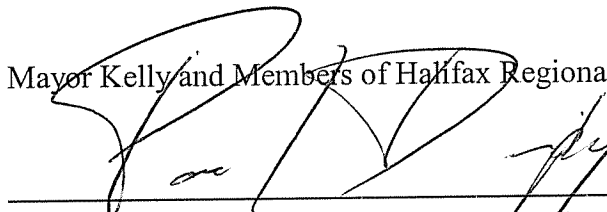


Halifax Regional Council
January 18, 2005

TO:

Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:


Paul Dunphy, Director of Planning & Development Services

DATE:

January 4, 2005

SUBJECT:

Affordable Housing Studies

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

May 28, 2003 Motion of the Committee of the Whole that staff provide a report on a policy or strategy on affordable housing in Halifax Regional Municipality.

BACKGROUND

This report provides a summary of two reports commissioned to support the development of Affordable Housing Policy and Strategy as part of the Regional Planning process and as part the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative research grant.

DISCUSSION

1. Municipal Land Use Policy and Housing Affordability Study

The purpose of this study was to identify key housing affordability issues in HRM, with affordable housing defined as housing that consumes no more than 30% of household's gross income. The report acknowledges that while the provision of social housing is a provincial responsibility, municipal regulations and policies can support the development and maintenance of housing that corresponds to the range of household types and household income levels in HRM.

The report is based on policy review, two workshops and numerous interviews that solicited input from HRM, provincial and federal government staff, developers, community stakeholders and housing practitioners in other Canadian municipalities.

The report points out both direct and indirect benefits of creating an environment that supports a broad range of housing affordability. It describes key components of the external and internal regulatory environment, identifies barriers to diverse and affordable housing development, and presents information on promising regulatory, financial and planning measures for HRM. The report

does not recommend that HRM become involved in capital funding or service provision of social housing. Instead, it provides suggestions on how planning, engineering and parking standards, as well municipal fees and charges can support the development of high quality, diverse and more affordable housing stock. The report also points out the importance of municipal involvement in research, supporting the capacity of the non-profit sector, public education and the championing of good urban design. The information is currently being utilized as a starting point to develop policies for the Regional Plan, and may further be used to develop an Affordable Housing Functional Plan.

2. The Potential for Partnerships in Community Reinvestment and Affordable Housing

Housing affordability has become an increasingly pressing issue in Canadian municipalities and in the wake of federal and provincial cuts to non-profit housing programs in the 1990's, partnerships have emerged as a means to extend limited resources and achieving strategic municipal objectives.

This research report informs HRM on the range of legislative and program arrangements in place in other Canadian provinces where municipalities are permitted to provide incentives to private housing developers. The measures can be used to achieve a broad range of objectives, such as good introduction of innovative design in modestly priced housing, revitalization of existing neighbourhoods or promotion of urban infill. The ultimate goal of the report is to help inform discussion on the potential for amendments to the Nova Scotia Municipal Government Act that would allow greater cooperation between HRM, other levels of government and private sector developers in the provision of affordable housing. The information presented in both reports is in the process of being evaluated by staff as part of the regional planning process.

3. Current Initiatives

HRM is currently supporting non-profit housing initiatives through land donations, exemptions from development fees and reduced property taxes. The HRM Community Grants Program makes a significant contribution to developing the capacity of non-profit organizations to provide essential community services. The municipality has also facilitated multi-lateral discussions between community groups and other levels of government on housing issues. The two research reports provide information on how currently provided services can be modified to realize greater effectiveness and efficiency.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

None

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

Attchmt 1: Municipal Land Use Policy and Housing Affordability Halifax Regional Municipality

Attchmt 2: The Potential for Partnerships in Community Reinvestment and Affordable Housing in HRM

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.

Report Prepared by: _____
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