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Item No. 8

**Halifax Regional Council
June 30, 2009**

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

Church

Jennifer Church, Managing Director, External & Corporate Affairs

DATE: June 12, 2009

SUBJECT: Government Relations Priority Action Areas - Update

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

In August 2008, Council approved the Government Relations Priority Action Areas for the coming year (August 5, 2008, moved by Councillor Sloane and seconded by Councillor McCluskey). This report provides a progress update.

BACKGROUND

In October 2006, Council approved HRM's first "Government Relations and Strategic Partnership Development Policy," designed to increase the effectiveness of the municipality's relations with other levels of government and community partners. Its' three aims were relationship and partnership building; advancing HRM's priority issues; and collaborative issue resolution. These goals do not change from year to year, but specific action areas are periodically updated to reflect HRM's priorities and interests.

In August 2008 Council approved the current set of government relations priority action areas. They were grouped by Council Focus Areas and corporate strategic initiatives. In the intervening months there has been progress under most of these areas and, with the upcoming provincial election, an update is timely. In addition to progress around the specific priority action areas, staff undertake meetings and relationship-building initiatives on an ongoing basis to maintain communication with government and community partners (e.g., CAO meetings with organization CEOs, caucus briefings, etc).

New government relations priority areas reflecting the new Council Focus Areas and taking into account the new Provincial government, will come before Council this summer for approval.

DISCUSSION

Community Development:

The passage of the HRMbyDesign legislation during the Fall 2008 session of the Legislature was a major success for HRM. The new HRMbyDesign Act enables Council to implement a planning and development policy for the downtown core that will best suit its unique needs. A comprehensive government relations strategy was undertaken to gain the support of a number of community and business organizations and secure the legislation.

There has also been significant activity on environmental initiatives. HRM is recognized as a leader by both the provincial and federal governments in regards to coastal and harbour management, and as a result HRM was awarded funding to participate in the Regional Adaptation Collaborative, an initiative which considers the impact of climate change on coastal regions and harbours and how it will influence future planning and development decisions. HRM continues to provide its input to the Province on the Energy Strategy and Climate Change Strategy, and to participate in discussions around water resource management.

HRM has been advocating at the UARB for its own energy efficiency initiatives. One is an exemption for small geothermal projects. The request has gone forward to the Province and appears to have some support from the government and Nova Scotia Power. HRM is also currently appearing at UARB hearings trying to have the NSPI proposed DSM (demand side management) funding project modified to include a self administered component that staff feels would be of significant benefit to funding HRM's energy efficiency projects.

Infrastructure:

The federal budget in January 2009 provided an unprecedented amount of funding for infrastructure, a large portion of it intended for municipalities. This outcome resulted at least in part because of FCM advocacy efforts on behalf of municipalities, in which HRM participated. It represents the first time municipalities have been at the table as equal partners. HRM is eligible to receive approx \$87 million of cost-shared funding under the economic stimulus package and the Major Infrastructure component of the Building Canada Fund (BCF).

Presentations to all three party caucuses in April established infrastructure as HRM's top current priority. There have also been extensive discussions around potential infrastructure projects and eligibility criteria for this funding. Some of these discussions led to the funding agreement for the Canada Games (Mainland Common) Centre, which reserved \$12 million each from the provincial and federal governments for HRM infrastructure. Staff discussions around the BCF and stimulus funds established criteria for eligible projects which were submitted to Council and debated on April 28. Council did forward its top infrastructure projects to the Province for funding and understood there was provincial support; however their status is now uncertain with the election of a new government.

Apart from the economic stimulus funding, there has been progress on other issues related to infrastructure. On May 5, HRM and the Province announced an agreement to continue the process of examining options for the development of a new convention centre for downtown. This was a major accomplishment. There have been preliminary conversations about transit and the concept of a Capital Transportation Authority (CTA) with the former government. The concept was also included in the April presentations to both opposition caucuses. The existing intergovernmental committee on transportation (Strategic Joint Regional Transportation Planning Committee) has been instrumental in helping to secure funding for four major road projects within HRM - one of which, the Larry Uteck interchange, has allowed 1600 acres of land to open up for development.

Staff continue to monitor infrastructure funding opportunities.

Tax Reform:

HRM continues to keep the Province informed on a staff level of its tax reform initiative. HRM has encouraged the Province's intention to conduct its own provincial tax reform study and has participated in the research-gathering work done to date by Provincial staff.

Public Safety:

Strong ties have been built between HRM/HRP and the Department of Justice (DOJ). Both organizations are committed to increasing the number of police officers on the street. HRP submits requests for additional officers annually to the DOJ, and 46 new positions have been funded over the past two years. There were more police officer positions added in the May 2009 budget which was defeated in the Legislature.

The follow-up from the Mayor's Roundtable in Violence recommendations involves significant collaboration between HRM, HRP, DOJ and the Department of Community Services. Already these organizations are working together to expand the success of the Uniacke Square community office, and have opened three more sites: Greystone Terrace, Bayers/Westwood and Scotia Court. This initiative has had proven results in Uniacke Square in forging closer bonds with the community and reducing crime and represents a significant achievement for HRM's government relations work in the area of public safety.

Other positive discussions with the Province have taken place around Summary Proceedings Act changes. HRM staff have been in consultation with Department of Justice officials around these changes and are in full agreement with them. The changes will use existing resources more effectively and address the increased workload that has resulted from the additional police officers hired over the past three years.

HRM continues to provide input to the NS Fire Service Training Committee and to contribute to the discussion on volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention.

Cultural Plan:

There were some unanticipated culture and heritage funding opportunities in the federal economic stimulus funding announced in January. In addition to the BCF funding, which HRM has asked be directed towards the Central Library, there are smaller programs aimed at supporting construction,

renovation and rehabilitation of existing heritage and cultural sites. Staff is pursuing these opportunities for the Dingle Memorial Tower, City Hall and possibly Evergreen House.

The municipal registry of historic places is now included in the federal registry (www.historicplaces.ca), providing a complete listing of HRM's historic sites. On the provincial side, HRM participated in Creative Nova Scotia, a province-wide capacity-building conference for artists and the cultural community. HRM is in discussions with the Province to organize a similar program with an HRM-focus.

Economic Strategy:

GHP and the Mayor's Economic Advisory Committee continue to work with stakeholders to align priorities and implement Economic Strategy goals. The Chamber's 2008 Scorecard on Economic Strategy progress released an additional "mini-scorecard" this year, focusing solely on areas where HRM has direct influence. This was a positive step as it recognized the progress HRM has made in achieving some of the Economic Strategy goals and gave the municipality an overall score of one green light. In addition, the Mayor's Economic Roundtable in March brought together a large cross-section of public and private sector representatives to discuss issues related to economic development in HRM and possible focus areas of the next iteration of the Economic Strategy.

As the organization tasked with implementation of the Economic Strategy, GHP has achieved a number of accomplishments that have enhanced HRM's economic development, including:

- Created and retained over 5000 jobs and consulted with 1800 businesses through SmartBusiness, the Business Retention and Expansion strategy;
- Launched widespread marketing campaign building awareness of the benefits and opportunities of hiring immigrants;
- Developed MOUs with Memphis and the Port of Churchill, Manitoba, around Gateway-related initiatives;
- Exploring partnership opportunities with Chicago World Business;
- Developed an MOU with Fusion and a Y2E (Youth to Employers) project, both aimed at connecting youth and the business community to keep young people in the region with good employment; and
- Increased focus and advocacy around HRM as the Economic Hub of Atlantic Canada.
- Moving forward with the African Nova Scotian Legacy Project (Ujamaa), which focuses on need for large, consistent financial commitments as well as a broad-based approach that addresses social, health, justice, and education issues in addition to economic ones.

Immigration Action Plan:

Immigration received heightened profile with the release of the Newcomer's Guide to HRM in January 2009. This valuable resource for newcomers, developed by HRM and GHP with input from MISA and several other settlement organizations, is now available through HRM Customer Service Centres, immigrant settlement organizations and on the HRM website. The Guide was profiled in a launch event in April that brought together government bodies and immigration service providers to discuss ways in which they could work more closely.

One such partnership is now in place around the “Welcoming Communities” barbeque and potluck which takes place each August. HRM provided the space and staff resources to help run the event last summer and discussion are underway to determine HRM’s future role on the organizing committee. HRM is also working closely with GHP to identify the most beneficial career fairs to attend in order to recruit newcomers to our organization.

Metropolis has awarded a grant to two Dalhousie researchers to undertake an evaluation of HRM’s Immigration Action Plan. This will be an independent academic study, however HRM staff is providing assistance and information. There are several potential benefits to the study, including a review of best practices from other municipalities, particularly as staff begins to revisit the Phase 2 objectives in the Plan.

Atlantic Gateway:

The Distripark concept originally put forward by HRM and endorsed by Halifax Gateway Council members was not considered by transportation industry stakeholders to be a viable and cost-effective alternative to using peninsula Halifax streets to access port container terminals and was shelved in favour of the Province’s ICT corridor study. As the Province has decided not to proceed with the ICT concept, HRM is again involved in discussions on alternative proposals that will reduce the downtown truck traffic and improve transportation of goods. Follow up discussions will also be undertaken to respond to a May 11, 2009 request by Harbour East Community Council to examine potential Gateway-related traffic impacts in the vicinity of Woodland Avenue/Victoria Road/Highway 118.

There has been progress on the Burnside-Sackville connector, funding for which was announced by the Premier and Minister MacKay in May. HRM continues to work with the Gateway Council and other partners to protect industrial land and ensure it is available for Gateway-related uses.

HRM Charter:

The bill establishing the HRM Charter as the governing legislation for the municipality was passed in the fall 2008 session of the legislature, and came into force in January 2009.

Strong Neighbourhoods:

As described above under Public Safety, the Uniacke Square community office initiative has been expanded to three other neighbourhoods and further expansion is under consideration.

HRM is one of Canada’s designated Safe Communities, an initiative that promotes a culture of health and safety in the community. In 2008 HRM received a perfect score on the Annual Safe Communities Canada report card, and was specially mentioned for strengths in Leadership, Sustainability and Community Engagement. To commemorate this, October 2, 2008 was proclaimed National Safe Communities Day in HRM.

Strategic Partnerships:

HRM now has seven signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with community partners including:

- Metro Universities
- Capital District Health Authority
- Nova Scotia Community College
- Halifax International Airport
- Halifax Port Authority
- Halifax Regional School Board
- Department of National Defence

These seven MOUs represent the entire number of agreements identified in the CAO's Goals for completion. Staff are now focused on implementing the priority areas identified in each MOU, and implementation plans are underway or being developed so that initiatives will relate to Council Focus Areas and/or corporate strategies. Of particular note is the MOU with NSCC, which has a number of initiatives underway to address HRM's training and recruitment issues.

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.

ATTACHMENTS

N/a

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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