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Halifax Regional Council
April 3, 2007

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan English", written over a horizontal line.

Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geri Kaiser", written over a horizontal line.

Geri Kaiser, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer - Corporate Services
and Strategy

DATE: March 28, 2007

SUBJECT: 2008 Municipal and School Board Elections Voters List

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

ORIGIN

January 9, 2007 Motion of Council to submit a report providing a costing analysis for enumeration and to outline a process to ensure that the voters list is as up to date as possible for the 2008 Municipal and School Board Elections.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Regional Council direct staff not to proceed with an enumeration for the 2008 Municipal and School Board Election.

BACKGROUND

On January 9, 2007 Council adopted Advanced Internet/Phone voting in the 2008 Municipal and School Board Elections, the estimated cost of which is \$400,000 for a total budget of approximately \$1,400,000. The importance of having the most up-to-date voters list available in advance of the election was reinforced by municipalities who have implemented complementary voting methods and through the response of vendors.

DISCUSSION

Having the most up-to-date voters list as close to the date voting commences is critical to implementing any complementary voting method. Council's discussion following the January 9, 2007 motion clearly outlined some of the challenges in achieving this objective and the variety of opinions on accomplishing the desired outcome. Key to achieving the most up-to-date voters list for the 2008 Municipal Election requires a strong working partnership with the Provincial Elections Office.

In an amendment to the Elections Act in 2005, responsibility for updating the list of electors between elections was given directly to the Chief Electoral Officer for the Province of Nova Scotia. What that meant in practical terms was that Elections Nova Scotia had to develop a formal strategy for the maintenance of a "Made in Nova Scotia List of Electors" and acquire personnel and budget to undertake this new responsibility. In meetings with Christine McCulloch, the Chief Electoral Officer for Nova Scotia, she has reported that this process is well underway. Her office is and will be undertaking a number of activities to ensure that the list is updated both between and during elections, including:

Activities between Provincial Elections

- updates from the Registry of Motor Vehicles change of address (SNSMR)
- updates from Vital Statistics Division or deceased persons (SNSMR)
- updates from municipalities (including HRM) resulting from ongoing work on their voters lists
- bi-annual Electoral District Reports by all Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers (field work)
- special projects undertaken by Returning Officers to address problems unique to their district
- in-person electors to Elections Nova Scotia to update their electoral information
- mail-in correspondence from electors to update their elector information
- bi-annual review of updates and corrections by Returning Officers from the electoral lists

Activities during Provincial Elections

- targeted enumeration of areas such as long-term care facilities and other major high turnover residential areas as determined by the Chief Electoral Officer

- targeted enumeration of all areas of significant new development
- revisions to the list from issuance of the writ until election day
- corrections identified by electors on election day to spelling of names or addresses

Activities following Municipal and School Board Elections

- updates including additions and corrections identified by the elector from municipal and school board elections and any referenda administered by Elections Nova Scotia

Elections Nova Scotia is also considering other potential sources of continuous updates to the voters list such as:

- updates from the Department of Health Nova Scotia Health Card data
- programs in high schools targeting new electors who have reached the age of 18 and with other partners such as Youth Advisory Committees or the Department of Education's Invest in Youth Programs to target youth 18-24 years of age
- on-line registration of new electors
- on-line updates by electors of their own data
- a public campaign to invite electors to be added to the List of Electors or update their electoral information

HRM and the Provincial Electoral List

For the past several years there have been agreements in place between the Municipal Returning Officers and the Office of the Provincial Chief Electoral Officer to use the changes to the voters list from each election (municipal or provincial) to improve and update the Provincial Electoral List. The provincial list, in turn, then becomes the basis for the next municipal voters list. In effect this ensures that the provincial electoral list is the master list of electors for all provincial and municipal elections.

Over the past year, HRM and CBRM staff have been working with Elections Nova Scotia staff to standardize and cleanse civic address data in the current Provincial voters list, and to establish a process to use municipal civic address data as the primary address source. All parties recognize that the process of sustaining the accuracy of the voters list is key to a successful election. Discussions with the Provincial Chief Electoral Officer regarding data sharing, transfer, and cleansing processes are underway and HRM civic addressing staff anticipate they will be completed over the next few months.

Staff have established a preliminary process to share civic address data with Elections Nova Scotia and to match the HRM civic address file to the voters lists. Both parties are impressed with the initial results of this work and HRM staff will continue to work with Elections NS to refine the data sharing process and work towards a real-time on-going data matching process.

Taken in combination, the best practises for a "Made in Nova Scotia Electors List" should provide an acceptable level of confidence in the list when HRM receives the provincial voters list in advance of the 2008 Municipal and School Board Elections. Based on the most current list of electors

received from the Province for the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) Special Election, our data group were able to match 95% of the addresses which is a positive result.

The 2008 Municipal Election

It is our intention to examine the feasibility of implementing an on-line verification with our service provider as implemented in several municipalities in Ontario for the 2006 Municipal Elections. This would allow more voters to check and ensure they are on the voters list and take the steps necessary to amend their information or to be added to the voters list in advance of the deadline date.

Enumeration can be part of the HRM Election Office tool kit. However, it should be used only in addition to the best practise voter-based maintenance systems and for limited and specific reasons of verifying or auditing the accuracy of a defined section of the voters list in a district such as new development or in a highly-transient area.

As in a provincial election, the Municipal Returning Officer can consider targeted enumeration of areas such as long-term care facilities and other areas of high turnover or areas of new development. Identifying those areas requires collaboration and discussion among many partners within HRM. This collaboration will occur during the voters list revisions period.

Careful consideration will be given during the evaluation of the proposal for advanced internet/phone voting to determine the vendor's ability to work with HRM to address the accuracy of the voters list during the voting process.

Additional costs for enumeration, even in limited areas, are not included in the current 2008 election budget. Enumeration cost estimates are based on the Provincial Tariff of Fees from the 2005 province-wide enumeration.

Enumerators generally are required to travel in pairs. Each pair of enumerators are asked to verify approximately 450 electors based on civic addresses. Verification often requires revisits. Each enumerator is paid a base rate of \$125.00 plus \$50.00 to attend the training session and are paid \$0.70 per name in the urban area and \$0.90 per name in rural areas with additional costs for data entry and supplies. To conduct a total enumeration of HRM, it would require over 1,200 enumerators and an additional \$800,000 would need to be allocated to the Election Reserve in the 2007/2008 budget year. That would bring the total budget contribution to the reserve for the 2007/2008 budget year to \$1,200,000.00 which is not included in the current budget documents.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications associated with the recommendation in this report. Should Council decide to proceed with an enumeration, it would be necessary to re-allocate and approve funding within the 2007/08 budget.

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

Council could direct staff to conduct a limited enumeration for a defined section of the voters list in a district which may include new development or in a highly-transient area. Should Council choose this option it is recommended that the 2008/2009 election reserve budget be increased to cover the \$100,000 estimated cost of a limited enumeration. This amount would allow for the enumeration of approximately 35,000 voters or 14,000 to 16,000 households and would bring the total budget contribution required to the Reserve for the 2008/2009 budget year to \$500,000.


Staff does not recommend diverting funds from the current election budget as this would endanger the voting options identified by Council.

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.

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