked if there were any statistics to support whether the dropout rates were primarily in schools receiving or not receiving supplementary funding.

In response to Councillor Uteck, Ms. Campbell stated that the supplementary funding is specifically tracked. Ms. Campbell referred to a report that identified exactly where the money was spent, and copies will be provided to Members of Council.

Mayor Fitzgerald asked for clarification. If supplementary funding is approved for all regions of the municipality, this would mean that the share for the Halifax region would drop down to 10.7. He pointed out that with the heavy assessments in the downtown area, this would mean a lot of money would be going out of this area to other parts of the municipality. Mayor Fitzgerald noted that at least twelve schools were closed in Halifax in the last few years, but the municipality has continued to pay large sums of money based on assessments.

Councillor Hetherington noted that due to the lateness of the hour Council adjourn and meet again next Tuesday to continue with these discussions.

Mayor Fitzgerald suggested that if there is agreement that Halifax and Dartmouth regions would freeze the supplementary funding at \$16.9 for the year 2000/2001, Council could adopt a motion now for this supplementary funding, with the County and Bedford regions coming back to Council for further debate. Mayor Fitzgerald asked if this would be acceptable to the School Board. Mr. Reid responded that this was not acceptable. The proposal that the School Board has put in front of Council is a phased-in implementation for Halifax, County and Bedford, and in order to get resources into all schools this is the only proposal that will work. Mr. Reid said this is in response to detailed consultation with individual County Councillors. Mr. Reid pointed out that this is a Halifax Regional Municipality Council decision, as opposed to distinct constituencies deciding whether or not they want supplementary funding.

MOVED by Councillors Greenough and Hetherington that the meeting adjourn and reconvene @ 2:00 pm on February 29th to continue discussions on supplementary funding. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 pm.

Vi Carmichael
Municipal Clerk