

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MINUTES

November 25, 2008

PRESENT: Mayor Peter Kelly
Deputy Mayor David Hendsbee
Councillors: Steve Streach
Barry Dalrymple
Lorelei Nicoll
Gloria McCluskey
Andrew Younger
Bill Karsten
Jackie Barkhouse
Jim Smith
Mary Wile
Jerry Blumenthal
Dawn Sloane
Sue Uteck
Jennifer Watts
Russell Walker
Debbie Hum
Linda Mosher
Stephen D. Adams
Brad Johns
Robert Harvey
Tim Outhit
Peter Lund

REGRETS: Councillor Reg Rankin

STAFF: Mr. Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer
Ms. Mary Ellen Donovan, Municipal Solicitor
Ms. Julia Horncastle, Acting Municipal Clerk
Ms. Melody Campbell, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:25 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES - None

3. HRM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- A report dated September 24, 2008 was before Council.
- A Power Point presentation was before Council.

Mr. Andrew Whittemore, Manager, Community Relations & Cultural Affairs, and Ms. Kasia Tota, Community Developer provided the presentation to Council.

Following the presentation the following issues were discussed:

Councillor Sloane advised that this is a very good initiative. It is essential to get the public involved. She stated that one of the largest issues is the need to have seniors involved in the process.

Councillor Smith raised concern as it relates to public apathy. He noted that there is a presumption of interests, that the Council interests and public are the same, which may not be the case. He added that the public often only comes out to discuss issues that affect them directly. Mr. Whittemore advised that staff are working on initiatives that will reach out to the public and promote public engagement. Councillor Smith advised that there needs to be a benchmark to ensure the plan is working.

Councillor Wile noted the importance of having seniors involved in the process. She added that seniors bring great experience, talent and knowledge to the table. Very often seniors fully participate and speak on behalf of their peers and their community.

Councillor Karsten raised concern over public participation noting that most members of the public do not get involved, for example, they do not attend Community Councils or Regional Council. It will be a challenge getting residents involved. He noted that success must be measured.

Councillor Mosher expressed her appreciation of the hard work by staff adding that she is pleased with the recommendations. She added her concern of getting the public out and involved. She advised that a staff debrief would be beneficial after public meetings. She noted that HRM has sent out calendars to residents in the past. She advised that in the UK, magazines are distributed to residents providing important information which people can keep and reference; and she added that this would be a great communication tool.

Councillor Younger added his concern regarding residents only attending meetings or forums addressing issues that directly affect them. He advised that there is a need to keep meetings focussed and on track, some issues that are brought up many times are not issues that Council can deal with. He added that residents can get discouraged by this as they believe their ideas are not being implemented, but the reasoning may be it is not a Council issue.

Councillor Watts advised that often residents are unclear as to how decisions are made. Many residents want to make a contribution, but are unsure of how they fit in the process. She advised that residents should be given clear explanation of what Council is looking for and how their contributions fit in the scenario.

Councillor Lund stated that people want to become actively involved. He advised that many residents believe that Council makes decisions before public consultation begins, adding that this belief needs to change. He advised that citizens need to be involved in the process from the beginning to ensure transparency. Mr. Dunphy advised Council that this is an ongoing process, and Council will be kept apprised. He added that this is a three to four year initiative, staff have to be trained and there will be continuous improvement to the strategy.

Councillor Hendsbee raised concern that the area Councillor is not mentioned in the report. Mr. Whittemore advised that the Councillor is a very important part of the success, as it is the Councillor who has local knowledge and is aware of resident concerns. Mr. Whittemore added that the Councillors will be involved in their area issues.

Councillor Nicoll noted that an element that may be missing is a sense of community.

Councillor Outhit stated that this will be an ongoing process and commended the report as forward thinking. He advised that the community wants to be involved, adding that residents need to receive information.

MOVED BY Councillor Sloane, seconded by Councillor Wile that Halifax Regional Council adopt the Draft Community Engagement Strategy in Appendix One of the report dated September 24, 2008. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

Julia Horncastle
Acting Municipal Clerk

