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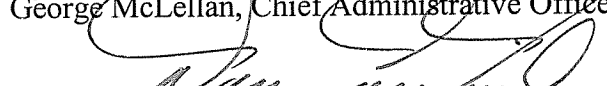
Halifax Regional Council
April 26, 2005

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



George McLellan, Chief Administrative Officer



Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 20, 2005

SUBJECT: Underground Utilities Feasibility Study

ORIGIN

In the spring of 2004, HRM initiated a process to review the costs and benefits of underground versus overhead wiring for power and telecommunications. HRM engaged the services of Kinetrics Inc., an Ontario company specializing in electricity/telecommunications engineering issues. Kinetrics partnered with a local company, the Terrain Group, to ensure that local conditions with respect to engineering, costing and regulatory standards were represented.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Regional Council table the Underground Utilities Feasibility Study until a presentation of the study occurs at a Committee-of-the-Whole meeting in May.

BACKGROUND

The Underground Utilities Feasibility Study was undertaken due to concerns HRM had about the potential impact Nova Scotia Power's expanded tree trimming policy would have on the appearance and character of the community. Following significant power outages in the Region, the scope of the study was expanded to examine whether underground services would significantly enhance service reliability for the community.

Beyond a general interest in these issues on behalf of the community, HRM also has a regulatory interest. By amending its subdivision bylaws, HRM could require that electrical/telecommunications utilities be placed underground in new developments. The scope of the study therefore included analysis of the costs and benefits of underground services to ensure that all of the relevant factual information was available to Council prior to debating the issue and making a decision. Consultation was also undertaken with the affected utilities and the development industry to ensure the study's information and analysis was accurate.

DISCUSSION

Staff was planning on releasing the consultant's study to Council in May, when the consultant will make a presentation at a Committee of the Whole meeting. At that time, staff will also submit a report with an analysis and recommendations. Events at last week's Utility and Review Board hearings have overtaken this schedule. The hearing was supposed to focus on last November's power outage. However, testimony about tree trimming, limited vegetation corridors and underground services has been introduced.

A copy of the consultant's report is being circulated to Council now for information purposes only. It is recommended that the report be tabled and that discussion and debate be deferred until after the consultant's presentation and receipt of staff's recommendations. Upon release of the Council package on Monday April 25, 2005, a copy of the consultant's report will be sent to the Utility and Review Board for their information. It should be mentioned that staff will meet with Council's Energy and Underground Service Committee prior to submitting a report.

The consultant's analysis of underground and overhead services is not presented as a simple either/or option. Eight alternative development/regulatory scenarios are analysed covering residential, industrial, suburban, urban and downtown development. As mentioned earlier, the study's focus is on new development. The study does not focus on burying all existing overhead wires because of the costs and disruption involved. Options for a small expansion of HRM's existing pole free zone in downtown areas are explored. This discussion places particular emphasis upon coordination with other capital works projects such as streets, sewer and water lines in order to manage costs and disruption.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications for 2005/06.

MULTI-YEAR FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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.

ALTERNATIVES

There are no alternatives at this time since this report is presented for information purposes only. Recommendations and alternatives will be presented to Council when the consultant presents their report in May.

ATTACHMENTS

Underground Utility Feasibility Study for Halifax Regional Municipality - Kinetrics Engineering

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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