

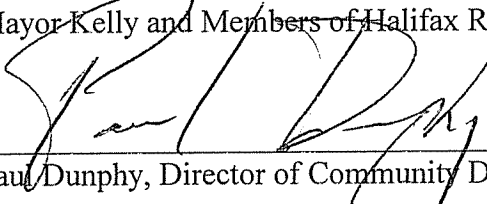


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Halifax Regional Council
April 10, 2007

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Paul Dunphy, Director of Community Development

DATE: March 27, 2007

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

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Staff

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 and on February 20, 2007 Council received an update on the implementation of this process. This report provides further update and additional detail on this initiative in response to questions raised by Council.

DISCUSSION

Since December 2006 staff has been managing a project to assess and evaluate HRM's past engagement exercises in an effort to improve community relations.

What methodology is being used in the study?

The methodology for the study was outlined in the draft terms of reference attached to the September 19, 2006 Council Information Report. They were refined in the RFP #06-384. The scope of work included 10 case studies to identify HRM strengths and weaknesses. Project scope included:

1. Pre-project Preparation with Staff Steering Committee
2. Implement Case Study Selection Process
3. Establish Evaluation Criteria based on local government best practice research
4. Synthesize and Analyse Case Study Documentation
5. Design Focus Group Process
6. Implement Focus Groups (one with Council, one with staff and five with HRM residents and stakeholders)
7. Prepare analysis and recommendations (Draft Report)
8. Prepare Final Report

Why was it necessary to engage consultants in the study?

The quality of this study depends on open and honest feedback from public, staff and elected officials. HRM has acquired consulting services to lead the review and assessment of HRM's engagement processes to eliminate the potential for bias. Staff explored the option of hiring a student or a part-time staff to carry out the evaluation, however given the tight time frame and the importance of the process, this option was ruled out. An RFP was therefore awarded to MacDonnell Group based in Halifax, which partnered with One World Inc. Based in Ottawa following a standard evaluation and procurement process. The cost of the study is \$40, 202 including HST as approved by Council in the 2006/07 Budget - Community Engagement Strategy.

How were case studies selected?

The consultants, with the aid of the steering committee, developed a number of selection criteria to confirm the mandatory case studies and select several additional case studies representative of HRM's involvement. The committee eliminated any ongoing consultation processes upfront because evaluation would have been premature and the process could potentially affect the final outcome. The final list of case studies includes:

- Cultural Plan
- Regional Plan

- Harbour Solutions CLC Plan (Halifax and Dartmouth)
- Budget Consultation Plan
- Halifax Regional Police Town Hall Meetings
- Vision 20/20
- Romans Avenue Traffic Calming
- Youth Engagement Strategy
- Williams Lake Road Park Study
- Auburn/John Stewart Community Playground

How were locations for focus groups selected?

The primary aim was to select locations that were equally distributed throughout HRM such that all residents, to the best extent possible, would have a focus group within their region. That being said, five regions, each made up of several communities, were identified based in part on geography and on population base to correspond to the five focus groups. The second aim was to maximize attendance by ensuring that focus groups were also held in the communities, or as close to them as possible, of the geographic-specific case studies. This was logistically necessary, given that certain case studies had only a few participants.

The locations for focus groups were:

- Central Halifax (St. Pat's High School)
- Bedford/Sackville/Fall River (LeBrun Centre)
- Dartmouth/Eastern Passage/Cole Harbour (Tellahase Community Centre)
- Spryfield/Clayton Park/Tantallon (Captain William Spry)
- Musquodoboit Harbour (MH Recreation Centre).

How were focus group participants recruited?

Council: All Councillors were invited to the Council focus group.

Staff: Staff leads on the various case studies were invited to participate.

Residents: Because the study focuses on specific case studies it was important to access the views of those who took part in them. Participant contacts were gathered using records maintained by staff. The original list included over 1,000 contacts including steering committee members, stakeholders and residents who may have attended one or more public meetings open to the public. Therefore, the contacts database was broader than special interest groups. In the case of the Regional Plan and Cultural Plan where a large number of contacts were available, participants were organized according to area codes and subsequently names were randomly selected to ensure geographic representation. Staff sent out initial letters and e-mails to over 200 contacts informing them of the study and that they may be invited to a focus group in the week of March 21st-24th. From that list consultants proceeded to contact residents with specific invitations. The goal was to confirm 60 participants (approximately 12 per focus group) and 53 participants actually took part in the focus groups.

How will the study address why some residents don't participate?

All focus groups' questions specifically ask about consideration given to barriers to participation. Having said that, this study is a first step towards developing a Community Engagement Strategy and staff, at Council's request, may follow up with additional inquiries to solicit input from individuals who do not normally participate in HRM consultations. This study will however highlight practices which are successful in soliciting participation in neighbourhoods and among populations who are less likely to take part in HRM consultations.

What are the next steps?

The consultants are in the process of analysing the case study information. A draft report was received and a final report is anticipated to be received in the week of April 16th. Staff will present the report to Council with recommendations on how to improve HRM public engagement practices.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no further budget implications associated with this report.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

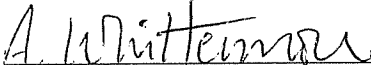
This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/agenda.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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