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Item No. 8

**Halifax Regional Council
September 8, 2009**

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Dunphy".

Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Development

DATE: August 5, 2009

SUBJECT: Physical Activity Strategy for the Halifax Region

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

An update by staff to Regional Council on the progress of the Physical Activity Strategy for the Halifax Region.

BACKGROUND

The Physical Activity Strategy for the Halifax Region is a call to action to address the serious problems associated with physical inactivity in HRM. While HRM has a vibrant and growing population, change is required with respect to the health and wellness of our citizens. Dangerously low levels of physical activity in the Halifax Region have been repeatedly documented and the negative health, social, economic, and environmental impacts well known. In fact, 50 % of the population in HRM is not physically active - most notably our youth and older adults.

In 2007, seven HRM organizations collectively recognized the need to develop a plan and pool resources to address this issue. The organizations publically endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding to support the development of the plan. The organizations include:

- Halifax Regional Municipality
- Halifax Regional School Board
- Dalhousie University
- IWK Health Centre
- Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection
- Capital District Health Authority
- The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia

Municipalities have a shared responsibility for active, healthy and engaged citizens and by working together with this range of service agencies, government departments, and universities municipalities can more aptly ensure a positive outcome. HRM is part of this group of organizations working to address this issue.

This resultant strategy lays an important and necessary foundation to shift HRM towards a culture of physical activity. There are several benefits to healthier citizens and communities including the following:

- Lower greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion if people walk or cycle more;
- Safer communities with more people out on the streets and trails of HRM;
- Developed infrastructure for walking, biking, and sports which attracts visitors and creates jobs;
- Active healthy people reporting reduced absenteeism from work. Studies also have demonstrated increased worker productivity in several countries.
- Active older adults are less at risk for falls and hip fractures and more likely to live independently longer;
- Healthy, active youth are more likely to stay out of trouble and become engaged in civic life
- In addition, healthy students are better learners (more engaged and resilient);
- Fiscal imperative. It is estimated that physical inactivity in HRM costs the health care system \$16 million a year in hospital, physician and drug costs alone.

Physical inactivity can only be addressed through a coordinated and collective community response. Creative initiatives are required, including new programs, improved policies and practices, increased awareness, and supportive built and social environments.

DISCUSSION

HRM Physical Activity Strategy responds to this challenge with:

- Over 60 action plans to enhance awareness, secure the commitment of community partners and establish supportive social, built and natural environments;
- Initiatives selected specifically for HRM; yet have also been proven successful elsewhere;
- Clear priorities and Lead Agencies identified to support the implementation of the action plans;
- Physical activity targets for 2013 to track the success of the strategy;
- An ongoing commitment to research, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of the action plans;
- A plan to secure resources, build additional partnerships and establish an ongoing governance structure.

Highlights of the plan

The plan is divided into 4 goal areas:

1. Awareness and Commitment:

To ensure HRM residents and community leaders are aware of the benefits and opportunities of physical activity and embrace it as an essential part of daily life.

2. Supportive Environments

Supportive social environments will provide informal and formal opportunities for physical activity in HRM neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces with improved access to community resources.

3. Community Built and natural Environments

Communities will be better able to support physical activity initiatives through improved planning, design and coordination among all agencies responsible for built and natural environments.

4. Leadership and Accountability

To ensure community organizations and public, private and non-profit agencies work in partnership to continually plan, implement evaluate and improve this sustainable, long term strategy.

The Strategy

A copy of the strategy will be circulated to Members of Council in the near future. Any questions on the initiative may be directed to Karen MacTavish at mactavk@halifax.ca.

Launch

There will be an official celebration launch on September 16, 2009 from 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. Invitations have recently been sent out and all Members of Council are invited and encouraged to attend. Join the committee in celebrating the release of the strategy and find out more about the initiative.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

HRM's contribution for the Project Manager have already been secured in the Community Recreation Services budget (D101) at \$15,000 per annum.

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.

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 : Karen MacTavish/General Manager, Community Recreation Services, 490-4734