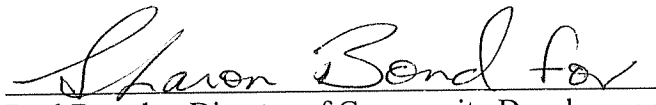




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Halifax Regional Council
February 20, 2007

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Paul Dunphy, Director of Community Development

DATE: February 6, 2007

SUBJECT: **Improving HRM's Community Relations - An Assessment of HRM's
Past and Present Public Engagement Exercises Project Update**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

1. On October 11, 2005, Council approved 12 areas of focus, including Community Relations. On October 3, 2006 these priorities were confirmed for the 2007/08 Budget year.
2. At the January 17, 2006 Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting, Regional Council endorsed establishing an HRM Community Engagement model/program under the Community Relations Council Focus Area.
3. At the September 19, 2006 Regional Council meeting, draft terms of reference were presented by staff in an Information Report to conduct an assessment and evaluation of HRM's past and present engagement exercises.

BACKGROUND

Council's Focus Area discussions on Community Relations identified the need to improve HRM's approach to community engagement. This is reflected in the CAO's 2006 Goals and Objectives and Business Plan. On September 19, 2006 an Information Report presented draft terms of reference for an evaluation of some of HRM's public engagement exercises. This report provides an update on this initiative.

DISCUSSION

Since amalgamation in 1996 HRM has striven to engage citizens to create effective grassroots dialogue and decision-making with its residents. HRM's intention is to "foster a community engagement process that instills the public with confidence and feelings that consultation has been worthwhile and productive".

A comprehensive evaluation of HRM's public engagement exercises is a first step towards understanding what works well, and what opportunities exist to improve current practices.

To eliminate potential for bias arising from this important evaluation, a call for proposals was issued to solicit proposals from qualified consultants to evaluate ten case studies of public engagement processes that occurred in HRM in the past 10 years. The closing date was November 10, 2006.

Selected Consultants

In response to HRM's Request for Proposals, three submissions were received. The contract was awarded to MacDonnell Group Consulting based in Halifax in collaboration with One World, Inc. based in Ottawa. Both companies are well qualified to conduct the required work. The Steering Committee for this project is comprised of staff from the departments of Community Development, Finance, Regional Police and Human Resources (see Attachment 1).

Project Progress to Date

The Consultants developed case study selection criteria and identified applicable policies and legislation that influence local government. They also researched best practices for local government community engagement processes, and proposed community engagement evaluation criteria. The selection criteria were used to confirm the following mandatory case studies for evaluation:

- Cultural Plan
- Regional Plan
- Harbour Solutions CLC Plan
- Budget Consultation Plan

Bloomfield Plan is no longer being considered because the process is still ongoing. The remaining six case studies selected on the basis of selection criteria include:

- Halifax Regional Police Town Hall Meetings
- Vision 20/20
- Romans Avenue Traffic Calming
- Youth Engagement Strategy
- Williams Lake Road Park Study
- John Stewart Playground

Staff and the consulting team believe that the above case studies represent an appropriate mix of current and past, regional and local, short and longer term consultations from which HRM can learn. The consultants also developed Evaluation Criteria approved by the Steering Committee which will be used to measure success of the ten case studies as determined by the results of upcoming focus groups and analysis of documentation received by HRM (see Attachment 2).

Next Steps

It is anticipated the project will be completed by March 31, 2007. The next steps in the process include:

1. Synthesis and Analysis of Case Study Documentation
2. Design and Test Focus Group and Interview Process
3. Implement Focus Groups and Interview Process
4. Analysis and Implementation
5. Final Report

Council Involvement

Individual Councillors will be contacted to participated in interviews related to some or all of the ten case studies. Council will also be asked to consider recommendations presented in the final report on ways to improve HRM's engagement processes.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

\$40,202 was committed for this project from the CAO Special Project account, E500-6919, with the award of RFP #06-384 in November 2006. There are no further budget implications associated with this report.

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.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment1 - Steering Committee
- Attachment 2 - Proposed Criteria for the Evaluation of Community Engagement Processes

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by : Kasia Tota, Community Developer Community Relations and Events 490-5190

Report Approved by: Andrew Whittemore, Acting Manager Community Relations and Events 490-1585

Attachment 1: Steering Committee

The Steering Committee for this project include the following HRM staff:

Andrew Whittemore, Acting Manager, Community Relations and Events
Kasia Tota, Community Developer, Community Relations and Events
Marilyn Smith, Community Developer, Community Relations and Events
Susan Corser, Senior Planner, Regional and Community Planning
Roxanne MacInnis, Planner, Regional Transportation Planning
Kathryn Brown, Training and Development Consultant, Human Resources
Frances Matheson, Area Coordinator, Community Relations and Events
Jan Skora, Coordinator, Planning and Real Property Planning
Theresa Brien, Halifax Regional Police

Attachment 2

PROPOSED CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES

Evaluation Objectives (from RFP)

1. To derive a better understanding of the processes and the factors that work well and those that do not;
2. To determine if participants felt the processes were accessible, inclusive, representative, fair and meaningful;
3. To gain a better understanding of any internal operational challenges that may be preventing or inhibiting HRM staff from being more effective;
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation tools and techniques used during the processes;
5. To evaluate the effectiveness of the communication tools and techniques used during the processes;
6. To gain a thorough understanding of process design problems and strengths as they relate to:
 - a) internal operation/coordination
 - b) consistency
 - c) representative participation
 - d) tools and techniques
 - e) staffing skill/training/expertise
 - f) evaluation
 - g) information gathering
 - h) community contact/relationships

Possible Areas of Inquiry / Evaluation Criteria

Preparatory activities

- Mandating the process – The purpose and objectives were clear.
 - Purpose made clear to the public?
 - Appropriate expectations of public participation?
 - Any conflict of interest?
 - Process integrity - Participants know the purpose of their involvement
 - Process Integrity - Participants know what will happen with their input
- Resources allocated to the process were sufficient
 - Were they sufficient? ... the right type (people, tools, materials)?
 - Staff adequately trained in community engagement?
 - Effective use of available community resources?
 - Type and level of administrative support provided?
 - Lessons from the past used in planning?
- Context factors were considered and handled well
 - External issues/factors that may have influenced process
 - Was there a committee or advisory body?

Engagement processes

- Communications strategies used throughout the process were effective and appropriate
 - "Wording" of communications (value-free, neutral, availability in all community languages)?
 - Timely, concise, understandable information?
 - Appropriate format?

- Effective media strategy for the engagement process?
- Public adequately advised of potential consequences of specific choices or actions?
- Process integrity - Participants have the information required to support their participation
- Participation was solicited from across the range of interested parties.
 - Appropriate outreach strategy – depth and breadth
 - Any barriers to participation? Were these addressed?
 - Any influence by pressure groups?
 - Adequate/appropriate involvement of political representatives?
 - Adequacy of participation – i.e. Participants were representative of the varied interests and an appropriate number participated.
- The public engagement process and methodology was appropriate to the issue and the purpose of the engagement
 - Common understanding of the purpose, structure and timing of process?
 - Match between purpose and type of engagement?
 - Process adapted to different levels of knowledge and understanding of issues?
 - Variety of ways to participate?
 - Structure and tone of process?
 - Was it value-neutral? ... Responsive to cultural differences?
 - Conflict-resolution component?
 - Process Integrity: Participants are able to voice their ideas and opinions

Evaluation and follow-up

- Feedback mechanisms
 - Type and effectiveness?
 - Participant satisfaction?
 - Sponsor satisfaction?
 - Process integrity - Participants have clear evidence of the commitment of decision-makers to hearing their input
- Results
 - Was there an evaluation conducted? Who participated?
 - Positive? ... productive? ... in line with expectations for involvement and for results?
 - Contribute to fostering long-term relationships between participants and proponents?

Summary of Process Integrity Criteria

- Participants know the purpose of their involvement
- Participants have the information required to support their participation
- Participants are able to voice their ideas and opinions
- Participants know what will happen with their input
- Participants have clear evidence of the commitment of decision-makers to hearing their input