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Halifax Regional Council
April 26, 2005

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



George McLellan, Chief Administrative Officer



Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 11, 2005

SUBJECT: Regional Plan Draft Policy and Public Participation

ORIGIN

Council approved Regional Planning Phase II Action Plan, December 3, 2002
Council appointed Regional Planning Committee, February 25, 2004
Council approved Regional Planning Process, Timeline and Workplan, June 10, 2003
Council approved Regional Planning Principles, June 10, 2003
Council approved Regional Planning Public Consultation Process, September 2, 2003
Council approved Regional Planning Goals and Objectives, January 15, 2004
Council approved Regional Planning Alternatives, Public Consultation Program, April 20, 2004
Council approved Regional Planning Concept Alternatives, April 20, 2004
Information Summary Report - Regional Planning Spring Consultation, November 9, 2004
Council approved Regional Plan Preferred Alternative - the Proposed Regional Plan, Dec. 7, 2004

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that :

1. Halifax Regional Council, after discussion at Committee of the Whole sessions between April 26 and May 3 (schedule attached), approve the Regional Planning Committee's recommendation to endorse the draft Regional Plan Policy for the purposes of public consultation, prior to initiating the plan adoption process.

2. Halifax Regional Council communicate a sense of urgency to the Province of Nova Scotia regarding the need for legislative authority to require groundwater assessments, in order that interim growth management policies can be lifted at the time of the adoption of the regional plan scheduled for fall 2005.

BACKGROUND

In December, 2004, staff supported the recommendation of the Regional Plan Committee's for the preferred alternative plan. The proposed Regional Plan creates a consistent vision for the Region's growth pattern and the manner in which development will be managed. Staff recognizes the need for community strategies to support each other, rather than dealing with isolated plans where the implications of policies under an individual plan impact negatively on another area. Staff also see the imperative of integrating the major elements of the Plan, such as the development pattern, roads, public transit, sanitary sewers, sewage treatment, storm water management, water service/treatment, and recreation/park facilities. The Regional Plan provides clear direction and opportunity to prioritize long range strategic capital works investments in light of our always limited financial capacity and competing demands. Upon Council's support of the Plan, staff has continued to work closely with the Regional Planning Committee and the community in the preparation of policies, regulations, standards and phasing with respect to land use, infrastructure, transportation, financial investment, economic development and environmental protection.

The Regional Planning process is currently on time and within budget with completion of step 7 - Development of policy and an implementation plan.

DISCUSSION

Regional Council endorsed the need for a regional plan for a multitude of reasons. HRM must be a vibrant, sustainable, healthy, safe community for our residents and businesses, and we must continue to be competitive against major cities if we are to continue to grow our economy and wealth. That means Council has to provide a set of services and programs reflecting the values and needs of our community, in an affordable manner. Without a plan Council won't have a road map or a guide to respond to pressures for service increases or expansion.

The Regional Planning Committee, guided by extensive public in-put, is proposing a plan which protects and strengthens the assets HRM residents and businesses value and significantly reduces the risks we face without a plan. Staff supports the conclusion of the Regional Planning Committee. With this Plan, Council, over time, will be able to provide a set of services, in many areas enhanced, which reflects the community values with regards to the environment, the economy, our transportation network and our quality of life. In staff's view, the Plan balances the needs of existing and new homeowners; urban/suburban/rural values and choices; current and future generations; commercial and residential interests. The financial analysis undertaken by staff provides confidence that this plan is financially achievable, and in fact, is cheaper for our residents, with a higher level of service.

The information staff have gathered throughout this process has raised our level of awareness of the issues facing this municipality, and indeed has further convinced staff that we cannot continue with the status quo- it is simply unmanageable and unaffordable. The Regional Plan, as described in the set of documents presented by the Regional Plan Committee, provides significant benefit to the community as a whole - there is something here of value to every HRM resident, regardless of where they currently reside or where they wish to reside in the future.

Relative to the Regional Plan adoption process, the Regional MPS will be implemented through the Regional Land Use By-law and subsequently, through community planning strategies that will become secondary plans. Following the adoption of the Regional MPS, community design and visioning exercises will be undertaken for designated growth areas (centers). Local communities will translate how they want the principles and policies adopted under this plan to work within their communities. The Regional MPS will also set the schedule and priority for the delivery of infrastructure to meet anticipated growth needs. Staff is committed to ensuring residents have sufficient opportunity to express their views.

With Council's endorsement and the Regional Planning Committee's guidance, staff will consult with the public regarding draft regional plan policy. The proposed plan, along with mapping and policies, includes a section on plan implementation. A performance measurement program is proposed to ensure the plan is implemented and desired outcomes achieved. Monitoring and a five year plan review process will build in flexibility to respond to opportunities and market demand. If it appears through the monitoring that the goals and objectives of the plan are not being met, staff will come to back to Council with recommended changes.

The Regional Planning Committee is benefiting from the advice of a Sub-Committee, the Implementation Working Group, comprised of key community stakeholders, including the development industry, business, health, tourism, heritage, rural economic, affordable housing, environment, and rural resource, eg mining, forestry. The Implementation Working Group focussed on advising how the plan goals and objectives can best be achieved.

Council's Role

As with the December report, the next step of the plan requires significant effort and is critical to the Plan's success. The intent over the next few months is to ensure the community is provided opportunities to become familiar with the policies, to ensure they reflect their priorities and values. Council support of this next public consultation phase will allow staff and the community opportunities to deal with specific issues and options. The policies will evoke increasingly strong reactions as it is now more specific. The results of the public input obtained over the spring and summer will be incorporated into the final documents to be recommended to Council in the fall for formal approval. Council will then have the obligation and opportunity to listen to public feedback, to respond and make changes. However, even at this stage, Council should be fairly comfortable with the direction these policies are heading in. If Council requires additional clarification regarding

any element in this plan, staff is perfectly willing to answer any question or discuss any issue.

Conclusion

The Regional Planning Committee has succeeded in bringing Council a strong proposed regional plan, on time and within budget. Significant savings (approximately \$250 million), service improvements and environmental benefits can be realized by the proposed plan. Council is asked to endorse the recommended approach for the purposes of draft policy public consultation.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

As always, budgets will be decided by Council on a yearly basis. Endorsement of the proposed plan for purposes of public feedback doesn't represent a budget commitment.

The recommended approach enables savings of approximately \$250 million over the 25 years of the plan compared to continuing with our past growth pattern.

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

Regional Council could direct the Regional Planning Committee to produce a different plan. This alternative isn't recommended.

ATTACHMENTS

NA

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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