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Item No. 6
Halifax Regional Council
September 14, 2010

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by Acting Director

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Peter Bigelow, Acting Director, Infrastructure and Asset Management

DATE: August 23, 2010

SUBJECT: Minimum Soil Depth Requirements

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

May 18, 2010: 13.1 Councillor Smith - Request for Report re: Minimum Soil Depth Requirements on New Development and in HRM Redbook

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councilor Lund that Halifax Regional Council request that the Sustainable Environment Management Office staff provide an Information Report outlining the actions to date and any obstacles encountered to creating policy and processes requiring minimum soil depth.

BACKGROUND

Having good soil depth provides a number of benefits to residents and the municipality, including:

- Healthier Lawns and less pests and pressures for pesticide control
- Better water absorption to reduce storm water impacts on municipal infrastructure
- Filtering pollution
- Healthier lawns enabling temperature buffering

DISCUSSION

To quickly address the first part of the request, Design and Construction have a minimum of 6 inches of soil (after compaction) prior to sodding. All municipal work meets this requirement and concept. Reference Municipal Services Handbook, Section 32, 91 19, P 5).

Following the Request of Council, Sustainable Environment Management Staff met with the Soils Committee of Landscape Nova Scotia, other internal staff, and reviewed other opportunities for inserting the benefits of good soil depth.

The Soils Committee of Landscape Nova Scotia recommended that Halifax Regional Municipality not introduce a prescriptive bylaw on soil depth. Summarily, their input was that landscaping plans and work may have a variety of sound methods to achieve environmental, social and economic benefits. The primary recommendation provided during this consultation was that it is important to ensure that Landscaping Plans as part of the Development Agreements are adhered to. Enforcement beyond the landscaping requirements in development agreements would extremely cumbersome and would require extensive resources.

Opportunities for introducing a minimum soil depth bylaw for new development was discussed with Community Development staff. Logistically, there does not appear to be a reasonable solution. The regulation of lot grading does not include landscaping so the Lot Grading Bylaw is not an appropriate legislation for minimum soil depth. In addition, the Lot Grading Bylaw is enforced at the time of construction and not when landscaping is being completed. Often homeowners purchase a home with no landscaping completed, with the intention of landscaping themselves or naturalizing their property without added soil or sodding. Thus insertion of a minimum soil depth in the Lot Grading ByLaw would be unenforceable.

Those points being said, minimum soil depth is indeed part of a sound set of holistic solutions towards protection of and betterment of our environment. Potential opportunities for alignment of soil depth, and general landscaping enhancement, include:

- Recognition in the Urban Forestry Master Plan
- On going review of content of Development Agreement Landscaping Plans
- Enhanced Training internally on Landscaping (for example arranging sessions with Landscape Nova Scotia for HRM staff)
- Ongoing Community and Stakeholder education (including utilization of Naturally Green and discussions with industry associations)
- Consideration of policy opportunities during the creation of the Stormwater Management Functional Plan

Staff will continue to seek opportunities to enhance environmental performance in the community through policy, planning, and project delivery.

The broad range of benefits of Landscaping solutions, not limited to soil depth, include:

- Enhanced Biodiversity
- Water Control
- Carbon Uptake
- Air Quality betterment
- Ecosystem betterment
- Shading
- Climate Change impact amelioration
- Increased property values
- Employment
- Sense of wellbeing
- Aesthetic improvements

There are Economic, Environmental and Social benefits to good landscaping practices.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no operating or capital budget implications from this report.

Education for Healthy Landscaping, which is part of the Pesticide ByLaw Administration Service Delivery has been reduced in 2010 / 2011 from the SEMO operating budget and will be eliminated in 2011 / 2012 in conjunction with the Provincial Legislation on Pesticide Restrictions.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES/BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Following the Motion of Council, staff met with Industry Represented by the Soils Committee of Landscape Nova Scotia.

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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