



Council Focus Area

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**Report on Progress Against 2009/10  
Council Focus Areas**

**Governance and Communications**

**December 8, 2009**

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## **Introduction**

During the 2009/10 business planning process, members of the newly elected Council identified Governance and Communications as one of five areas of focus for the duration of their term.

The outcome of the Governance portion of the Governance and Communication CFA is to meet Council's objective of creating a council and committee governance structure that is efficient, effective, scaled appropriately, and where decisions are made at the appropriate level.

The outcome of the Communications portion of the Governance and Communication CFA is to confirm HRM as the source of information about the region's plans, priorities and growth. The overall goal is to ensure a proactive approach to all of the municipality's internal and external communications and marketing activity.

## **Issue - Governance**

There are two primary objectives to achieve the outcome under the Governance portion of the Governance and Communications focus area. The first is to explore reforming and better aligning Committees of Council. The second is to conduct a legislated District Boundary Review that will include reviews of Council size and of the role and authority of Community Councils.

### **2009/2010 Progress**

#### **1. Committee of Council Alignment**

A recommendation from the Membership Selection Committee to move to six (6) Standing Committees of Council was sent to Committee of the Whole for debate on November 17, 2009. After some positive discussion, the matter was referred back to Membership Selection for further clarification. Recommendations to streamline HRM's planning application process have been integrated into the recommendations from this process. In general Council seems open to making changes. The degree of change and approach will require further discussion and debate by Council.

#### **2. District Boundaries Review**

In August 2009, Council struck a Committee of Council to advance the District Boundary review process as required under legislation. The Committee is actively working on phase one, which consists of consultation on HRM's governance model and a subsequent recommendation to Regional Council early in 2010. A request for revisions to the HRM Charter to allow Community Councils authority in local planning issues has been forwarded to Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations for consideration at the Spring sitting of the provincial legislature.

### **2010/2011 Objectives**

#### **1. Committee of Council Alignment**

Objectives for 2010/11 will be focussed on implementation of any changes to the Council Committee structure recommended and adopted by Council.

#### **2. District Boundaries Review**

Following Council's decision on governance, phase two involve establishing proposed district boundaries and conducting public consultation on those boundaries. HRM must make its submission to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (NSUARB) by December 31, 2010. NSUARB will deliver their decision early in 2011.

**Medium/Long Term Outcomes**

**1. Committee of Council Alignment**

Based on work and consultation with Council and citizens, HRM's Council Committee structure will be as effective and efficient as possible.

**2. District Boundaries Review**

The decision of the NSUARB in regard to any boundary revisions will be implemented for the next Municipal Election in October 2012.

## **Issue - Communications**

The first objective under the Communications portion of the Governance and Communications Council Focus Areas (CFA) is to develop a communications plan for all CFAs. Internally, it is necessary to communicate to staff and ensure that they understand the focus areas, how they relate to their daily activities, and how business units can coordinate initiatives and service delivery to citizens. Externally, it is necessary to clearly communicate Council's areas of focus and the results that citizens can expect.

The second objective is to implement HRM's Strategic Communications Plan, which defines actionable goals and an implementation plan to guide the design, preparation and execution of strategic communications. The plan facilitates communications leadership across the organization, with emphasis on proactive approaches to communications balanced with the need to react to urgent matters; and operational effectiveness in the areas of marketing, communications and public affairs.

### **2009/2010 Progress**

#### **1. Develop CFA Communications Plans**

External and Corporate Affairs has been aligning support to marketing and communications plans and tools for Council Focus Areas. The result of this activity will be enhanced profile of Council's accomplishments and subsequent results for citizens of HRM. Marketing and Communications staff have been realigned to better profile CFAs. Each focus area has been assigned resources to help ensure a proactive and consistent approach to communications in relation to the services that are provided to residents as a result of CFAs. Initiatives that support focus areas are given priority.

The CFA Communications and Marketing plan that has been developed sets out a framework to highlight progress on the focus areas and their key outcomes. This represents a shift in the philosophical approach to HRM's communications. Some of the specific initiatives that exemplify this shift are highlighted below.

Through the communications plans, staff are taking opportunities to provide visual representation of Council Focus Areas, linked to the Good Neighbours, Great Neighbourhood (GNGN) brand. Posters have been designed and provided to all HRM work locations. "Halifax Regional Council, Serving the needs of our neighbourhoods" is the tag line used on each of the public facing posters. Another example of this approach was an advertisement developed for the World Canoe Championships held at Lake Banook this past summer. The ad links the site improvements at Banook to Council's commitment to infrastructure, while also profiling the municipality's commitment to improving neighbourhoods.

Tag lines that relate services and initiatives to the appropriate Council Focus Area have been developed for corporate advertising. This initiative promotes CFAs broadly and helps to clearly link HRM's programs and services back to Council's direction. Four articles have been published in Business Voice Magazine, each one profiling a particular focus area or corporate strategy. In addition, HRM's Annual Report will be designed to highlight Council Focus Areas and incorporate messaging around community and corporate success stories.

A redesign of the *halifax.ca* web site is underway to better align the content and public information on the site with Council Focus Areas. The approach is to base navigation on services, rather than business units, and theme the services according to CFAs. There has been internal consultation and a focus group of citizens will be organized for the new year, to ensure public input into the final design. It is expected that the revamped design will be launched next year.

In an effort to profile community success, HRM continues to market the GNGN brand and integrate it with the Council Focus Areas. *Myhrm.ca* has been enhanced to become more interactive and attractive to residents and a Facebook page for GNGN has been launched. A successful ad campaign ran for a month during prime time programming on CTV, ads have been published in Saltscapes Magazine and Living Magazine, and the GNGN logo has appeared on a number of newspaper ads and notices. The HRM Today publication has been redesigned as My HRM and focuses on items of interest to neighbourhoods.

This year's citizen calendar is fully branded with GNGN messaging and seamlessly integrates Council Focus Areas. The calendar highlights the partnership between Council, HRM staff, and citizens, and features the people, tools and resources available to residents through their local government. It also promotes the things Council is doing to make HRM neighbourhoods great places to live, work, and play, and includes key municipal dates such as deadlines for applying for community grants, reminders to nominate someone for a Volunteer Recognition Award, and recreation registration periods. The pullout centre spread includes information on GNGN, key contact information, and the 2010 waste collection schedule.

An online calendar is being developed for *halifax.ca* to help improve citizen engagement. When launched in the new year, this calendar will include events such as Council meetings, public meetings, and civic events. By clicking on a date, an individual will see the events and meetings for that date, as well as any related materials. For example, citizens will be able to access Council agendas, minutes, and reports directly from the online calendar. Definitions of terms such as "public hearing" and "public information meeting" will be provided to help citizens better understand the public engagement process and their role in each stage. Offering easy access to information about involvement in municipal government is expected to result in better informed citizens, and potentially increase community engagement and civic participation. In addition, the ability to view Council proceedings online is a key component of engagement in the public process. Through the

Clerks Office, posting video clips of Council on *halifax.ca* as part of the record of meetings is being explored and will be brought to Council in early 2010.

## **2. Implement HRM Communications Strategy**

The HRM Strategic Communications Plan has been developed to ensure the municipality's marketing and communications resources support development of proactive and positive messages. The overall goal of the plan is to make HRM the source of information about the region's plans, priorities, growth, and progress, and to move communications from a reactive to proactive model. Progress in relation to the main themes identified in the strategy is as follows.

### (1) Culture of Communications

An organizational shift to a public affairs based approach to communications is underway in HRM. This shift represents a move toward a different communications culture within the organization. Specifically, it will ensure that the municipality's communications with the public, and the information needs of all stakeholders (i.e. media, residents, employees, and other organizations), are considered from the earliest stages of development of a project, initiative, or decision.

In recent months, Corporate Communications has conducted sessions with Senior Management and Business Unit management teams. These sessions outline the broad goals of the communications plan, primarily the shift from a reactive to a proactive communications model, and are helping to build communications capacity throughout the organization.

A new Manager of Public Affairs was hired in the Spring and two Senior Communications Advisor vacancies have been filled. The roles of these positions have been revised to ensure that they are primarily addressing corporate priorities, issues management, and provision of strategic support to Council Focus Areas. This approach represents an acknowledgement that, in order to improve, resources and tools need to be aligned in consideration of a variety of audiences and tactics.

### (2) Stakeholder Communications

To ensure that target audiences are kept updated on important issues, HRM is increasing its use of direct-to-stakeholder communications. The Chief Administrative Officer's stakeholder list is being used to send updates on corporate direction to the business community, other levels of government, and relevant organizations. Similar lists have been developed for Metro Transit, the Sustainable Environment Management Office, Real Estate and Facility Services, Solid Waste, and Infrastructure and Asset Management. In addition, issue-specific lists have been used successfully (i.e. Harbour Solutions). An inventory of Neighbourhood Associations is being developed to facilitate communication directly with these groups, who can act as ambassadors and profile local stories.

This is a significant change that supports a broader public affairs approach and builds toward HRM's goal of becoming the main source of information about the municipality.

To help maximize opportunities to receive citizen feedback, a communications plan has been developed for this year's Citizen Survey. It is hoped that long term citizen participation will be increased through use of communications tools in relation to the survey, its results, and actions that are taken to support those results. Survey results will be communicated to all citizens through Reports to Council, media releases, and newspaper / magazine features. Any action that results from survey responses will be communicated to the public. In this way, HRM hopes to build public confidence in the process and motivate citizens to participate in a meaningful way.

### (3) Issues Management

Central to building, maintaining and enhancing an organization's reputation is a strong issues management program. Public Affairs is managing a shift toward better issues management by building a model to increase awareness of issues as they are developing, which will in turn allow for development of more proactive communications strategies.

Among recent examples where strong and coordinated issues management has guided communication to the public are the Concerts on the Common and this year's Winter Safety operations. In both of these cases, staff from various business units have worked in cooperation with communications, allowing for development of comprehensive and consistent material for the website, news releases, public service announcements, and stakeholder communications.

A media relations training program has been developed to help ensure that the organization is better able to respond to inquiries and promote stories of interest. Training will be provided to communications staff and subject matter experts to support the goal of building an organization that maintains a consistent message and image. The objective is to support media by having the right individuals responding to requests, while ensuring HRM experts feel prepared and supported. Ultimately, this supports HRM's ongoing commitment to openness, transparency, and accountability.

### (4) Alignment and Policy Development

As part of the service review process approved by Council, a Publications Review is underway. The objective is to review the publications that HRM produces to potentially integrate those that have a common message or target, and eliminate those that do not support CFAs or corporate strategies and/or are no longer relevant or effective. Through this process, opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness in getting required information to target audiences will be considered.

Social media tools such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter present a significant opportunity for



communications and citizen engagement. To ensure appropriate and effective use of social media, a strategy and guidelines are being developed in consultation with IT, Legal, HR and FOIPOP. The guidelines will include criteria for acceptable use of social media in getting information from residents, how to moderate online discussions and content posted by non-HRM employees, and management of record retention. Training in the effective use of social media has been ongoing and staff are conducting best practice research and regularly monitoring social media sites for information related to HRM. A Facebook page has been developed for GNGN and is being used to profile positive stories about HRM communities and to support neighbourhood initiatives.

### **2010/2011 Objectives**

#### **1. Develop CFA Communications Plans**

- The redesign of *halifax.ca* will be launched. The revamped site will allow for easier navigation, include an improved media centre, provide for increased citizen engagement, and better profile Council's Focus Areas.
- A stakeholder database of neighbourhood associations will be finalized to allow better flow of important information directly to and from these groups.
- A further increase in proactive marketing and communication of good news stories, especially in relation to Council Focus Area activity, will be delivered.
- Resources and business processes will be further revised and refined to better respond to Council Focus Areas and corporate priorities.
- Marketing and communications resources will be devoted to Council Focus Area and Business Unit management teams to promote holistic and integrated support to Council and corporate priorities.
- HRM's social media presence will be further developed and enhanced, particularly in terms of information gathering and research on Council's areas of focus.
- As other CFA projects and initiatives proceed, marketing and communications resources will be provided to help with messaging and alignment of corporate themes.
- Support will be provided to ensure that Councillors' newsletters are better able to profile Council Focus Areas.

#### **2. Implement HRM Communications Strategy**

- A media relations policy will be finalized and delivery of the media training program will continue.
- To enhance HRM's social media presence, guidelines for the effective use of social media tools to better engage citizens will be finalized and implemented.
- Implementation of recommendations from the publications review will begin.
- New Business Unit and issue-specific stakeholder lists will be developed to support further

- direct-to-stakeholder communications.
- Development of an internal communications strategy will begin, to help ensure that HRM staff receive the information they need to better promote Council and corporate priorities.
- The research and evaluation capability in marketing and communications will be further enhanced to allow for better performance measurement and tracking of results.
- Crisis and issues management sessions for managers and other key staff will be initiated.
- Social marketing campaigns will be developed for community issues such as graffiti management and tobacco restrictions on HRM park properties.
- A long term communications plan and tools will be developed for HRM's Citizen Survey.

### **Medium/Long Term Outcomes**

#### **1. Develop CFA Communications Plans**

Council Focus Areas will frame HRM's communications and marketing activities and, as a result, Council Focus Areas and corporate priorities will be supported by comprehensive communications and marketing campaigns.

#### **2. Implement HRM Communications Strategy**

Culture of Communications - Communications is part of corporate decision-making and all Business Units consider communications goals and needs as part of annual business planning. In addition, the organization has a comprehensive framework for internal communications.

Stakeholder Engagement - All stakeholders use HRM as the source of information about the region's plans, priorities and growth.

Issues Management - An effective issues management program is developed to ensure that proactive and coordinated communications planning helps the organization to identify and address issues early.

Alignment and Policy Development - HRM's communications and marketing resources and practices are aligned to support Council Focus Areas and corporate priorities.