



Halifax Regional Council
January 21, 2003

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Dale MacLennan, Director, Financial Services

DATE: January 21, 2003

SUBJECT: Budget 2003-2004: Public Participation

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On December 3, 2002 during Halifax Regional Council, Staff indicated that it would be holding a series of budget information sessions prior to tabling the Budget on February 24, 2002.

BACKGROUND

In preparation for the release of the 2003-2004 Budget, Staff plans to use the following communication tools to allow the public an opportunity to comment on the budget.

- Conduct six public information sessions using the Community Councils in January and February 2003 (See Attached Schedule)
- Use news releases, public service announcements and newspaper ads to promote public participation
- Update the HRM Website to include a Budget Link with a comment section
- Create a dedicated phone line and e-mail address (budget@region.halifax.ns.ca) used specifically for budget inquiries
- Provide HRM's address to allow for written submissions
- Provide comment cards at each of the meetings to allow individuals a more private mechanism to inform staff

DISCUSSION

Staff recognize the importance of maintaining dialogue with the residents of HRM in preparing the budget. Prior to tabling the budget on February 24, 2003 Staff recommends using a series of communication tools and vehicles in order to obtain public input.

Budget consultations sessions are considered an important component of the budget process. In the past, such sessions have been held through the Community Councils and have been information sessions more than consultations. Given the lateness in the 2003/04 budget process and the feedback from the public that they want do not want to be asked for input on priorities when the process is well underway, staff recommend that the communication goals for this year be focussed on:

- providing information to the public on the process and timing
- providing information on the broad options which Council will debate
- obtaining suggestions on timing and ways to involve the public early in 2003 for the 2004/05 Budget process.

Therefore, for this year, staff are recommending that information meetings be held at Community Council and that they be supplemented with information and feedback through discussion groups, news releases, public service announcements, the HRM Website, a dedicated phone line and e-mail address and written submissions. Staff are exploring the possibility of conducting two discussion groups in February 2003 with representatives from the business organizations and homeowners associations,

As a follow-up to a recommendation made in the final Tax Structure report for an initiative to expand public participation in HRM decision making, staff are currently exploring options to expand HRM's consultations on the Corporate Scorecard, service delivery and budget throughout HRM in the Spring and Fall of 2003. Staff will return to Council with specific recommendations.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Funding is being provided within the Financial Services Business Unit.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

Not applicable

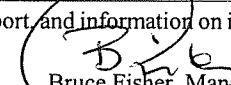
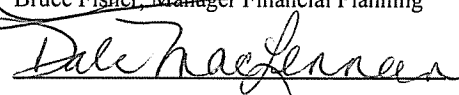
ALTERNATIVES

Should Council not wish to use the intended approach, the following alternatives are available:

- No information sessions - not recommended.
- A series of public information sessions separate from Community Councils - Not recommended as these would not be timely and assume a more consultative process which is not possible given the time frame for 2003/04.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Community Council Schedule

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:	 Bruce Fisher, Manager Financial Planning	490-4493
Report Approved by:	 S. Dale McLennan, Director, Financial Services	490-6308

COMMUNITY COUNCIL SCHEDULE

- January 27, 2003 Western Community Council
Keshen Goodman Library, 7:00PM to 9:00PM
- February 3, 2003 Chebucto Community Council
Keshen Goodman Library, 7:00 PM to 9:00PM
- February 6, 2003 Harbour East Community Council
90 Alderney Gate Council Chambers, 7:00PM to 9:00PM
- February 10, 2003 Peninsula Community Council
Council Chambers City Hall, 7:00 PM to 9:00PM
- February 10, 2003 Marine Drive Valley
Oyster Pond/Jeddore fire Hall, 51 Old Trunk Road
7:00PM to 9:00PM
- February 13, 2003 North West Community Council
Sackville Public Library 7:00PM to 9:00 PM