

Item No. 10.1.4
Halifax Regional Council
October 12, 2010

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by _____
Mike Labrecque, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: September 27, 2010

SUBJECT: UNSM Conference Resolutions 2010

ORIGIN

Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities request for resolutions for 2010 Annual Conference.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council forward the two resolutions outlined in this report, concerning the following issues:

- Active Transportation (paving of highway shoulders)
- NS Renewable Electricity Plan (Feed-In Tariff)

BACKGROUND

Each year at its annual conference, UNSM debates a number of resolutions submitted by its 55 member municipalities. Those that are passed are forwarded to the Provincial government as requests for changes in policy, legislation, financing, etc. These resolutions have the benefit of UNSM's collective voice, and may be considered to have the support of all municipalities in Nova Scotia. A formal resolution passed by UNSM in support of the initiative(s) may assist the municipality in securing support for those items.

HRM is represented in the Regional Caucus of UNSM. The role of the Caucus is to elect members to serve on the Board and to make recommendations to the Board on matters of interest and concern to the caucus. In advance of each annual conference, Municipalities, Caucuses, the Board and the Resolutions Committee can submit resolutions for debate at the Fall Conference. To be properly received, the resolution must include whether the resolution was considered and passed by the municipal unit – i.e., whether Council has approved it.

The 2010 UNSM Annual Conference is being held October 26-29 in Sydney. The deadline for submitting resolutions to UNSM was in late August; however UNSM continues to accept and consider resolutions up until the day before the conference. There are criteria for considering and accepting late resolutions, all of which the two resolutions proposed below appear to meet.

DISCUSSION

Below is a description of the two proposed resolutions.

1) Active Transportation (paving of highway shoulders)

In July 2010, UNSM released the results of its Active Transportation Survey. The survey was sent to all 55 municipalities in Nova Scotia and its purpose was to identify active transportation initiatives within municipalities as well as opportunities and challenges for the same. In all, 34 municipalities responded. Results indicate that while only a few municipalities have an Active Transportation (AT) plan, almost all have considered and support it to some extent. One of the main barriers to implementing AT on a widespread scale is the lack of coordinated policies and between municipalities and at a provincial level.

The benefits of Active Transportation (AT) are multi-faceted. Investment in AT now leads to ongoing, long-term improvements in a number of areas:

<p><i>Environmental</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in air pollution - Noise reduction - Land-use reduction 	<p><i>Environmental</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in air pollution - Noise reduction - Land-use reduction
<p><i>Transportation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less traffic congestion 	<p><i>Resident & Tourist Benefits</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased mobility - Improved livability
<p><i>Health</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased physical activity 	

HRM adopted an Active Transportation Plan in 2006 that aims to build upon the existing transportation system of on- and off-road pedestrian, trail and cycling facilities, linking them into an integrated, region-wide AT network. It is an incremental plan, intended to take place over approx 20 years. There are a number of ways in which HRM is developing the network, such as:

- Off-road multi-use trails
- Sidewalks
- Signed-only cycling routes
- Bicycle lanes
- Paved shoulders on arterial and higher-volume collector rural roads

HRM has made significant progress in implementing its Active Transportation Plan, such as expanding the amount of designated bicycle lanes, and the number of trails. The new UNSM survey presents an opportunity to enhance AT throughout the region as UNSM advocates for coordinated provincial policies around AT. A relatively straightforward way of enhancing AT would be to ask the Province to adopt a policy of paving shoulders on all future highway improvement projects. This could be undertaken with fairly minimal cost and would not impose timelines on any party - in keeping with the incremental approach to developing an AT network. At the same time, it would represent an improvement from the current situation and help build connections between communities.

Paved highway shoulders constitute part of the “primary spine system” of the AT Network that HRM is building and so would be considered a priority action. This is already underway in some areas of the province, such as the Cabot Trail in Cape Breton, Highway 104 between Truro and Pictou, and Purcell’s Cove Rd in HRM. Adopting a policy of paving shoulders when roadworks are underway would standardize the Provincial approach to this issue.

Proposed Resolution:

WHEREAS active transportation systems have economic, environmental, health and transportation benefits;

AND WHEREAS the 2010 UNSM Active Transportation Survey demonstrates widespread support among Nova Scotian municipalities for increasing active transportation;

AND WHEREAS the UNSM Active Transportation Survey identified the lack of standardized policies on active transportation issues as a barrier to implementing active transportation;

AND WHEREAS increased number of trails and bicycle paths/lanes throughout the Province would encourage use of active transportation methods;

AND WHEREAS paved highway shoulders have already been undertaken in some areas of the Province to support increased use of active transportation

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities request that the Province adopt a policy of paving highway shoulders when roadworks are underway so as to enhance the active transportation system throughout Nova Scotia and standardize Provincial policy and action on this issue.

2) NS Renewable Electricity Plan (Feed-In Tariff)

The Province's new Renewable Electricity Plan establishes through legislation a commitment to achieve 25% of the Province's electricity supply from renewable sources by 2015. While the bulk of this will come from large-scale industrial projects, the Plan sets aside 100 megawatts to be supplied by smaller-scale energy producers using a Community-Based Feed-In Tariff (COMFIT) system (For the sake of comparison, 2300 megawatts of electricity are generated and consumed annually in Nova Scotia). The Feed-In Tariff guarantees those participating in the program a fixed price for the renewable energy they produce over a fixed period of time. The price usually reflects the cost of generating the electricity plus a reasonable return for the producer. In other words, the municipality/community group would generate and supply NSPI with electricity and NSPI would be required to pay the supplier the fixed rate, set by the UARB. Groups eligible to participate in the COMFIT program include municipalities, First Nations, co-operatives and non-profit groups.

The benefits of the 100 megawatt COMFIT program are:

- Support for community ownership and smaller scale projects that accommodate the electricity needs of specific communities
- Expanding municipal energy expertise, diversity and security
- Economic development in local/rural communities
- Potential revenue source for municipalities/groups supplying power

The Plan says that COMFIT projects will be connected to the power grid at the distribution level. Drafting of the Electricity Plan regulations is underway, and a review of COMFIT is planned for 2012 to allow the government to adjust the program if necessary. In explaining the potential issues with COMFIT, the Plan compares the energy distribution system to the highway network:

The transmission functions like a major 100-series highway, while the distribution system operates more like a network of small, local roads. Just as a sudden influx of unexpected traffic onto local roads can produce gridlock, the introduction

of intermittent electricity at many different points around the province could overwhelm the distribution system.

HRM has reviewed the proposal to give 100 megawatts of power to municipalities and other local groups, and concluded that it is unworkable by the initial 2015 deadline. As outlined in the August 3, 2010 Council report, there are issues of risk, available funds, and capacity building. However the potential benefits of the COMFIT program are significant. HRM strongly supports entrenching the 100 megawatts for municipal and non-profit groups into the Electricity Plan regulations to ensure it remains available once municipalities have strengthened their capacity

HRM has made efforts to increase the number of innovative energy efficiency projects it undertakes in recent years, such as the District Energy, geothermal systems, etc. As it builds capacity and available expertise, it would be useful to have the potential to take advantage of the COMFIT program, particularly as it represents revenue-generating opportunities. HRM is asking UNSM to support entrenching the 100 megawatts available for municipal and non-profit use in the Renewable Electricity Plan regulations.

Proposed Resolution:

WHEREAS the NS Renewable Electricity Plan sets a legislated target of achieving 25% of the Province's electricity supply from renewable sources by 2015;

AND WHEREAS the Plan reserves 100 megawatts to be supplied by Community Based Feed-In Tariff (COMFIT) systems run by municipalities, First Nations, co-operatives and non-profit groups, but does not enshrine those 100 megawatts in legislation;

AND WHEREAS there are several benefits to municipalities in having access to the reserved 100 megawatts, including economic development, increased expertise and access to revenue;

ANND WHEREAS in the opinion of HRM staff it is not feasible for municipalities to build their capacity and expertise in energy generation by the 2015 deadline;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities request that the Province entrench the 100 megawatts reserved for COMFIT systems run by municipalities, First Nations, co-operatives and non-profit groups, in the Plan regulations, so that they are available once municipalities and groups build energy generation capacity.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

None

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

ALTERNATIVES

Council could choose to forward only one or some of the above resolutions to the UNSM Fall Conference.

Council could choose to forward other issues as resolutions to UNSM.

Council could choose not to forward a resolution to the UNSM Fall Conference.

ATTACHMENTS

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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