

Questions & Answers on HRM Standing Committees

Why has Council moved to Standing Committees?

After significant discussion in November 2010 Regional Council adopted the move to Standing Committees. The intent of the Standing Committees is not to create additional administrative burden but to:

- Streamline and consolidate a number of existing Committees of Council
- Better enable Council's and staff's focus on the Corporate Plan and Council's Focus Areas
- Increase the accountability and oversight of Advisory Committees
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Council decision making by providing opportunity for increased discussion on strategic issues prior to coming to Regional Council

Further background can be found on the HRM web site in the originating reports and presentations at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/101012cowAgenda.html>

Who sits on Standing Committees?

Standing Committees are part of Regional Council's own governance and decision making structure. Each Standing Committee is made up of eight (8) members of Council. One (1) member is appointed by each Community Council and two (2) members of Council are appointed "at large".

The current make up and membership of the Standing Committees can be found on the HRM web site at <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/index.html#standing>.

How many Standing Committees are there? And what are they responsible for?

There are six (6) Standing Committees that align generally with Council's Focus Areas and Governance responsibilities. They are:

Administration: Consolidating Membership Selection/CAO review/Emergency Management/Volunteer Awards & oversight of Council Governance Issues & Corporate Performance

Appeals: Consolidating Appeals and Dangerous & Unsightly Committees under one committee

Audit & Finance: Consolidating Audit Committee (HRM Charter), oversight of Financial Outcome Areas and HRM's Enterprise Risk management

Community Planning & Economic Development: Oversight of HRM's Regional Plan and related strategies and HRM's Economic Outcome Areas and related strategies

Environment & Sustainability: Oversight of matters related to the Environment & Sustainability including but not exclusive to Solid Waste Resources, Energy Security and Sustainability, Parks, Forests (urban & rural) and Open Spaces and Water Resource Management.

Transportation: Oversight of HRM Regional Transportation Outcome Areas and related strategies including Transportation Demand Management (TDM), Safety & Accessibility, Transit, and Active Transportation.

Draft Terms of Reference are under discussion at the Committees and will be available for each Standing Committee by the end of March 2011 following approval by Regional Council.

What type of items and reports should go to the Standing Committee and how does that decision get made?

Standing Committees are intended to focus on the more strategic initiatives in their areas of oversight and responsibility. The types of reports that should come to the Standing Committees are about “What?” HRM should be focusing on and “Why”? These are the questions that help Council and Administration set the *strategic direction* and *priorities* for those areas of focus.

In addition the Standing Committees are responsible for carrying out Council’s governance responsibilities such as oversight, review of policies and improvement of Council procedures, appointments and oversight of Advisory Committees and the legislative requirements of Council under the Halifax Charter such as Audit, Appeals, and responsibility for Emergency Management.

Just like Council each Standing Committee has a Chair and Vice Chair and follows the Council and Committee processes outlined in Administrative Order# 1 – *Procedures of Council*. Each Standing Committee is supported by the Clerk’s Office and by the Directors and Staff for their area of oversight. Each month the Clerk’s Office, Senior Staff and the Standing Committee Chair meet to determine the items that need to be addressed by the Standing Committee and prepare the agenda for the following meeting.

Agendas and Reports and the Minutes of the Standing Committees are posted on the HRM web site at <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/index.html#standing>

How do we know when Standing Committees are meeting?

Standing Committees meet once a month or as otherwise determined by the Committee. A schedule of the Standing Committees meetings can be found on the front page of HRM web site on the HRM Online Municipal Calendar <http://www.halifax.ca/calendar/>.

The intent is, as much as possible, to keep the Standing Committee meetings on a set schedule that both Staff and the Committee can count on.

What type of items and reports can bypass the Standing Committees and go directly to Council and how does that decision get made?

There are many matters that should bypass a Standing Committee and go directly to Council. Those would include: MPS amendments and Planning matters not addressed at Community Council; awards from the Special Events and Grants Committees; matters under the Heritage Act; Tenders and Awards; and other matters that are strictly Regional in focus.

Sometimes it is just a matter of timing that may require that a matter be brought directly to Council. Making those types of decisions is the role of the Senior Management Agenda Review process, which occurs every Tuesday and/or the Directors in discussion with EMT. The Clerk's office will be glad to assist in making those inquiries if a manager has any doubts or concerns in this areas. Once again, the purpose of the Standing Committees is not to create obstacles to decision making but to provide an opportunity for Council to engage with staff on strategic matters that will be coming to Council.

What staff need to be at the Standing Committee meetings? Do they also have to go to the Council meeting where the item is discussed?

Each Standing Committee has a member (or members) of the Senior Management Team who act as Liaison with the Standing Committee. Those include:

Administration: Mike Labrecque, Deputy CAO Corporate Services & Strategy

Appeals: Legal Services, Staff responsible for By-law Services and Dangerous and Unsightly inspections

Audit & Finance: Cathie O'Toole, Director of Finance and Larry Munroe, Auditor General

Community Planning & Economic Development: Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Planning and Jennifer Church, Managing Director, Governance & Communications

Environment & Sustainability: Phillip Townsend, Director, Infrastructure & Asset Management

Transportation: Ken Reashor, Director of Transportation and Public Works

Those Directors, along with the Clerk's Office, have met with the Senior Managers who are most likely to have reports to the various Standing Committees. If a manager has a report that is scheduled on the agenda of a Standing Committee the Managers (or staff) if at all possible should attend that meeting. Staff are not expected to attend Committee meetings for information items.

Once the issue comes to Council there will be both a staff report and a report from the Standing Committee. Staff would be expected to attend and answer Council's questions on the staff report. The Chair and/or Members of the Standing Committee will be responding to questions coming from the report of the Standing Committee.

Are Standing Committees open to the press and the public? And can the public make presentations to Standing Committees?

Standing Committees are governed by Administrative Order #1 – Procedures of Council. As such, meetings of Committee of Council are open to the press/public except for items that fall within the Charter definitions of "In Camera".

The Committee can determine when/if and how they should receive public input on any items that they are considering. There is no open public participation at Committee Meetings.

What about other Committees of Council?

The move to Standing Committees consolidated a number of Committees of Council. There are still a number of Advisory Committees that continue to do the work required of them by their Terms of Reference from Council. Some of those Committees will now report to either a Standing Committee, Community Council or, in a small number of cases, directly to Regional Council. A full list of Committees of Council can be found at <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/index.html>