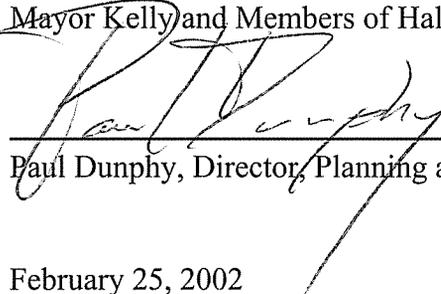

Halifax Regional Council
March 5, 2002

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:


Paul Dunphy, Director, Planning and Development Services

DATE: February 25, 2002

SUBJECT: Watershed Advisory Groups

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

North West Community Council meeting of September 13, 2001:

“To request a Staff Report regarding the possibility of changing the boundaries for the responsibility of the waters advisory boards with the purpose to rationalize the boundaries through watersheds and new lines to be drawn rather than political boundaries or Districts.”

Chebucto Community Council meeting of January 7, 2002:

“Report to be requested on the feasibility of splitting the above (Halifax/Halifax County Watershed Advisory) Committee into two committees, the jurisdiction for one to be the area of the former City of Halifax and the other to be the area of the former Halifax County Municipality as there are too many waterways for the present Committee to adequately deal with and the Committee appears to be too large.”

BACKGROUND

Both Community Councils requests have to do with the boundary areas and mandates of the waters advisory groups appointed by HRM Community Councils. Staff agree with the intent of the Community Council motions, which provide a basis to establish administrative boundaries on scientific grounds. This report has been presented to Regional Council, as opposed to each Community Council, since the issues raised are regional in nature. The watershed groups would continue to report to Community Councils following any revisions, but Regional Council has the appropriate level of authority, and it is more efficient to have one discussion of the issues.

Issues:

At present, the boundaries and Terms of Reference of the groups result in unbalanced workloads, arbitrary boundaries, differing mandates and membership criteria. However, the groups all deal with impacts on natural processes within natural watersheds. There is a need to rationalize the scope and boundaries of this work, as well as provide for administrative harmonization.

There are currently three waters advisory groups appointed, and reporting to various community councils depending on the geographic area of coverage:

- the Halifax/Halifax County Watershed Advisory Board (H/HCWAB - area of the former City of Halifax and Halifax County);
- the Bedford Waters Advisory Committee (BWAC - area of the former Town of Bedford);and
- the Dartmouth Lakes Advisory Board (DLAB - area somewhat larger than the former City of Dartmouth).

The basic mandate of all the groups is similar - to review development applications referred by staff, and to provide advice and recommendations to Council through the Community Councils on the environmental impacts (primarily to water bodies) which may result.

DISCUSSION

Watershed vs Political Boundaries

It is evident that administrative, political and planning boundaries are all subject to change, and that development applications may cross any such boundaries. The mandate of the groups in question is to consider the environmental impacts of development, primarily on water resources, within HRM. Such impacts will originate and disseminate within natural boundaries. For water resources the natural boundaries are the watershed or drainage basin boundaries. Such boundaries do not change over time. Consideration of individual and cumulative impacts of developments is best done within this context. It is most efficient and effective to have one advisory group responsible within each natural watershed. Watersheds can then be combined in appropriate ways to derive the boundaries for the watershed advisory groups.

Historically, the waters boards/committees were created and functioned within specific political boundaries which no longer exist. Some adjustments have already been made to the Dartmouth Lakes Advisory Board boundaries to better conform to watershed boundaries. With the demise of the City of Halifax committee, the boundaries and workload of the Halifax/Halifax County Watershed Advisory Board have significantly increased and have become difficult to manage. It seems appropriate at this time to rationalize the groups' boundaries for several reasons:

- to better conform to watershed boundaries;
- to better balance workloads for board members and HRM support staff;
- to better anticipate future areas of development;
- and to avoid splitting development reviews between boards as much as possible.

The suggestion to divide the H/HCWAB into two groups along old municipal boundaries would not address the existing problems. The former City of Halifax area has relatively few natural watersheds, and is largely fully developed. Problems of excessive area and workload for the H/HCWAB would be better resolved through adjustment of the boundaries between the H/HCWAB, and the BWAC and DLAB.

It will never be possible to have these boundaries fully coincide with boundaries for planning areas, community councils, or other administrative units. However, the possible changes would allow the groups to best fulfill their mandate, which is to advise Council on the impacts of development within watersheds.

Consistent Terms of Reference

Concurrent with this effort, it would be appropriate to better harmonize the Terms of Reference and membership criteria of the waters advisory group, to provide a consistent mandate and scope of work. This is important for consistency in public expectations, as well as for predictability for the development community in terms of scope of reviews and general types of terms and conditions imposed on developments. It also helps to ensure consistent environmental protection through the development review process.

Conclusion

Staff will consult with the existing waters advisory committees and return to Council with recommendations with respect to:

- using natural watershed boundaries as the jurisdictional boundaries for waters advisory groups;
- proposed boundary revisions; and
- revised Terms of Reference for the committees.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

None.

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

- 1) Maintain the status quo, with no alteration of watershed advisory group boundaries or terms of reference.
- 2) Undertake, in consultation with the present three watershed advisory groups, changes to the geographic boundaries to balance workloads and conform to watershed drainage boundaries, along with changes to better harmonize the present Terms of Reference, to be developed and returned to Council for approval. (Recommended)

ATTACHMENTS

Map indicating natural watershed boundaries, and present administrative boundaries of the advisory groups. The H/HCWAB boundaries include all HRM areas not covered by the BWAC and DLAB.

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.

Report Prepared by: Tony Blouin, Manager of Environmental Policy

Bedford and Dartmouth Watershed Advisory Groups Jurisdictional and Watershed boundaries

