



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 3.2
Audit and Finance Standing Committee
July 19, 2017

TO: Chair and Members of Audit and Finance Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed

Brad Anguish, Director of Parks, Recreation & Communities

DATE: July 11, 2017

SUBJECT: HRM Gun Amnesty Program

ORIGIN

September 20, 2016 - Halifax Regional Council motion:

MOVED by Councillor Hendsbee, seconded by Councillor Nicoll

THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report that shall be vetted through the Audit and Finance Standing Committee to find \$10,000 as cash incentive for the HRM Gun Amnesty program during the 2016-17 fiscal year. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Purpose of HRM Charter

Section 2 of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* provides that

“The purpose of this Act is to

- (a) give broad authority to the Council, including broad authority to pass by-laws, and respect its right to govern the Municipality in whatever ways the Council considers appropriate within the jurisdiction given to it;*
- (b) enhance the ability of the Council to respond to present and future issues in the Municipality; and*
- (c) recognize that the functions of the Municipality are to
 - (i) provide good government,*
 - (ii) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality, and*
 - (iii) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.”**

Crime Prevention

Clause 79(1)(d) of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* provides that “*The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for ... police services.*”

Subsection 68(1) of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* provides that “*The Council may provide police services in the Municipality by a combination of methods authorized pursuant to the Police Act and the board of police commissioners of the Municipality has jurisdiction over the provision of the police services, notwithstanding that they are provided by a combination of methods.*”

Municipal police services are defined in subsection 35(3) of the *Police Act* available at <http://nslegislature.ca/legc/statutes/police.pdf>.

Function of the Police Board

Subsection 55(3) of the *Police Act* provides that the Board of Police Commissioners shall ... (a) “*determine, in consultation with the chief officer, priorities, objectives and goals respecting police services in the community.*”

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Audit and Finance Standing Committee recommend to Halifax Regional Council that:

- (1) Halifax Regional Police (HRP), in partnership with the Public Safety Advisor and Halifax District RCMP, consider gun amnesty program options as part of the 2017/18 Gun Safety Strategy deliverable approved by Regional Council; and, in the event a cash incentive program is determined to be the best way forward, transfer up to \$10,000 to HRP from Fiscal Services, as outlined in the Financial Implications' section of this report.

BACKGROUND

As the result of gun violence in the spring of 2016 involving the deaths of four young men, meetings were held to determine what steps could be taken to mitigate the immediate violence and potentially decrease future violence. These discussions included the Mayor, the Minister of Justice, the HRM Acting Chief Administrative Officer, police leaders of Halifax Regional Police (HRP) and Halifax District RCMP, clergy and members of the general public. One of the suggestions from the community was that a Gun Amnesty Program be put in place for the municipality, similar to the 2009 “Pixels for Pistols” program. Such a program would provide citizens the opportunity to turn over any firearms and/or ammunition to the police without the fear of being charged for possession of an unrestricted, restricted or prohibited firearm. Any firearm received would be checked by the police and further investigated if it were found to be implicated in any kind of prior criminal activity.

On September 6, 2016, Halifax Regional Council supported a new Gun Amnesty Program for Halifax Regional Municipality and directed Halifax Transit to support the program by contributing 50 single tickets for each firearm turned in. During the Council discussion, a concern was raised that offering only bus tickets may not be fair to those who do not use the bus service. It was indicated that a motion would be coming forward to ask staff to prepare a report to explore additional cash incentives for Gun Amnesty. On September 20, 2016, Halifax Regional Council passed a motion requesting a staff report to return to the Audit and Finance Standing Committee to find an additional \$10,000 to use as a cash incentive for the HRM Gun Amnesty Program during the 2016/17 fiscal year.

DISCUSSION

The most recent Gun Amnesty Program ran from September 12 to September 23, 2016. The results of the program surpassed expectations, with 152 firearms turned in. Halifax Transit originally supported the program for 50 tickets per firearm, for an expected dollar value of \$5000. Halifax Transit was able to meet the increased demand and contributed a total of 6,450 tickets with a value of \$12,900. In 2015, 194 firearms were turned in as part of the municipality's normal gun amnesty process with no incentive. Council has requested staff to find \$10,000 as a cash incentive to be applied against an HRM Gun Amnesty Program funded from the 2016/17 budget. Due to timing, this request will now have to be considered in the 2017/18 budget.

While there is data that suggests that Gun Amnesty Programs do not directly decrease violence; there are several advantages to running such a program:

- There is an immediate increase of turning in unwanted firearms over a short span of time;
- Any firearm that is turned over to the police is a firearm that cannot be stolen and used in the commission of an offense;
- Provides an opportunity to raise awareness about safety issues;
- Provides an opportunity to contribute to overall safety as firearms sometimes get in the hands of untrained young people or children; and
- Support for this program demonstrates responsiveness to the community and assists with keeping community stakeholders engaged when looking for other opportunities to increase public safety.

Despite these advantages, there is the concern that:

- Anticipated incentives for a Gun Amnesty Program could encourage the public to hold on to their unwanted firearms and wait for an incentive program to come around so they are rewarded for turning over an unwanted firearm.

A 2017/18 Business Plan deliverable for HRP is to develop a Gun Safety Strategy in partnership with the Public Safety Advisor and Halifax District RCMP. The Strategy will include proactive crime-prevention and social measures, including consideration of gun amnesty program options. Given the Gun Safety Strategy is still in the early stages of development, it is premature to commit \$10,000 for a cash incentive program in advance of defining what type of gun amnesty program, if any, will be developed as part of the Strategy. Therefore, staff is proposing that the Audit and Finance Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council authorize staff to transfer up to \$10,000 to HRP from Fiscal Services in the event that a cash incentive amnesty program is determined to be the best way forward as part of the Gun Safety Strategy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Should a cash incentive gun amnesty program be determined as the best way forward, up to \$10,000 could be made available from Fiscal Services, M310-8004, in the 17/18 fiscal year. Staff will manage the expenditure by an offsetting projection throughout the year. The funds would have to be transferred to the Halifax Regional Police budget to be disbursed by Halifax Regional Police (under the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, HRM is only authorized to expend money on "crime prevention" in the context of providing "Police Services").

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendation in this Report. The risks considered rate as being low.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This initiative will require effective communication with the public to ensure there is community involvement as the success is reliant upon this relationship and community engagement.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

None

ALTERNATIVES

- (1) Audit and Finance Standing Committee could recommend that Halifax Regional Council await the outcome of the Gun Safety Strategy before authorizing up to \$10,000 for a cash incentive Gun Amnesty Program.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

Report Prepared by: Ted Upshaw, Public Safety Advisor, Parks, Recreation & Communities, 902.490.4177
