



Halifax Regional Municipality Issues and Initiatives

For More Information Contact
Dan English
Chief Administrative Officer
englisd@halifax.ca
490-6430

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Introduction

The following document highlights some of Halifax Regional Municipality's current initiatives and issues.

HRM came into existence in 1996 as the result of the amalgamation of the former cities of Halifax, Dartmouth, the Town of Bedford and the former County of Halifax. Ours was one of the first of the many municipal amalgamations that took place across the country, beginning in the 1990s.

As a regional municipality, we have a rich history and culture. We are unique in many respects. We are Canada's largest municipality, covering more than 5,600 kilometres, an area larger than the Province of Prince Edward Island. Unlike many other urbanized municipalities, we have a very large rural area.

Halifax continues to serve as the capital city of the Atlantic Provinces. Its economy is strong and diverse. It has one of the largest deepwater, ice-free ports in the world and is one of the top three ports in Canada in terms of traffic, which it handles through its inter-modal facilities. It is the regional centre for government, post-secondary education, research and development, medical and health services and the financial and business community. Despite a lack of growth in the public sector, employment continues to grow. The unemployment rate of 5.6% is among the record lows, and is well below that of most major Canadian cities including Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Ottawa.

Council Focus Areas

On October 3, 2006 Council approved a list of 4 areas of focus

- Infrastructure
- Community Development
- Public Safety
- Tax Reform

The Council Focus Areas are a regional strategic priority setting exercise and an articulation of the areas Council believes require specific and focussed attention.

The focus areas represent multi-year issues and they will not necessarily be resolved within one single budget year, rather indicate the direction of Regional Council on those key topics. However, each year, specific needs and priorities within a focus area will be reflected in budget and business plans. This will require a balancing of priorities with the capacity of the organization. Choices will be made and new approaches will be considered.

Finance

HRM continues to face increasing budgetary pressures. The \$630.9 million budget for 2005/07 is approximately \$42 million (7% higher) than seen the prior year. These increases are due to several pressures:

- **Provincial Costs** - Under Provincial legislation, HRM is required to fund Mandatory Education costs (ie a share of the School Board's budget) which for HRM is one of the fastest rising costs. Over the past five years, mandatory education payments have increased from \$59.6 million (actual, 2001-02) to \$83.0 million (budgeted, 2006-07), a 39.3% increase – a rate almost 1.6 times the growth of funding for municipal services. The cost to HRM of the Provincial assessment system will rise by \$ 1.3 million (from \$4.4m to \$5.7m). Corrections system cost will increase by \$370,000, from \$7.2m to \$7.6m this year. In total, about 25% of the general tax rate goes toward mandatory provincial expenditures.
- **Inflationary Pressures:** Inflationary pressure on construction costs is significant, growing far more rapidly than our revenues. For instance, in the last 10 years, the local Consumer Price Index (CPI) has risen just over 20%. The cost to re-surface a kilometre of street, however, has risen over 100%. Sidewalk renewals are up to 150%. Insurance costs have more than doubled. There is a growing gap between CPI and the cost to do municipal services. Pressure such as this makes it even more challenging to slow the growth of the infrastructure deficit. Adding to this pressure is the dramatically rising cost of fuel, and the subsequent impact it has on municipal operations.
- **Service Improvements:** New services approved in 2006/07 include bus rapid transit; police dispatch and officers.
- **Debt Reduction:** HRM's debt, which is supported by the property tax rate, continues to steadily decline. At the end of the 2005/07 fiscal years, our debt is projected to be \$273 million. At its peak in 1999, debt reached \$348million. Despite this, our total debt level is considered high, compared to other Canadian municipality standards. To reduce the debt, more capital projects are funding "pay as you go" (capital from operating). To deal with the larger capital budget, "pay as you go" has increased \$4.1 million over the past year.

Transfers from other levels of Government continue to be minimal. Compared to other major municipalities, HRM receives very low transfers. In 2006/07 HRM expects to receive approximately 1.7% of its revenue from provincial transfers.

Another 1.0% is received from the provincial government and its boards and agencies through grants in lieu and tax agreements.

Most of the increased budget is funding from property tax revenues, which are estimated to increase by \$24.7 million this year. This is after an overall reduction of 5.1%. Some of this current increase is the result of new properties or developments in HRM. On average, total property taxes for a single-family home increased by about \$100 in 2006.

HRM also provides both rebates and deferrals for low income individuals. Those with family income under \$27,000 can receive rebates up to \$700. The remainder of tax owing can be deferred.

HRM has recorded small budget surpluses for each of the past six years, and Council has lowered the General Tax Rate slightly in five of the past six years. As a result of strong growth in both the economy and the population base, we have seen substantial growth in our tax base. However, such growth also brings with it the need for new services, which translate into additional costs.

HRM would appreciate any opportunities to discuss in more detail specific municipal priorities as budget and funding decisions are being discussed. Some of HRM's biggest pressures are being felt in the areas of environmental sustainability, transportation and the continued support of economic, social and cultural infrastructure.

Like many municipalities, HRM is also experiencing tremendous pressure on the property tax system, as residents in some areas are seeing substantial increases in assessment without any corresponding increase in services. It's important to point out that HRM has among the highest dependencies on property taxes as its primary source of revenue of any municipality in Canada. Regional Council has established a Tax Reform Committee (TRC) to review the foundations of the property tax system. It is based upon the premise that there needs to be a consensus on "what we want our tax system to do for us?" Tax reform is intended to provide a very broad review of the taxation system, including the relevance of the market value system and by implication the many components of the system including the relationship of the tax system to economic competitiveness and population growth. This process will include public consultation and cooperation with the Province.

Regional Plan

HRM's first Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (Regional Plan) was adopted by Regional Council on June 27, 2006. Following a review by Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, the Regional Plan came into effect on August 26, 2006.

The Regional Plan is a first step to establishing a shared vision of the future of HRM; a vision of healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities, a strong economy and a healthy and sustainable environment. The Regional Plan will direct growth and development in HRM over the next 25 years.

Directing Future Growth

New growth will be directed to a series of Centres located throughout HRM. These Centres will be compact, well-designed, mixed-use communities with access to services and amenities. They will be linked to one another through an integrated transportation system of improved transit service (such as bus rapid transit and high speed ferry), active transportation corridors and new or expanded roadways. An open space system of parks and trails, wilderness areas and wildlife corridors, and natural resource areas will serve and support the Centres and help to define their boundaries.

Community Visioning

Now the Regional Plan is approved, the work to implement it begins. Key to implementation is a new Community Visioning program to be piloted in three of HRM's distinct communities – Bedford, Fall River and Musquodoboit Harbour – in 2006/07. Regional council approved the visioning project in September and over the fall and winter, residents in each of these communities will come together to create a vision and action plan.

Functional Plans

The preparation of "Functional Plans" is also key to the Regional Plan's implementation. Some, like the Active Transportation Plan and Cultural Plan, are complete, while for Community Energy and Open Space, as two examples, are gearing up to begin. Each Functional Plans will contain specific actions to be taken by HRM to ensure the municipality's programs are consistent with the Regional Plan. Functional Plans called for in the Regional Plan include:

Active Transportation	CommunityEnergy <i>*includes Wind</i>
Affordable Housing	<i>Energy</i>
Business Park Development	Cultural
Capital District Public Infrastructure	Economic Development
Communication & Public Education	Emission Reduction
Communication Tower/Antenna	Finance
	Halifax Harbour

Heritage
 Potential Hazards to Development
 Open Space
 Opportunity Sites Redevelopment
 Public Transit
 Regional Parking Strategy
 Road & Road Network
 Storm Water Management

Transportation Demand Management
 Urban Forest Master Plan
 Urban Streetscape
 Wastewater Management
 Water Quality Monitoring
 Underground Utilities

Capital Cost Contribution (CCC) Program

HRM has recently completed an assessment of the feasibility of expanding its Capital Cost Contribution (CCC) Program. Integral to the research was coming to an understanding of how these infrastructure changes relate to the regulatory setting in other cities and housing affordability in the local setting. The main purpose behind infrastructure charges is to cover growth-related costs of new development.

The newly completed study:

<http://www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning/documents/>

HRMInfrastructureChargesStudy FinalReport Oct24 06.pdf provides policy

guidance on possible changes to municipal policy and regulations concerning infrastructure charges (An infrastructure charge (also known as a development charge) is a specific dollar value per lot or per hectare or acre that a municipality imposes on a developer to finance the offsite capital costs associated with new development. It is not a charge to finance ongoing maintenance or operational costs.)

People living in pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods lower their risk of obesity by 35%. Even a 10% improvement in our level of physical activity would yield a savings to the province of \$4.75 million. - Heart and Stroke Foundation (2004)

Open Space Development

Enabled under the new Regional Plan, Open Space development is a creative form of subdivision designed to conserve open space. The basic principle of the design is to locate homes on the portion of the site where the soils are best suited for development while retaining the remainder of the site as open space.

A new Guide <http://www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning/OpenSpaceGuide.html> provides an introduction to the concepts, application process, information and studies required to carry out two forms of open space design development in Halifax Regional Municipality.

Groundwater Assessment and Reporting

A new guide to Groundwater Assessment Reporting in HRM

<http://www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning/Groundwater.html> provides general administrative and technical guidance to Subdividers applying for subdivision approval. The guide prescribes a set of minimum requirements for preparing Groundwater Assessment Reports. These Guidelines are not intended to provide a detailed methodologies for conducting a Groundwater Assessment, as there are

a number of acceptable methods. The methodology should be developed and justified by the Qualified Person on a site-specific basis.

To Get More Information

To get more information about the Regional Plan, Community Visioning and the work underway on Functional Plans, visit:

<http://www.halifax.ca/regionalplanning/> or www.halifax.ca/VisionHRM

Infrastructure Planning

HRM is currently working towards the development of a long-term infrastructure strategy for the region. This strategy will guide infrastructure investment to address asset deterioration and deficiencies through recapitalization while balancing new capability projects required to support the areas of growth. HRM faces significant infrastructure challenges to support the requirements and objectives of several strategic plans including the Regional Plan, Cultural Plan, Indoor Facility Master Plan and the Transportation Plan as well as consideration of several opportunities. A funding balance will need to be determined in order to meet the needs of both these areas. Last fall Council approved a set of General Infrastructure Criteria that are used to develop systematic and objective recapitalization and capability plans for infrastructure projects. This approach is coupled with the Asset Management projects which will provide the linkage between municipal strategic plans, available capital and operational resources in order to provide cost effective core service delivery. The information provided through both of these initiatives, Long-term Infrastructure Strategy and Asset Management, will support improved decision making through the provision of well planned, reliable, accurate and timely information regarding HRM's infrastructure.

Environmental Snapshot

HRM plans to strategically move forward on a number of clean air, land, water and energy initiatives. Although not municipal mandates in many cases, they represent very important human health and environmental protection issues impacting the quality of life for HRM residents where more than 40 % of the provincial population live.

Community Benefits:

Environmental Sustainability

- Clean air, land, water, energy options

Fiscal Benefits

- Cost avoidance, life cycle costing, new products and services

Social, Cultural Enhancement

- Through the Regional Plan and Cultural Plan

Local, National, International Recognition and Branding

- Naturally Green, awards/ recognitions

Integrated Approach to Clean Air, Land, Water, Energy (examples):

Air	Land	Water	Energy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean Air Strategy • Climate SMART • GHG Emission Reduction • Bus Rapid Transit • Reduced Idling • Methane Capture • Bio-Fuels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Plan • Solid Waste Mgt. • Sustainable Practices • Sustainable Land Use • Pesticide By-Law • Pollution Prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harbour Solutions • Strategy for Wastewater/ Stormwater • Road Salt Mgt. • Wastewater Discharge By-Law • Water and Sewer Ext. • Septic Stewardship • Bio-Solids Program • Upgrade WWT facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District Energy • Natural Gas Synergy • Wind Power • Energy Performance Contracts • Community Energy Planning • LED lights • Solar Power

Priority Issues Include:

- Major waste and stormwater infrastructure funding deficiencies
- Protection of the natural environment and human health
- Severe weather impacts on an already strained infrastructure
- Collaborative approaches to issues
- Community based stewardship

There are some excellent collaborative and cost sharing opportunities with numerous mutual benefits. Some examples include:

- Preservation of Water Quality , ie, water quality monitoring and guidelines related to sedimentation , eutrophication, bacterial contamination , etc. and related issues such as septic system maintenance and regulations
- Clean Air Strategies and comprehensive Airshed Management Plans
- Community Energy Plans and related renewable energy opportunities
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation ,ie-Climate SMART initiative
- Environmental regulatory and policy information sharing opportunities
- Data collection and information sharing, ie LIDAR mapping of vulnerable areas
- P2 public education and awareness shared opportunities
- Signature Environment Event for 2006-collaborative opportunity
- Public infrastructure renewal , protection, upgrading Fiscal, cultural and social sustainability through a sustainable environment

Sustainability is a key issue facing every Canadian municipality. According to the Federal 2005 Project Green, climate change is the greatest sustainability issue facing Canada today. Greenhouse gas emissions are the leading contributor to climate change\global warming. HRM, like other progressive Canadian cities, has made a commitment to be a healthy, sustainable, vibrant community -- with clean air, land, water and energy options for our citizens. This includes greenhouse gas emission reductions. Enabling funding from other government partners will help dramatically move forward many of the related public transportation, infrastructure, planning and related activities to reduce greenhouse gases and meet the federal, provincial and local goals and mandates.

Cultural Plan

In April 2006 HRM Council approved the Municipality's first Cultural Plan; a comprehensive policy and action plan to guide investment and support for Culture over the next ten years. The Cultural Plan links directly to HRM's growth management, economic development and community development strategies. Culture is recognized within HRM's policy framework as a key pillar of sustainable and health growth.

The Pillars of Culture:

- Arts
- Heritage
- Community Design
- Life long Learning
- Diversity
- Leisure & celebration

The Cultural Plan establishes five strategic directions for which detailed policy development, program and investment will be framed:

Strategic Direction 1: Focused Service Delivery & Partnerships

- integrated service delivery
- partnership development
- community development

Strategic Direction 2: Cultural Access & Equity

- cultural infrastructure
- asset and information management
- promotion and awareness
- equity and diversity

Strategic Direction 3: Promote & Reinforce Community Character

- heritage conservation
- community and urban design
- public art
- building community identity
- public and civic spaces
- leisure and entertainment

Strategic Direction 4: Life-Long Learning & Creative Development

- a "Learning" City and Regiona
- Creative Community
- arts development
- children and youth

Strategic Direction 5: Investment & Promotion

- competing globally
- cultural investment

Implementation of the Plan will be driven by a cultural mandate that emphasizes the Municipality's role as:

HRM as Programmer:

direct delivery of recreation and culture programs and services, facility management and community management and service delivery partnerships

HRM as Investor:

direct and indirect investment in cultural and community facilities, community cultural organizations, public and civic spaces, public art, streetscaping and urban design

HRM as Facilitator:

of partnerships, community development and capacity building; economic development; and heritage and cultural stewardship, and effective governance

HRM as Manager:

of civic heritage and cultural assets, information management, fiscal resources and land use and infrastructure planning and investment

SHORT TERM IMPLEMENTATION:

Highlights: 2006-2007

Priority #1:

Enhanced Community Cultural Development:

- cultural asset mapping and service(s) inventory
- community and public art policy development and art investment
- enhanced art programs for children & youth; HRM Communit Centres
- review of financial support programs for cultural organizations
- community visioning exercises (Regional Plan implementation)

Priority # 2:**Cultural Infrastructure & Cultural Sector Investment**

- multi-sector Creative Community Strategy (including creative cluster development)
- Cultural Facilities Master Plan and financing strategy
- cultural facility/space investment through community centres and HRM owned property
- establish program for community management of HRM culture & heritage facilities
- development Major Events Hosting Strategy

Priority #3:**Building Partnerships & Leverage Resources**

- establish multi-sector Cultural Advisory Committee
- leverage Federal Cultural Spaces Funding for Urban Arts Cluster
- development investment proposal for 2010 Cultural Capital of Canada designation
- establish inter-government cultural investment committee

More information on the Cultural Plan is available on the web at:

www.halifax.ca/culturalplan

Economic Strategy

HRM is the economic hub of Atlantic Canada. The region accounts for 40 percent of Nova Scotia's GDP and one fifth of all the economic activity in Atlantic Canada. In late fall 2005, HRM released the region's first economic strategy – Strategies for Success. The strategy is an essential component in defining our future and ensuring that future is within our grasp. The strategy sets out 5 goals and 11 priority actions for implementation.

Economic Strategy Goals:

- HRM's bustling job market will stop our young and ambitious from leaving and make our community a magnet for highly trained immigrants and expatriates.
- HRM's investments in social and cultural infrastructure will enhance the city's persona as one of the most vibrant and unique communities on the continent.
- HRM will possess the best business climate in Canada, one able to kick-start and grow ambitious new enterprises and attract exciting companies from anywhere on the globe.
- HRM's renown as one of the continent's great cities — a beautiful, immensely liveable place that teems with history and creativity —will draw top-drawer companies and people to our community.
- Each partner in HRM's future will work in sync to propel our economy forward in a way that improves the quality of life for every citizen.

Economic Strategy Priority Actions:

- Work with businesses and existing ethnic, cultural communities and recent immigrants to attract and retain new immigrants.
- Develop and promote a compelling community business case for retention, expansion and attraction of DND facilities and other federal government offices.
- Support rural economic development by encouraging and providing support services to those individual and organizations establishing or maintaining businesses in rural areas.
- Build support and work to fast track social investment projects that are already well advanced.
- Establish a Quality of Place Council to review existing brand equity in HRM and develop a multi-partner approach to marketing HRM.
- Benchmark tax, regulation, development permit approval/timing against competing cities.
- Bring infrastructure spending up to appropriate comparable standards.

- Work with Nova Scotia trade partners to inform and educate HRM business about exporting. Identify and assist trade-ready companies to enter new markets.
- Establish new and enhanced maintenance initiatives and standards with a focus on year-round, 24/7 accessibility in the downtown. Engage through a public/private approach that emphasizes individual and business responsibility and stewardship.
- Work with our partners to identify common values and vision around growing our community. Create an “alignment of strategic intent” and “rules of engagement” to implement this vision.
- Work to develop the Halifax Gateway as the East Cost logistics hub.

More information on the Economic Strategy is available on the web at:

www.halifax.ca/economicstrategy

Immigration Action Plan

In spring 2005, Halifax Regional Council adopted a vision for immigration in our region. *"Halifax Regional Municipality is a welcoming community where immigration is supported and encouraged. Halifax Regional Municipality will work with other levels of government and community partners to increase our collective cultural, social and economic diversity by welcoming immigrants to our community."* Subsequently in early fall 2005 the HRM Immigration Action Plan was developed. The Action Plan sets out a series of tasks that HRM will undertake in providing services to our citizens to create and maintain a more welcoming community.

The following is a summary of the initiatives HRM has committed to undertake:

Action Plan Summary		
	Communications - External Focus	Organizational - Internal Focus
Phase I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host citizenship ceremonies • Provide welcome letters to newcomers from Mayor and Councillors • Website improvements • Develop a "Newcomers' Guide to Halifax" • Create an advisory group of staff and citizens to identify the challenges and needs of diverse communities • Utilize HRM access centres to link immigrants and existing services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfill HRM's diversity mandate to ensure employees represent the population they serve • Develop a list of potential interpreters within the HRM workforce. • Establish a "Where in the World" section in the HRM News employee newsletter.
Phase II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with community partners to provide HRM service information in multiple languages. • Develop additional versions of the "Newcomers' Guide to HRM" in Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish, Farsi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance cultural diversity training for customer service and front-line public facing employees. • Encourage appropriate behavior and create staff performance accountabilities for recognizing diversity.

Action Plan Summary		
	Communications - External Focus	Organizational - Internal Focus
	<p>and Russian and French.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase diverse community representation on municipal committees and in policy & event planning. • Improve staff training in communications, in particular in providing plain language correspondence. • Explore opportunities for the three levels of government to co-locate service centres. • Collaborate with Halifax Regional School Board to provide information to students on civics and by-laws. • Promote culture in HRM. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance emergency service protocols for dealing with diverse languages.

Implementation of the Immigration Action Plan is ongoing. Significant progress has been made in a number of areas including:

- Mayor Kelly hosted citizenship ceremonies on October 16, 2006. 35 new Canadians took their citizenship oath. Each new citizen received a welcome package including information about HRM services.
- The official launch of the immigration website was held during HRM's 2006 Diversity Week Kick off
- HRM has been awarded a \$14,000 grant from the Provincial Office of Immigration to assist HRM in the promotion and welcoming of newcomers to our city and educate the public on the importance of newcomers to HRM.

A copy of the Immigration Action Plan is available on the web at:
<http://www.halifax.ca/communications/ImmigrationActionPlan.html>

Conclusion

As a municipal government, it is our responsibility to maintain and expand the collection of municipal services and infrastructure within our boundaries. However, we also have broader responsibilities towards the environment, the economy and the nation, as a whole. We have made considerable progress towards achieving many of our goals. Along with our Federal and Provincial partners, we hope to continue to move forward and look for new tools and funding where our issues converge, such as in sustainable planning, environmental management, economic growth, culture and green infrastructure.