



Item No. 11.1.7
Halifax Regional Council
December 10, 2013

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

Original signed by 

Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by 

Mike Labrecque, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: November 5, 2013

SUBJECT: Halifax Memorial Library - Assembly of Mi'kmaq Chiefs

ORIGIN

At its March 5, 2013, session, Regional Council approved the following Motion:

1. Declare the Memorial Library building, excluding the lands, surplus to municipal needs;
2. Direct staff to grant an Option Period ending December 16, 2013, to the Assembly of Mi'kmaq Chiefs, to allow for the Assembly to develop potential conditions of occupancy for the Memorial Library building; and
3. Direct staff to advance alternative plans including the demolition of the Halifax Memorial Library and the restoration of the full site as a public park, should the Assembly Agreement fail to produce agreeable terms, and defer sending a recommendation on demolition to Regional Council until after December 16, 2013.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Chapter 39, Section 61, Powers of the Municipality Regarding Property.

RECOMMEDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council authorize an extension of the December 13, 2013, Option Period deadline to June 30, 2014. If the June 30 commitment is not met, staff will return to Council for direction.

BACKGROUND

With the opening of the new Halifax Central Library in the fall of 2014, the existing Halifax Memorial Library will close. A series of Regional Council reports regarding the Halifax Memorial Library have articulated the limitations which exist on re-use of the Library property (historically called Grafton Park) and discussed the need to examine the options available to HRM.

Under the terms of the ownership grant, HRM has two options for retention of the property; public library within a public park or solely a public park.

Public Library Use:

The Halifax Regional Library has indicated that the building will not be required as a public library. It is no longer suitable for their function and cannot be used without significant alterations and repairs even if a qualifying library use could be found. Operating budgets from the present library will be transferred to the new Central Library.

Park Use:

The retention of the property as a park is recommended and warranted. The property continued to function as a vital and vibrant park even after the Library was constructed. The two uses actually worked in concert. Leaving the triangle on the south east side of the main diagonal path unencumbered with buildings was deliberate and a reflection of the pedestrian crossroad and gathering place function of the park in 1949: Sun, lawn, food, seating wall, and the heaviest pedestrian activity in the municipality, combine to create an ideal location for public open space and make it just as vital today. The connecting diagonal, as an organizing feature, has even been deliberately reinforced through the design of the new Central Library near-by, which was sighted to terminate the view and draw pedestrians, when walking towards Spring Garden, along the path.

Other Building Uses:

Currently, the zoning splits the property: The open space at the front being Institutional Cultural and Open space (ICO), and the building portion being Downtown Halifax 1 (DH1), with a 28 metre height restriction. Retention of the building would also require the Province to lift the condition limiting building use to a library. No other use, aside from a public park, has been determined by HRM staff at this point. Any consideration of a lease or sale of the building would need to include appropriate protection, conditions, or retention of the grounds and open space.

Option Period - Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs:

In June of 2011, Regional Council received a presentation from representatives of the Assembly of Chiefs outlining their desire to secure the building as a Centre for Mi'kmaq Governance and Culture. HRM further received a formal request to Council for a suitable timeframe to allow the Assembly of Chiefs to explore with the Province, HRM, and others, the reality of the potential reuse of the building. At its March 5, 2013, session, Regional Council approved an Option Period ending December 16, 2013, to the Assembly of Mi'kmaq Chiefs, to allow for the Assembly to develop potential conditions of occupancy for the Memorial Library building.

DISCUSSION

Staff and members of the working group from the provincial of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs, have been meeting to review and assess the suitability of the existing Spring Garden Road Library as the site for a potential Mi'kmaq Government Building.

The working committee continues to work on a more in depth analysis of the Library site and to address the range of complex issues respecting this site. This work will track in parallel with other work that the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs have commissioned including the business case analysis, so pivotal to the Assembly being able to make a recommendation in respect to advancing this initiative.

With the extent of the work yet to be completed, it is clear that more time is needed. On November 8, 2013, Chief Deborah Robinson, Lead Chief of the Government Portfolio, wrote to the Director of Planning and Infrastructure requesting an extension to their current Option period approved by HRM Council (December 16, 2013).

There is merit to extending this deadline to a mutually acceptable time frame; one which enables both parties to be able to meet their unique requirements.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public consultation was carried out as part of the 2006 Spring Garden Road/Queen Street Joint Public Lands Plan, HRM by Design, and the Central Library Process.

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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