

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

MINUTES

June 18, 2013

Session 1

PRESENT: Mayor Mike Savage  
Deputy Mayor Reg Rankin  
Councillors: Barry Dalrymple  
David Hendsbee  
Bill Karsten  
Lorelei Nicoll  
Gloria McCluskey  
Darren Fisher  
Waye Mason  
Jennifer Watts  
Linda Mosher  
Russell Walker  
Stephen Adams  
Matt Whitman  
Steve Craig  
Brad Johns  
Tim Outhit

STAFF: Mr. Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer  
Mr. Martin Ward, Municipal Solicitor  
Ms. Cathy Mellett, Municipal Clerk  
Mr. Ted Aubut, Legislative Assistant

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## **1. CALL TO ORDER**

Deputy Mayor Rankin called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

## **2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - NONE**

## **3. PRESENTATION FROM STAFF - Stantec Waste Resource Strategy**

The following documents were before Regional Council:

- A presentation with graphics prepared by staff and Stantec dated January 2013
- Stantec Waste Resource Strategy Report dated January 2013
- A declassified Staff Report dated February 5, 2013
- SNC-Lavalin Peer Review of Stantec Report dated April 17, 2013
- Correspondence from John Cascadden dated June 8 & 13, 2013
- Correspondence from Tom Musial dated June 4 & 18, 2013
- Correspondence from Ken Donnelly dated June 17, 2013
- Correspondence from Dr. Pamela Ritchie dated June 18, 2013

Councillor Watts explained that her spouse has a contract with Stantec on an unrelated project. Neither she nor Legal Services believed this constituted a conflict of interest. She thought it was prudent to inform Council of this nonetheless.

Deputy Mayor invited staff to deliver their presentation on the Waste Resource Strategy Report prepared by Stantec.

Councillors Mason and Outhit arrived at 10:04 am.

Mr. Mike Labrecque, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer introduced Mr. Jim Archibald, Principal, Stantec Consulting and Mr. Gord Helm, HRM Manager of Solid Waste Resources. He explained that Regional Council, in July 2012, approved a review of HRM's waste resource strategy. The work was subsequently awarded to Stantec with instructions that they explore options that would maintain or improve environmental and community protection.

Councillor Mosher arrived at 10:06 am as did Mr. Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer.

Mr. Labrecque noted that Policy SU22 of the Regional Plan governs landfill operations and the future of the Otter Lake facility. It gives HRM the authority to consider all options so long as the public is consulted.

Mr. Labrecque explained the history of the Waste Resource Strategy, noting that it was developed in 1995 with the goal of:

- Diverting waste from the landfill by separating organics, recyclables and banned materials from garbage;
- Protecting the environment from gases, odours, leachate and vectors; and

- Avoiding the negative environmental and community outcomes of a wet landfill, like that of Sackville

Council of the day accepted that higher processing system costs would be necessary to achieve these goals.

Councillor Hendsbee arrived at 10:09 am.

In 1996, Council amended the strategy to control costs and to address odour-related concerns. One year later, Council approved a contract with Mirror NS stipulating, among other things, that materials must pass through the Front End Processor (FEP) and Waste Stabilization Facility (WSF) before going into the landfill.

Mr. Labrecque noted that HRM's diversion rate, prior to the implementation of the strategy, was 3%. Currently, HRM diverts 61% of all materials from the landfill. Diversion of organics and recyclables tops 70%.

Mayor Savage arrived at 10:13 am and assumed the Chair. Deputy Mayor Rankin returned to his seat.

Mr. Labrecque then outlined a number of lessons learned since 1995, including the following:

- Residents have significantly changed their behaviour when it comes to discarding materials.
- The landfill cell liner works.
- There are opportunities to reduce operating costs while maintaining environmental performance.
- Otter Lake was intended to be a dry landfill. It has not met this goal.
- The FEP and WSF don't capture all organics. Approximately 30% make it into the landfill.

Mr. Labrecque invited Mr. Archibald to provide additional comments.

Mr. Archibald commended staff and contractors for their good work at the waste treatment facilities across the municipality. He also commended HRM for its leadership in this area, noting that it was the first municipality to institute the green bin program and is among Canada's top performing municipalities in terms of total diversion rate.

He explained that Stantec reviewed all aspects of the system and compared HRM's strategy to that of select North American municipalities. Best practices in the private sector were also studied. His team was mindful, throughout the process, of the principles underpinning HRM's strategy: diversion, environmental stewardship and community protection.

Mr. Archibald noted a number of challenges that Council should be aware of before proceeding with changes to HRM's waste resource system:

- It is highly integrated, making stand-alone changes difficult. Any modifications must be undertaken in sequence to account for the many relationships between facilities and collections.
- HRM facilities are spread across the municipality rather than concentrated in a single area.
- Contracts with facility operations are in place and must be respected.

He then described what happens when materials land at Otter Lake. He noted scrap metal and household appliances are removed, as are recyclables and special waste, like propane tanks. Bulky items, like couches and mattresses, go directly to the landfill as do food waste. The remainder is shredded.

Councillor Johns arrived at 10:27 am.

Mr. Archibald noted that waste shredding means that greenhouse gases are produced much earlier, and are more difficult to control, than in a traditional landfill.

Overall, Mr. Archibald was of the opinion that HRM's waste-resource facilities were well designed and well managed. However, he outlined a number of areas of improvement:

- *Propane tanks*: HRM should consider diverting propane tanks from the landfill.
- *Landfill elevation*: HRM should consider raising the final elevation of the landfill by 5 to 15 metres to increase the site's capacity, and ultimately its lifespan. He believed that vertical expansion could help bring operation costs down towards \$50 per tonne. Currently, HRM pays \$170 per tonne while the average municipality pays \$75.
- *Organics*: HRM should consider ways to improve the diversion of organics. He noted that the green bin and backyard composting programs have diverted most, but not all, organic waste from the landfill.
- *Processing capacity*: HRM should consider adding processing capacity, including anaerobic digestion processes to maximize its facilities.
- *Apartments/ ICI*: HRM should increase efforts to reduce waste from apartment buildings and industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) sites. He acknowledged that this is a common challenge faced by municipalities.
- *Recycling equipment*: HRM should recognize that its recycling equipment will need to be replaced by 2019.
- *Collection services*: HRM should consider reviewing collection zones and policies related to household appliances pick-up so that the service is as cost effective as possible.
- *Facility clustering*: HRM should consider co-locating recycling facilities at Otter Lake to bring greater flexibility to the waste system. Mr. Archibald noted that some municipalities use split trucks, which allow them to collect recyclables and garbage at the same time. This model would not work in HRM because facilities are spread across the municipality rather than clustered.
- *FEP*: HRM should reconsider the value of the FEP given its cost. He noted that 17 years ago it made a lot of sense. However, moving forward, the focus should be capturing organic waste from apartments and ICI.

- *Leachate collection system*: HRM should consider less expensive alternatives to the two-feet of additional stone in the cushion layer. He did not believe the current system was good value for money.
- *Leak detection system*: HRM should review the leak detection system in terms of value for money.
- *Green bin*: HRM should consider separate collection services for leaves and yard waste. Currently they are mixed together in the green bin. Mr. Archibald noted that it would be more cost effective to process the materials separately.

To conclude the presentation, Mr. Labrecque noted that the recommendations put forward by Stantec represent up to \$1 billion in savings all the while improving environmental and operational outcomes. He explained that public consultations on this matter will take place from June to October. In the medium term, HRM will be preparing a compliance plan for organics processing to the Province.

The Mayor thanked Mr. Labrecque and Mr. Archibald for their presentation. He invited members of Council to ask questions of clarification.

Councillor Adams asked staff to clarify if HRM has jurisdiction over changes to the Otter Lake landfill.

Mr. Labrecque replied in the affirmative, noting that this is spelled out in the *HRM Charter*.

Mr. Martin Ward, Municipal Solicitor, added that the *HRM Charter* gives the municipality control over solid waste so long as it complies with the *Environment Act*. This means that HRM would have to apply to the Province for a landfill operating permit and the Province would have to access the application based on criteria set out in the Act. He noted that there is no legislative requirement for an FEP.

Councillor Adams asked staff to comment on correspondence from the Minister of Environment in which he states that he will not permit any changes to the Otter Lake facility.

Mr. Ward believed the statement was premature because HRM has not voted to change the facility. Council will make an informed decision on the matter after the consultation process is held.

Councillor Adams wished to know which communities would be consulted.

Mr. Labrecque indicated that HRM will be consulting with the Community Monitoring Community and with the broader community, in-person and online. Residents will be asked for input on the following:

- Increasing the height of the landfill
- Creating a waste resource campus at Otter Lake
- Removing the FEP and WSF

Deputy Mayor Rankin noted that the core conclusion of the Stantec Report - that HRM should eliminate the FEP and WSF - conflicts with the legal agreement between HRM and the Halifax Waste-Resource Society, which was designed to ensure a high level of community protection. The WSF reduces odours, leachates and vectors. It should not be eliminated. He commended the community for the success of the Otter Lake landfill, noting their involvement in the siting, design and monitoring of the facility. He reminded colleagues that this work had been done with HRM's commitment to protect the host community.

Councillor Karsten thanked Stantec for their work. He noted that certain stakeholders were circulating erroneous information about the waste stream and the general state of the landfill. He found this to be unfortunate. He wished to assure residents that Council would not vote for a plan that jeopardizes the health and wellbeing of a community.

Councillor Watts wished to know how new provincial requirements would impact HRM's composting facilities. As for the WSF, she asked staff to comment on its temporary closure in 2010 and on whether its permanent removal would encourage less rigorous source separation.

Mr. Labrecque replied that Council can enact bylaws to enforce source separation. However, he was of the opinion that residents would not change their behaviour if the WSF was removed. Finally, with respect to compost, he noted that new requirements have been discussed at the the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, one such requirement relating to composting curing process – a process currently lacking at HRM facilities.

Mr. Archibald noted that HRM processes organics indoors for one (1) month after which point the product is sold and out of HRM's control. Compost must be cured for six (6) to twelve (12) months to be fully mature.

Councillor Craig asked staff to clarify what is meant by wet landfill and dry landfill.

Mr. Archibald replied that if organic matter is readily decomposable then some people refer to it as wet; if it is not decomposable, then it is often referred to as dry. When all active composting processes are complete, then it is considered compostable.

Councillor Mason wished to know what was done to mitigate the effects of the temporary closure of the WSF in 2010.

Mr. Labrecque indicated that staff inspections were extra vigilant during the closure.

Councillor Adams wished to know how Stantec collected data on the waste entering the landfill.

Mr. Archibald replied that his team used data from waste audits, which are conducted by external consultants on behalf of HRM.

Councillor Adams, referring to the Stantec Report, noted that 8,419 tonnes of organics received at Otter Lake go into the landfill without passing through the WSF for partial drying. He wished to know how this was happening.

Mr. Archibald responded that material is processed based on size, not content. This means that large objects go to the landfill even if they are candidates for diversion.

Councillor Adams noted that it currently costs \$170 to treat one tonne of waste. Stantec is of the opinion that this can be reduced to \$50 per tonne. He asked Mr. Archibald to account for the difference.

Mr. Archibald attributed high costs to the following two elements:

- Shredding: Currently, HRM shreds materials before they enter the landfill. This is an expensive process and releases gas at an earlier stage. Mr. Archibald was of the opinion that this process could be eliminated and materials could go directly into the landfill.
- Elevation: By adding to the height of the existing landfill, HRM could extend the life of the landfill and avoid extra costs.

Councillor Nicoll asked Mr. Archibald to provide further details on the leachate process and, in particular, the location of the stone buffer.

Mr. Archibald explained that there is a base liner underneath the entire landfill area. As for the leachate process, it collects and treats rainfall that trickles on waste. Anything that touches waste is treated. Clean water is then diverted to the retention ponds.

Deputy Mayor Rankin objected to Stantec's recommendation that Otter Lake become a waste resource campus. He asked that Council respect the legal agreement that it negotiated with the host community.

Councillor Johns asked Mr. Archibald to comment on clear bag programs in other municipalities.

Mr. Archibald replied that his team had not study this as part of their report to HRM. He believed clear bag programs, which have been implemented elsewhere, can help improve diversion because collectors can see what is being discarded. However, the potential return in HRM would be smaller because diversion is already common practice.

Councillor Watts asked staff to describe the visual, environmental and operational impacts of increasing the elevation of the landfill. Moreover, she wished to know:

- What specific steps had been taken when the WSF was temporarily closed in 2010
- What would be the recommended sequence for implementing the options presented by Stantec
- How HRM planned to respond to the new composting requirements



Mr. Archibald, responding to the first question, indicated that adding 15 metres to the landfill would not be visible to nearby residents. He acknowledged that the higher the mound, the more exposure to wind. However, this could be controlled.

Mr. Labrecque, responding to the second question, noted that extra top cover had been added to the landfill when the WSF was temporarily out of order. As for composting, the new requirements will require that HRM take more control of the final composting product. All options will be presented to Council before one is selected and implemented.

Councillor Hendsbee acknowledged the presence of Mr. Ken Meech, Mr. Ken Donnelly, Mr. Peter Lund and Mr. Jack Mitchell of the Community Monitoring Committee. He noted that the FEP and WSF were part of HRM's commitment to the local community, and asked that it be respected. Given the difficulty in siting a landfill, he believed that HRM should seriously consider taking steps to extend the life of the existing facility. This could mean reducing the stone buffer. He saw merit in the creation of waste resource campus so long as incineration processes are not included.

Councillor Adams, referencing the report, indicated that Stantec's claim that their recommendations, if implemented, would improve environmental protection. He wished to know how so.

Mr. Archibald noted the following:

- Eliminating the shredding process would make it easier to contain greenhouse gases. The site would emit fewer odours as a result.
- Eliminating the shredding process would mean less electricity would be used at the site.
- Creating a waste resource campus will result in fewer trips, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from collection services vehicles.

The Mayor thanked everyone for their comments.

#### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 am.

Cathy J. Mellett  
Municipal Clerk