

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The HRM Tax Structure Committee developed a proposal for the funding of public safety issues which they presented to HRM Council on July 16<sup>th</sup> 2002. Members of Council wanted to ensure that the public had an opportunity to comment prior to additional deliberation of this proposal. A team consisting of staff and the Chair of the Tax Structure Committee was formed to respond to all tax structure questions and related issues, during the public consultations.

The majority of the public at these meetings appreciated the consultation process, notwithstanding there were opposing opinions on the proposal itself. As a result of the feedback provided through public meetings, telephone and e-mail the following has been concluded:

- The majority of people agreed in principle that there should be a basic level of fire service across HRM, however, they were not always clear as to the best way to finance it.
- There was no consensus that street lights and school crossing guards are acceptable components of this proposal; many questioned the “health and safety” basis as well as the Council approved standards to implement these services.
- The attendees questioned if the Recreation component of this proposal was in fact a safety issue, nevertheless, there was guarded optimism that this proposal would enhance Recreation opportunities throughout HRM
- the asphalt curb and gutter component of this proposal prompted two separate observations:
  - < the residents clearly indicated that the lack of sidewalks throughout the municipality constituted a safety issue and should have been a component of this proposal
  - < due to a lack of clarity in the information provided, the attendees did not fully understand that only the urban general rate would pay for these improvements
- the 5 cent rural subsidy issue was one of the most controversial components of this proposal for two reasons: many were not aware that the subsidy exists and second it was a difficult concept to explain. As such it prompted division among communities.

The level of public participation in this process was impressive in terms of the historical attendance at public consultations; however, there is concern that this does not capture the views of all citizens of HRM.

It is recommended that this report be tabled to allow members of Council to digest the information and give the public an opportunity to review the report and provide further feedback to Councillors and staff.

One other, unexpected outcome arose from the process followed. It was too compelling to ignore during these meetings that HRM staff need to build stronger bridges of understanding with our citizens. These sessions revealed not only that communications between HRM and its citizens are insufficient, but that citizens have a great desire to be involved in HRM’s decisions. It is recommended that the CAO develop strategies to allow all of HRM’s citizens an opportunity to participate in the decision making process.

## **BACKGROUND**

In May 2000, Halifax Regional Municipality ( HRM ) Council approved the creation of a sub-committee of Council (with staff representation) to review the current tax structure. On May 14<sup>th</sup> 2002, the Tax Structure Committee presented an Information Report to Committee of the Whole outlining details of proposed changes to the existing HRM Tax Structure. At that point, Staff were directed to provide financial impact information prior to beginning public consultations. On July 16<sup>th</sup> 2002, the Tax Structure Committee returned to Council and recommended a revised tax structure for purposes of public consultations.

The HRM Council approved a public consultation schedule that included 14 meetings throughout HRM from September 16<sup>th</sup> to October 24<sup>th</sup>. The schedule was based on geographic locations to ensure that the majority of citizens would have an opportunity to attend. The HRM website, local newspapers and radio as well as a mass mailout of a brochure were used to generate public awareness of the proposal and meeting schedule.

In their proposal, the Tax Structure Committee developed four Principles to use as criteria as a basis to make their recommendations:

- Everyone Pays for Services Received
- Everyone Shares in Paying for Services one has Access to
- Everyone Pays for Basic Universal Services
- Commercial Tax Base belongs for the Benefit of all HRM

The following is an outline of the proposed tax structure model to which the above Principles were applied. The model was accepted by Council in principle to obtain public feedback:

1.) Placing the following additional items in the general tax rate:

- Volunteer and core fire departments
- Street lighting
- Cost sharing on capital upgrades for existing Recreational Facilities
- Cost sharing on the construction and acquisition of new Local and Regional Recreational Facilities
- Capital repairs for existing recreation and community facilities (on a go forward basis)
- School Crossing Guards
- The HRM call centre

- 2.) That Local Improvement Charges on upgrading of existing asphalt curb to concrete curb and gutter be eliminated.
- 3.) That all areas of HRM with access to Metro Transit should share equally in the cost of Metro Transit.
- 4.) That the \$0.05 transfer from Urban/Suburban to Rural general tax rates be eliminated

The foundation for the proposal is to ensure all citizens of HRM have access to basic health and safety services regardless of where they live, work or travel within HRM. There are communities across HRM who do not have a sufficient tax base to afford a basic level of service. The Tax Structure Committee believed that this was of utmost importance to address, thus the slogan for this proposal is *Commitment to Community 2003*.

## **REPORT OBJECTIVE**

The Objective of this report is to evaluate the public consultations and provide a detailed analysis to determine if residents of HRM agreed or disagreed with the new Tax Structure Proposal. This report will act as an information tool for all residents of HRM to allow them to see what was captured at the meetings and to confirm that their voices were heard. It will also provide Councillors with the opinions expressed throughout the *Commitment to Community 2003* meetings. It is recommended that feedback to this report and from the public will be included in Council's final deliberations.

## **PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS**

The majority of residents who attended the meetings expressed pleasure that both HRM Council and staff recognized the importance of obtaining public opinion; however, scepticism in regard to this proposal being already "a done deal" and lack of trust were prevalent themes. Many residents expressed frustration as they did not feel prepared to discuss this proposal due to lack of available information prior to the meetings; it was suggested that this was an Information Session as opposed to a Consultation Session.

Throughout the public consultation process it became evident that HRM staff and Council members need to develop better education tools to enhance public awareness concerning topics such as municipal taxation, service standards, Municipal/Provincial authority, etc. The lack of understanding made it difficult for the team of presenters to discuss the proposal and alternately it was a frustrating process for the public. Due to the fact that there is a need for this education component to take place, some of these quotes may be out of context.

The public was pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this process, however, it was made clear at each meeting that such a process was long overdue and that decisions made during past Municipal, Provincial and Federal exercises did not necessarily reflect the opinion of the public. The majority of attendees expressed concern around HRM staff understanding local issues but were respectful toward staff and welcomed the opportunity to use this process to communicate in person.

One prevalent concern was the lack of available information prior to the consultations; the sessions were seen as a provision of information as opposed to a collaborative process. However, the information available at the meetings was deemed very effective; especially the document that contained impact details by Community and the comment sheet. Many residents approached staff at the end of the meeting with completed comments sheets as they felt uncomfortable speaking in a public forum. Regardless, residents often found it difficult to express a firm decision for or against the proposal

While the impact sheets clarified the individual tax amounts by community, they also moved the focus of the debate from the service issues to the changes in the level of taxation. Many individuals felt they could not afford any additional increases in taxation. Part of the cause of this feeling goes back to the assessment system and

the inequities the public feels it creates.

The public meeting format did create “scope creep” challenges. Each of the Community meetings contained questions, concerns, opinions and statements which were outside the mandate of *Commitment to Community 2003*. The decision was made by the staff and Council members who attended these meetings to respond to the items which had dependencies or relationships to the proposal ( ie: assessment ). Other comments that impacted the individual personally were dealt with once the meeting adjourned.

The tone of the meetings dictated its outcome and deterred from the objectives of the consultation. For instance:

- Some meetings focused more on issues of a local nature than the proposal.
- Meetings in the majority of areas diverted to comments or questions regarding topics outside the scope of the proposal, for example, Assessment, Harbour Solutions, Amalgamation, etc.
- Attendance was dictated by the financial impact of this proposal in that geographic area.
- Often attendees had preconceived notions that HRM staff do not comprehend each of their community issues, needs and wants
- the lack of trust in both HRM staff and Council members as well as the process was evident in each of the 14 meetings

In addition, meetings in Sheet Harbour, Cole Harbour, Lake Echo and Brookside had external distractions that hindered participation and frustrated those present.

## LEVEL OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following table provides statistical data for each of the *Commitment to Community 2003* Public Consultations:

MEETING	# OF PEOPLE IN ATTENDANCE	# WHO SPOKE (COMMENTS/ QUESTIONS)	PARTICIPATION PERCENTAGE
Sheet Harbour	60	17	28%
Fall River	17	7	41%
East Preston	9	4	44%
Hammonds Plains	78	13	16%
Middle Musquodoboit	56	16	28%
Lake Echo	85	14	16%
Tantallon	220	37	17%
Cole Harbour	18	5	27%
Halifax (Bloomfield)	12	4	33%
Ostrea Lake	60	10	17%
Halifax (Keshen Goodman)	10	6	40%
Sackville	26	8	31%
Dartmouth	7	4	57%
Brookside	98	18	18%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>22%</b>

In terms of a public consultation process, the level of participation was extraordinary. However, caution must be exercised as this data may not be representative of the majority of the public based on the total HRM population of approximately 350,000. Participation tended to be highest in the rural areas where the impact was the greatest.

In addition to public meetings, staff received approximately 70 e-mails, 50 phone calls, and 12 letters. Lastly, approximately 60 comment forms were submitted following the meetings. Meetings were recorded and minutes are available on request.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Tax Structure Proposal**

The quote below summarizes the opinions of most of the residents who attended the meetings:

“I can’t argue with what has been presented, what you are trying to do is you are trying to simplify a very overly complicated system. In that regard when it comes to HRM because we are all HRM no matter what it means at the end of the day, it is up to us to improve the general community. Forget the areas urban, suburban, and rural. We should be able to do things for the whole of the community.”

( Brookside )

### **Fire Protection**

A) The majority of people agreed in principle that there should be a basic level of fire service across HRM, however, they were not always clear as to the best way to finance it.

*Quotes:*

“I don’t mind paying taxes if I am getting the services for them. I would like to think that we have adequate fire service but apparently we don’t which is news to me. I also don’t mind paying fire if it means that some of my taxes are going to Ecum Secum or anywhere where people don’t have adequate fire protection. We are a richer community and can afford to support our lifestyle. I don’t want to hear that a child was killed or a fire fighter injured on the Eastern Shore because a small community couldn’t afford the equipment they needed the most.” (Halifax)

“Right now we get money by fund raising. Fund-raising is great but it is not enough. I think with this new tax rate it’s a way for our departments to get the equipment to do a better job. Now streetlights that a different issue, but as far as fire equipment goes that is an excellent way to go.” (Sheet Harbour - Volunteer Fire Fighter)

“I am happy with the fire service in Hammond Plains. I have lived here for 15 years and have heard many times that we weren’t big enough. From what I see, we will be paying an extra three cents but for what? We do not want our money to go to another community.” (Hammond Plains)

“I want to make a point that I am a proud member of the HRM Fire Services. I do have a problem with paying taxes to help other departments. I agree that every department should have nothing but the best equipment, but the way we do it is to take it to an area rate payers meeting so the public knows what is going on, and that they are the ones who make the decision on whether you get a tax rate or you don’t get a tax rate.” ( Tantallon )

*Conclusion:*

The public supports a basic level of fire service across HRM. Should HRM not do that through the general tax rate, the public would support looking at other alternatives.

**B)** The citizens that did support the fire component of this proposal wanted to ensure that if this was approved that there would be “ proof in the pudding”.

*Quotes:*

“If you are going to take more for fire are we going to see it go towards fire? I don’t mind paying for fire if it goes to fire not to the general ledger, as that gets bled off.” ( Hammonds Plains )

“ ..there is one thing lingering in my head, how are we going to be assured that the equipment is going to become available to us before say 7 years?” ( Sheet Harbour )

*Conclusion:*

If this proposal is approved, HRM needs to develop and communicate an implementation plan.

## **Street Lights and School Crossing Guards**

During the staff presentation, it was articulated that the intent of this proposal was not to install streetlights on every pole nor to have a school crossing guards stationed at every intersection. These decisions would be based on Council approved criteria and the focus of these decisions would be based on safety issues. However; many of the rural residents felt additional streetlights were unnecessary and that due to bussing school crossing guards was an urban issue. Rural residents also questioned why they should share in the cost since they felt they could not access these services. Streetlights currently exist in roughly 65% of Rural HRM. Staff were unable to confirm which of the comments they heard represented those who currently had streetlights, and those who do not.

*Quotes:*

“ We’ve been waiting for them ( streetlights ) for years as we are tired of living in the boon docks. We pay for things in our taxes we do not get, so why not pay for something we need.” ( Sober Island)

“Rural residents don’t care about streetlights in rural communities and don’t care about crosswalks in the rural community. We do not want to be rated as urban/suburban communities.” ( East Preston)

“In rural areas, street lights are a health and safety issue because they are adverse to the health of a majority of the creatures living the area and cause great damage to the wildlife.” ( Tantallon)

“A lot of people I know would prefer no lights, not more, we certainly do not want the city standards”. ( Lake Echo )

“...for crossing guards, we need these people, we want to protect our staff and children, we have to give them money, where it is coming from we have to figure that out.” ( Halifax)

“We don’t need streetlights, we don’t want streetlights...streetlights are not a safety issue to us.” (Ostrea Lake)

*Conclusion:*

There is not broad public support for this part of the proposal. Members of the public would have to first be assured that street lighting standards are not excessive. While some citizens would be supportive, many taxpayers view street lighting as local issues not a safety issue. School crossing guards were often seen as an urban-only issue.

## **Recreation**

The question of how this part of the proposal dealt with safety concerns was raised in many of the meeting locations. The general consensus of the speakers was that this would allow greater access to Recreation services.

*Quotes:*

“You are talking about basic essential services, which would be the preservation of life and limb, what is recreation doing in safety?” ( Cole Harbour )

“I am concerned...some Ratepayers Associations are concerned that funding will remain the same for recreation.” ( Waverley )

“Why do we use two different models, we use a model to say fire, lights, roads are done this way and then when we talk about recreation, why do we handle it differently as tax payers? We are paying for it, so it should be included with the other services we require. So I am just wondering why do we use two different models when all of them are services I require?” ( Sackville )

“Suppose Halifax Dartmouth wanted a whole new \$50 million dollar recreation centre, they have much more recreation facilities that we do, and they will continue to do so because of their population.” ( Lake Echo)

*Conclusion:*

While attendees did not view this as a safety issue, they generally supported the concept of HRM partnering with local communities on recreation.

## **Asphalt Curbs**

At these meetings, the public questioned the rationale for this being placed in a “health and safety” proposal. Staff did explain that this would be the most cost effective method of funding curbs and gutters; however, most citizens felt that sidewalks should have been addressed as opposed to the curbs. The opposition to this component was compounded by the inability to properly convey that curbs would be funded only by the urban general rate.

*Quotes:*

“the curbs for example, my understanding of the proposal is that it will not increase the overall tax revenue, it sounds like you are shifting the taxes from the city core to the suburban areas where we don’t have the curbs and sidewalks, now you want to sneak it into the general rate out here, we are going to be supporting the city, with their safety issues while we don’t have it out here.”( Hammonds Plains )

“How is asphalt curbs a safety issue when we don’t even have sidewalks. Why should I pay for someone to have a brand new curb when I don’t have a serviceable curb or sidewalk?”(East Preston)

*Conclusion:*

Those without immediate access to sidewalks felt they shouldn’t pay for curb upgrades. Inclusion in the urban general tax rate would probably satisfy many of these individuals.

## **5¢ Rural Subsidy**

This topic was mentioned in each of the meetings and was one of the most controversial. Many citizens were unaware of the subsidy and felt compelled to defend their own communities. Consequently this created a division among rural, suburban and urban residents.

*Quotes:*

“...this so called elimination of the 5 cent that I have heard described as a subsidy/assistance, as though I do not pay my fair share...I do not see it that way. I moved from Halifax to Haliburton Heights. I expected that when I moved I was not going to get town services, so if you need to call it anything, call it my contribution to the city.” ( Halifax meeting - citizen from Tantallon )

*Conclusion:*

Few taxpayers understood what the subsidy was and how it functioned. As a result, the majority of rural taxpayers believed they paid the full cost of Municipal services and were unwilling to eliminate any such “subsidy”.

## **Metro Transit**

In the recommendation “to ensure all citizens who have access to Metro Transit will pay their share”, the term “access” created much discussion. The public want a common sense approach to determining access. For instance, if a resident is one kilometer from a transit bus stop but the only access for this kilometer is through the woods do they pay?

*Quotes:*

“I think if you have a look at it citizens would have to travel 3 kilometers just to get to the bus stop (in question). If you have to take a car three kilometers, you probably will not take the bus.” (Tantallon )

*Conclusion:*

There was some concern that the term “access” could be used to justify additional taxes for transit where it otherwise wouldn’t be appropriate. If limited to a 1 km walking distance, any changes would likely be accepted.

## **RECURRING THEMES**

Numerous questions were raised about the Principles established by the Tax Structure Committee, notably: “the services one has access to” and “services that are received”. There is confusion among residents as to what services they pay for currently ( ie: what is under the basic general rate in Urban/Suburban/Rural ) .

- **Paying for services not received**

Many residents believe they are paying for services they do not receive and as a result they are subsidizing another part of the Municipality. For example sidewalks are paid for by the urban core but many rural and suburban residents feel they are either currently paying for urban sidewalks or will do so under this proposal.

*Quotes:*

“I appreciate the snow removal, drinking water and green bins, but on the down side we don’t have sidewalks. We are paying high taxes and are not receiving the services. If the tax rates do go to what we expect, will we expect the same level of services as the core area get?” (Hammonds Plains)

“In the flyer that came out to our homes, you include curbs. Its great, it means we’ll get curbs, we don’t have sidewalks, but we will get curbs, because we are paying for them now . I don’t want to pay for things I will never see.” (Middle Musquodoboit)

*Conclusion:*

The public should be informed about what services they pay for in the general rate as well as the Council approved criteria for street lights and school crossing guards.

- **Services one has access to**

Some individuals question the principle that one should pay for the services one has access to.

*Quotes:*

“ Access to transit...the bus service is deplorable, our Councillor’s should have gotten our letters, we are not getting home from work, the people on that bus are absolutely furious.” ( Tantallon)

*Conclusion:*

There needs to be a greater public debate on what constitute access to a service. Some taxpayers view access very narrowly (eg., the street or road in front of their property).

- **People living in rural and suburban areas feel they are subsidizing urban areas and those in urban areas feel they are subsidizing suburban and rural areas**

Many residents feel their residential taxes were being used to subsidize another part of HRM. The small decline in urban tax under the proposal convinced some rural residents that their money would go to the core. There was little discussion on the commercial tax rate or the role commercial tax payers play in keeping residential rates low.

*Quotes:*

“We do not want rural communities to subsidize the core of HRM. We do not want to pay for new fire apparatus for City of Halifax.” (East Preston)

“It appears that rural rates are going up the most, while city rates are actually declining. In a lot of cases, it sounds like you are shifting the taxes from the city core to the suburban areas. Here we don’t have the curbs or sidewalks, now you want to sneak it into the general rate out here. We are going to be supporting the city, with their safety issues while we don’t have it out here.”( Hammonds Plains)

“ This is like Robin Hood, only his motto was take from the rich and give to the poor, only yours is take from the poor and give to the rich, fine but we should not have to subsidize and we should have to live with what we can afford.” ( Middle Musquodoboit )

*Conclusion:*

Residents need more information about taxation and the full costs of providing residential services.

- **There is a lack of trust by residents towards HRM due to past public consultation experiences. Residents want HRM to listen and hear the residents wants and needs for their communities, and then, show that this was taken into consideration when Council makes a final decision.**

*Quotes:*

“The reason you don’t get a lot of people at these meetings, you go to them and nothing happens so why bother nothing changes.” (Hammond Plains)

“This proposal will go forward as planned. You send a committee to the community, have a meeting go back and say we had a meeting and on that precedence the people were informed, asked their opinion and we come back so we’ll go ahead. This didn’t change anything so what’s the point.” (Middle Musquodoboit)

“What I am asking and I have just been told now is that you are going to redistribute money in areas, what is going to happen in areas that need money too. Just because you decide this is priority these people don’t get it” (Sackville )

“...maybe I am like a lot of people who are not here, the experts have had days, months to think about it, and you know all the advantages, and you presented all the advantages to us, is there a down side you know about and you might want to tell us about.” ( Dartmouth )

*Conclusion:*

As discussed elsewhere in this report, release the results of these consultation to the public and provide time for them to respond.

## **Commercial Taxation**

Few comments were received on commercial tax but from those who spoke they felt their taxes were excessive.

*Quote:*

“Five percent of our business is in Canada, 95% is outside, we have to compete something which seems to be totally lost on our Councillors and their staff... The Chairman of the committee who wants to raise my taxes, spend the money, doesn’t look at competitiveness, or attracting investment.” (Tantallon)

*Conclusion:*

There is a need to review the commercial tax burden and its relationship to HRM’s economic growth and competitiveness.

## **NON TAX STRUCTURE ISSUES**

At some meetings it was not evident whether or not the residents supported the proposal based on the limited amount of conversation regarding the Proposed Tax Structure. Parts of these meetings were based on non tax structure issues. For example:

### **a) Assessment**

“I think most people here wouldn’t be here if there wasn’t a horrendous increase in our assessment or a proposed increase in our assessment. It’s unbelievable what’s been going on, if a splash of water hits your land, it is just skyrocketing. Based on what tends to be a false economy and you are about to say, well the Province assesses our land, it’s nothing to do with you, but your whole tax regime, is based on that Province’s assessment.” ( Sheet Harbour )

“...there is an issue we are experiencing here, we are in an area that is currently under construction and we have lived in that house for two and ½ years, the assessment has gone up \$50,000. This is a middle class house, the twin to our house sold this year and it went up \$2,000. So I am thinking the solution possibly is Provinces and the Municipal Government may have to start asking you to not increase us on anything, beyond the inflation rate, without some kind of referendum, because we all have to live with the same salary year after year, then I think that politicians and government should give us that.”

( Dartmouth )

### **b) Amalgamation**

“ When we amalgamated were we supposed to save millions of dollars, I don’t know what happened, I hope it wasn’t the same people that made these calculations.” ( Lake Echo )

“ Why was it when we amalgamated, into HRM I got about a 30 - 50% increase in my property taxes? I was paying about a \$1,000 and when HRM comes along, I am paying \$1,800, and supposedly I am not paying for all these extra services and I am getting less now.” ( Brookside )

“Not everyone who lives here is rich. I grew up in St. Margaret's Bay and live in my grandparent's home. Mine is a single income family. I am willing to pay my bill, but cannot afford to pay someone else. Many seniors are in the same position as myself and simply do not have the income to support these constant increases. Since amalgamation, my services have not improved and my taxes have risen alarmingly. Time to cut our losses, end amalgamation, and capture this tax monster!” ( via e-mail, Tantallon )

### **c) Harbour Clean-up**

“ You would have an uprising here if we are going to pay for Harbour Solutions.” ( Middle Musquodoboit )

“ In respect to Harbour clean-up, if Peter Kelly says you will raise these pollution control rate and adjust the tax rate, who is going to make the decision...will there be a referendum held?” ( Lake Echo )

### **d) Sidewalks**

“I do not believe that the proposal has captured the full range of safety issues.” ( Waverley )

“We don’t need streetlights but sidewalks are a big safety concern for us....how do we get sidewalks.” (Ostrea Lake)

### **e) Roads/ Snowplowing**

“ Why are we not hiring more contractors to plow snow? In our area we have city trucks, we have very little service, they are broke down half the time.” ( Cole Harbour )

“My question is what are you going to do about street repairs, snow removal, because last year, on three occasions minimum, the fire department and ambulatory service could not access our community until well after 4:00pm when other communities on the other side of the 103 had snow removal before 9:00am. So what are you going to do to improve overall service to the ones that do have safety and health issues?” ( Middle Musquodoboit )

“When the city took over the roads, why are some of the roads taken care of by the Municipality and some done by DOT.” ( Brookside)

### **f) Governance**

“ What is the ratio between the rural number of Councillors and the urban? There is a majority of urban Councillors to rural?.”( Sheet Harbour )

### **g) Boundaries**

“Is there a geographic boundary that comes into play when taxes are assessed for an area, what is it, and what constitutes Rural, Urban and Suburban?” ( East Preston )

## **h) Growth - Regional Planning**

“ HRM wanted to take responsibility of governing a large area...if HRM is finding it too difficult to manage - they must find a solution that satisfies the rural customers of HRM. ” ( East Preston )

“ I am concerned about the growth in the area, as a result, the tax rates have increased dramatically and the revenues the municipality collects have increased as well. So the question I have is where are we seeing those benefits directed back to the communities, or is this model going to allow for greatly needed upgrades to this area with all the rapid developments that’s happening. It seems that all the developers can come in here, do things and walk away, we are stuck with the traffic and safety issues.” ( Hammonds Plains )

## **i) Policing**

“ Is Council familiar with census data in terms of district and everyone knows that the Tantallon area is one of the fastest growing real estate districts in North America, for a couple of years, it was the top. And in that area the visible policing services have not changed in 9 years.” ( Halifax )

“It says here on your proposed tax structure that everyone is going to be paying for basic universal services, to me that includes policing. Do you feel that the RCMP is giving the basic level of service.” ( Brookside )

## **RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE PUBLIC**

1) The public made a number of alternative suggestions as to how taxation could work. People agreed with providing access to a basic level of fire service but questioned if streetlights were truly an HRM wide safety issues. School crossing guards were seen as an urban issue. There was the suggestion that this proposal did not address other health and safety services: sidewalks, policing and crosswalks.

### *Quotes:*

“If we cannot get crossing guards can we get crosswalk as least since we will be paying for the service. Why do you limit the scope of public safety to crossing guards and streetlights?”( Hammond Plains)

“HRM police is putting together a proposal to take over the Tantallon RCMP....with the limited funds that are going to come out of the budget, I am extremely concerned about the level of service we will receive. To me police and fire safety are the two biggest issues.” ( Hammond Plains)

“When I lived in Rockingham I moved into a \$1400 sidewalk bill where they put new sidewalk in front of my house. I am willing to pay for sidewalks here. I have children, it’s a safety issue.” (Hammond Plains)

2) The residents did suggest alternatives or enhancements to the current proposal methodology.

### *Quotes:*

“Leave the taxes they way they are and have it set up on a district basis...40% of the revenue generated in each district goes to HRM 60% stays in the district.” (Timberlea)

“Is there any thought in asking the provincial or federal government for an increase in transfer payments? We are taxed and user feed to death by all levels of government.” (Halifax)

“...the whole system is wrong, whereby you run up the price of the house, and some 60 or 70 year old pensioner has to get rid of the family home. It is ridiculous, you should go to a community charge, and pay with the community charge, you are the financial planners, let’s get working on it shall we.”

(Brookside)

“Why not have a plebiscite so we can all vote on it.” (Tantallon)

“Determine the costs and equally divide among everyone, renters included. Renters also need all these service and should pay. Maybe this way low income seniors and single parent struggling won’t be hit so hard.” (Shad Bay)

3) The audience suggested it is mandatory to get the information out to the public prior to these meetings so they can participate in an informed fashion. The impact of the 2003 tax roll on the proposal should be made public. A desire was also expressed for additional consultation prior to the final decision being made.

*Quotes:*

“ I think it is important that HRM staff and Council come out and listen to the residents of HRM. You need to have more opportunities for the residents to find out what’s going on in HRM. If you live in the city you can tune into cable vision and you can get what’s going on at Council meetings.” (Middle Musquodoboit )

“You are trying to bombard people with 2 years of work in 2 hours, we didn’t have an opportunity to read the material.” ( Lake Echo )