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Halifax Regional Council
August 31, 2004

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Labrecque".

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Mike Labrecque, Director, Real Property and Asset Management

DATE: August 12, 2004

SUBJECT: **HRM Sites in Eastern Passage - Potential for High School Location**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Council requested at the July 15, 2003, Regional Council meeting that staff prepare a report, identifying HRM owned sites in Eastern Passage which might have potential for use as a high school.

BACKGROUND

The population of Eastern Passage is 7,951 (2001 census). The community has grown steadily but slowly in the last 20 or so years. The existing land use by-law for the area means there will probably be minimal change in population over the next 10 to 20 years. According to municipal planning staff, the municipal planning strategy (slated for approval in Autumn 2004) will probably have little impact on these predictions. Eastern Passage could even be re-structured to absorb less population growth than is presently permitted. In the past few years, Eastern Passage's elementary schools have undergone renovations and upgrades by the Halifax Regional School Board and the Department of Education. In addition, a new junior high, the Eastern Passage Education Centre, was built in 1999.

There are approximately 500 - 600 high school students from Eastern Passage who attend Cole Harbour District High School. As a result, members of the community are requesting a high school in Eastern Passage to keep students closer to their home community. Cole Harbour High School's enrollment in 2003-2004 was 1079. This means Eastern Passage students make up at least half of the entire Cole Harbour District High population.

DISCUSSION

There has been community interest in a local high school in Eastern Passage for approximately five to six years. Halifax Regional School Board staff prepared a report to School Board Council in February 2002 regarding a high school in Eastern Passage. The report was a response to HRSB Audit and Finance Committee's inquiry into the feasibility of constructing an addition or making alterations to Seaside Elementary School and converting it into a high school for Eastern Passage.

The report cited over-capacity at Cole Harbour District High, which could be alleviated by constructing a new high school in Eastern Passage. The proposed school received a capital project score of 70 out of 100. This meant an Eastern Passage high school was a worthy endeavour, but not a top priority. The project was ranked 16th in the list of priorities for Additions/Alterations, and tied with three other addition/alteration projects. However, the project could be even lower on the list, since new school construction priorities must be taken into account as well.

The report summarized why HRSB staff felt this project would not advance up the priority list in the near future:

Given the evaluation criteria established by the Department of Education, it is difficult to see this project moving to a high priority until some of the oldest buildings in the system are consolidated and/or replaced. We are entering a period of enrolment decline and projects that reduce capacity are more "efficient" than are projects that add to it. The scoring system favours high efficiency projects that consolidate and replace old buildings or that refurbish existing space without adding square footage. Likewise projects that achieve staffing economies score higher than do projects that add to staff.

In September 2003, HRSB included the proposed high school in the year's Capital Construction Submission to the Department of Education. However, submitting the request for a high school is dependent upon the province's request for a capital project priorities list. As of July 2004, the most recent Capital Construction Submission list request from the Department of Education was in 2002. Many of the approved projects from the 2002 list have not even begun construction (some of the projects on the 2002 list are QEH/St.Pat's, Sir John A MacDonald, Bedford Junior High, Lakeview Consolidated, etc.). The school board is also uncertain when any future request

for a new Capital Construction Submission list will be forthcoming. Because there has been no request from the province, HRSB does not currently have a capital projects priority list, and has not done the research to determine where an Eastern Passage high school would fall on the priority list.

Typically, the province only approves projects that are on the school board's priority list. Site selection committees are generally set up for approved new school construction about two years before the planned construction/school opening date. This committee, once set up, requests information from HRM about possible sites for school construction. To-date, the province has not approved a capital project for a high school in Eastern Passage. There is therefore no site selection committee, and as a result HRM has not received any requests from HRSB for potential sites for a high school in Eastern Passage.

An Eastern Passage high school is essentially 'in limbo' until such time as the school board and province decide how to handle the over-capacity at Cole Harbour High and the Eastern Passage community's desires. Any help HRM can provide to speed up the school construction process must come after the province and HRSB have decided on a course of action.

There is one instance where HRM has proposed a potential site for a school before the school board and the Department of Education had an agreement to build a school. This was the case of Halifax West High School, where HRM offered the school board use of property on the Mainland Commons to build a new school. This offer helped speed up the HRSB and province's process for new school construction. The case of Halifax West High School is markedly different from Eastern Passage. In Halifax, the new school was to be built for an already existing student body, who needed a new building due to the health and safety issues caused by the deterioration of the old building. The students of Halifax West were being bussed first to JL Ilesley which required a split shift arrangement for both high schools and then to Bell Annex in Cole Harbour from Fairview and Clayton Park. The desire for a high school in Eastern Passage does not concern health and safety issues such as the ones faced at Halifax West High School. The case of Eastern Passage is the creation of a completely new student body in an area that is already served by a school, although it does have increasing space issues. Still, these school and boundary issues can only be solved by the Department of Education and the Halifax Regional School Board.

It is a moot point for HRM to propose any potential Eastern Passage high school sites at this time. Selecting sites for schools is a time-consuming process, and it is not immediately pressing to identify a site for a potential high school in Eastern Passage. Furthermore, it is uncertain how such a report would benefit the HRSB and the Department of Education process for approving capital projects when student population and school boundaries, not site locations, are the issue. HRM cannot help identify potential sites until the school board makes a high school in Eastern Passage a priority, and asks HRM for its input.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications with maintaining the status quo.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES

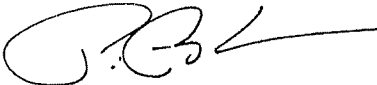
None

ATTACHMENTS

None

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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