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Item No. 12.1.4
Audit and Finance Committee
June 15, 2016

TO: Chair and Members of Audit and Finance Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Bruce Zvaniga, P.Eng., Director, Transportation and Public Works

DATE: May 31, 2016

SUBJECT: **Change to Capital Funding Allocation for St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails Association**

ORIGIN

Request from St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails Association.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

79 (1) The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for... (ah) playgrounds, trails, including trails developed, operated or maintained pursuant to an agreement made under clause 73(c), bicycle paths, swimming pools, ice arenas and other recreational facilities;

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Audit and Finance Committee recommend that Regional Council change the designation of capital funding to be provided to the St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails Association (SMBARTA) from "planning" to "recapitalization".

BACKGROUND

Halifax Regional Municipality provides funding support to community trails associations who are members of the Halifax Regional Trails Association (HRTA) to support the construction, recapitalization and maintenance of active transportation greenways (also known as multi-use trails) that are identified as part of the regional greenways network from the Active Transportation Priorities Plan. There are approximately 25 members of HRTA.

The SMBARTA is a member of HRTA. They have a Letter of Authority from the Province of Nova Scotia to operate and maintain the 32km former rail corridor that extends from the Hubley area to the Hubbards area at the border between HRM and the District of Chester. This facility is not on municipal land and HRM has no role in its governance or operation; however, it is considered part of the active transportation network in the municipality.

The group is eligible for two streams of funding through HRM's support of HRTA member projects. These are:

- 1) annual maintenance funding to support core organization costs such as insurance and registration and a modest amount of maintenance funding (typically \$5,000 - \$10,000 per year).

In 2016-17 SMBARTA is receiving \$10,000 for maintenance of their facility;

- 2) capital funding to build new segments of AT greenway or recapitalize existing segments. In 2015 there were changes in the board membership and leadership of SMBARTA. The group decided to embark on a larger-scale improvement and recapitalization process. The Association determined that an estimated \$719,000 multi-year recapitalization initiative was required. SMBARTA applied through the HRTA funding process for \$50,000 in 2016-17 to support the first phase of this recapitalization.

Halifax staff recommended \$25,000 to be used to develop a functional plan for the facility.

Halifax staff had recommended \$25,000 to develop a broader facility plan for the following reasons:

- 1) Given that the quality of the trail surface had deteriorated, Halifax staff believed that a planning process would help the group understand the causes of this deterioration and identify measures that would minimize such deterioration in the future. The key issue is the ability to prevent damage caused by motorized vehicles. This would ensure that recapitalization funding from Halifax's AT capital budget would result in a facility that could be sustained at a comparable standard and cost as other AT facilities funded by the municipality;
- 2) Comprehensive, community-based trail/greenway planning exercises have been funded by HRM through the Regional Trails Program and preceded major greenway investments by Halifax for the past six years. Such planning exercises have helped to establish the conditions for longer term success in facility development and enhancements and provide information to inform staff funding recommendations; and,
- 3) With SMBARTA about to engage on a large, \$719,000 recapitalization process, such a planning process would provide a solid basis upon which to assess funding requests in future years. It would also help address Council requests for reports on how the Trail could improve connectivity with adjacent origins and destinations in support of AT objectives.

These plans have been very helpful to inform decision-making on capital investments. Plans have been developed for the Chain of Lakes Greenway, the Sackville Greenway, the Penhorn Greenway, Bissett-Cole Harbour Greenway and Active Transportation facilities in Porters Lake.

DISCUSSION

The quality of the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails facility has deteriorated since it was initially converted from a former rail bed to a trail facility in the late 1990's. The trail has a gravel and crusher dust surface. While the trail is generally passible for pedestrians and bicyclists, many sections are deeply rutted and there are large potholes. The facility requires recapitalization if it is to be maintained to a similar standard as other parts of Halifax's active transportation greenway network.

SMBARTA currently has secured \$40,000 from the provincial government's Off-Highway Vehicle Infrastructure Fund, \$40,000 from the provincial government's RFD fund and \$5,000 from the TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Fund to support resurfacing of the facility in 2016-17. The facility is also being proposed for funding by Bicycle Nova Scotia for provincial Blue Route funding.

Following approval of the 2016-17 Halifax Capital Budget, SMBARTA requested that Halifax change the recommendation for \$25,000 in planning funds to \$25,000 in recapitalization funds. They are comfortable with the level of facility assessment and planning that they have already undertaken and would prefer to focus on recapitalizing the facility.

There is no formal HRM requirement for the development of a facility plan. Rather, this has been a staff practice in working with community trails associations in recent years. Given the level of deterioration on the facility, it is prudent to focus on recapitalization in the case of SMBARTA.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications to making this change.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There has been no formal community engagement process related to this matter.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct environmental implications.

ALTERNATIVES

The Audit and Finance Committee may choose to maintain the previous staff recommendation and request that SMBARTA conduct a formal facility planning exercise.

ATTACHMENTS

N/A

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

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