

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PROPOSED 1999/2000 OPERATING BUDGET) MINUTES MARCH 3, 1999

PRESENT:

Deputy Mayor Larry Uteck
Councillors: Bill Dooks
David Hendsbee (10:35 a.m.)
Ron Cooper
Harry McInroy (10:20 a.m.)
Jack Greenough
Condo Sarto
Bruce Hetherington (10:20 a.m.)
Clint Schofield
John Cunningham
Graham L. Downey
Sheila Fougere
Russell Walker
Barry Barnet
Robert P. Harvey
Peter J. Kelly
Reg Rankin
Jack Mitchell (12:15 p.m.)

**ABSENT WITH
REGRETS:**

His Worship Mayor Walter Fitzgerald
Councillor Stephen D. Adams
Councillor Jerry S. Blumenthal
Councillor Gordon R. Snow
Councillor Bill Stone

STAFF MEMBERS:

Mr. George McLellan, A/Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. Wayne Anstey, Municipal Solicitor
Ms. Karen Swim, Assistant Municipal Clerk

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The meeting was called to order at approximately 10:00 a.m. by Deputy Mayor Uteck.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Councillor Downey, seconded by Councillor Walker that the Minutes from meetings of Committee of the Whole held on February 22, February 24 and February 25, 1999 be approved as circulated with the following amendment: that Councillor Barry Barnet be noted as being present for the meeting held on February 25. THE MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.

2. 1999/2000 OPERATING BUDGET

The following documentation was submitted:

- ! *Taking Care of Business - Operating Budget Recommendations: 1999/2000, dated March 3, 1999.*
- ! *Two (2) information packages relating to Parking Lot Items Requiring Deliberation at Program and Service Review Committee for Budget Approval.*
- ! *An Information Report dated February 25, 1999 and entitled HRM's Corporate Membership in UNSM under the signature of Mr. Wayne Anstey, Director of Administrative and Legal Services.*

Mr. George McLellan, Acting Chief Administrative Officer, provided a brief overview of the documentation submitted, and responded to questions from various members of Council.

Councillor Kelly suggested that an audit of HRM telecommunications requirements might provide an effective method of identifying the cost-savings required to hire additional police officers. Noting that this suggestion had also been raised during last year's budget discussions, the Councillor referred to the large number of telephones, fax machines, voice mail, Internet connections, cellular phones and pagers utilized by HRM staff and asked for information as to whether the use of this equipment has been adequately rationalized.

Mr. McLellan advised that while he was not prepared to respond in detail to Councillor Kelly's suggestion at this time, it was his understanding that many divisions had scrutinized their communications requirements in an effort to meet their 1999/2000 budget envelopes, and had subsequently made appropriate reductions.

Councillor Kelly referred to a suggestion put forward during the February 24 meeting of Committee of the Whole; namely, that changes be made to allow volunteers to provide Fire Services in Bedford after 6:00 p.m. on week days and on weekends. The Councillor

reiterated that, in his opinion, this approach could result in considerable cost-savings which could then be reallocated for use by core fire services in Dartmouth and Halifax.

Chief Michael Eddy, Fire Services, advised that staff have not yet had an opportunity to explore this suggestion with Legal Services, adding that, given the language of the contract currently in place as well as various liability issues, it was his view that Councillor Kelly's recommendation will have to be carefully analysed before a staff recommendation can be brought forward. In response to a question from Councillor Kelly regarding a possible time frame, Chief Eddy suggested that a report might be ready for Council's consideration within two weeks.

In reference to any cost-savings that might be identified as a result of this or any other change in service delivery, Mr. McLellan emphasized that staff will be recommending that these monies be reallocated first and foremost to those projects in which cost-overruns are probable.

Responding to a question from Councillor Greenough, Mr. McLellan advised that, once the budget approval process has been completed for 1999/2000, it is staff's intention to undertake a complete review of the tax structure and the geographical boundaries on which they are based, and to bring back issues and recommendations for Council's consideration.

MOVED by Councillor Greenough, seconded by Councillor McInroy that the proposed Operating Budget for 1999/2000 be recommended for approval by Halifax Regional Council.

Councillor Barnet made reference to Attachment "A" (attached to the report entitled *Halifax Regional Council Budget Debate, February 1999: Parking Lot Items Requiring Deliberation*) dealing with a proposal to charge a \$500 administrative fee to each of the groups and organizations currently paying nominal rent for space in an HRM-owned facility. The Councillor expressed concern that this "back door" approach would discourage many of these groups from continuing to provide much needed services, especially at a time when such "partnerships" are badly needed by the Municipality. Councillor Barnet also called into question HRM's rationale for permitting certain organizations (particularly those designated as "commercial" uses) to occupy rent-free space when, superficially at least, they would appear to be in a position to pay full market price.

Concurring with the concerns put forward by Councillor Barnet, Councillor Schofield made reference to the four properties owned by Harbour City Homes, and asked for clarification as to why those properties have been included in Attachment "A."

In this same context, Councillor Dooks also made reference to p. 2 of Attachment "A" and suggested that there is only one Lion's Club facility in Sheet Harbour, not two.

Again on the matter of Attachment "A," Councillor Harvey questioned why the Sackville Stadium should be included in this list of HRM leased space.

Mr. McLellan indicated that, given the number of apparent inaccuracies in the staff report, he was prepared to rescind the proposal of a \$500 administrative fee, and request staff of the Real Estate section to find the \$39,000 in revenues (which would have been raised through the introduction of this fee) elsewhere.

Referring to concerns previously raised by various members of Council with regard to the cost of HRM's membership in the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, Councillor Schofield advised that it was his understanding that the Union will shortly be undertaking a review of the formula used to calculate these fees.

Councillor Walker made reference to Attachment "C" (attached to the report entitled *Halifax Regional Council Budget Debate, February 1999: Parking Lot Items Requiring Deliberation*) and expressed concern that the figures used by the Director of Policing Contracts in his letter to Mr. Meech of February 25 do not seem to coincide with those used to compile the Municipality's budget documents.

Deputy Chief of Police Bob Barss indicated that he would request clarification on this matter from Superintendent Ferguson of the RCMP, to be provided within the next 24 hours.

MOVED by Councillor Rankin, seconded by Councillor Walker that the meeting be continued to 1:00 p.m. THE MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.

12:05 p.m. - Deputy Mayor Uteck retires from the meeting with Councillor Rankin assuming the Chair.

12:20 p.m. - Deputy Mayor Uteck returns to the meeting with Councillor Rankin resuming his usual seat on Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Cooper, Ms. Karen MacTavish, General Manager, Recreation Programming, indicated that she would provide the Councillor with information relating to the costs budgeted against the Cole Harbour activity centre for the coming fiscal year.

Councillor Downey made reference to a joint project between HRM and the Province of Nova Scotia, to which the Municipality has already contributed over \$150,000 and which, when finalized, was supposed to have provided the necessary framework through which many thousands of dollars in unpaid parking tickets could be collected. The Councillor expressed concern that, although work on the project has been completed, the Province has not yet seen fit to implement the process. He noted that, if the situation had been

otherwise, the Municipality could have used the revenues from these tickets to offset proposed reductions in staff and programs in the coming fiscal year.

Concurring with the concerns put forward by Councillor Downey, Mr. McLellan observed that the Municipality has been attempting for many years to obtain consent from the Province to attach unpaid ticket fines to the processes relating to vehicle registration and license renewal. He went on to point out that it is anticipated that implementation of such a process would yield HRM over \$1 million in new revenues, monies which are especially needed at a time when the Provincial Government is reducing its financial contribution to its municipalities.

Councillor Mitchell made reference to the staff proposal that, providing the deed to the St. Margaret's Bay Arena is returned to the Municipality, HRM will assume responsibility for the facility's debt costs (approximately \$40,000). The Councillor asked that, before any further steps are taken in this regard, staff meet with him and Councillor Rankin to ensure that the concerns of the volunteers now responsible for the Arena are dealt with in a fair and sensitive manner.

MOVED by Councillor Rankin, seconded by Councillor Kelly that the meeting be extended beyond 1:00 p.m. in order that the review of the proposed Operating Budget might be completed. THE MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.

Councillor Kelly referred to the memorandum received from the Chairman of the Board of Police Commissioners expressing concern regarding the impact of the proposed Operating Budget on the staff complement of Police Services. In this context, the Councillor noted that the fine proposed for false alarms has been suggested as \$100 when, in actuality, it is estimated that the cost per incident of a police response is \$117. Councillor Kelly therefore suggested that the fine be increased to \$117 and that the additional revenues be put toward the hiring of three police cadets.

While thanking the Councillor for his suggestions, Deputy Mayor Uteck advised that, as a first step, Council had to agree that additional monies would be spent during the 1999/2000 fiscal year for this purpose. Once that decision is made, Council must then decide where the necessary funding is to be identified.

MOVED by Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Schofield that Council authorize the hiring of three police cadets prior to March 31, 1999. THE MOTION WAS PUT AND DEFEATED.

Councillor Hendsbee made reference to the proposal (outlined earlier in the meeting by Mr. McLellan) to reduce the Councillors' discretionary grant funding to \$2,000 per Councillor, and noted that this was contrary to the recommendation put forward by the Grant Committee in its report of February 23.

MOVED by Councillor Hendsbee, seconded by Councillor Schofield that, as recommended by the Grant Committee, the Councillors' discretionary grant funding be maintained at the rate of \$3,000 per Councillor for a total of \$69,000 for the fiscal year 1999/2000 (representing an increase to the Operating Budget of \$23,000). **THE MOTION WAS PUT AND DEFEATED.**

Councillor Cooper suggested that, as another possible source of additional revenues, staff review the rates charged for billboards erected throughout the Municipality.

Following a brief discussion, **the motion (i.e., to recommend approval of the proposed 1999/2000 Operating Budget to Halifax Regional Council) was put and passed.**

IT WAS FURTHER AGREED THAT this matter would be forwarded to the next regular meeting of Halifax Regional Council scheduled for Tuesday, March 9, 1999.

3. ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Councillor Greenough, seconded by Councillor Hetherington that the meeting be adjourned at approximately 1:35 p.m. **THE MOTION WAS PUT AND PASSED.**

Karen F. Swim
ASST. MUNICIPAL CLERK

