

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES NOVEMBER 10, 1998

PRESENT:

Mayor Walter Fitzgerald
Deputy Mayor Larry C. Uteck
Councillors: Bill Dooks
Gordon R. Snow
David Hendsbee
Ron Cooper
Harry McInroy
Jack Greenough
Condo Sarto
Bruce Hetherington
Clint Schofield
John Cunningham
Jerry Blumenthal
Graham L. Downey
Sheila Fougere
Russell Walker
Bill Stone
Stephen D. Adams
Barry Barnet
Robert P. Harvey
Peter J. Kelly
Reg Rankin
Jack Mitchell

ABSENT WITH
REGRETS:

Councillor Ron Hanson

STAFF MEMBERS:

Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. George McLellan, Deputy CAO
Mr. Wayne Anstey, Municipal Solicitor
Ms. Vi Carmichael, Municipal Clerk

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Mayor Fitzgerald called the meeting to order at approximately 1:05 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Councillor Hetherington, seconded by Councillor Cunningham that the Minutes of the last regular meeting of Committee of the Whole Council, held on Tuesday, July 7, 1998, be approved as circulated. MOTION PASSED WITH UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

2. DEFICIT REDUCTION PROGRAM

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy CAO, advised that, as part of the deficit reduction program, staff are already proceeding to implement various changes in their approach to service delivery throughout HRM. He emphasized, however, that the issues before the Committee today represented what he termed "critical" reductions in service delivery which, in staff's view, cannot be implemented without Council's specific direction.

Councillor Kelly made reference to deliberations during the November 3 meeting of Council, indicating that he would appreciate receiving information from Police Services as to current service levels, particularly with regard to the department's approved staff complement, the current number of vacancies (and when it is expected that these vacancies will be filled), and any changes in service delivery that are being implemented in the interim period before next year's budget.

It was agreed that Police Services would be requested to provide this information if at all possible in time for the November 17 meeting.

2.1 Streets By-Law S-301

C A staff report dated November 5, 1998 and entitled *Street By-Law S-301*, was submitted under the signature of Mr. Dan English, Deputy CAO.

Mr. Kulvinder Dhillon, P.Eng., Director of Engineering and Transportation Services, responded to questions from various members of Council.

Councillor Sarto suggested that, in addition to the increases proposed under this By-Law, staff should be requested to review **all** permit and license fees charged by HRM to ensure that they accurately reflect related administrative costs.

MOVED by Councillor Greenough, seconded by Councillor Sarto that Halifax Regional Council proceed with a Notice of Motion instructing staff to prepare

amendments to Streets By-Law No. S-301 intended to increase the Streets and Services Permit Fee from \$75.00 to \$100.00. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

1:25 p.m. -- Councillor Hendsbee enters the meeting.

2.2 Metro Transit 1998/99 Budget Reduction Proposals

- C A staff report, dated November 4, 1998 and entitled *Metro Transit 1998/99 Budget Reduction Proposals*, was submitted under the signature of Mr. K. R. Meech, CAO.
- C Correspondence, dated November 9, 1998, was also received from Margaret Ann McIntosh, External Vice President, Mount Saint Vincent University Student Union.

Mr. Brian Smith, Director of Business Operations, provided a brief overview of the November 4 staff report and, in conjunction with Mr. Brian Taylor, Manager of Metro Transit, responded to questions from various members of Council.

Referring to the staff recommendation that Route #48 (Highfield) be discontinued, Councillor Schofield noted that approximately 900 new employees will be coming on stream in this area within the next several months. Under the circumstances, the Councillor suggested that ridership on this particular route might increase considerably and asked that staff reconsider their recommendation to discontinue service.

Councillor Adams asked for information as to the increase in bus fares that would be necessary should Metro Transit wish to recover the **full** cost of its service delivery. Mr. Taylor advised that he would provide this information to the Councillor at a later date.

MOVED by Councillor Greenough, seconded by Councillor Sarto that:

- 1) the base Adult cash bus fare be increased from \$1.55 to \$1.65 effective January 1, 1999, with similar increases in other fares as outlined in the staff report dated November 4, 1998. Monthly bus pass prices will remain unchanged from those established July 1, 1998;**
- (2) the scheduled bus service on selected routes, as outlined in the November 4 staff report, be reduced in the next regular schedule/pick change planned for February 28, 1999.**

Councillor Walker asked for information concerning the proposed combination of Routes #30 (Glenforest) and #34 (Glenborne), specifically as to whether it is being suggested that service to certain streets in these areas be discontinued. The Councillor also expressed concern with reference to the proposed cancellation of Route #5 (Springvale), emphasizing that not only does this route provide service to an entire subdivision but it is also his understanding that snow removal will be reduced in this area. Messrs. Smith and Taylor indicated that they would

confer with the Councillor concerning these matters following the conclusion of today's meeting.

Referring to comments made at an earlier point in the meeting by Mr. McLellan, Councillor Cooper voiced the opinion that certain of the deficit reduction proposals currently being considered are not "short-term" but will, in fact, carry over into next year's budget. He went on to strongly recommend that, given the far-reaching implications of some of these proposals, Councillors should be provided with all pertinent information **before** they are called upon to make decisions concerning service reductions.

Councillor Fougere expressed concern that users of Access-A-Bus are being doubly hard hit by deficit-reduction measures -- first by a fare increase, and then by a reduction in service. Mr. Smith clarified that only two hours of daily service will be eliminated, adding that it was his understanding that the Access-A-Bus Advisory Committee was supportive of this change. **Note:** At a later point in the meeting, His Worship Mayor Fitzgerald read from a note handed to him on behalf of Ms. Nancy Josey, a member of HRM's Access-A-Bus Advisory Committee. Ms. Josey had requested that Council be advised that the Committee had *not* approved the two-hour reduction in service per day or the 10 cent rate increase. She clarified that the Committee had only been *informed* of the proposed reduction and had not been given an opportunity for input.

Councillor Stone suggested that staff might review the bus transfer process as a possible means of increasing revenues and/or reducing abuse. He further recommended that consideration be given to increasing the time between buses (currently set at one hour) during off-peak hours.

Councillor Sarto suggested that, during the preparation of the 1999/2000 budget, staff look at revenues generated by parking and Charter services and also at the manner in which overtime is paid to Transit employees as possible areas in which costs could be reduced.

Councillor Hendsbee recommended that, in the interests of long-term planning, the time may now be opportune to "bite the bullet" and establish a fare structure that could be kept in place until, for example, 2001. The Councillor noted that such an approach would not only provide the Municipality with a rationalized pricing scheme and allow it to recoup certain of its transit costs, but would also allow the public time to adjust to the new rates, thereby minimizing the impacts on ridership normally associated with fare increases.

An amendment to the motion was proposed by Councillor Blumenthal, seconded by Councillor Schofield that cash fares for seniors and students be increased by only 5 cents (rather than by 10 cents as proposed by staff).

Ms. Allison Goodwin, a resident of 3 Glenmore Avenue, addressed the Committee in support of Councillor Hendsbee's recommendation; namely, that transit fares be fixed for a longer period of time and also rationalized on the basis of the rider's ability to pay.

Reverend David Boston, a resident of 3761 Robie Street and a member of HRM's Transit Advisory Committee, addressed Council to express support for Councillor Stone's recommendation that the current bus transfer system be reviewed in an attempt to increase fees and reduce the potential for abuse.

On another but related matter, Reverend Boston expressed concern that there are certain "para-holidays" on which stores and malls are open but government and other business offices are not. Noting that despite the fact this results in circumstances very similar to a normal Saturday, he pointed out that Metro Transit continues to offer its services on those occasions as if it were a full business day.

As another approach to reducing costs, Reverend Boston suggested using part-time employees to provide service during peak hours only, thereby reducing their work week from 40 hours to somewhere in the vicinity of 25-30 hours.

There being no further persons wishing to address the Committee, **THE AMENDMENT TO THE MOTION WAS PUT AND LOST.**

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Hendsbee; namely, that the following fare increases be implemented for a two-year period: (1) Cash Fares: Child/Senior -- \$ 1.25; Adult/Access-A-Bus --\$ 1.75 (2) Tickets: Child/Senior --\$25.00; Adult/Access-A-Bus -- \$35.00 (3) Bus Passes: Child/Senior --\$40.00; Adults --\$60.00; Students -- \$50.00.

There was no seconder for the motion.

THE ORIGINAL MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.

2.3 Waste Resources 1998/9 Budget Reduction Proposals

C A staff report dated November 4, 1998 and entitled *Waste Resources 1998/99 Budget Reduction Proposals* was submitted under the signature of Mr. K. R. Meech, CAO.

Owing to the lateness of the hour, **it was agreed that this matter would be deferred to the next meeting of Committee of the Whole Council scheduled for Tuesday, November 17, 1998.**

2.4 Fire Station #4 (Lady Hammond Road)

C A staff report dated November 4, 1998 and entitled *Fire Station #4 Lady Hammond Road*, was submitted under the signature of Mr. Dan English, Deputy CAO.

C The following submissions were also received:

- e-mail dated November 9, 1998 from Mr. John Blanchard, a resident of Cabot Place, in addition to correspondence dated November 10;

- fax dated November 9, 1998 from Collier Advertising Specialty Limited, P. O. Box 8536, Station "A," Halifax, B3K 5M2;
- fax received on November 9, 1998 from S. R. Dunn;
- correspondence dated November 10, 1998 from Mr. Lorretta J. Smith, 5371 Albert Place, Halifax, B3K 2P6.

Chief Michael Eddy, Fire Services, provided the Committee with a brief overview of the November 4 staff report emphasizing that staff's dilemma is one of having to decide to close one fire station (that being the one on Lady Hammond Road) or to reduce service across the Municipality.

Responding to a question from Councillor Blumenthal, Chief Eddy advised that the 16 personnel currently allocated to the Lady Hammond Road location would be redeployed to fill existing vacancies and reduce the over-time costs which have been required to cover off those vacant positions.

With reference to a question from Councillor Harvey, Chief Eddy emphasized that, in staff's professional opinion, properties currently serviced by the Lady Hammond Road fire station can be adequately (and more consistently) served by personnel and equipment dispatched from the West Street and Bayers Road locations.

During the ensuing discussion, several members of Council offered their suggestions as to areas which might be reviewed from the perspective of more efficient service provision and/or reducing costs. Councillor Barnet made reference to situations in which both fire trucks and ambulances respond to medical emergencies and also questioned whether sufficient consideration has been given to providing for "dual-purpose" personnel (i.e., staff trained in both fire prevention and fire fighting).

Councillor Walker indicated that he would not be supporting staff's recommendation, given the fact that one of the fire stations who would be expected to cover off the calls currently serviced by the Lady Hammond Road facility also services part of his District. The Councillor went on to emphasize that, in his opinion, Fire Services should be increasing its manpower to offset retirements and sick leave, and finding other methods by which costs can be reduced.

Councillor Adams expressed concern that the number of fire stations in the former City of Halifax are being seriously reduced, adding that the situation is exacerbated by the fact that with the coming of natural gas, there may be an even greater requirement for these facilities.

The Chair then called for presentations from those present in the public gallery.

Ms. Lorretta J. Smith, a resident of 5371 Albert Place, Halifax, reading from a prepared text, spoke in opposition not only to the proposed closure of the Lady Hammond Road fire station but also to such other cost-saving measures as changes to the snow removal procedures, the recovery of fines for parking violations, increases in Metro Transit fares, etc.

Ms. Emma Organ, a resident of 6018 Lady Hammond Road since 1942, made reference to the expropriations which took place in the mid-seventies in order to make way for the Lady Hammond Road fire station. Noting that at the time there was only a limited amount of commercial and residential development in that portion of North End Halifax, Ms. Organ referred to the growth that has taken place over the last several years and expressed concern that at this point in time HRM would consider closing down this facility.

Ms. Margaret MacNeil, a resident of 3652 Highland Avenue, put forward the view that the closure of the Lady Hammond Road fire station will not only impact on the delivery of fire services in the North End but (because Station #4 backs up three other facilities) on other areas of the former City of Halifax as well. She went on to question the response times noted in the staff report, indicating that she was not convinced that these statistics related to responses made during traffic rush hours.

Ms. MacNeil also drew Council's attention to the fact that the North End is home to a very busy container pier and one through which cargoes of dangerous materials are often shipped. Noting that there have been a number of "close calls" in the past, she expressed the view that now is not the time to be giving consideration to the reduction of fire services, particularly in this portion of HRM.

Ms. Maureen MacDonald, MLA (Halifax-Needham) and a resident 5525 Cabot Place, made reference to the numerous calls she has received over the past several days in opposition to the proposed closure of the Lady Hammond Road Fire Station.

Concurring with comments made earlier by Councillor Walker, Ms. MacDonald suggested that the level of fire services provided by the Municipality should be based not only on what has happened in the past but also on what might happen in the future. She also suggested that, in her view, HRM should not be concerned with designing its Fire Services to be comparable to that in American cities, but rather with maintaining what used to be a *superior* level of service. Ms. MacDonald concluded her remarks by offering the opinion that, in an effort to reduce the municipal deficit, staff should be looking at areas other than "essential services."

Ms. Chrissy Merrigan, a resident of 6 Trillium Terrace, Clayton Park, addressed the Committee, noting that she had grown up in the North End of Halifax and that her family business was also located there. In her remarks, Ms. Merrigan suggested that because no one can put a price on a human life, HRM would be better advised to concentrate its cost-reduction efforts on non-essential services, rather than to attempt to reduce the delivery of Fire Services.

Mr. Don Snider, a former member of the Halifax Fire Department and the Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency Service, the Associate Editor of *First Responder* (an emergency services publication) and a resident of Novalea Drive, addressed the Committee. In his remarks, Mr. Snider observed that during 1996-97 there had been a total of 11,453 incident responses throughout the Halifax Regional Municipality, 55 percent of them originating in the

former City of Halifax. He went on to note that despite the fact that recent reports indicate a substantial increase in these calls (an increase in Halifax alone from 8,673 to

12,025), there have been considerable reductions in the manpower and equipment originally based in this portion of the Municipality.

Mr. Snider questioned whether the fire stations on West Street and Bayers Road (which he described as two of the busiest stations in Fire Services) would be capable of adequately servicing the Halifax North End, should the Lady Hammond Road facility be closed. He instead suggested that consideration be given to selling the former Bedford Fire Station and using the revenues to offset Fire Services' portion of the deficit reduction program.

Mr. Paul Dober, President of Halifax Regional Professional Firefighters Association, concurred with comments made by certain of the previous speakers in opposition to the proposed closure of the Lady Hammond Road fire station. Referring to information previously circulated to members of Council, Mr. Dober emphasized that at a time when the number of incident calls are increasing, HRM appears to be taking steps that will result in the deterioration of its Fire Services Division. He expressed concern that what he called *preventable tragedies* will occur and called on Council to provide more -- not less -- firefighters so that they might do their jobs more effectively and safely.

Reverend David Boston, a resident of 3761 Robie Street, asked for clarification as to why the Fire Prevention officers from the former City of Halifax had been relocated to rental space in Queen Square at a time when there would appear to be a surplus of HRM-owned buildings. On another point, Reverend Boston made reference to a recent call for assistance made by the Highland Park Junior High School, noting that the truck had been dispatched from the University Avenue fire station. He expressed concern that, in circumstances such as this, the universities and hospitals situated in the South End of Halifax are left with reduced protection. Reference was also made to previous reductions in the Traffic Services portion of the Police Department. Reverend Boston suggested that if fire engines were dispatched to the North End through the intersection at North and Agricola Streets during rush hour, their response times might be considerably delayed.

Mr. John Blanchard, a resident of Cabot Place, Halifax, read from a prepared text in which he expressed various concerns relating to the proposed closure of the Lady Hammond Road fire station. Mr. Blanchard made reference to the considerable growth in residential and commercial/industrial development in this portion of the Municipality and suggested that, should the fire station be closed at this time, HRM would find itself in a civic liability situation. Reading from a prepared text, he called upon Council to listen to the concerns of the residents who will be directly affected by this closure and, in fact, to consult with them as to possible alternatives to this cost-cutting measure.

Mr. David Duffett, a resident of 99 Deepwood Drive, referred to the proposals to close both the Lady Hammond Road fire station and Centennial Pool, and expressed concern that North End residents of the former City of Halifax are witnessing a considerable reduction in services.

Chief Eddy addressed the Committee in order to comment on various of the questions and concerns put forward by the previous speakers. In his remarks, Chief Eddy acknowledged

that the closure of the Lady Hammond Road fire station is not without risk but emphasized that the proposal has been based on factual data, history and experience. He went on to point out that, with the implementation of the Opticom system, response times in the former City of Halifax should be improved. In addition, he pointed out that while the number of calls have increased, their severity has decreased owing to the growing use of smoke detectors. The Chief made reference to concerns raised previously; namely, that Fire Services in the former City of Halifax have been systematically reduced as a result of amalgamation. Chief Eddy emphasized that there had been planned reductions in both manpower and facilities dating as far back as 1994. In closing, he stated that, in staff's view, the closure of this particular facility was "do-able" and one of the few cost-cutting measures that could be taken without impacting on manpower.

Councillor Blumenthal addressed the Committee, making reference to a petition (previously submitted) carrying the signatures of over 4,000 taxpayers opposed to the closure of the Lady Hammond Road fire station. He reiterated that these individuals are extremely upset by what they see as a threat to their safety and security, and are not comfortable with the response times staff suggest will be maintained should this fire station be discontinued. The Councillor went on to make reference to the increased amount of combustibles that many small business owners are now storing in their basements owing to the Municipality's new waste management policies. He suggested that this practice represents an added risk to the North End area as does the prospect of increased development on Gladstone Street, Kempt Road and Willow Park.

Taking these factors into consideration, **it was moved by Councillor Blumenthal, seconded by Councillor Snow that Halifax Regional Council reject staff's recommendation that Fire Station #4 Lady Hammond Road be closed. THE MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.**

4:20 p.m. -- The meeting adjourned for a brief recess.

4:40 p.m. -- The meeting reconvened with the same members being present.

Councillor Blumenthal publicly apologized for comments made earlier in the meeting to Chief Michael Eddy, Deputy Chief William Mosher, and Chief Administrative Officer Ken Meech, adding that issues surrounding the proposed closure of the Lady Hammond Road Fire Station had caused him a considerable amount of emotional stress.

2.5 Centennial Pool

C A staff report dated November 6, 1998 and entitled *Centennial Pool* was submitted under the signature of Mr. Dan English, Deputy CAO. Following is staff's recommendation contained in that report:

- (1) Centennial Pool operate with reduced programs and service levels between January 1, 1999 and March 31, 1999; and
- (2) Centennial Pool be closed effective April 1, 1999, unless it can be sold or operated under a management agreement involving a substantially reduced financial contribution from HRM.

C The following submissions were also received:

- Correspondence dated November 4, 1998 from Dr. Gerald P. Reardon, Orthopaedic Surgeon, Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre;
- Fax received on November 9, 1998 from Ms. Rosanne Coates, Physical Education Department, Westmount School.

Ms. Karen MacTavish, General Manager of Recreation Programming, made reference to the November 6 staff report which recommended reducing program and service levels at Centennial Pool between January 1 - March 31, 1999. She went on to point out that staff had also suggested extending the Pool's closure date to April 1, 1999 in order to allow an opportunity for user groups to form a coalition and consider various alternatives for the continued operation of the facility. Ms. MacTavish reported that a group unofficially known as the *Centennial Aquatics Society* has now been formed and has begun working with HRM staff to develop an appropriate management agreement that will ensure continued service delivery at Centennial Pool.

Based on the information received from Ms. MacTavish, **it was moved by Councillor Downey, seconded by Councillor Walker that this matter be deferred pending the conclusion of negotiations between staff and the newly-formed Centennial Pool user groups (a report is to be presented to Council in January, 1999).**

Presentations in opposition to the closure of the Pool were heard from Mr. Kirby Judge, Mr. Rufus Cameron, Mr. Gary Alcock (speaking on behalf of the Centennial Aquatics Society), Ms. Kanna Manos, and Ms. Lori-ann Veniotte (on behalf of the Special Olympics Swim Team).

THE MOTION TO DEFER WAS PUT AND PASSED.

3. ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Councillors Greenough, seconded by Councillor Hetherington that the meeting be adjourned at approximately 5:05 p.m. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Vi Carmichael
MUNICIPAL CLERK

*K