HALIFAX
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

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Item No 11.1.8 (i)
Halifax Regional Council
August 7, 2012

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original signed
Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: August 7, 2012

SUBJECT: 2012 HRM Citizen Survey Results

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report stems from the Municipality's commitment in the 2011/12 business plan to conduct a Citizen Survey, as outlined in the Information Reports to the Executive Standing Committee of Council of June 27, 2011 and October 31, 2011.

BACKGROUND

As part of the commitment to citizen-centred service delivery, the 2012 HRM Citizen Survey was conducted in January 2012. The survey was designed to gauge community priorities and expectations of HRM residents, and will provide Council and staff with valuable feedback as we move through the year's planning cycle.

The Citizen Survey is an important component of HRM's Corporate Planning Framework, as it establishes resident priorities, and solicits feedback on Municipal performance. As an engagement tool it is an invaluable means of gathering information to inform policy and decision-making and investments in the community.

On June 27, 2011 the Executive Standing Committee endorsed a long term survey cycle, as per the following table.

Long Term Survey Cycle

Year	Survey Type	Reporting Time Frame
2010	Full Priority and Satisfaction	April 2010
2012	Community Priority/Expectations	April 2012
2013	Service Satisfaction	April 2013
2015	Service Satisfaction	April 2015
2016	Community Priority/Expectations	April 2016
2017	Service Satisfaction	April 2017
2019	Service Satisfaction	April 2019
2020	Community Priority/Expectations	April 2020

Benefits of a Survey

There are a number of benefits associated with conducting surveys, but perhaps the most important reason for surveying is that it gives a voice to a random cross section of the community, not just those who choose to make their voice heard through public hearings, letters to the Municipality, or calls to their councillor. The survey represents an opportunity to hear from the community at-large, and avoids the risk associated with relying on the feedback from the self-selecting public.

There are a number of benefits associated with conducting a community priority/expectations survey:

- Best-practice of leading cities and municipalities to solicit feedback from a random and representative sample of citizens region-wide;
- Enables identification of the variable(s) with the most influence on citizen's perception of HRM, and identification of the themes most affecting residents quality of life;
- Provides an assessment of community priorities and need(s), identifies broad community issues, and enables Council and staff to align service delivery to meet specific community and planning needs;
- Results will help to inform discussions during business planning, enabling better allocation of resources for maximum community benefit and improved policy development and decision making;
- Fulfils a commitment made as part of HRM's Economic Strategy to undertake citizen surveys on a regular basis.

DISCUSSION

The 2012 Citizen Survey was developed in collaboration with HRM Business Units, the Greater Halifax Partnership, and with feedback from the Executive Standing Committee of Council. The Survey was conducted between January 3rd and February 3rd 2012 by Nova Insights, a locally-owned independent market research firm that was contracted via standard procurement process to conduct the survey on behalf of the Municipality.

Paul DesBarres of Nova Insights will present a high-level summary of the findings of the survey to Regional Council on Tuesday August 7th. The executive report is being finalized, and a bound copy of Nova Insights' report will be provided to Council at the presentation.

A copy of the Nova Insights report, a copy of the presentation, and the tabular data from the survey will be made available to the public following the presentation at www.halifax.ca/citizensurvey/.

Methodology:

Approximately 12,700 randomly selected households received a letter from the Mayor, including instructions on how to participate in the survey. The Mayor's message welcomed residents to the survey, introduced the process, and outlined the survey completion options and benefits.

Residents had the option of completing the survey online, by telephone, or by mail. This methodology was selected because it was the most cost-effective and timely approach, as well as to reduce the environmental impact associated with doing a large scale survey. Each household received a unique passcode which allowed them access to the online survey, or to identify them if they chose to call Nova Insights to request a mail survey, or to complete the survey via telephone.

The survey contained approximately 140 unique components across 47 questions, ranging in topics from quality of life, participation in municipal affairs, taxation, infrastructure, the economy, planning and growth, the environment, public safety, municipal service delivery, lifestyle opportunities, key issues and priorities, and communication with the Municipality.

The survey also captured a broad range of demographic information that further allows the analysis by segments of the population.

Future surveys will follow similar methodologies to ensure accuracy and reliable of results, but will also be made available to all residents to participate on a voluntary, self selected basis. That data will be compiled and reported separately from the random sampling.

Interpreting the Results:

This is the 7th survey HRM has conducted since amalgamation in 1996. This survey's focus is on determining the priorities and expectations of residents, while assessing their attitudes toward a variety of HRM's programs and service areas.

Typical municipal or city surveys range from 400 to 1500 respondents. 1241 HRM residents completed the region-wide 2012 survey, representing a completion rate of 9.7%, consistent with the expected completion rate of 10%.

HRM's Citizen Survey provides the Municipality with feedback and priorities of citizens that is representative of the general population of HRM, and is accurate to within ±3%, 95% of the time.

The margin of error reported for the results is ±3% This means that, for example, if a result shows that 80% of residents say they receive good value for the property taxes they currently pay, the real result lies between 77% and 83% (80% + 3% = 83%, or 80% - 3% = 77%). This is called the confidence interval, and represents the range within which true sentiment toward value for taxes can be expected to fall, 95 times out of 100.

Results Analysis:

While the final report and presentation will contain the complete findings, the following is a summary of the results.

Note: It should be noted that due to differences in question format and response options, direct comparisons cannot be made between 2010 and 2012 responses. 2010 data is shown for reference only.

Quality of Life:

- 94% of residents believe that the quality of life in HRM is good or very good. 53% said that the quality of life has stayed the same over the past 5 years, and 19% say it has improved. These figures closely mirror 2010 results.
- When it comes to municipal decision-making, 57% of residents say they have too few opportunities to have their voice heard, compared to 41% who feel they have sufficient opportunities. More frequent surveys (15%) and community and Town Hall meetings (13%) were suggested as ways HRM could help residents become more involved.

Priorities:

- When asked about prioritizing resources, 44% of respondents named transportation as their top priority, followed by economic development (31%), the environment (13%), and community development (11%).
- Residents were surveyed about what they thought were the top three issues facing HRM over the next five years that should receive the greatest attention from Municipal leaders. The top issues are shown in Table 2 on the following page.

Table 2: Top 3 Issues facing HRM over the next five years

	2012	2010
Transit Service (frequency / coverage / availability)	26%	24%
Public Safety	22%	20%
Environment	19%	6%
Transportation (traffic flow / ease of getting around)	18%	14%
Economy / employment / jobs	18%	7%
Downtown (redevelop / revitalize / densification)	17%	8%
Taxation (lower / fairer / do not increase)	15%	23%
Roads and streets	12%	15%
Infrastructure (deterioration)	11%	13%

- Residents were asked what their top three priorities would be for where to focus spending over the next 5 years to improve economic prosperity in the HRM. The ranking of top priorities and the sum of the score of the choice if it was ranked in the top 3 choices (total mentions) is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Spending on priorities to improve economic prosperity (First Priority / Total Mentions)

	2012	2010
Increased efforts to attract and retain young workers / professionals	20% / 48%	17% / 51%
Investments in the transit system	14% / 39%	13% / 40%
Improvements to HRM's roadway system / road conditions	13% / 35%	8% / 27%
Public safety	10% / 28%	12% / 29%
Changes in tax structure	10% / 21%	18% / 29%
Increased marketing of HRM as a destination of choice for business	8% / 28%	5% / 17%
Emphasis on downtown growth	7% / 17%	5% / 13%
Investments in environmental protection and sustainability	5% / 21%	N/A

Taxation:

- 72% of residents believe that they receive good or very good value for their money – up from 19% in 2010.
- 56% of respondents would prefer the Municipality not increase property taxes when creating a budget, with 44% saying it is more important to keep municipal service levels the same or higher.
- Residents were asked to consider possible changes in tax and service levels and indicate which ones would be acceptable to them (Table 1).

Table 1: Tax Levels vs. Service Levels

	2012	2010
Same taxes but shift funds between services	53%	32%
Small increase in taxes for a small improvement / increase in service levels	30%	11%
Same taxes with same level of Municipal services	23%	13%
Moderate increase in taxes for a moderate improvement / increase in service levels	13%	7%
Small decrease in taxes for a small decrease in service levels	11%	5%
Moderate decrease in taxes for a moderate decrease in service levels	6%	3%

- Residents were asked whether they would like to see the Municipality increase the level of service, maintain the level of service, reduce the level of service, or eliminate the service for a wide range of municipal services. In the majority of cases, the greatest proportion of respondents suggested maintaining the service level. However, there were a number of services where residents indicated a strong opinion that the Municipality may wish to focus additional resources, or shift spending between services, as outlined in Table 4, which shows services where more than 25% of respondents suggested either an increase or reduction in service levels.

Table 4: Spending on Services

Increase Service	Increase	Maintain	Reduce	Eliminate
Public Transit	58%	37%	4%	1%
Police protection and patrols	38%	59%	3%	-
Ongoing regular street maintenance	34%	62%	3%	-
Recycling programs	33%	61%	5%	1%
Economic development	31%	55%	11%	1%
Major street improvements	28%	62%	9%	1%
Snow and ice removal	28%	67%	5%	-
Environmental protection and management	26%	62%	10%	1%
Cleanliness and litter control	25%	65%	9%	-
Reduce Service	**Increase**	**Maintain**	**Reduce**	**Eliminate**
Publicly supervised beaches	6%	64%	25%	5%
Arts and cultural programming	16%	54%	25%	4%
Festivals and community events	13%	58%	25%	3%
Graffiti removal	13%	56%	25%	6%
Community beautification	14%	58%	25%	3%
Community grants	14%	54%	26%	6%
Communication and public affairs	8%	58%	28%	4%
By-law enforcement	11%	57%	29%	3%
Animal control services	7%	60%	29%	3%
Parking enforcement	5%	49%	40%	6%

Public Safety:

- Respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with the level of safety in the community, with scores averaging in the mid-80s for feeling of safety in their community and where they go for work, shopping, or recreation, and with the quality and responsiveness of policing services. Public safety still shows up as a priority for residents however, so as much as they appear satisfied with HRM's performance, and their overall safety, they would like the Municipality to keep a focus on it.

Infrastructure:

- 68% of residents would prefer to see HRM invest a greater proportion of capital funds toward fixing and maintaining existing assets, facilities, and infrastructure than toward investing in new assets (32%).
- Residents were asked to rate their top 3 most important infrastructure projects in three categories: Transportation, Community, and Environmental projects. Scores are shown in Table 5 for both first priority and the sum of the mentions as first/second/third priority (total mentions).

Table 5: Capital Project Priorities by Category (First Priority / Total Mentions)

Transportation Infrastructure Projects	**First Priority**	**Total Mentions**
Maintaining existing roads and streets	21%	55%
Upgrading major roadways to provide increased capacity	16%	42%
Active transportation improvements	15%	47%
Improved / additional transit facilities	14%	42%
More buses so that service can be extended to new areas	14%	40%
Community Infrastructure Projects	**First Priority**	**Total Mentions**
Improve existing recreation facilities	20%	54%
New stadium	16%	27%
Beaches and waterfront areas	11%	40%
New outdoor recreation facilities	11%	40%
Environmental Infrastructure Projects	**First Priority**	**Total Mentions**
Renewable energy projects	35%	73%
Capability within the waste program to reduce demand for additional land fill cells	28%	67%
Investments in expanding recycling infrastructure	17%	64%

- When asked to select their top 3 priorities across all three of the infrastructure areas combined, the highest priority projects are shown in Table 6, along with comparable results from 2010.

Table 6: Capital Project Priorities - Combined (First Priority / Total Mentions)

Transportation Infrastructure Projects	2012	2010
Maintaining existing roads and streets	12% / 24%	27% / 53%
Upgrading major roadways to provide increased capacity	11% / 23%	13% / 31%
Renewable energy projects	10% / 30%	N/A
Active transportation improvements	9% / 21%	10% / 26%
Improved / additional public transit facilities	7% / 18%	
More buses so that services can be expanded to new areas	7% / 16%	
More buses on existing routes	7% / 14%	
Capability within the waste program to reduce demand for additional land fill cells	6% / 23%	N/A

- While Transit (bus) services (frequency of buses, additional routes, improved facilities) did not show up as the priorities within the Transportation category, it still rated higher than most options from other categories when factoring in second and third priority mentions
- As suggested by the Priorities and Top Issues questions elsewhere in the Survey, community infrastructure does not rank as a top priority for most respondents, but when 2nd and 3rd priorities are considered, its priority tends to increases.
    - For example: Improvements to existing recreational facilities scored 1% for 1st priority, but 15% when factoring in 2nd and 3rd priority mentions.

Planning and Growth:

- Suggestions for what the Municipality could do to make the downtown more attractive for residents and businesses included more/free parking (20%), beautification (14%), tax incentives for businesses to locate downtown (12%), and better transit service (8%).
- When asked about priorities to help mitigate traffic congestion issues facing the Municipality, respondents rated an improved public transit system, commuter rail, encouraging people to consider sustainable options, and improved bike lane network as their top preferences.
- Tolls into the downtown, high occupancy vehicle lanes, and doing nothing were considered low priorities.

- Residents were asked to rate the importance of a set of quality of place indicators that would impact their decision if moving to a new neighbourhood, and their satisfaction with these indicators in the neighbourhood in which they currently live. Top indicators of quality of place included safety, affordability of housing, look and feel of the street, traffic, and the presence of trees and greenery.
- Factors such the proximity of the home to key locations (work, schools, and recreation facilities) are less important than other neighbourhood considerations.

Lifestyle Opportunities:

- Respondents indicated that, over the past 12 months, the main lifestyle activities they had participated in were using HRM's trails, walkways, or paths for leisure, going for a walk or run in a major park, and visiting a playground. Residents also indicated that swimming at one of the local beaches was an attractive option.
- Less favoured lifestyle opportunities included using a bike/skate park, skating at the oval or on a lake or pond, visiting an outdoor gym, or participating in a community garden.
- Factors influencing their choice included distance to nearest facilities, concerns about safety, and the activity generally not being of interest.

Communication:

- Residents primarily get their information about the Municipality from the radio, television, or the newspaper, with a smaller percentage using online means to gain information.
- 55% of respondents indicated that they would like to receive email updates across a variety of topics from the Municipality.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no further budget implications resulting from this project. The total cost of the 2012 HRM Citizen Survey is $52,036 (net HST included). Total consulting fees were $19,512 (net HST included).

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

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

A copy of the consultant's Report will be provided to Councillors at Regional Council on August 7th.

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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