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Item No. 3

**Halifax Regional Council
September 29, 2009**

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Phillip Townsend, Director, Infrastructure & Asset Management

DATE: July 20, 2009

SUBJECT: Septic Tanks in HRM

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

A report from the Halifax Water Advisory Board dated July 31, 2007 on the above noted item was referred to staff for a report.

BACKGROUND

The report from the Halifax Watershed Advisory Board recommends that HRM regulate the maintenance of all septic tanks in HRM, including expanding sludge handling systems, and further that HRM develop a program to remediate all malfunctioning on-site septic disposal systems.

DISCUSSION

A septic tank is one part of an on-site septic disposal system, along with piping and a leaching field. The regulation of on-site septic disposal systems, including disposal of septic tank waste, is a matter of Provincial jurisdiction and responsibility. Notwithstanding, the Provincial legislation was amended in 1982 to allow a municipality to create a Wastewater Management District to better regulate the ownership, operations, or maintenance of on-site systems.

This authority is discretionary, and there have only been a few examples to date where a wastewater management district has been established in Nova Scotia. Since 1982, wastewater management districts have been established in Port Maitland, Yarmouth Co., Guysborough Village and Little Dover, Guysborough Co., Woods Harbour, Shelburne Co., and Conquerall Bank, Lunenburg Co.

System Maintenance/Remediation of On-Site Disposal Systems

Policy guidance in this matter may be found in the Regional Plan, which contains policies that deal in whole or in part with wastewater management in areas that do not have a central sewer. Generally speaking, the Regional Plan does not contemplate that HRM would regulate septic tanks on a broad basis as requested by the Halifax Watershed Advisory Board.

The Plan does however contain policy which indicates that Council will consider establishing Wastewater Management Districts in certain situations as follows:

- During community visioning exercises in rural centres¹;
- In existing areas with failing on-site systems that cannot be re-mediated on-site²; and
- when considering extending central water without central sewer³.

To date, there has not been any request for HRM to consider wastewater management districts pursuant to these policies. However, pursuant to Regional Plan policy direction, HRM staff are commencing discussions with Halifax Water regarding the administrative processes and operational requirements for introducing wastewater management districts within HRM. Based on these discussions, options for implementing such districts will be presented to Council for discussion and direction.

Sludge Handling Program

¹Policy SU-18, HRM Regional Plan, p.125

²Policy SU-19, HRM Regional Plan, p.125

³Policy SU-20, HRM Regional Plan, p.126

The HRWC report recommends that HRM expand the sludge handling system for septic tank sludge. Transporting and disposal of septic tank waste is also a matter of Provincial responsibility. Private contractors that pump-out, transport, and dispose of septic waste are licensed by the Province.

If a private contractor chooses, they may dispose of the septic tank waste at the de-watering facility at the Aerotech Wastewater Treatment Facility. Costs are recovered on a fee for service basis. The sludge is then de-watered and trucked to the Halifax Water's N-Viro Facility, which is also located in the Aerotech Business Park.

The sludge handling systems at Halifax Water's Aerotech de-watering or N-Viro facilities cannot be expanded due to capacity limitations.

Other acceptable methods of disposal include private lagoon stabilization facilities followed by land application, both of which are regulated by the Province.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

N/A

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/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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