

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES JANUARY 26, 1999

PRESENT:

Mayor Walter Fitzgerald
Deputy Mayor Larry C. Uteck (3:30 p.m.)
Councillors: Bill Dooks (3:00 p.m.)
Gordon R. Snow
David Hendsbee
Ron Cooper
Jack Greenough
Condo Sarto (2:50 p.m.)
Bruce Hetherington
Clint Schofield
John Cunningham
Jerry Blumenthal
Graham L. Downey
Sheila Fougere
Russell Walker
Bill Stone
Barry Barnet
Robert P. Harvey
Peter J. Kelly
Reg Rankin
Jack Mitchell

**ABSENT WITH
REGRETS:**

Councillor Stephen D. Adams
Councillor Ron Hanson
Councillor Harry McInroy

STAFF MEMBERS:

Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. Wayne Anstey, Municipal Solicitor
Ms. Vi Carmichael, Municipal Clerk
Ms. Karen F. Swim, Assistant Municipal Clerk

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	APPROVAL OF MINUTES	3
2.	APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS, AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS	3
4.	RECOMMENDATION - COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT, LOCAL 108	3
3.	SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION FUNDING	3
5.	ADJOURNMENT	7

The meeting was called to order at approximately 2:30 p.m. by His Worship Mayor Walter Fitzgerald.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Councillor Blumenthal, seconded by Councillor Hetherington that the Minutes from the November 24, 1998 meeting of Committee of the Whole be approved as circulated. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

2. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS, AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

It was requested that *Recommendation - Collective Agreement, Local 108* be added to the agenda as Item 4.

IT WAS GENERALLY AGREED that the agenda, as amended, be approved; and further, that Item 4, *Recommendation - Collective Agreement, Local 108*, be considered at the beginning of the agenda.

4. RECOMMENDATION - COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT, LOCAL 108

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Councillor Downey declared a conflict of interest (owing to the fact that his son is a member of Local 108), and removed himself from the discussion.

MOVED by Councillor Blumenthal, seconded by Councillor Hetherington that:

- (1) Halifax Regional Council ratify the collective agreement negotiated by the Halifax Regional Municipality's negotiating team and the Halifax Civic Workers Union, Local 108/CUPE, and as ratified by the Union, and authorize the Mayor and Municipal Clerk to execute the same on behalf of the Halifax Regional Municipality; and further, that**
- (2) the matter be forwarded to the next regular meeting of Halifax Regional Council scheduled for later in the day.**

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Councillor Downey returned to the Council Chamber.

3. SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION FUNDING

This matter had been deferred from a meeting of Committee of the Whole held on

November 24, 1998.

Mr. K. R. Meech, Chief Administrative Officer, clarified that this matter had been placed on today's agenda in order to provide the Halifax Regional School Board with some indication as to the position Council is prepared to take now and in the future with regard to supplementary education funding.

The CAO went on to point out that under existing legislation the Halifax Regional Municipality is required to continue supplementary funding for the communities of Dartmouth and Halifax although Council has been given the discretion of reducing that funding by a total of 10 percent per annum. Mr. Meech advised, however, that because Council has not yet chosen to exercise that option, the total amount of supplementary funding provided by the Municipality has remained at an estimated \$17 million (\$11 million from Halifax, \$6 million from Dartmouth) -- as it was in the years prior to amalgamation.

Mr. Meech went on to refer to the fact that, from time to time, the possibility has been raised of providing supplementary funding from the Halifax Regional Municipality in its entirety, an approach that would necessitate the establishment of an additional tax levy for those areas outside Halifax and Dartmouth. He concluded his remarks, however, by emphasizing that he personally has taken the position that education is a provincial responsibility and that, under the circumstances, Council should begin to reduce its supplementary funding as is permitted under the provisions of the HRM Act.

Noting that, some time ago, he had put forward a motion in support of extending supplementary funding to the whole of HRM, Councillor Schofield asked for clarification from the Municipal Solicitor as to the impact, if any, of the new Municipal Government Act on this option.

Mr. Anstey advised that there is nothing in the new legislation that will alter the options currently available under the HRM Act. He went on to clarify that, assuming the School Board concurred, Council could move to extend supplementary funding to the entire Municipality "in one fell swoop." Should the School Board not agree, Council would still have the option of implementing this approach, albeit in a phased-in fashion. As an aside, Mr. Anstey pointed out that, under the provisions of the Municipal Government Act, areas rates can now be applied to commercial as well as residential property.

Councillor Barnet indicated that he had recently undertaken a survey of his constituents, asking the question, "Do you support supplementary funding for enhanced technology in your high schools?" He noted, however, that possibly because of increases in their assessments and taxes over the last several years, between 75 and 80 percent of those surveyed had responded in the negative.

Councillor Barnet went on to express his sympathy with the School Board's financial problems, pointing out that because of the restrictions inherent in its relationship with both HRM and the Province, the Board has no way of controlling its own destiny. He went on

to suggest that, in his opinion, there were only two solutions to this situation, one being to encourage the Province to live up to its previous commitment of a 90-10 funding formula for education. On the other hand, the Councillor suggested that a change in legislation that would permit the Board to establish and collect taxes for education purposes might also be beneficial in this regard.

MOVED by Councillor Barnet, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee that Halifax Regional Council send a letter to the Departments of Education and of Housing and Municipal Affairs requesting that they examine the possibility of the Halifax Regional School Board having its own taxing authority.

Speaking in reference to the motion, Mayor Fitzgerald pointed out that roughly 39 cents of every tax dollar collected by the Municipality goes to the Province in the form of mandatory education funding, despite the fact that HRM has little or no input into the rate-setting process. His Worship went on to reiterate the view that “education” is a responsibility that should be completely assumed by the Province of Nova Scotia, and expressed concern that the motion put forward by Councillor Barnet might continue to relieve the Province of its obligations in this regard.

Councillor Greenough stated that, in his opinion, the imbalances in supplementary funding across HRM should be corrected but noted that, given the reluctance of the residents of the former County and Town of Bedford to participate, the question remains as to how this can best be accomplished. The Councillor went on to express his support for Councillor Barnet’s motion, indicating that, in his view, this approach represented a sound interim solution until such time as the broader issues can be resolved.

Councillor Snow advised that he too had undertaken a survey of his district with regard to the feasibility of introducing supplementary education funding, adding that a full 80 percent of respondents had indicated their strong opposition to this proposal. The Councillor went on to indicate that, before embarking on this survey, he had attempted to ascertain the differences in educational programming made possible by supplementary funding in Halifax and Dartmouth. He noted, however, that he had been unable to obtain this information from the Regional School Board and was personally of the opinion that this additional funding made very little difference in terms of the programs offered to students in the urban core.

Councillor Snow emphasized that, in his opinion, residents of the County and Bedford are “satisfied” with the level of education currently provided to their children. He concluded his remarks by suggesting that, should Council decide to pursue the concept of supplementary funding across the whole of HRM, area residents must be given the opportunity for input.

Councillor Hendsbee spoke in support of the motion put forward by Councillor Barnet, questioning how the School Board can ever hope to control its own destiny when it cannot control its own purse. The Councillor went on to state that, in his opinion, the School Board

has an obligation to provide taxpayers with a quality education program but to do so it must be given the ability to tax for those programs appropriately. He indicated that he supported the proposition that, if supplementary funding is to be retained, it should be reduced by 10 percent and spread throughout all of HRM. In this context, he suggested that the time has come to establish a "level playing field" both in terms of education programs as well as the funding required for those programs.

Councillor Hendsbee noted that, with increased development in the former County, he has encountered a constant demand for more and better school facilities. He added, however, that, in his view, HRM should be responsible only for the "real estate management" of these properties (the buildings, the recreational fields, and the playgrounds) with the School Board being totally accountable for educational programming.

On a final note, the Councillor made reference to the surveys undertaken by Councillors Barnet and Snow, suggesting that the time has come for residents to be "educated about education" -- to be cognizant about where the funding comes from and where the taxes go. He concluded his remarks by suggesting that if the question of universal supplementary funding is to be considered, it should be the subject of a plebescite, to be held, if at all possible before the October 2000 municipal election.

Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Walker referred to comments made earlier by Councillor Snow and emphasized that, in his opinion, students in Halifax and Dartmouth do receive a higher level of education as a direct result of supplementary funding. In this context the Councillor noted that he too had undertaken a survey of his constituents, adding that the majority appear to be more concerned about losing the supplementary education programs than about paying for them.

Councillor Harvey stated that, in his view, Council's objective on the issue of education funding should not be "to bring Halifax and Dartmouth down to the lowest common denominator as represented by the systems in the former County and in Bedford." He went on to emphasize that if Council believes that the Municipality's greatest resource is the 58,000 young people studying in its public schools, it is inappropriate to support the status quo which creates two categories of students within the same school system. The Councillor suggested that the only way to rectify the situation is to implement a program of universal supplementary funding across HRM over a 5-10 year period, adding that he was prepared to support such a motion on behalf of his constituents.

Councillor Stone made reference to the fact that, as part of the deficit reduction program, all of HRM's administrative departments are being asked to make considerable reductions in their operating budgets and to decrease both personnel and services. Given the circumstances, he indicated that he was prepared to support a reduction of 10 percent in the amount of supplementary funding provided by the residents of Halifax. Having said that, however, the Councillor strongly recommended that this issue be deferred until Council has reviewed its budget and has a clearer idea of what tax increases, if any, there are likely to be.

Councillor Stone went on to commend the School Board for its efforts in attempting to involve the local schools in deciding how the supplementary funding was to be spent , adding that he has received a number of accolades in this regard from the schools in his area.

On a final note, Councillor Stone suggested that, given the financial problems currently facing the School Board, it would be appropriate, in his view, for the supplementary funding to be used to maintain current levels of service, rather than to introduce new programs.

Councillor Fougere spoke in support of Councillor Barnet's motion, but emphasized that she would never support a proposal designed to reduce the current levels of supplementary funding. She went on to note that, in her view, the value of education is "priceless" and is everyone's responsibility.

After some further discussion, **THE MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.**

IT WAS FURTHER AGREED THAT the matter would be taken to the next regular meeting of Halifax Regional Council scheduled for later in the day.

Making reference to the report submitted to Council in September by the Municipal Solicitor, Councillor Harvey advised that he was prepared to move Option 2; namely, that the supplementary funding levels in Halifax and Dartmouth be maintained at approximately the same level, but that the total supplementary funding paid to the School Board be increased by a proportionate amount of County/Bedford funding (this would be incremental over a 10-year period).

The Chair ruled that he could not accept Councillor Harvey's motion at this point in time.

Ms. Stella Campbell, Chair of the Halifax Regional School Board, briefly addressed Council. In her remarks, Ms. Campbell noted that the School Board is trying to provide a level of education that every child in the Municipality will find acceptable and fair, whether they attend school in the inner City or in Musquodoboit. She acknowledged, however, that the current system is not fair -- children in the urban core receive far more exposure to French language and computer programs (as an example) than their counterparts in the outlying areas of HRM. Ms. Campbell added, that, in her view, parents are very aware of these inequities and are interested in having the programs provided by supplementary funding made available to their children. She indicated that it would be her preference to see HRM established as a "benchmark" for the delivery of education programs, but indicated that she would like the opportunity of making a more formal presentation to Council on the matter of funding at a later date in time.

Mayor Fitzgerald, speaking on behalf of Regional Council, thanked Ms. Campbell for her comments.

5. ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Councillor Blumenthal, seconded by Councillor Hetherington that the meeting be adjourned at approximately 4:00 p.m. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Vi Carmichael
MUNICIPAL CLERK

*K