

Shape Your Budget – Shape Your City

As Vice-Chair of HRM's Audit and Finance Standing Committee, I am pleased to advise that HRM is seeking input from residents as part of the 2014 budget consultation. As a municipal taxpayer, you can have a say in how your municipal tax dollars are allocated.

Municipal revenue is obtained through both residential and commercial taxes as well as bus and ferry fares, building and development permits, tickets and transfers from other levels of government. Thirty percent (30%) of your municipal tax dollars goes toward provincial services such as education, housing, social services and corrections. The remaining seventy percent (70%) goes toward police and fire services, metro transit, streets and roads, library and recreation services to name a few. Water and sewer costs are not part of the property taxation as those rates are determined by the Halifax Water Commission and are not charged on the property tax bill.

The average residential property tax bill in HRM for a single family home is approximately \$2,500 per year (80% of the residential property tax bills range from \$1,000 to \$4,000). The average commercial property tax bill in HRM is approximately \$43,000 per year with the range including everything from the corner store and gas station to large shopping malls and warehouses. Residential taxes provide 60% of the municipal tax revenue with commercial taxes providing the remaining 40%. Both the residential and commercial tax bills are comparable to other cities across the country. Property taxes are based on the assessed value of your property which is evaluated by the arms-length organization Property Value Services Corporation (PVSC). HRM has three main tax rates: urban, suburban and rural. Everyone's tax bill is different because there is a wide range of property values, as well as various tax rates.

HRM has an annual operating budget of \$824 million and a capital budget of \$165 million which equates to approximately \$4,400 per home. The capital budget is \$165 million. HRM has been doing very well managing the annual budget as is shown by the resulting sixteen (16) consecutive years of surplus and continuing decline in the debt.

The reality facing HRM in budget setting is the same as it is for home owners in that we must also deal with increases to heating costs, electricity and fuel that impact our budget. We must also maintain our infrastructure/property in a state of good repair, as do homeowners, while continuing to provide and improve upon municipal programs and services; which is why we are seeking your assistance in where/how you wish to have your tax dollars allocated.

Each property tax bill currently contributes \$16.92 per month toward fire and emergency services, \$23.75 per month toward police services and \$22.17 toward metro transit. You can help HRM make decisions concerning distribution of tax dollars by letting us know whether you feel this amount is sufficient or whether you feel one area needs more investment.

Visit www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca to find out more about municipal finances/budget allocation. By using the Budget Allocator, you can select your preferred budget and service delivery levels from each of the key Council budget areas listed. As in your personal budget calculations, to add to one area you

may have to take from another. The Budget Allocator will show you how the allocations and any changes to them will impact the budget. I encourage you to visit the website, get informed, and help plan your municipal budget.

Shine a Light on a Volunteer

Volunteers add so much value to our communities by contributing countless hours of service and help to improve the quality of life for all residents.

Do you know an outstanding individual or group making a difference in your community? Consider nominating them in one of three categories for the 2014 HRM Volunteer Awards. The three categories are adult, youth (ages 13-19), and community group. For the nomination application, visit www.halifax.ca/volunteerservices or call (902) 490-6577. The application deadline is December 13th.

Winter Parking Ban

During the 2013/14 winter season, HRM's Traffic Authority will continue with the trial of an amended winter parking ban. The changes offer some flexibility to those who are most affected by the ban, such as shift workers, residents without a driveway and business owners, without compromising HRM's snow and ice clearing operations.

The overnight parking regulations will be in effect from December 15 until March 31, and will be enforced during declared snow and ice operations only. When in effect, the parking ban runs from 1:00 am until 6:00 am.

If you require on-street parking during the winter months, please plan ahead and find alternate parking in the event of a snow storm.

HRM offers residents the option to subscribe to notifications letting them know when the overnight winter parking ban would be enforced. Residents can subscribe to our CityWatch program to receive phone and email messages by emailing citywatch@halifax.ca or by calling 490-7403. Please indicate that you are requesting to sign up for notifications about the overnight winter parking ban. You have the option to provide up to two phone numbers and up to two email addresses or a combination of both. Residents are asked to not rely on notifications alone and to also check HRM's website, twitter feed "@hfxgov" or call our citizen contact centre at 3-1-1.

My wife Cheryl and I extend best wishes to you this holiday season and hope your holidays are filled with love, peace and happiness.