

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Brad Anguish, Director, BPIM and Harbour Solutions Project

DATE: 24 November, 2009

SUBJECT: 2009 HRM Citizen Survey

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report stems from the Municipality's commitment in the 2009/10 business plan to conduct a Citizen Survey and is a follow up to the Information Report dated October 21, 2009.

BACKGROUND

As part of the commitment to citizen-centred service delivery, an HRM Citizen Survey will commence in early December 2009. Regular surveying of its residents is a best-practice of leading cities and municipalities. The survey is designed to solicit citizen expectations and satisfaction regarding HRM services, and will provide Council and staff with valuable feedback as we move into this year's planning cycle.

The Citizen Survey is an important element of the Corporate Planning Framework that was reviewed with Council at COW on December 16, 2008. The survey asks questions related to HRM's Community Outcomes, namely:

- A Safe and Welcoming Community;
- Affordable Transportation and Mobility Options;
- Diverse Recreation, Leisure and Cultural Choices;
- Well Planned and Engaged Communities;
- Respect for the Environment; and
- Economic Prosperity.

Benefits of Doing a Citizen Survey:

There are a number of benefits associated with conducting a Citizen Survey:

- Best-practice of leading cities and municipalities to solicit feedback from a random and representative sample of citizens region-wide;
- Enables identification of the variable(s) with the most influence on citizen's perception of HRM, and identification of the main themes most affecting residents quality of life;
- Establishes a performance baseline that will be used to evaluate ongoing HRM performance;
- Provides an assessment of community priorities and need(s), identifies broad community issues, and enables Council and staff to align service delivery to meet specific community and planning needs;
- Results will provide valuable feedback and trends over time to gauge satisfaction with HRM's services;
- Results will help to inform discussions during the 2010/2011 business planning cycle, enabling better allocation of resources for maximum community benefit and improved policy decision-making;
- Fulfills a commitment made as part of HRM's Economic Strategy to undertake a citizen survey on a regular basis.

DISCUSSION

A draft citizen survey has been developed in-house, in consultation with HRM business units, and our partners at the Halifax Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Halifax Partnership. The survey is currently being finalized in collaboration with Thinkwell Research, a Halifax-based market research firm that was awarded the contract on October 28, 2009 to conduct the survey on behalf of HRM.

Methodology:

As per the 2009/10 business plan, a Region-wide survey of HRM residents will be conducted. The results will provide feedback and priorities of citizens that is representative of the general population of HRM.

24,000 random households will receive a letter from HRM containing a message from the Mayor, including instructions for how to participate in the survey. The Mayor's message welcomes residents to the survey, introduces the process, and outlines the survey completion options and benefits.

2400 returned surveys (10% of those sent) will provide HRM with data that is accurate to within +/- 2%, 19 times out of 20. The greater the return rate the greater the level of statistical accuracy.

Residents will have the option of completing the survey online, by mail, or by telephone. This methodology has been selected to reduce the environmental impact associated with doing a large-scale, mail-based survey, as well as to expedite the surveying process. Each household will receive a unique Participant ID and Password which would allow them to complete the survey online. Residents who chose to complete the survey by mail or telephone will be asked provide their ID and password, in order to ensure that the sampling pool remains protected. The ID will also be used to track completed surveys, and reduce mailing costs by eliminating those who have completed the survey from receiving a reminder postcard.

It is hoped that most residents will take the survey online, as this is both the most cost-effective solution, and the most environmentally friendly.

Survey Schedule:

It is estimated that the engagement will take approximately ten weeks to complete, with results presented to Regional Council in early February 2010. A draft time line is shown below.

If there has not been a sufficiently high-enough response rate the Municipality may extend the closing date for participation. In this case, the data analysis and final report to Council may be delayed by one to two weeks in order to ensure sufficient sampling has been achieved.

| Task | Completion Date |
|--|------------------------|
| Survey pre-test / Finalize Survey | Late November |
| Survey distribution and administration | Early December |
| Close survey | End December |
| Data analysis | Mid January |
| Final Report to Council | Early February |

Communication Plan:

HRM has developed a comprehensive communication plan to accompany the survey and build broad awareness for this initiative and motivation on the part of HRM citizens to participate in the survey.

The communications plan is intended to raise awareness of the survey before, during, and after the survey, and to communicate results to citizens in a timely fashion. It should also raise the confidence of citizens that the Municipality will use the results to improve services and further engage them in helping shape their community.

| Task | Timing |
|--|---|
| News Release | Approximately 5 days before mailing of survey |
| Newspaper Ad (Chronicle Herald, Metro, The Coast) | Timed with initial mailing of survey |
| Public Service Announcement (PSA) | Weekly during survey duration |
| Reminder Postcard | 10 days after initial mailing |
| Thank you ad to those who participated | Once survey period is complete |
| Media Release Results of Survey | Following final Report to Council (February 2010) |

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

As per the Information Report dated October 21, 2009 the full cost of conducting the survey will be approximately \$75,000 and remains consistent with the 09/10 Business Plan. Thinkwell Research was awarded the contract to carry out the survey at a cost of \$34,650 (plus HST). Additional costs such as sampling list acquisition, administrative costs associated with printing and mailing, and HRM's media communications promoting the survey are anticipated to be under \$40,000.

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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