

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PROPOSED 1999/2000 OPERATING BUDGET) MINUTES FEBRUARY 25, 1999

PRESENT:

Deputy Mayor Larry Uteck (2:05 p.m.)
Councillors: Bill Dooks (1:40 p.m.)
David Hendsbee
Ron Cooper
Jack Greenough
Condo Sarto
Bruce Hetherington
Clint Schofield
John Cunningham
Jerry Blumenthal
Graham L. Downey
Sheila Fougere
Russell Walker
Bill Stone
Stephen D. Adams (1:00 p.m.)
Barry Barnet (1:25 p.m.)
Robert P. Harvey
Peter J. Kelly
Reg Rankin
Jack Mitchell

ABSENT:

Mayor Walter Fitzgerald (Regrets)
Councillors: Gordon R. Snow (Regrets)
Harry McInroy (Regrets)
Bill Stone (Regrets)

STAFF MEMBERS:

Mr. Ken Meech, Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Mr. Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Ms. Patti Halliday, Assistant Municipal Clerk

**HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES
PROPOSED 1999/2000 OPERATING BUDGET**

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Deputy Mayor Uteck called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m.

1. 1999/2000 OPERATING BUDGET

Discussion of the 1999/2000 Operating Budget began on Monday, February 22, 1999 and was continued on Wednesday, February 24, 1999. Deliberations continued today, commencing with Community Services - Recreation Facilities.

i) Recreation Facilities

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Recreation Facilities. The overall change in the Recreation Facilities budget from 1998-99 was a 6.8 percent decrease. With respect to Shubie Campground, Mr. McLellan stated staff is currently negotiating an agreement to allow a private company to run the campground. If this is not successful, the recommendation would be to close it for this summer season. Mr. McLellan also advised that since the budget was tabled with Council, an error of \$88,000 was found in the revenue for Shubie Campground. Shubie Campground was identified as a "parking lot" item for further discussion.

Mr. McLellan stated that subsequent information to the budget indicates that the Halifax Forum will probably run a \$40,000 deficit and the Sackville Sports Stadium's deficit will be \$65,000 more than indicated. Information from these facilities is that they will be carrying this forward and dealing with it in their own annual budget, and, therefore, it will not have a direct impact on the HRM Operating Budget.

Responding to a question of Councillor Hetherington regarding the Sackville Sports Stadium, Mr. Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, stated they will be making a presentation to Council in the near future regarding an expansion plan that would be aimed at reducing their deficit.

ii) Community Recreation

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Community Recreation. The overall change in the Community Recreation budget from 1998-99 was a 15.8 percent decrease.

Responding to a question from Councillor Cunningham regarding beaches, Mr. McLellan stated an option to closing some of the beaches would be to keep all the beaches open for five hours per day. Councillor Cunningham supported this option. Councillor Cooper

suggested if all beaches are going to remain open, lifeguards should be reinstated at former County beaches that had them removed several years ago.

Councillor Cooper inquired what the effects on programming will be if playgrounds are closed. Ms. Karen MacTavish, General Manager, Recreation Programming, replied the intent is not to close any playgrounds that have supervised or active programs.

In response to a question from Councillor Cooper regarding the criteria used to select which playgrounds would be closed, Mr. McLellan stated staff would like to the opportunity to consult with Mr. Stephen King, Manager, Works and Natural Services, who will be in attendance later in the day.

Councillor Cooper stated he hopes that anticipated benefits of this proposed budget will be used in the future to help restore some of items being cut this year.

(Councillor Downey took his place at the meeting at 9:35 p.m.)

Responding to a question of Councillor Greenough regarding the current hours of supervision at beaches, Ms. MacTavish stated hours are staggered across HRM but beaches are generally supervised for eight hours per day. Councillor Greenough stated the compromise of leaving all beaches open and supervised for five hours per day seems to be a reasonable trade-off.

Councillor Greenough inquired what is actually meant by "closing" playgrounds. Ms. MacTavish replied HRM will not be supervising the playground programs, but will be looking at community partnerships to assist in running the programs this year in the areas of most need. Mr. Peter Bigelow, General Manager, Recreation Facilities, stated there will still be some maintenance, such as mowing, at these "closed" playgrounds. The closure refers to the playground structure, and unsafe equipment will be removed and not replaced at this time unless demographics warrant it.

Responding to a question of Councillor Harvey, Ms. MacTavish stated staffing levels are reduced at beaches when they are closed due to high coliform counts and signage is posted.

Councillor Harvey suggested, due to the high level of public interest in this matter, it should be referred to the "parking lot" for further discussion. Councillor Schofield agreed stating there a few items in the budget, such as lifeguards, Police and Fire, etc., that may warrant a tax increase if needed.

Councillor Sarto inquired if staff could provide Council with a listing of all children's

programs and the costs of these programs. Ms. MacTavish replied staff could access this information by target groupings but not by individual programs.

Councillor Kelly inquired when the final analysis will be completed with respect to beaches and playgrounds to determine which ones will be affected. Ms. MacTavish replied staff will have the information regarding the beaches within the week, and just under two weeks for the remaining playgrounds and summer programs.

With respect to the Recreation Coordinators program being held at White Point Beach, Councillor Kelly suggested reconsideration should be given to conducting this program closer to home. Staff noted accommodations for this program are being provided at no cost to HRM.

Councillor Kelly agreed with Councillor Schofield that a tax increase for one year only may be warranted to generate funding for certain items. Mr. McLellan replied that will be Council's decision, but stated he believed it is still possible to deal with the mandate given by Council of no tax increase.

Councillor Mitchell inquired about the cost of the study regarding recreation conducted last year. Ms. Peggy Allen, Regional Co-ordinator, Recreation Programming, replied staff would have to get back to the Councillor with that information. Councillor Mitchell inquired how much funding for community programming is allocated to community development in District 23. Ms. MacTavish replied staff can come back with that information.

Responding to a question of Councillor Cooper regarding community development officers, Ms. MacTavish explained where these staff will be located. Councillor Cooper suggested additional funding should be provided for community development to assist the communities in taking over the activities the Municipality would like them to do.

With respect to the Cole Harbour Activity Centre, staff advised that a ramp will be installed at this location within the next two weeks to improve accessibility. In response to concerns expressed by Councillor Cooper, Mr. English advised there is no intention to move Recreation staff from Cole Harbour Place to the Cole Harbour Activity Centre.

(Councillor Rankin took his place at the meeting at 10:40 p.m.)

In regards to earlier questions raised by Councillor Kelly regarding security at Paper Mill Lake, Mr. King stated some security will probably be reinstated and monitored throughout the year.

In response to questions raised earlier by several Councillors, Mr. Bigelow and Mr. King

reviewed the criteria used to determine the changes to sport fields and playgrounds.

Councillor Downey stated he supports using Councillors' capital funding to keep some of these facilities open, and requested a legal opinion on using capital funding for operating expenses.

iii) Planning

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Planning. The overall change in the Planning Services budget from 1998-99 was a 26.4 percent decrease.

Councillor Hendsbee stated delaying community planning any longer is unacceptable. Councillor Blumenthal also expressed concern with the consequences of the increased processing times, and suggested this item should be placed in the "parking lot" to determine how much revenue will be lost due to the delays.

Councillor Kelly inquired if there is any opportunity for community reviews to be driven by the community. Ms. Donna Davis-Lohnes, General Manager, Planning Services, stated communities can play a key role in the process, but she expressed concern with having no staff involved. With respect to the Regional Plan, Councillor Kelly stated it may, in some cases, be contrary to a community objective with respect to areas that can be developed. The Councillor requested that community planning be added to the "parking lot" for further discussion. Mr. English suggested discussion could take place subsequent to the budget approval to determine where Council's priorities are with respect to regional, community and planning applications and how to best utilize the available resources and funding.

In response to questions raised by Councillor Schofield, Ms. Davis-Lohnes explained how heritage will be affected by the proposed budget, noting Starr Manufacturing has been identified in the work plan as a specific project and staff have been allocated to it.

Councillor Cooper inquired about the status of the site of the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children which has been before the Heritage Advisory Committee for consideration of heritage designation. Ms. Davis-Lohnes stated it is her understanding that this project is still under Mr. Dan Norris, Regional Heritage Coordinator, who is now with Tourism. She agreed to clarify this for the Councillor.

Councillor Cooper suggested a couple of staff should be added back into the budget to assist with regional planning. Ms. Davis-Lohnes stated details of the regional planning program are available and further information can be provided to Council. With regards

to the regional planning process, Mr. Meech advised that he expects to firm up the direction and implementation of this with Planning Services in the near future. At that time, information will be provided to Council and debate can follow. Mr. Meech suggested communities could possibly identify key issues on which to focus. Mr. Meech noted if staff is unable to meet expectations with respect to planning, the Municipality should be in a better position next year to restore some funding into this program.

With respect to layoffs, Ms. Davis-Lohnes clarified there are 7.5 FTEs being reduced, but this only involves 4 actual layoffs.

RECESS

A recess was taken at 11:55 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 1:00 p.m. Councillors Hetherington and Blumenthal were no longer present. Councillor Adams took his place at the meeting at 1:00 p.m., Councillor Barnet at 1:25 p.m., Councillor Dooks at 1:40 p.m., Deputy Mayor Uteck at 2:05 p.m.

As the Deputy Mayor was not present when the meeting reconvened, Councillor Rankin assumed the Chair.

iv) Tourism

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Tourism. The overall change in the Tourism budget from 1998-99 was a 21.7 percent decrease.

In response to a question of Councillor Schofield regarding the Tourism Centre in Mic Mac Mall, Mr. Lew Rogers, Director, Tourism, stated there is already some cost-sharing with the Mall for this service, but he agreed to look into the possibility of further cost sharing.

Councillor Schofield expressed concern with cuts to Natal Day funding and requested that this item be placed in the "parking lot" for further consideration. Council agreed to his request. The Councillor suggested the Millennium Committee could provide funding for the HRM Natal Day float for the next few years. Mr. Meech replied he has asked Mr. Bill Stevens, Millennium Coordinator, to place this before the Committee, but suggested the best that can be expected is a possible 50/50 partnership arrangement.

Councillor Greenough inquired about the impacts of the cut to Natal Day funding. Mr. Andrew Cox, Coordinator, Festivals and Special Events, replied the Natal Day Committee has only met once since becoming aware of the proposed cut, and, therefore, no decision has been made yet as to the impacts. Councillor Greenough suggested this issue should

be referred to the Natal Day Committee for further information. Mr. Cox noted the Committee will meet next on March 4 and can prepare a response to the Program and Service Review Committee.

Responding to a question of Councillor Harvey regarding the Communities in Bloom ceremony, Mr. Rogers stated staff recognizes that this is a commitment made by HRM and it will proceed as planned. Staff will also be seeking additional funding from the private sector and sponsorship for this event.

(Councillor Barnet took his place at the meeting at 1:25 p.m.)

Councillor Fougere stated the constraint that can be shown over the next twelve months will result in long term gain, and, hopefully, after this one year, money can be funneled back into this program, thus reducing the impact.

With regards to special events receiving funding cuts, Councillor Stone inquired if there is any expectation that these events will not be held. Mr. Rodgers replied the organizations affected were notified as soon as the budget was tabled in order to give them the opportunity to seek alternative revenue sources. However, he could not guarantee that these events will continue.

Councillor Sarto suggested the cuts to Natal Day funding should be modified to lessen the impact. The Councillor also suggested Councillors could look at the possibility of making a contribution to Natal Day funding from their discretionary funding.

(Councillor Dooks took his place at the meeting at 1:40 p.m.)

v) Development Services

Mr. George McLellan, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the effects of the proposed 1999-2000 Operating Budget on Development Services. The overall change in the Development Services budget from 1998-99 was a 1.5 percent increase.

In response to a suggestion of Councillor Kelly, Mr. Ed Thornhill, Regional Coordinator, Inspections/Enforcements, stated staff is attempting to reduce duplication of staff visiting work sites, however, this is not reflected in this Operating Budget.

Councillor Walker requested information as to where in Regional Operations the Street Opening Permits was moved. Mr. McLellan replied this information will be provided to the Councillor.

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With respect to by-law enforcement, Councillor Adams stated he would like to see the Municipality being permitted to send notices to unsightly properties with a 48 hours notice to clean up property, or the Municipality would do so and charge the property owner. Mr. Peter James, By-Law Enforcement Officer, stated the Dangerous and Unsightly Premises Committee meets once per month and written notice is required to the property owner 10 days prior to the meeting date. At the Committee level, 30 day orders can be issued. These notice are legislated by the Province. Councillor Adams requested that this matter be referred to Legal Services to look into seeking the required legislative changes to allow 48 hour notices. Council agreed to this request.

In response to a question of Councillor Adams regarding allowing the Mainland South MPS to be amended by the community, Mr. Meech stated he believes staff can look at this specific situation and provide some advice to the Councillor as to how this can be handled.

(Deputy Mayor Uteck took his place at the meeting at 2:05 p.m. and assumed the Chair.)

Responding to concerns expressed by Councillor Greenough, Mr. Thornhill stated there is no anticipated change in service with respect to building inspections. He noted that delays are often caused by pending approvals from other agencies rather than Development Services.

Councillor Schofield inquired if the new legislation will allow HRM to make Community Councils Unsightly Premises Committees, and staff replied that this is possible. The Councillor suggested this may be a way to deal with these issues more promptly. Councillor Hendsbee spoke in support of this suggestion.

With respect to delays in obtaining permits, Councillor Cooper suggested HRM may want to look at obtaining bonds from those seeking permits.

Councillor Stone suggested if there was more enforcement of by-laws it may provide enough revenue to hire another by-law enforcement officer.

With respect to signage, Councillor Stone inquired if there is a new by-law in place. Mr. Thornhill replied there is no harmonized by-law at this time, and staff is still working under former legislation. Enforcement of the by-law is generally complaint driven. Ms. Sharon Bond, Regional Coordinator, Subdivision/Development, noted many of the signs in question are in HRM road right-of-ways and suggested Regional Operations and Development Services need to identify how to deal with the illegal signage issue on HRM property.

Responding to a question of Councillor Stone regarding enforcement of solid waste by-

laws, Mr. James stated he would have no problem with providing municipal by-law warning tickets to the solid waste collectors to issue on By-Law Enforcement's behalf.

Councillor Dooks expressed concern regarding the safety of By-Law Enforcement Officers and suggested it may be necessary to provide them with sidearms. Mr. James replied staff work very closely with Police Services and concerns are addressed through this connection.

Councillor Barnet raised a suggestion from a constituent regarding a possible revenue opportunity for the Municipality by examining licensing fees for delivery and courier vehicles in exchange for exclusive use of loading zones. Mr. James replied staff can look into this suggestion.

Councillor Barnet expressed concern with the Community Councils dealing with unsightly premises noting many are not covered by a Community Council and there will also be an increased requirement of staff to attend various Community Council meetings.

Councillor Cunningham stated it was his understanding that a harmonized sign by-law has been in the works for a year or so, and expressed concerns regarding stacked signs. Mr. McLellan suggested the Dartmouth By-Law could be amended to deal with stacked signs. Councillor Cunningham stated he would pursue this at a later date. Mr. Meech noted if there is a former municipal unit by-law that Council would like to implement, that particular by-law could be adopted for HRM and would save time in the review process. Councillor Cunningham inquired if this suggestion could be looked at with respect to the sign by-law. Mr. Meech replied in the affirmative.

Councillor Harvey inquired when Supplementary Educational Funding will be discussed. Mr. Meech suggested background information could be sent out to Council and this matter could be discussed next week at a Committee of the Whole meeting.

MOVED by Councillors Fougere and Rankin that the 1999-2000 HRM Operating Budget be approved in principle conditional on the successful resolution and consideration of all matters in the "parking lot."

Councillor Cooper spoke against the motion stating it was premature to make any motion as there are too many unanswered questions.

The meeting schedule for next week was discussed and Council agreed to the following:

Tuesday, March 3, 1999 - Committee of the Whole - Capital Budget (approval of Capital Budget during the Regular Session to follow)

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Wednesday, March 4, 1999 - Program and Service Review - Parking Lot Items
Thursday, March 5, 1999 - Committee of the Whole - Operating Budget
Tuesday, March 10, 1999 - Regional Council - Approval of Operating Budget

In response to a question of Councillor Walker, Mr. McLellan advised that the Partial Residential Tax Exemption and the Councillors' Discretionary Grant Funding will be included in the "parking lot" discussions.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

**MOVED by Councillors Greenough and Rankin that the meeting adjourn at 2:50 p.m.
MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Patti Halliday
Assistant Municipal Clerk