

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MINUTES

June 23, 2009

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

REGRETS: Councillor: Andrew Younger

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	CALL TO ORDER	3
2.	APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES	3
3.	INVASIVE SPECIES - YELLOW FLOATING HEART (Presentation)	3
4.	SERVICE REVIEW PROCESS	
5.	TAX REFORM	
6.	ADJOURNMENT	

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 10:08 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES - NONE

3. INVASIVE SPECIES - YELLOW FLOATING HEART

Mr. Cameron Deacoff, Environmental Performance Officer, introduced Dr. Sherman Boates, Manager of Wildlife Resources and Mr. Mark Elderkin, Species at Risk Biologist from the Department of Natural Resources who provided the presentation on Invasive Species. Highlights of their presentation were as follows:

- C The Yellow Floating Heart originated in the Mediterranean and was sold in stores for lily ponds;
- C Invasive species were a symptom of the greater problem of globalization;
- C Only 2 to 3% of exotic species in Nova Scotia were alien invasive species;
- C Part of the problem involved competing value systems, therefore, beyond the biological problems there were also social issues;
- C In 2005 when the status of the plant was assessed it was not well known in Canada, however, as of 2009 it had been found in 9 provinces as when invasive species arrive they do so very quickly;
- C There were several meetings in the fall of 2008 with the Department of Environment, residents, HRM Councillors and Provincial MLA's;
- C Chemical control and manual removal of the plants has been investigated however, neither approach seems feasible upon networking with people across North America;
- C Many invasive species issues could be prevented via residents becoming better informed;
- C Alien invasive species were one of a whole set of bio diversity issues and were the second biggest threat after climate change;
- C Many government departments were interested in the problem, therefore, there was no one group that could address the issue;
- C The Provincial government was not adopting a provincial scale for invasives at this time, however, it would be part of a larger process;
- C A large scale operation at Little Albro Lake was not recommended.

Councillor Barkhouse entered the meeting at 10:33 a.m.

A discussion ensued with Dr. Boates and Mr. Elderkin responding to questions. They advised that the Yellow Floating Heart was very tough to eradicate as it reproduced through fragmentation and had sticky seeds which were easily and unintentionally

transported by birds. They also indicated that residents needed to pursue active monitoring of the lakes upstream from both Little and Big Albro Lake.

Regarding the fire ant problem in HRM; Dr. Boates and Mr. Sherman noted that these ants had multiple queens and sister colonies and that groups of neighbours needed to close in the parameter and use a paste of peanut butter and borax to eradicate the queens.

Councillor McCluskey entered the meeting at 10:38 a.m.

Dr. Boates and Mr. Sherman advised that Council could develop a policy that no invasive species would be adopted through HRM's knowledge.

MOVED BY Councillor Wile, seconded by Councillor Blumenthal, that Halifax Regional Council request that the Mayor write a letter to the Province requesting that there be a ban on the sale and import of alien invasive species. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

MOVED BY Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor McCluskey, that Halifax Regional Council refer the matter to staff to bring forward a policy for invasive alien plant control in HRM.

A discussion on the motion ensued. It was noted that there was not one single agency able to address the issue and that a discussion with multiple Provincial and Federal Departments was required as well as to promote healthy stewardship.

It was also noted that it would be an ecological assault on Little Albro Lake if it was unsuccessfully drained to eradicate the Floating Yellow Heart.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Councillor Rankin entered the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

The meeting recessed at 11:16 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 1:31 p.m.

4. SERVICE REVIEW PROCESS

- A report dated June 15, 2009 was before Council.

Mr. Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer introduced the Service Review Process presentation to Council.

Mr. Brad Anguish, Director, Service Delivery, and Mr. Ed Thornhill, provided the presentation, Service Review, to Council.

The following points were made in the presentation:

- What is a Service Review
- Why Conduct a Service Review
- Why a Service Review Now
- The Objective
- Background
- Best Practice Approach
- How will a Service Review be Conducted
- Alternatives
- Summary & Conclusion

Following the presentation, the following discussion ensued:

MOVED BY Councillor Blumenthal, seconded by Councillor Sloane, that Halifax Regional Council approve the Service Review Process and authorize staff to proceed as per the draft schedule as outlined in Attachment A of the report dated June 15, 2009.

Councillor Blumenthal requested a report on snow removal contractors and parks contractors, adding that these are key areas that need to be addressed. Mr. Labreque, Director, Transportation and Public Works, advised Council that delivery of the winter works programs are determined through audits and cost implications. He noted that a report will be issued on July 7th providing a summary of past winters and the service standards. He advised that this area can be reviewed.

Councillor Karsten stated that staff continually look at efficiencies in its programs. He expressed concern that some of the programs are initiated from other levels of government and that HRM should not take on their responsibility.

Councillor McCluskey questioned how long of a list of services and programs this entails and whether the public really wants these programs. She questioned the cost of the services. Staff advised that the review would be done to determine which programs will be eliminated and costs will be looked at. Staff noted that costs are in the budget books. The Councillor stated that she will wait for costing in the service catalogue.

Councillor Hum stated that this could be an extensive list of programs and services. She added that she looks forward to a sidewalk snowplow review with public consultation. Staff advised that Council will set priorities, and a list of services to be reviewed will come back to Council set by criteria.

Councillor Harvey advised that Council needs to see the savings over the past years as a result of contracting out work. In response to a query by the Councillor regarding activity based costing, staff advised that it was an isolated activity indicating the dollar value.

Councillor Barkhouse stated that snow and ice removal is a large issue. Staff advised that over the past year the service standards were met 95% of the time. It was noted that service standards may have to change.

Councillor Walker advised that this review may be difficult to deal with at Council and it will be a slow process. He added that snow and ice removal should be at the top of the list and that service standards have to be addressed.

Councillor Watts stated that public consultation and participation should be part of the review. She added that more power should be given to the Community Councils.

Councillor Outhit stated and snow and ice removal and tax reform has to be addressed.

Councillor Lund advised that costs and benefits of contractors and consultants needs to be addressed. In response to a question by Councillor Lund, staff advised that Council will determine the level of the review and if the review goes beyond staff capacities, Council will determine any further direction.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Council recessed at 2:45 p.m.

Council reconvened at 3:04 p.m.

5. TAX REFORM

- A report dated June 17, 2009 was before Council.

Mr. David Grace, Chair of the Tax Reform Committee, introduced the presentation to Council. He introduced members of the Committee, that were in attendance, to Council.

Councillor Uteck entered the meeting at 3:09 p.m.

Councillor Mosher entered the meeting at 3:10 p.m.

Ms. Cathie O'Toole, Director, Finance Services, and Mr. Bruce Fisher, Manager of Fiscal and Tax Policy, provided the presentation, Halifax Needs to Change the Tax System, to Council.

MOVED BY Councillor Rankin , seconded by Councillor Outhit, that Halifax Regional Council approve that:

- 1. The current property tax system no longer reflects ability to pay and that Council continue to explore moving off of assessment-based residential property tax as the current property tax system no longer reflects ability to pay.**
- 2. Confirm that it supports taxation that reflects the recovery of the cost of providing municipal services, ability to pay and supports the following taxation principles:**
 - Equity, Economic Competitiveness, Efficiency, Respect for other Governments, Simplicity, Stability, Transparency and Accountability.**
- 3. Instruct the Tax Reform Committee to undertake a complete review of Commercial Taxation under the following broad categories:**
 - The relationship between the commercial and residential rates of taxation;**
 - Taxation within the commercial sector to determine whether there should be a redistribution of commercial taxation.**
- 4. That the Deed Transfer Tax be retained.**
- 5. Instruct the Tax Reform Committee to:**
 - Return to Council in September with recommended options on taxation, reflecting the above principles, including a phase-in schedule starting in 2010-2011 and continued support for modest incomes;**
 - Hold an information workshop for Council on those recommendations prior to the Committee of the Whole debate.**

The following discussion ensued among Council following the presentation:

Councillor Rankin advised that the tax system needs to be revamped.

Councillor Sloane noted that focus needs to be on commercial taxation.

Councillor Hum stated that it is time to change the system and move forward with equity and fairness to the taxpayers.

Councillor Karsten advised that he does not support the motion adding that this is a defaulted system. He noted that residents of Cole Harbour were not noted in the public

consultation process. He commended the Committee and staff for all its hard work and efforts.

Councillor Walker expressed concern that this is all or nothing and the plan is a leap of faith. Ms. O'Toole advised that many Canadian cities are moving away from assessment based taxation, but not totally shifting way.

Councillor McCluskey raised concern that this process is flawed, beginning with the open house method. She questioned whether or not the majority of residents agree with this. She advised that Council needs to see the facts and figures on the area moving away from assessment based taxation. Mr. Fisher advised that he will provide this information to Council.

Councillor Streach advised that the tax burden in his area is going up substantially. Mr. Fisher advised that the Eastern Shore area is one of the most difficult areas as it relates to tax reform, as it has a different market for real estate and in its costs of services. He added that the area has numerous private and provincial roads, and he cannot say today how this will average out.

Councillor Dalrymple stated that the current system does not work and citizens are irritated. He stated that many areas have less services and higher taxes, adding that some areas have no water and sewer services, no transit services, no sidewalks, and a sporadic garbage pickup. He added that many communities maintain their local recreation facilities. He advised that this is an opportunity for Council to come up with ideas.

Due to time constraints, the Tax Reform debate item will continue at the next Committee of the Whole.

6. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m.

Julia Horncastle
Acting Municipal Clerk