



**BUDGET COMMITTEE
(STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON BUDGET)
MINUTES
November 28, 2023**

PRESENT: Councillor: Paul Russell, Chair
 Mayor Mike Savage
 Deputy Mayor Cathy Deagle Gammon
 Sam Austin
 Councillors: David Hendsbee
 Becky Kent
 Trish Purdy
 Tony Mancini
 Waye Mason
 Lindell Smith
 Shawn Cleary
 Kathryn Morse
 Patty Cuttell
 Pam Lovelace
 Lisa Blackburn
 Tim Outhit

REGRETS: Councillor Iona Stoddard

STAFF: Jerry Blackwood, Executive Director of Finance & Asset Management/Chief
 Financial Officer
 John Traves, K.C., CD, Executive Director of Legal & Legislative
 Services/Municipal Solicitor/Chief Governance Officer
 Iain MacLean, Municipal Clerk
 Annie Sherry, Legislative Assistant
 Elizabeth Macdonald, Legislative Assistant

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

The agenda, reports, supporting documents, information items circulated, and video (if available) are online at halifax.ca.

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m., and recessed at 12:05 p.m. Budget Committee reconvened in at 1:02 p.m. Budget Committee recessed at 2:00 p.m. and reconvened at 7:00 p.m. Budget Committee adjourned at 7:56 p.m. During the November 28, 2023 Regional Council Meeting the election of Deputy Mayor occurred, resulting in a change in Deputy Mayor for the evening portion of this meeting.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mayor Savage called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. and acknowledged that the meeting took place in the traditional and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people, and that we are all treaty people.

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – NONE

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

Additions: None

Deletions: None

MOVED by Councillor Deagle Gammon, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT the agenda be approved as presented.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Not present: Budget Committee Chair Russell, Deputy Mayor Austin, Councillors Hendsbee, Kent, Stoddard

4. CALL FOR DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS – NONE

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Deirdre Dwyer, Eastern Shore, spoke to concerns with food insecurity in rural communities and highlighted the work of the Old School Community Gathering Place. Dwyer noted that the volunteer-ran organization did not have core funding, that many clients experience housing insecurity, and that the numbers of clients using the food pantry increased from 63 to 82 people since August 2023.

Karen Bradley, Chair of the Old School Community Gathering Place, spoke to concerns with the proposed amendments to the Strategic Priorities Plan not addressing issues experienced by rural communities on affordable housing and access to safe drinking water during power outages and droughts. Bradley spoke in favour of the development of a coordinated model for emergency response strategies that include community consultation, working with other levels of government to address the lack of housing stock, and recommended the addition of, “the municipality will reduce building permit processing time by doubling the current number of planners working on approvals” to the Strategic Priorities Plan. Bradley requested that Budget Committee help combat burnout in volunteer, community-based groups by providing additional financial support to ensure that they were adequately staffed.

Richard Bell, Musquodoboit Harbour, spoke to their support for strengthening public transit in rural areas of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), their concerns with infrequent bus service from rural areas to the downtown core, and requested that bus service be extended beyond Porters Lake to Musquodoboit Harbour. Bell highlighted the importance of MusGo Rider, noted that the service ran 9,978 trips and drove over 400,000 kilometres last fiscal year, and requested Budget Committee fund MusGo Rider's request to increase the per kilometre reimbursement rate from 50 cents per kilometre to 62 cents a kilometre. Bell noted their support for the creation of a public-owned bicycle share rather than a privately-owned option and responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee.

Greg Cross, Sheet Harbour Chamber of Commerce and Civic Affairs, spoke to the broad scope of work undertaken by volunteers in Sheet Harbour, the aging population and rates of burnout of the volunteer network, and their concerns with volunteers supporting community work that should have been the responsibility of municipal staff. Cross highlighted ongoing efforts of a volunteer, community-based group to attract doctors and healthcare workers to Sheet Harbour and noted that most other groups throughout the province had at least one paid staff member to support their efforts. Cross noted that volunteer burnout could lead to the closure of the Chamber of Commerce and Civic Affairs, result in the HRM taking on those responsibilities, and requested that Budget Committee allocate funding for a local community office, a local HRM staff person onsite, and consideration for another staff person for community maintenance.

6. REPORTS

6.1 2024/25 Strategic Priorities Plan Update

The following was before Budget Committee:

- Staff report dated November 16, 2023
- Correspondence from Tim Rissesco
- Staff presentation dated November 28, 2023

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer gave a presentation and responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee.

MOVED by Councillor Outhit, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT the Budget Committee approve amendments to the 2021-2025 Strategic Priorities Plan as outlined in the discussion section of the staff report dated November 16, 2023, and direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop 2024/25 business plans and budgets consistent with this plan.

Jerry Blackwood, Executive Director of Finance & Asset Management/Chief Financial Officer responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee.

Mayor Savage stepped down from the Chair and Councillor Russell assumed the Chair.

Michael Pappas, Director of Corporate Planning & Performance, and Jacqueline Hamilton, Executive Director, Planning & Development responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Not present: Councillors Kent, Stoddard

6.2 2024/25 Budget Direction

The following was before Budget Committee:

- Staff report dated November 22, 2023
- Correspondence from Bill Macgregor, Cynthia McCutcheon, Jeremy and Barb Grattan, Lewis Thibault, Curtis Lord, Alan Prosser, Sharon Warecki
- Staff presentation dated November 28, 2023

Jerry Blackwood, Executive Director of Finance & Asset Management/Chief Financial Officer gave a presentation and responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee. Blackwood noted that the projected shortfall for the 2024/25 budget was approximately \$105 million, which would have required an increase of 15.2 percent to the average tax bill. Blackwood further noted that staff were able to reduce the projected shortfall to \$68.7 million by reducing the capital-from-operating fund by \$30 million and the Strategic Initiative funding reserves by \$7 million, resulting in a 9.7 percent increase to the average tax

bill.

MOVED by Mayor Savage, seconded by Councillor Mason

THAT the Budget Committee:

- 1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop the 2024/25 Budget according to Council's approved priorities, and preliminary fiscal direction, including setting the average property tax bill for residential and commercial properties at a 9.7 percent increase; and,**
- 2. Approve revised debt policy of \$1,800 per dwelling.**

Tyler Higgins, Manager, Budget & Reserves responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee and noted that the proposed 9.7 percent increase would translate to an approximate increase of \$223 on the average residential tax bill.

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee.

MOVED by Councillor Outhit, seconded by Councillor Lovelace

THAT section one of the motion be amended to strike, "and preliminary fiscal direction, including setting the average property tax bill for residential and commercial properties at a 9.7 percent increase."

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee and noted that the amendment did not provide staff with clear direction on capital-from-operating funding, which would result in staff targeting an average tax increase of 15.2 percent. O'Toole suggested including phrasing to cap the capital-from-operating funding at \$57.4 million.

Councillor Outhit proposed to amend the motion by adding, "with capital-from-operating funding capped at no more than \$57.4 million," immediately after, "2024/25 Budget." As provided for in section 53 (2) of Administrative Order One, *Respecting the Procedures of the Council*, the amendment was accepted as friendly.

The motion now read:

MOVED by Councillor Outhit, seconded by Councillor Lovelace

THAT section one of the motion be amended to add, "with capital-from-operating funding capped at no more than \$57.4 million," immediately after, "2024/25 Budget," and strike, "and preliminary fiscal direction, including setting the average property tax bill for residential and commercial properties at a 9.7 percent increase."

Jerry Blackwood, Executive Director of Finance and Asset Management/Chief Financial Officer responded to questions of clarification from Budget Committee.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED. (13 in favour, 1 against)

In favour: Budget Committee Chair Russell, Deputy Mayor Deagle Gammon, Councillors Hendsbee, Kent, Austin, Mancini, Smith, Cleary, Morse, Cuttall, Lovelace, Blackburn, Outhit

Against: Councillor Purdy

Not present: Mayor Savage, Councillors Mason, Stoddard

The motion as amended now read:

MOVED by Mayor Savage, seconded by Councillor Mason

THAT the Budget Committee:

- 1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop the 2024/25 Budget with capital-from-operating funding capped at no more than \$57.4 million, according to Council's approved priorities; and,**
- 2. Approve revised debt policy of \$1,800 per dwelling.**

MOTION AS AMENDED PUT AND PASSED. (13 in favour, 1 against)

In favour: Budget Committee Chair Russell, Deputy Mayor Deagle Gammon, Councillors Hendsbee, Kent, Austin, Mancini, Smith, Cleary, Morse, Cuttell, Lovelace, Blackburn, Outhit

Against: Councillor Purdy

Not present: Mayor Savage, Councillors Mason, Stoddard

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Iain MacLean
Municipal Clerk