

Citizens for Halifax Survey (2008.09.22)

Seven (7) Questions.

For each question:

- Part 1 - Citizens for Halifax Statement on Topic
- Part 2 - Survey Question on Topic
- Part 3 - Yes / No electronic button response, plus written elaboration

1.0 Rural and Urban Units

1.1 Citizens for Halifax Statement on Topic

The division of the municipality into two units with smaller councils to better serve the rural and urban communities more effectively and efficiently.

It is evident that current system of governance in Halifax is not serving the needs of residents. The inclusion of the old County of Halifax in the amalgamation process has created many unforeseen problems. The needs of rural residents and urban residents differ significantly. The current size of council (23 councilors plus the mayor) is simply too large for effective decision making and has created a divisive culture for council, pitting one community against the other. The Halifax Regional Municipality is the largest, from a geographical perspective, in Canada. On a population per capita basis, our analysis suggests that the size of council should be reduced from 23 to between 12-14 councilors for similar sized communities. This would add efficiency to the system and facilitate more effective decision-making with fewer, more empowered councilors.

At the same time, it is time to redraw the boundaries of the current municipality into two separate units which would better represent the interests of those living in the urban area and those living in the rural areas. The city municipality could, for example, include the former Town of Bedford, the former City of Halifax and the former City of Dartmouth as the starting point. The former County of Halifax would provide the boundary for that municipality. A plebiscite could be employed to determine the final boundaries. The two resulting municipal units would effectively reduce the size of both councils down to a more manageable number.

The two municipalities would share common services (such as policing, fire protection, public transit and garbage collection) on some form of equitable cost sharing basis.

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1.2 Survey Question on Topic

The division of the municipality into two units with smaller councils to better serve the rural and urban communities more effectively and efficiently.'

Please explain why you support or oppose dividing the municipality in this manner. Specifically, if elected, what concrete actions will you take in support of, or in opposition to, dividing the municipality in this manner?

1.3 Yes / No electronic button response, plus written elaboration

No

At least "No" if it relates to an administrative break up of HRM staff executing their activities. Some adjustments to the geographic boundaries for particular internal administrative units may be useful, but within HRM (ie. Where does a relatively rural eastern district start and stop).

With respect to more effective decision making for the rural, urban, and suburban parts of HRM, I find it preferable to first seek the potential benefits of a smaller HRM council. If that does not adequately address the current concerns, seek the increased use of double majorities or community council committees within a regional council. If those do not bring satisfactory results, and if there is a consistent level of support for the break up of HRM expressed by a clear majority, in a clear vote, on a clear question, well we do live in a democratic society. I would argue against a formal break up, but would accept a democratic verdict to do so.

Conceptually, or in principle, I support the eventual reduction in size of the HRM Council from 23 to about 12 - 14 people. On peninsular Halifax, presumably District 12 (Downtown Halifax) could effectively merge with either District 11 (North End) or District 13 (Northwest Arm - South End).

An alternative that might not greatly reduce the number of districts, could be to use the same geographical areas for municipal council districts and for seats in the provincial legislature. An incentive for better cooperation might exist between provincial and municipal representatives for essentially the same district or group of voters.

Conceptually, or in principle, I support keeping HRM intact administratively. There is a

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useful staff consistency in areas such as engineering, planning, and infrastructure. Perhaps a smaller council would address concerns on the quality of political decision making at HRM Council.

If dissatisfaction continues to exist, I could then support having the municipal council decision making process making more use of something like a double majority or parliamentary committee system. If a specific question is supported or approved by the local "community council," it would go to the full council for a vote.

2.0 Tax Reform

2.1 Citizens for Halifax Statement on Topic

Tax reform that more closely aligns taxes with the actual cost of services delivery.

The costs of running the municipality since amalgamation have risen dramatically, as have the expectations of service delivery, particularly outside the urban core. Indeed, since amalgamation the municipality has had the largest increase in the history of the community, mostly driven by escalating property assessments. This has led to significant inequities in taxation. We support the latest tax reform program brought forward to council, which would allocate the tax burden more fairly. We believe that taxes should be more directly linked to the services provided. This would include a basic charge for fire, police and administration plus add-ons for services received. Consideration would also be given to protecting those on fixed or low incomes.

1.2 Survey Question on Topic

Tax reform that more closely aligns taxes with the actual cost of services delivered.

Please explain why you support or oppose reforming taxes in this manner. Specifically, if elected, what concrete actions will you take in support of, or in opposition to, reforming taxes in this manner?

2.3 Yes / No electronic button response, plus written elaboration

Yes.

We each pay the same rate for a loaf of bread from the corner store. We each pay the same rate for a glass of water from Halifax Water. We pay the same residential

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electricity rate from Nova Scotia Power. We each pay the same rate for a parking meter space from HRM. We each pay the same rate of tax to the provincial and federal governments for a litre of gasoline.

Where one lives could be considered to be a “total package deal” of sorts with benefits and costs. Part of the package for living on relatively cheap abundant land in the suburbs could be to spread the premium costs associated with many roads and pipe over relatively few people who live there. Alternatively, part of the package for living on relatively high priced land in Downtown Halifax, could be to spread the relatively modest costs associated with a small quantity of roads and pipe over the many people who live there. Conceptually, or in principle, I support basing a greater portion of the municipal taxes we pay, on the HRM services we have an opportunity to benefit from or receive.

All people who live in those areas of relatively high property assessments, are impacted by the payments of relatively high municipal taxes. They are being paid for by those living in apartments as part of their rent, and by those living in homes as part of their property taxes. People choosing to live in denser urban arrangements, should receive the benefits for their relatively more efficient and economical use of energy, road, pipe, and other resources.

There may not be sufficient political support among others in HRM to make this happen, but we can try and seek the greatest possible, politically acceptable reforms.

3.0 Aggressive Development of Arts & Culture

3.1 Citizens for Halifax Statement on Topic

More aggressive development of the Arts and Cultural sector by committing a minimum of 1% of the annual municipal budget to this sector.

Council adopted a comprehensive and, for the most part, well-considered Cultural Plan for the municipality in March of 2006. Unfortunately, little has been done since that time to advance that plan. The main reason appears to be related to inadequate funding to support its recommendations. We believe in dedicated and predictable funding for the arts and culture community. We believe a strong and healthy creative class is essential to building Canada’s most vibrant and liveable city. The development of a rich creative class is a core strategy to attracting and retaining more people to our community in our judgment.

Our analysis indicates that the municipality spends only a tenth of one percent of its annual budget on arts and culture. We advocate committing 1% of the annual municipal budget to this sector and implementing the already approved Cultural Plan that will

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foster the creative economy by investing in programs and infrastructure that will allow it to thrive and grow. Consideration should be given to the possible designation of creative areas or districts within the city where creative businesses will be encouraged and supported, to investment in key infrastructure and long-term sustainable financial support of key cultural activities. We also support the creation of an Innovation Award program to recognize the most creative and innovative solutions to the issues and challenges being faced by our city.

3.2 Survey Question on Topic

More aggressive development of the Arts and Culture sector by committing a minimum of 1% of the annual municipal budget to this sector.'

Please explain why you support or oppose committing a minimum of 1% of the annual municipal budget to the Arts and Culture sector. Specifically, if elected, what concrete actions will you take in support of, or in opposition to, committing a minimum of 1% of the annual municipal budget to the Arts and Culture sector?

3.3 Yes / No electronic button response, plus written elaboration

Yes

The HRM community of creative people is far broader than just the “Arts and Culture” sector, although that sector is the focus of this survey question.

An increase in spending from 0.1% to 1.0% is ten times (10 x) the current level, or 1000%. The current Council has not voted to support this scale of an increase. This “Yes” on my part may be more of a commitment to seek additional, sustainable political support from other Councillors, for additional, sustainable funding to the 1% level. I can be a low key but effective advocate among other Councillors. I can appreciate a variety of perspectives, and have successfully sensed potential common ground with others, where it may not have been initially apparent.

There may also be creative alternatives to achieving the same functional result such as activities with multiple purposes, activities incorporated into redevelopment and other projects, and activities that are a catalyst for the involvement of others. The short term result may not be the achievement of the “more aggressive” goal, but the approach could be to aim high with this goal, improve things where possible, understand where any why the most progress is being made, revise the approach where appropriate, and repeat the cycle.

4.0 Chief Sustainability Officer

4.1 Citizens for Halifax Statement on Topic

The creation of the position of Chief Sustainability Officer with the necessary authority and budget to ensure Halifax becomes the most sustainable city in Canada by 2020.

Sustainability is critical, not only for assuring the needs for future generations, but also to reduce costs associated with the consumption of non-renewable energy, generate economic opportunities through the development of “green industries”, and create a city that becomes more environmentally accountable for its actions. This will contribute to making Halifax an attractive place to live and do business.

Our citizens have told us that they want Halifax to lead the way in the adoption of sustainable management practices. These include supporting sustainable development, partnering with industry to reduce the city’s carbon footprint, removing barriers to achieving sustainability, implementing education programs and implementing sustainable procurement practices.

In 2004, the municipality announced the creation of the Sustainable Environment Management Office (SEMO), only to diminish its power significantly by placing it under the authority of Infrastructure and Asset Management. We believe that a higher level of commitment to sustainability is required by the city. Following the lead of national and international companies, institutions and organizations, we propose the creation of the position of Chief Sustainability Officer with senior responsibility equivalent to that of a Chief Financial Officer and a mandate to ensure that the decisions being made by the municipality are in the long-term interest of creating the most sustainable city in Canada by 2020. This is the level of commitment required in our judgment to ensure greater accountability with regard to our environment.

4.2 Survey Question on Topic

The creation of the position of Chief Sustainability Officer with the necessary authority and budget to ensure Halifax becomes the most sustainable city in Canada by 2020

Select 'Yes' if you support creating the position of Chief Sustainability Officer as described in this statement, or 'No' if you oppose.

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4.3 Yes / No electronic button response, plus written elaboration

Yes

“Applying Public Sector Resources to Climate Change Adaptation in Canada” is the title of my 2006 Discussion Paper available in PDF at the website www.CameronConsulting.ca. For the federal and provincial levels of government, it suggested the creation of a coordinating office not an officer. The “Office” would have an executive mandate, authority, budget, an auditing capacity, and accountability requirements. The office would be a coordinating catalyst for incorporating climate change adaptation into the regular decision making of the various government departments.

Something similar could be used by HRM with respect to sustainability. The intent would be that sustainability becomes another component of regular decision making, while maintaining existing lines of authority and responsibility for HRM staff activities. Staff should be clear and accountable in terms of what they are trying to achieve, and should not be confused with potentially conflicting direction from multiple authority figures.

The Nova Scotia provincial government seems to be using a committee approach, including regular Deputy Minister representation, in trying to execute their Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act. Time will tell how effectively this will work.

Yes to the goal of sustainable HRM activities. Yes to having a clear executive mandate (ie. Council resolution, budget item, and CAO direction), with an appropriate level of resources, performance goals, and methods of accountability. It is suggested that a coordinating office hosted by HRM Infrastructure and Asset Management, but involving all departments, as opposed to a stand alone authoritative Officer, could be a useful way of making progress in the achievement of HRM sustainability goals. Perhaps at the scale of HRM activities, a “Coordinator” and an “Officer” might be a similar person.

My perception is that now retired HRM staff member Stephen King accomplished quite a bit through the SEMO office. He did this, not by authority but by personal persuasion, well researched information, creative interpretations, pragmatic methods, and a network of good will.

5.0 Develop Integrated Intercultural Strategy

5.1 Citizens for Halifax Statement on Topic

The development of an integrated intercultural strategy to attract and retain immigrants and to better support disadvantaged groups within our community.

While there are many organizations doing good work helping immigrants adapt to life in our city, there is little overall coordination of this effort or a focal point for leadership. We believe strongly in making Halifax a great place to live for our residents and potential residents. This includes creating opportunities to include, engage, share and understand, creating more opportunities to celebrate inter-culturalism, as well as supporting and empowering cultural diversity. Specifically, we encourage outreach to disadvantaged communities to address systemic issues such as unemployment, poverty and low education.

To this end, we advocate the development of an integrated intercultural strategy focused on the attraction and, more importantly, the retention of immigrants to our community, while proactively addressing the issues faced by disadvantaged groups within our community. We believe that an intercultural strategy must be developed to integrate the efforts of various organizations operating in this realm in our community that includes focused leadership, coordination of effort and meaningful measures of success.

5.2 Survey Question on Topic

The development of an integrated intercultural strategy to attract and retain immigrants and to better support disadvantaged groups within our community.'

Select 'Yes' if you support developing an integrated intercultural strategy to attract and retain immigrants, and to better support disadvantaged groups within our community, or select 'No' if you oppose

5.3 Yes / No electronic button response, plus written elaboration

Yes

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The phrase “integrated intercultural strategy” is new to me, and when I googled it in “quotation marks,” two of the three hits are from the Citizens for Halifax website.

I have met some immigrant entrepreneurs and others who have done well here. I have also met some for whom a better integration would have been more positive for them and for our community. Our community benefits from its integration with immigrants and those influenced by unemployment, poverty, education levels, some drug use, and some medical health conditions. In mother nature and in our everyday experiences, variety not “purity” provides a stronger long term adaptive capacity. We can see this in our communities, our sports teams, our ecosystems, our organizations, and more.

I am unsure that municipal government is the natural lead on this topic, but perhaps it can be a useful coordinator. There can be benefits to all involved when municipal governments make useful contributions to community integration. Such actions should be encouraged and coordinated - which I think is the intent of this question topic.

6.0 Create Transportation Authority

6.1 Citizens for Halifax Statement on Topic

The creation of a transportation authority to develop and implement a long-term comprehensive transportation strategy that integrates all modes of transportation.

Many of the decisions regarding traffic and public transportation appear to be undertaken in isolation. The recent decision to pursue a ferry service from Bedford to downtown Halifax is but one example. The Bridge Commission’s musings about the need for a third harbour crossing is another and the widening of Chebucto road yet another. While there apparently is already a master transportation plan in place, it is unclear how decisions related to transportation choices are being made and to what end.

Movement is the lifeblood of cities and the ability to move people and goods from place to place directly affects and is affected by the various land-uses within the city. A city’s transportation policies need to reflect, therefore, not only efficiency, but their effects on the world around it. In light of dramatically higher energy costs, it is time for a complete review of our transportation assumptions in our view.

We believe in starting with the needs of our citizens as a basis for a transportation strategy. By managing transit, biking, automotive, bridges, rail and new options separately, we build duplication and inefficiency into our system. We believe that, with

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limited funding, priorities need to be established that maximize benefits for the whole population. The creation of a transportation authority, that looks at the needs of citizens and has a long-term vision, would ensure the best possible decisions for an efficient transportation system that integrates a diverse range of transportation options.

6.2 Survey Question on Topic

The creation of a transportation authority to develop and implement a long-term comprehensive transportation strategy that integrates all modes of transportation.'

Select 'Yes' if you support creating a transportation authority as described in this statement, or 'No' if you oppose

6.3 Yes / No electronic button response, plus written elaboration

Yes

A "Regional Authority" approach has worked well in the past through Halifax Water (Regional Water Commission) for potable water. Halifax Water has recently become responsible for the HRM sanitary and storm sewer systems in the future. This long term thinking, in the form of an HRM owned utility, is effective. Similar long term thinking and activity in the form of a Transportation Authority should be useful in the future for HRM.

7.0 Adoption of a Development Process

7.1 Citizens for Halifax Statement on Topic

The adoption of a more transparent and streamlined development process as proposed by the HRM by Design initiative.

We believe in a depoliticized system that puts faith in the vision of the city and gives a stake to developers, residents and politicians in one streamlined process. The HRM by Design initiative is an example of what can happen when planners take the considerations of a wide group of stakeholders into consideration and develop a plan that is respectful of heritage while looking to the future.

Given that half the jobs in the municipality are currently in the urban core, there is an urgent need to increase the density of the population within the urban core. This would

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have the immediate impact of less traffic, a much smaller carbon footprint, a safer downtown and a more attractive city for those looking to relocate to Halifax. We believe in the benefits of urban densification, including more efficient transportation, better access to services, a stronger tax base and a vibrant, unified community. Therefore, a downtown core with significantly greater density creates a stronger, more liveable city as a whole.

7.2 Survey Question on Topic

The adoption of a more transparent and streamlined development process as proposed by the HRM by Design initiative.'

Do you support or oppose adopting a more transparent and streamlined development process in this manner?

7.3 Yes / No electronic button response, plus written elaboration

Yes

Yes to improvements that result in a less politicized and more predictable development process. We have already done this for our water and wastewater utilities, and we are better off for it (even if we should not be surprised but we will be, when we start paying the real replacement costs of the very old sewer pipe system).

Be it engineering design, environmental clean up projects, or climate change - infrastructure vulnerability evaluations, the use of performance goals is very useful in the decision making. There might be a variety of ways of achieving a certain goal, and for different people, different approaches make the most sense. Flexibility can exist. Perhaps it is not critical what the exact route is that one is taking, so long as what is achieved is the desired performance goal. This approach results in creative opportunities for those closest to a project, to work out the details. They can then achieve the overall community performance goals, while making the best use of available resources - materials, financial, human, opportunity, and more.

Criticisms can easily be made of the HRM by Design initiative. There is room for improvement from the DRAFT documents that have been produced. My workshop experience left the feeling that there were sometimes answers they knew that they wanted to hear, and so the talk and "the table" or tactical process, seemed a little tilted. The time frame for public review and comment of the DRAFT 1 documents was

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frustratingly brief. Some of the text in the documents has a “boiler plate” feel to it, that for some reason could better have taken into account local knowledge.

Still, overall, there is more to be positive about than negative. It is an imperfect improvement on the currently applied and flawed process. In a simple Yes / No vote, I would vote yes - a qualified yes as described here, but a yes. I would also see it as a work in progress and one that already merits revisions.

There are lessons to be learned about applying this HRM by Design initiative process to the next part of the regional municipality. My understanding is that Downtown Halifax was intended to be the first, and not the last area in HRM to go through this process.

Compared to today, a Downtown Halifax where there are more people living and working and playing, and within an easy public transit system, is both a reflection of the past and an image of a promising and attainable future.