

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
1996/97 OPERATING BUDGET SESSION

August 26, 1996

PRESENT:

Mayor Walter Fitzgerald
Councillors: Bill Dooks
Gordon R. Snow
David Hendsbee
Ron Cooper
Jack Greenough
Condo Sarto
Clint Schofield
Jerry Blumenthal
Graham L. Downey
Howard Epstein
Russell Walker
Bill Stone
Ron Hanson
Barry Barnet
Bob Harvey
Peter Kelly
Reg Rankin
Jack Mitchell

ABSENT:

Councillors Harry McInroy
Bruce Hetherington
John Cunningham
Larry Uteck
Stephen Adams

STAFF MEMBERS:

Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. Dan English, Commissioner, Community Services
Mr. Richard Cameron, Director, Recreation and Leisure
Mr. Alasdair Graham, Budget Coordinator
Mr. Raju Sohdi, Recreation and Leisure
Ms. Jane Nauss, Acting Municipal Clerk
Ms. Patti Halliday, Assistant Municipal Clerk

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1. Community Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr. Dan English, Commissioner, Community Services, gave an overview of the operating budget for Community Services, which included the following:

BENEFITS OF AMALGAMATION

- reduced staffing costs
- flexibility in allocating resources throughout HRM to meet market demands
- streamlined administration
- ability to provide wider range of recreation and leisure services
- expanded CLASS system

SERVICE LEVEL IMPROVEMENTS

- moving towards harmonization of by-laws, administrative procedures, applications and fee structures
- storefronts provide improved public access through integrated delivery of HRM services

The net increase to the Community Services budget is \$958,584.

Councillor Rankin expressed concern regarding storefronts. He felt this was a new expenditure line as it is a new type of function. Councillor Rankin felt it has not been demonstrated that these services can be amalgamated. He felt the current locations of the storefronts are inefficient and should be reduced. Although he believes in the storefront concept, he stated it needs to be truly accessible and user friendly and open after 4:30 p.m. Commissioner English replied he did not see storefronts as new but just a new way of providing the services. They are currently tracking and evaluating each of the storefront locations and will be reporting back to Council on this at a later date.

Regarding Councillor Rankin's concerns regarding implementation of certain parks projects, Commissioner English replied he met with Mr. Meech last week and hopes to have some of these projects moving ahead immediately. Councillor Mitchell echoed Councillor Rankin's concern with the delay in approved capital projects.

Councillor Kelly expressed concern with the amount allocated for outside consulting fees.

Councillor Barnet noted there have been deductions in some areas but more being spent through grants and vice versa. His concern is that all divisions are not showing a true financial picture. Councillor Barnet asked if the Grant Committee

recommendations could be integrated in this budget to show a true reflection of what was spent this year and last year. Commissioner English replied this is an initial year budget and Councillor Barnet's concerns will work themselves out next year.

Regarding libraries, Councillor Barnet suggested a policy regarding open hours should be set across the board for all libraries in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Councillor Stone stated this would reduce the hours of what citizens have come to expect, and he would not be in favour of this. He is also against reducing the number of storefronts.

Councillor Downey inquired about the Spring Garden Road BIDC surplus. Commissioner English replied if it still exists, they would be entitled to receive it. He agreed to check with the Finance Department regarding this.

Councillor Blumenthal expressed concern with the summer programs ending on August 18, two weeks before Labour Day. He asked that consideration be given to extending the program in the future. Mr. Cameron agreed to take his comments back to staff.

Councillor Schofield stated the area that concerns him is the increase in recreation and leisure, as he thought amalgamation would decrease some of the costs. Councillor Schofield did not think an increase would be acceptable in future years. He also felt the HRM needs more control over the major facilities.

Deputy Mayor Greenough stated the increase in expenditure in this department is not acceptable, and he wants a significant improvement next year.

In response to a question from Councillor Sarto regarding staffing numbers for the museum, Commissioner English noted there was an error in the budget as there is a new position at the museum.

Councillor Cooper questioned the full time equivalent of two on Page G-26 (Recreation & Leisure - Director). Mr. Graham replied this is an error and should be seven.

With regards to storefronts, Councillor Cooper felt this is an area that should be enhanced and not reduced. He also questioned why privatization should be considered for Shubie Campground when it is making money.

RECESS

A five minute recess was taken at 11:20 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 11:25 a.m.

RECREATION AND LEISURE

Mr. Richard Cameron, Director, Recreation and Leisure, gave a philosophical explanation of the department. Following that presentation, Mr. Alasdair Graham, Budget Coordinator, reviewed the financial aspects of the budget noting the total net increase for Recreation and Leisure is \$695,748.

Regarding fiscal debate of major facilities, Councillor Hendsbee stated next year some facilities should be taken out of the major facility category and put through area rates. He suggested next year, as part of the budget process, there should be a major facilities presentation as well as annual reports being submitted.

In response to a question from Councillor Kelly asking for details of the one line items such as Metro Centre, Mr. Graham replied this information could be provided to Council before the approval of the operating budget.

With regards to tax levies and the Halifax Forum Commission, Councillor Walker asked that next year this be clarified between the Halifax Forum Building, the Civic Centre and the Multi-Purpose Room.

In review of the Sportsplex budget and questions raised regarding specific numbers, Mr. Bob Quigley stated he could forward an updated copy of this year's budget to the Recreation and Leisure Department. Commissioner English added the bottom line is there is no taxpayer subsidy and, if there is a surplus, the major facilities will be permitted to keep it.

With regards to outstanding debt, Councillor Kelly asked that breakdowns of outstanding debt and payment schedules be included in next year's budget.

RECESS

A 20 minute lunch recess was taken at 1:00 p.m.

The meeting resumed again at 1:30 p.m. with the following individuals in attendance:

Mayor Walter Fitzgerald; Deputy Mayor Jack Greenough and Councillors Bill Dooks, Gordon Snow, David Hendsbee, Ron Cooper, Harry McInroy, Condo Sarto, Bruce Hetherington, Clint Schofield, John Cunningham, Jerry Blumenthal, Howard Epstein Russell Walker, Bill Stone, Ron Hanson, Barry Barnet, Bob Harvey, Peter Kelly, Reg Rankin, and Jack Mitchell.

Absent from the meeting were Councillors Graham L. Downey, Larry Uteck and Stephen Adams.

Staff members in attendance included: Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer, Mr. Dan English, Commissioner, Community Services, Mr. Richard Cameron, Director of Recreation, Mr. Peter Dickson, Director of Planning, Mr. John Kitz, Chairman, Regional Library Board, Dr. Field, Museum Director, and Mr. Bill Stevens, Manager, Client Support Services, Recreation.

A brief discussion ensued on recognizing the identity of smaller communities which now comprise Halifax Regional Municipality, particularly as it pertains to recreation and leisure.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Cooper as to how staff will address inequities in major recreational facilities, Mr. Richard Cameron, Director of Recreation, advised that staff is driven to improve the bottom line through revenue, however, staff was still in a building and learning stage.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Cooper respecting operating and capital grants for community facilities, staff advised this was a separate issue altogether and that these grants previously pertained to sports and organizations. Other groups received funds to subsidize their operations, but not necessarily allocated to groups which operated community facilities.

Mr. Cameron stated in the past, sport type grants existed however, these have been eliminated. This area will be further researched, however.

Councillor Dooks enquired if staff could authorize expenditures (\$5,000 - \$10,000) as they pertain to small projects (recreation and leisure) for communities. This would eliminate the tender process which is drawn out. With staff working closing with each community, a cheque could be easily "cut" and the project(s) could be commenced and completed on a timely basis.

In response, Mr. Bill Stevens, Manager, Client Support Services, Recreation, advised that staff could look into this concept in further detail.

Councillor Kelly suggested the Committee look at the overall aspect of an association with the Recreation and Leisure Department and the School Board for the sharing of resources and enhancement of programs i.e. sports equipment, facilities, and

personnel. In response, Mr. Dan English, Commissioner of Community Services, advised that a report will be prepared, on a larger scope.

Mr. Richard Cameron advised that staff has met with the School Board in this regard, however, with amalgamation of the School Boards taking place, this matter has been put on hold for the time being.

LIBRARY

Mr. John Kitz, Chairman, Library Board, noted the entire region will be working under the same computer system. Further, a breakdown in library services will be provided.

Councillor Kelly stated the School Board and the Library Board should work collectively to reduce costs.

In response, staff advised that the Libraries have worked closely with the schools in the past in the development of services.

Mayor Fitzgerald advised that the Halifax Regional School Board has been invited to make a presentation Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Kitz stated that Library staff need to define the centre of a branch operation which must be near the universities. The Spring Garden Road location is an excellent anchor for the downtown area and is a favourable site. This issue will be reviewed over the winter months as the three library systems are merged.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Barnet regarding differences in operating costs between libraries, Mr. Kitz advised that library service costs relate to circulation.

Mr. Kitz advised there is a long history of relations with academic and citizen libraries. One major difference between both types of libraries, however, is that there is not ample recreational reading material in an academic library.

A brief discussion ensued on the fact that Alderney Gate library space is rented through a long term lease which is reflected under fiscal services of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Budget. At the end of the lease, the space will be transferred to HRM for one dollar.

Mr. Meech advised that in the future, calculations for each branch will be included in the Budget.

Councillor Rankin expressed concern that although HRM is renting from the private sector, same is not identified in the Budget; this practice should be changed in the future.

With respect to funding from the Province, Mr. Kitz advised that the Province looked at the funding formula 1.5 years ago and brought in a three year funding deal to stabilize funding across the Province. Overall, however, there was a net reduction.

The Deputy Mayor assumed the Chair.

Concern was expressed with the drop in library material. Mr. Kitz advised this reflects a shift of collection monies from one branch to another.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

A brief discussion ensued on the fact that Councillors should be made aware of planning and development issues in their districts. Mr. Peter Dickson, Director of Planning, offered to look into this.

Councillor Hendsbee requested a summary sheet of building permits and subdivision plans and activities for his District as well as the status of a by-law enforcement officer and the issuance of summary offence tickets.

A brief discussion ensued on the difference between by-law officers working out of two separate offices (Police and Planning). Staff advised that Police Services have five special constables. It is anticipated they will work on nuisance issues with Planning by-law officers dealing with land issues.

OTHER

- a) **Animal Control** - Councillor Hendsbee advised that the existing animal control program is inadequate and should be reviewed. Further, the by-law is not being enforced across the region.
- b) **By-Law Enforcement Officers** - In response to an enquiry from Councillor Schofield if Dartmouth By-Law officers have been made special constables, Mr. Paul Dunphy, Executive Assistant, Community Services, advised this is still being reviewed and that a report will be provided within the next few weeks.

- c) **Museum** - Dr. Field, Museum Director, advised that the Museum has received a \$25,000 grant (of the \$50,000 requested) and that this is phase one of a four phase project.

It was suggested by several Councillors that the Province should be responsible for museums and that this concept should be revisited for the 1997/98 Budget.

Dr. Field advised that a report on fundraising will be prepared for Commissioner English in the near future. Further, a list is to be comprised and distributed on the 128 cultural agencies and societies that are responsible for the cultural education of the residents of HRM. Dr. Field also advised that the Heritage team will be preparing a report for Council in October pertaining to artifacts from the four former metro units.

- d) **Store Front Operations** - Staff advised that discussions are ongoing with the Nova Scotia Power Commission regarding payment of power bills at store fronts.

Councillor Cooper requested an analysis of efficiencies achieved by Halifax Regional Municipality in the store front operations for the 1997/98 budget year.

- e) **Community Projects** - Allan Waye advised these programs serve youth at risk, group homes, etc. and that most are in the former City of Halifax area as this is where the program originated. Due to funding formulas, staff is attempting to maintain the status quo.

MOVED by Councillors Blumenthal and Cunningham to adjourn the meeting at 4:00 p.m. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.


Jane Nauss
Acting Municipal Clerk