

Item No. 01
Halifax Regional Council
March 8, 2011

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by Director

Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Development

DATE: September 7, 2010

SUBJECT: **Heritage Impact Assessment of Visitors Information Centers Closures**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On April 13, 2010, Regional Council approved staff to commence transition planning to close urban Visitors Information Centres (VICs), and partner with Destination Halifax and the tourism industry to operate the rural VICs.

Regional Council also approved staff to undertake and complete a detailed review of the cultural and heritage aspects of the four rural Visitors Information Centres (VICs) linked to museums, by December 2010, in consideration of future HRM support.

BACKGROUND

In April 2010, Regional Council approved the closure of HRM's Visitors Information Centres (VICs), with the exception of four rural centres located in the communities of Eastern Passage, Enfield, Musquodoboit Harbour and Sheet Harbour, which would remain open for the 2010 tourism season. Each of these VICs share a facility with a community-operated museum, being either a tenant of that museum (i.e., Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum; Musquodoboit Harbour Railway Museum), or as one of many other tenants sharing the same facility (i.e., Sheet Harbour and Area Heritage Museum) or the same site (i.e., Fisherman's Cove Museum). Among the four locations, MacPhee House is the only HRM-owned and operated facility. See TABLE 1 for a list of VICs included in this review.

TABLE 1: VISITORS INFORMATION CENTRES (VICs)		
Location	Owner	Cultural & Heritage Partners
Eastern Passage #24 - 200 Government Wharf Road	Fisherman's Cove Development Association	Fisherman's Cove Museum
Enfield 20 Sky Boulevard Road	Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum	Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum
Musquodoboit Harbour 7895 Highway 7	Musquodoboit Harbour Heritage Society	Musquodoboit Harbour Railway Museum
Sheet Harbour MacPhee House, 22404 Highway 7	Halifax Regional Municipality	Sheet Harbour and Area Heritage Museum & Society

DISCUSSION

The March 26, 2010 report tabled with Regional Council suggest that these four VICs play a more significant role for culture and heritage development, than the other VICs located in HRM. Specifically, the report questions whether the closure of the VICs will trigger an amplified negative impact on the museums, given their rural setting, the multi-level functions the VICs play, and that the VIC use complements that of the museums. Based on this, Council requested staff to review the cultural and heritage aspects of the four rural VICs to better understand the degree of impact closing might have. The following discussion provides Regional Council with an overview of the potential impact of the VIC closures located in proximity of a community museum.

It should be noted that this analysis did not include consultation with the respective VICs/Museums. This was intentional as this exercise was to consider the impact from a more analytical perspective. It was felt that by engaging these groups, staff might create a false expectation that Council's decision could be revisited, which was not the understanding.

However, for the impending launch of the Social Heritage Strategy, a full community engagement program will be designed and implemented. From staff's perspective, this is the more appropriate means for engaging and seeking community input on the future of HRM's social heritage program.

1.0 An Analysis of the Impact of VIC Closure

The VICs' relationship to the four museums varies from location to location, therefore, the level of impact on the closures will vary with each museum. The following provides an overview of staff's understanding of the impact of closing the respective VICs:

- a) The Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum and the Musquodoboit Harbour Railway Museum both own their facility and provide space free of charge to the VICs. As a tenant sharing the same reception area, the VIC staff regularly provides direction to the museums' visitors. In the case of the Railway Museum, the VIC staff will also open and close the facility and provide access to the museums to visitors when museum staff are not present (mostly outside of the tourism season). Closure of the VICs will signify a decrease in customer services at the front-desk reception for both museums, as well as the loss of a mandate-compatible tenant. In the case of the Railway Museum, closure will result in a decreased access to the museum, especially during the pre and post-high season. This may cause hardship on human resources, as these museums have been accustomed to supplementary support from HRM staff. On the other hand, it will also free-up space for another tenant (although tenancy in rural setting may take longer to develop) with possible lease revenues, or additional space for the museum to expand their programming.
- b) The Fisherman's Cove Museum is located in a separate building on the same site as the VIC. The VIC pays a leasing fee to the Fisherman's Cove Development Association and not to the museum. Therefore, there will be no direct loss in revenues from rental fees to the museum, and the association will be able to lease that space to another tenant. (The association oversees about 15 such spaces on that site.) The VIC and the museum do not share a reception area, and the VIC staff is not involved in providing access to the museum. Other than the potential decrease in visitors originally attracted by the VIC, the impact here will be minimal.
- c) The Sheet Harbour and Area Heritage Museum is a tenant of HRM in an HRM-owned facility. The museum does not pay rent and/or provide staff resources on-site. For their daily operation, the museum relies entirely on the VIC to provide access to the visitors and answer interpretation-related questions. Closure of the VIC means that there will be no facility supervisor on site to open/close the facility during regular operation hours, and that visitors will no longer have access to the displays. However, like with many other community groups, HRM would consider a facility management agreement for alternative service delivery with the museum, or with any another local group, to operate the facility and render full access to the property and consequently the museum. Such agreement could be tailored with a focus on cultural programming. This alternative service delivery model is in line with other programs and services currently being delivered throughout HRM.
- d) HRM currently maintains MacPhee House in the amount of \$22,500 per year (variable based on priorities for heritage conservation). Whether HRM is successful in identifying a partner to operate/program the facility or not, the bulk of this expense will remain. If

the EOI is successful, HRM will provide access to the facility at no cost to the group, but it will be up to them to raise the necessary funding and/or volunteer support to operate and program the facility. This is a unique opportunity to assess the potential of HRM's own heritage facility, and to include the results of this assessment to guide the upcoming Social Heritage Strategy. If the community identifies this scenario as a definite possibility, HRM's staff can guide this transition process and initiate a pilot project.

In addition to the above, all of these museums will lose an added-value service located in proximity of the museum, which is useful to attract additional visitors. However, they will also gain an opportunity to possibly partner with the local tourism industry and operate their own rural visitor's information centre. Other museums in HRM have already expressed their interest in developing such a service.

TABLE 6: IMPACT OF VICS CLOSURE ON MUSEUMS		
	Risk Assessment	Benefit Assessment
Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of VICs staff to provide reception services - Loss of a mandate-compatible and supporting tenant - Loss of an added-value service to attract additional visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity for new tenancy plan with revenues, or to expand programming - Opportunity to operate their own information centre, and partner with local tourism industry
Musquodoboit Harbour Railway Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of VICs staff to provide reception services resulting in decreased access during off season - Loss of a mandate-compatible and supporting tenant - Loss of an added-value service to attract additional visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity for new tenancy plan with revenues, or to expand programming - Opportunity to operate their own information centre, and partner with local tourism industry
Fisherman's Cove Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of an added-value service to attract additional visitor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity to operate their own information centre, and partner with local tourism industry
Sheet Harbour and Area Heritage Museum & Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of VICs staff to provide reception services - Loss of building operation services resulting in building closure - Loss of an added-value service to attract additional visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity for museum to partner with HRM through a facility management agreement or alternative service delivery model - Opportunity to operate their own information centre, and partner with local tourism industry

Potential Opportunities for Assisting Museums

An assessment of HRM's existing museum services suggests a lack of strategic focus, resources and budget collectively hampering HRM's ability to effectively promote and develop social heritage. The lack of focus is due primarily to the fact that most of HRM's social heritage programs were grandfathered at amalgamation, and a comprehensive Social Heritage Strategy has not yet been developed. In fact, beyond the Dartmouth Cultural Centre project, Council has not formally endorsed "museums" as HRM's primary vehicle for social heritage service delivery.

Additionally, during the last budget cycle, heritage building operating and heritage programming budgets were reduced quite significantly (one-third of the total budget). Notwithstanding, HRM's community grant program continues to provide granting opportunities for heritage development – both through capital projects and programming initiatives. The program does not, however, provide for on-going operating grants.

Conclusion:

As a result of the closure of the VICs, the four community museums will likely experience a diminution of visitors, previously first attracted by the VICs, and the related revenues (entrance fees). Although, HRM does not have a program to support these museums at this time, an interim solution is that they continue seeking funds through the Municipality's existing Community Grant Program. By providing their expertise and appropriate training, HRM staff can also help these organizations seek funding from other funding sources. In the long-term, HRM's role in community museums will be defined in the upcoming Social Heritage Strategy.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There will be no budget impact for 2010/11 with respect to the closure of the four rural VICs identified, as the 2010 operating season has ended. As stated in the March 26, 2010 VIC Service Review report, the closure of these four VICs will realize an annualized cost savings to the organization of:

(C740-Visitor Services)

Eastern Passage (Fisherman's Cove):	\$ 84,400
Musquodoboit Harbour (Railway Museum):	\$ 68,600
Sheet Harbour (McPhee House):	\$ 62,800
Enfield (Aviation Museum):	<u>\$ 38,800</u>
TOTAL	\$254,600

There will not be any direct saving from HRM's existing social heritage programs (C730, C770) due to the closures of the VICs.

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

No community engagement exercise was undertaken under this report. The assessment provided is based on staff's analysis and understanding of current arrangements. Engagement opportunities will take place during the development of the Social Heritage Strategy.

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.

Report Prepared by: Christine Lavoie, Team Lead/Culture & Heritage Development/490-1989

Report Approved by: _____
Andrew Whittemore, Manager, Community Relations & Cultural Affairs/490-1585

Financial Approval by: _____
Cathie O'Toole, CGA, Director of Finance, 490-6308

Original Signed