

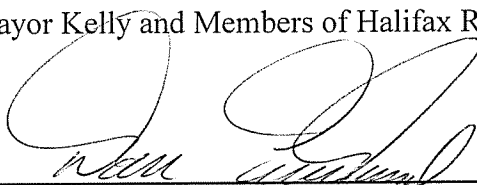


PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada


Halifax Regional Council
September 19, 2006

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer



Wayne Anstey, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: September 1, 2006

SUBJECT: **Improving HRM's Community Relations - An Assessment of HRM's
Past and Present Public Engagement Exercises**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

1. On October 11, 2005 Council approved a list of 12 areas of focus, one being Community Relations.
2. January 17, 2006 Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting Regional Council endorses the concept of establishing an HRM Community Engagement model/program under the theme of Community Relations.

BACKGROUND

During the Council Focus Area discussion on Community Relations, Council identified the need to improve HRM's approach to community engagement as important and necessary. After all, local government is the most grassroots of all levels of government and HRM spends a considerable amount of resources regularly engaging the public on a wide array of topics.

The idea of community engagement has a long history. There is widespread agreement that it generally refers to individuals and communities actively expressing their views and local government in turn listening and responding.

The idea of the 'active citizen' is central to this idea. Specifically, promoting the informed involvement of citizens in decision-making, encouraging citizens to learn about policy issues and considering different perspectives before making recommendations about how to proceed are essential for effective community relations.

DISCUSSION

Both the approved 2006 CAO Goals and Objectives and Business Plan outline the CAO's commitment to improving HRM's community relations through enhanced community engagement. The purpose of this staff report is to outline the key steps the CAO will take to improve community engagement processes in HRM.

As a first step, several different community engagement exercises that have occurred since amalgamation will be reviewed and analysed to assess the organization's overall effectiveness. This exercise will provide Council and staff a much better understanding of HRM's strengths and weaknesses, and priority areas for improvement.

Attachment one includes a draft terms of reference for the review. Essentially, the review will include a scan of both internal and external conditions. This will involve a detailed assessment of HRM's existing approaches to community engagement, the models employed, and an evaluation of HRM's effectiveness. The external scan will focus on reaching a better understanding of community and stakeholder perspective on HRM's existing processes and activities and areas where HRM needs to become more effective.

The findings from the research will be used to advance the organization's overall effectiveness in community engagement. Specifically, the findings will provide a basis of a comprehensive plan for improving HRM's community engagement. The plan will provide a clear vision, a set of Community Engagement Guiding Principles, goals and objectives, and detailed set of actions for improving community engagement. The draft plan will be tabled with Council in the 06/07 business cycle.

The review of HRM's engagement processes will occur simultaneously with the community visioning pilot project. In fact, the pilot project will be included as part of the overall analysis. Consequently, any recommendations for improving community engagement will contemplate a future community visioning program.

Beyond the community visioning pilot project, several community engagement exercises will be reviewed during the analysis including the Community Liaison Committee (Harbour Solutions), Regional Planning, Master Planning, Cultural Planning, Budget Consultation, and Bloomfield. With respect to the methodology, a series of focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews will be conducted. A number of public as well as councillor and staff who have participated either formally or informally in one of HRM's consultation exercises will be invited to participate in this capacity.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

This review is pending approval of the draft 2006 budget. Within the draft 2006/7 budget E500 includes \$40,000 in support of a review of community engagement and recommendations.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES


None

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Community Engagement Assessment Draft Terms of Reference

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:



Andrew Whittemore, EA & CAO Special Projects staff, CAO Office 490-6422

Attachment 1

Draft Terms of Reference Assessing HRM's Community Engagement Practices - Past and Present

1. Problem Statement

HRM has facilitated several very positive and effective community engagement processes since its inception. In order to ensure HRM community engagement processes are effective and foster positive community relations, it is important that the tools, techniques and processes used are current, proven effective, and meeting the expectations of the public and council.

2. Project Objective

HRM's goal is to ensure all community engagement processes are effective and instill the public with confidence and a feeling that the consultation has been worthwhile and productive. As a first step, HRM is proposing to undertake a review of its past and present community engagement processes to derive a better understanding of the processes, and the factors that work well and those that do not. It is hoped that through the review, process design problems will be identified and specific actions for improvement will be recommended to avoid similar problems in the future. Specifically, the review will reveal if HRM's processes are accessible, inclusive and representative, fair and meaningful. Eventually, the results of the review will serve as the basis for improving HRM's Community Relations environment, a defined priority of Regional Council.

The purpose of this review is not intended in any way to point fingers or to pass judgement on staff, public, or council members that have participated in past or current engagement processes. The findings of this review will be used in a constructive and professional manner and in the vein of advancing the organization and the approach to effective community engagement. The results will not be used as a basis to reconstitute or reinstate past processes.

3. Methodology

The proposed methodology is case study based. Specifically, a minimum of 10 case study will be reviewed to identify HRM strengths and weaknesses. All minutes, reports and documentation associated with each engagement process will be reviewed, synthesized and analysed for specific trends. In addition, focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews will be used to assess the overall effectiveness of each case study.

A set of case-study selection criteria will be developed and applied to a master list of HRM engagement activities that occurred over the last 10 years to identify 10 case studies. The criteria will be designed to ensure that each case study is different, and that they exhibit specific components and are considered representative processes. The following is a list of criteria that will serve as a basis:

A) General Case Study Selection Criteria:

- a range of long- and short-term initiatives.
- tests for all types of barriers to involvement;
- various sizes/scales;
- complex information;
- the continuum of public involvement;

- not already evaluated;
- legislative vs non-legislative driven processes
- committee driven (ie. PPCs, PACs, HACs, WABs) versus non committee and
- areas where the public is not usually consulted

Because there are known engagement process that are either unique or important enough to demand consideration, independent of the final selection criteria, ***the following list of engagement processes will be mandatory case studies for review and evaluation:***

- Budget consultation process;
- Harbour Solutions CLCs
- Regional Plan
- Cultural Advisory Committee
- Bloomfield

B) Evaluation Questions

A series of questions will be developed to evaluate the selected case studies. In order to garner the most beneficial results, the evaluation of HRM's engagement processes needs to include a wide range of engagement initiatives, as well as activities that range in complexity and length. Moreover, the evaluation needs to consider specific qualities or elements of a process that are considered to be key for success. The questions will be designed to reflect the proposed community engagement guiding principles, and known qualities of effective consultation processes including, but not limited to, the following:

- Process Mandate** (ie. were the purpose and objectives of the process clear?)
- Resources** (Were there adequate resources to achieve the mandate?)
- Participation** (Did all affected stakeholders have representative involvement?)
- Communications** (Were communications effective and inclusive?)
- Involvement**(Did the process allow for clear understanding of issues and deal with conflict?)
- Evaluation** (Did the process achieve its mandate, and does the public know how their input was used?)

C) Focus Groups/Interviews

A series of focus groups will be organized and conducted (a minimum of 4 focus groups) comprised of staff, council and members of the public who have been involved in specific engagement exercises . The results of the focus groups will be assessed against the evaluation criteria and a list of strength and weaknesses generated for each process.

4. Deliverables

The primary deliverables will be:

- A set of evaluation criteria
- Focus Group/Interview Results
- Detailed analysis on 10 case study exercises conducted in HRM over the last 5 years
- Best Practice Research
- Detailed recommendations for improving HRM's community engagement exercise including

recommended guiding principles, strategic directions, goals and objectives, and specific initiatives or actions).

- ❑ A set of performance measures for community engagement in HRM including .
- ❑ A comparative analysis of how HRM compares with other municipalities respecting public participation (representative and diverse involvement) and communications (effective and inclusive) and an established baseline for community engagement in HRM to use as the beginning measure

4. Project Scope

The following outlines the proposed scope of the work:

- A) Pre Project Preparation**
- B) Implement Case Study Selection Process**
- C) Establish Evaluation Criteria**
- D) Synthesize and Analyse Case Study Documentation**
- E) Implement Pre - Focus Group/Interview Process**
- F) Focus Group Implementation**
- G) Analysis and Recommendations**
- H) Final Report**

5. Project Management

This project will be managed by the CAO EA/Special Projects, but is a cross-departmental activity that requires cooperation from multiple sources in support of the overall goal - to improve community relations. It has been identified by the CAO as a priority. Therefore, the request for support from the Special Projects staff will be considered to be at the CAO's request. Any conflicts will be negotiated where possible, and settled by the CAO if staff level- agreement cannot be reached.

The research, analysis and focus group implementation as outlined within this terms of reference will be the responsibility of the successful consultant. The consultant will report directly to the Special Projects staff who will supervise and manage the overall project. work plan.

A steering committee will be established to oversee the work.