

**Item No. 3 (i)**  
**Committee of the Whole**  
**May 13, 2014**

**TO:** Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Mike Savage, Mayor

**DATE:** May 6, 2014

**SUBJECT:** Mayor and Council Review of Task Force on Violence and Public Safety

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**ORIGIN**

On March 5, 2013, Council adopted a recommendation from the Mayor to “endorse a review of the original Mayor’s Task on Violence and Public Safety report and accompanying ‘current state’ assessment of violence and public safety in the Halifax Regional Municipality.” On April 29, 2014, Regional Council adopted a recommendation to receive the Mayor and Council Review of Task Force on Violence and Public Safety and to refer the Review to Committee of the Whole for discussion.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter—Act of 2008, Part 1 Section 3 Role of the Mayor

(3) The Mayor may:

- (a) monitor the administration and government of the Municipality; and
- (b) communicate such information and recommend such measures to the Council as will improve the finances, administration and government of the Municipality.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council, as a part of the Healthy Communities Core Priorities Area:

- 1) Direct the CAO to implement the relocation of the Public Safety Office function from the Halifax Regional Police to the HRM administration, as described in the Mayor and Council Review of Task Force on Violence and Public Safety;  
and
- 2) Direct the CAO to review and respond as appropriate to the recommendations of the Mayor and Council Review of Task Force on Violence and Public Safety, and to report back to Council at a future date.

## **BACKGROUND**

On February 17, 2009, Council approved a public safety action plan based on 64 associated recommendations in response to the Mayor's Task Force on Violence and Public Safety. On December 4th, 2012 Council signaled public safety as a continued strategic priority area. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Council adopted a recommendation to review the Task Force recommendations. Public Safety is a part of many discussions within the community, including the Mayor's Conversation on a Healthy and Liveable Community, held in October, 2013. A review of the Task Force Review recommendations was referenced in the backgrounder to the Council Report on the Mayor's Conversation on a Healthy and Liveable Communities, adopted by Council on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

## **DISCUSSION**

The task assigned by Council to this Roundtable Review was "(t)o review the implementation of the recommendations of the Round Table Report of 2008, and provide a(n)...assessment of current levels and manifestations of violent crime in Halifax Regional Municipality as well as corresponding public safety initiatives". Specifically the Review was to:

1. Provide an analysis of local and national data on violence and public safety;
2. Review the work done since 2008 with observations about progress and areas that still need attention. Particular attention will be paid to the core recommendations and their relevance today;
3. Identify any new issues that need attention; and
4. Provide suggestions on how to proceed, including identification of possible strategies and associated partnerships that might improve the current landscape.

This 2006-2008 Roundtable report was founded upon the premise that violence is a problem in Halifax, and that municipal and community initiatives can effect positive change. The report's 64 recommendations centered on five general areas of concern: teen swarmings, downtown bar violence, the justice system response to youth crime, self-reported victimization from violence and community impacts of gang violence, and turf wars. Following an intensive staff review, recommended responses were approved by the HRM Board of Police Commissioners, and Regional Council in February 2009, creating the Public Safety Office within the Halifax Regional Police.

While the impetus for the 2006-2008 Roundtable were several major incidents, including the killing of an American sailor downtown, and random swarmings, the Review concludes that the number and impact of these important “signal crimes” (crimes that garner significant public concern) have diminished. Moreover, the Review states that “(o)verall, crime, including violent crime has been on the decline in HRM as it has been in Canada as a whole and throughout Western societies.” However, three major dimensions of violence and public safety have emerged, which were not highlighted in the 2008 Roundtable:

1. Guns, Shootings and the Drug Culture (including homicides and attempted homicides);
2. Gendered Violence (the 3 aspects in the Review focus on intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and violence directed at sex workers, none of which were discussed at length in the 2008 Roundtable report); and
3. The impact of the explosive growth of social media on the social construction of violence and public safety in Halifax

The Review’s 41 recommendations centre on eight general areas of concern: firearms violence, gendered violence, HRM’s organizational response to violence prevention, downtown violence, links with housing and violence, offender reintegration, emerging concerns related to social media, and victimization variations associated with age, race and neighbourhoods.

The major recommendation of the Review resembles a recommendation from the original report, namely that the Public Safety Office (PSO) be relocated to within the municipal bureaucracy. The Review acknowledges the achievements of the PSO, which did emerge as a direct result of the original report, but makes clear that more could be achieved through greater organizational alignment of this office with the municipal bureaucracy. As Clairmont puts it, “the PSO has clearly not been the mechanism of organizational change and strategic action planning in responding to violence and public safety as had been hoped for.”

The Review’s recommendations are more strategic than operational in their approach, and make clear that the task of reducing violence extends well beyond the role of first responders. Indeed, reducing violence will require a wider community response, which engages diverse sectors including youth, housing providers and minority groups. Therefore, a more holistic response to the Review’s recommendations will require further analysis on the part of staff. However, with the direction of council, meeting the Review’s major recommendation to relocate the PSO to within the municipal bureaucracy may be achieved over the short term.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The cost of relocating the Public Safety Office function will be addressed in a future report when specific details have been determined.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Over 250 individuals were interviewed in the formation of the Review.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

**ALTERNATIVES**

N/A

**ATTACHMENTS**

The 3 sections of the Mayor and Council Review of Task Force on Violence and Public Safety were included as a part of the April 29<sup>th</sup> Regional Council agenda package.

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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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