

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
MINUTES  
MARCH 21, 2000

PRESENT: His Worship Mayor Walter Fitzgerald  
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. Sandra M. Shute, Assistant Municipal Clerk

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1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Fitzgerald called the meeting to order at 2:55 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to continue with the question of Supplementary Education Funding. The previous meeting, held on February 29, 2000, adjourned due to lack of time, with a motion on the floor.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOVED by Councillors Sarto and Greenough to approve the following Committee of the Whole Minutes:**

**February 29, 2000**  
**March 2, 2000**  
**March 7, 2000**  
**March 8, 2000**  
**March 9, 2000**

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

3. **SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION FUNDING**

At the time of adjournment, the motion on the floor was:

**MOVED by Councillors Harvey and Adams to recommend to Regional Council that in the context of the School Board proposal dated February 29, 2000, with the understanding that any amount raised in the County and Bedford would go directly to schools on a per capita basis, to move Year 1 of the School Board proposal which would be complementary to the motion already passed.**

There were a number of Councillors in line to speak on the motion when the meeting adjourned. Those Councillors began the debate on the motion.

Councillor Streach stated that his position has not changed. He had not received any input from residents in District 1 since the last meeting in favour of supplementary funding. He was not prepared to support the motion on the floor and further burden the taxpayers of District 1.

Councillor Walker asked if it would be possible for Councillors Kelly, Harvey and Adams to bring supplementary funding to their Districts and could the School Board guarantee that the funds would be spent in their Districts.

In response, Mr. Richard Morris, Chief Financial Officer advised that he understood that if it were to be applied in those three areas, it would be similar to an area rate and would remain in those particular areas.

Councillor Merrigan stated that he did not think supplementary funding would work but did not think the inequity was fair. There would have to be a solution that would see the students within the old County area and within Halifax/Dartmouth get the same education. He referred to Councillor Harvey's motion which was to put 3 cents on this year only and asked what would happen if it were put on this year, and next year the 3 cents was not supported. This could create a greater hardship than putting it on in the first place.

In response, Mr. Morris agreed that it would create a definite hardship. There was an inconsistency between fiscal and school years. If the rate was applied and staff hired, it would be difficult to terminate staff on March 31 rather than the end of the school year. It would also create an expectation that additional programs and services would be provided.

Councillor Merrigan stated that the majority of his residents he talked to did not support supplementary funding but wanted some kind of solution for similar education. He referred to the 10% that Halifax/Dartmouth could reduce their funding by each year. He asked if the School Board has looked at any type of funding where these funds could be eliminated over a period of time.

In response, Mr. Morris advised that at this point there was no plan in place to address any kind of systematic withdrawal of supplementary funding. If that direction were coming forward, the School Board would have to plan for it.

Councillor Cooper stated he still had difficulty with what the School Board was planning to do with supplementary funding if it was put across the whole system. If the School Board wants to maintain the present services they have, then they would be continuing an inequity across the system. They would have to come up with a system that would have a common program up to a certain level and only then could they claim equity. Halifax/Dartmouth programs were different now. In his District, the majority of the residents he spoke to were opposed to supplementary funding. He suggested that the Student Success Initiative would be the place to start, applied across the whole system. He asked if the School Board had considered revamping the whole system to have a consistent program across the whole Municipality.

Ms. Stella Campbell, Chair of the School Board advised that with the five year plan offered to Council, one of the primary considerations was that there would be equity within the school system. She felt there should be identification from residents themselves as to what programs are important. There might not be the same programs offered in downtown

Halifax as opposed to the Eastern Shore but similar resources would be available, matching the needs of the school.

Councillor Cooper stated that if the School Board wants to meet equity provisions, there would have to be common programs throughout HRM. The Student Success Initiative went in that direction. He also had difficulty with having funds raised going to a school for the school to determine how they are spent. He could not support supplementary funding across the board until there are equitable programs across the system.

Councillor Mitchell remarked on the fact that the French programs receive more money and asked for clarification.

In response, Mr. Morris advised that through the provincial funding formula, the Francophone School Board receives more money per student because it relates to the cost to provide programs and services to a small number of students spread out throughout the province.

Councillor Uteck referred to the question of whether or not there could be an area rate and stated that if so, she would gladly take District 13 out of supplementary funding and put on an area rate. She was, however, not willing to put the rest of the school system in jeopardy. Consistency means, at this point, going down to the lowest common denominator; however, the problem is that the accountability issue has come forward time and time again. She took strong objection that Halifax/Dartmouth would pay into a fund that would not go directly to the Districts but others saying they could area rate with the funds going directly to schools.

Ms. Campbell advised that Councillor Uteck was correct and that was why there was a five year plan proposed with equity in the fifth year. If individual area rates go forward, there would be differences in dollar figures and certain areas could suffer the greatest.

Councillor Kelly acknowledged that Halifax/Dartmouth has been long established in terms of area rates. He thought a Plebiscite was a very important part of the process and hoped that between HRM and the School Board, an in-depth report could be provided as to how to get the information out to the residents so that they can have a vote on whether or not they feel it is beneficial to proceed with an area rate or fixed rate overall.

Ms. Campbell, speaking with regard to a Plebiscite, stated that the School Board has not singled out in the budget the impact on former Halifax/Dartmouth and County Schools so that when a Plebiscite does take place in the fall, there would be an informed decision.

Councillor Schofield said that his position has been to move towards equal education opportunities for every student throughout HRM. If the motion fails, he would be willing to put a motion on the floor to take the supplementary funding given last year and spread it throughout the Municipality, recognizing less services for Halifax/Dartmouth but they would pay less, and the School Board could then work out a formula to distribute those funds and come back to advise how they would spend the money. He agreed there was an inequity which should be corrected in some manner. At least this would get funding to all residents.

Mayor Fitzgerald pointed out that the responsibility for education in Nova Scotia lay with the provincial government.

Councillor Schofield continued by referring to Councillor Uteck's comment about area rating her residents. He asked for input from the Municipal Solicitor as to whether or not this could be done.

Wayne Anstey, Municipal Solicitor advised that the option open to Council at present on a unilateral basis is to reduce the overall funding by 10% of the original amount each year without legislative change. Council and the School Board, however, can agree to anything.

Councillor Rankin stated that it would be very unseemly and undemocratic to impose on a community a tax that is not a municipally based service. If Halifax/Dartmouth want it, then he was supportive. The so-called County representatives did not impose, by the vote at the last meeting, their will on Halifax/Dartmouth. Should the School Board come forward with a modest program, he would receive it in the spirit of taking it to his community; however, not the motion on the floor because it was in the context of a lock-step program building from 3 cents to 7 cents to 10 cents. He would fight the imposition of this tax but, at the same time, he was fully supportive of what is in Halifax/Dartmouth because it was not an imposition but fully chosen among the Councillors in those communities.

Councillor Adams advised that he supported the motion on the floor as far as the money going in the area it is levied because if it was spread out all over the place, Halifax/Dartmouth would be subsidizing those areas. He had the ability to see the differences since one half of District 18 has supplementary funding and the other does not. He was willing to go with even 4% for the first year bearing in mind there would be a decrease in the tax rate that would allow the children in the area to get a better education. If the motion does not pass, he would come forward with a motion to levy some kind of rate for the former District 5 of District 18 to ensure the children have access to supplementary funding.

Councillor Blumenthal stated he would not support the motion nor would he support what Councillor Schofield proposed because it would mean watered-down funding for his area. Either it stays the way it is or start to get rid of it. He was not going to vote to put Councillors Snow or Rankin in a position that they do not want to be in. He did not want to see supplementary funding go in Halifax, however. As far as equality was concerned, you either go down or everybody comes up. He recommended that senior staff and Council meet with the Minister of Education regarding additional funding for the School Board. As far as a Plebiscite was concerned, it would have to be worded in such a way that it was not a losing situation.

Pointing out that she would have to leave to attend another meeting, Ms. Campbell advised that she looked forward to working with the province in insisting that the Halifax Regional School Board's allotment of dollars is increased. From the comments from Regional Council, she felt there would be support for this.

Councillor Fougere stated that supplementary funding has made the issue of equitable education across the Municipality complicated and perhaps there was another way to approach the issue. She suggested coming back to Council with a proposal for equitable programming across HRM in terms of providing such programs as physical education, art and music as opposed to distributing the money on a per capita basis to schools. This would allow Council to look at the accountability for specific programming issues instead of having Council look at a dollar amount. The big question seems to be what the money is being used for. She would not be supporting the motion on the floor.

Mayor Fitzgerald pointed out that HRM gives the School Board about \$16 million a year which they are supposed to spend on certain programs. Council has never looked at it being reduced by 10%. He asked when the people were last asked about funding.

Councillor Fougere stated she did not think people would have objection to supplementary funding as long as the information is provided for them to be able to make an objective choice. The issue of accountability is the crux of the whole matter at this time. If accountability can be addressed, then perhaps Council could look at the question in a more objective fashion.

Mr. David Reid, Superintendent, Halifax Regional School Board stated that the School Board indicated with its Terms of Reference that it would assure accountability before Council. There was \$4.1 million in the financial information that Council has had for several weeks - unallocated. There was very little in the way of maintenance included but such things as discretionary expenditures for special education, done school by school. The proposal made with respect to implementation is that the amounts to be raised in the County would go to the schools on a per capita basis. The schools would have the

opportunity then to decide with their school councils how they would spend the funds - programs or services all within the definition of enhanced or augmented programs which the Board year by year would establish. With regard to Councillor Cooper's comment about system standards for programs, that was exactly what the Student Success Initiative is - a program paid for entirely out of provincial funding with a standard established for every child across the system and has nothing to do with supplementary funding which is entirely for augmentation and enhancement with decisions being made at the local level.

Councillor Colwell stated the bottom line was that this was a provincial government responsibility. Money was spent on repairing schools and other things that should have been paid for by the province. He was afraid that when the public in Halifax/Dartmouth realize what is happening - if it goes to a public vote - the supplementary funding could be wiped out. The more the School Board comes back, the more risk for them of losing supplementary funding. There was no support in his area for supplementary funding. If you add ten cents on the tax rate over three years, it would be close to the same tax rate as downtown Halifax without the services. He asked that supplementary funding not be forced on the rural areas.

Mr. Reid advised that the School Board recognized there was serious work needing to be done with respect to its public image and credibility. The message to Council has been through the Terms of Reference and accountability measures that would be built in. He acknowledged Council's idea that there should be provincial funding and advised that the School Board was doing its utmost to encourage the province to give the Halifax Regional School Board a fair shake. Supplementary funding, however, was about augmentations and enhancements.

Councillor Mitchell stated that some of the residents in his District had been insulted that some people think the people in the rural area do not have a good education. People were used to the level of service being provided in the rural area. He did not support supplementary funding. If a motion comes to Council to support supplementary funding, there would be a lot of people in attendance against it.

Councillor Harvey stated the reason the School Board has been to Council four times is because Council has taken that long to even get a motion on the floor to vote on. There was a difference between supplementary funding and an area rate for education. Supplementary funding requires commercial properties to pay at a commercial rate but if it is an area rate for education, it would be a flat residential rate on all properties. If Councillor Uteck applied an area rate for education, it would not be as much as with supplementary funding. The objective was to bring the same fair level of enhanced education to every student from Ecum Secum to Hubbards.



The vote was taken on the motion.

**MOTION DEFEATED.**

Mr. Mike Brownlow, Principal, thanked Council for the opportunity for the School Board to come forward. He advised that the School Board would not be ignoring the issue of inequity.

The following motions were then passed:

**MOVED by Councillors Adams and Blumenthal to request that staff explore and outline the steps necessary to implement an area rate in the former District 5 of District 18 with the proceeds to be utilized for supplementary education. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**MOVED by Councillors Kelly and Mitchell to begin to prepare for a Plebiscite to be put forward in the October vote and work with the School Board to ensure they provide the information to all residents in depth and detail so that they can make an informed and educated choice. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

Councillor Adams expressed concern with the wording that would be used for the Plebiscite. In response, Mayor Fitzgerald said he understood that the Committee would meet with the School Board to come up with the question which would come back to Council for approval.

Councillor Stone referred to Councillor Adams' motion regarding an area rate and asked if it was possible to do so.

In response, Mr. Anstey advised that an area rate could be applied for education but it would only be on residential property and on commercial property at the straight rate. As far as reducing by 10%, in Halifax/Dartmouth it could only be reduced to the maximum of 10% of the original amount each year. Councillor Uteck could still have an area rate on top but in terms of getting out of her commitment, without legislative change or without the agreement of the School Board, all that could happen now would be for Council as a whole to agree to take off 10% each year. Any area rate, even though the Councillor might propose it, has to be approved by Regional Council.

Councillor Harvey referred to the Plebiscite and asked the following questions:

1. Would it be a binding Plebiscite.
2. Would there be a Plebiscite for as many Districts as there are at election time.

3. If there was one big Plebiscite, would the vote carry it across the whole Municipality.

Mayor Fitzgerald, in response, advised that the HRM Council Committee would bring forward this type of information.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOVED by Councillors Hetherington and Blumenthal that the meeting adjourn at 4:00 p.m.**

Vi Carmichael  
Municipal Clerk