



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

Info item No. 2
Executive Standing Committee
March 25, 2019

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of the Executive Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: **ORIGINAL SIGNED**

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: January 16, 2019

SUBJECT: **Open Government Initiatives in the Municipal Clerk's Office**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Council Priority - Governance and Communication: Develop and support governance structures and communication approaches that provide maximum opportunity for public engagement and consultation and ensures proper management of municipal affairs.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Executive Standing Committee Terms of Reference, section 8 General Governance of Council:

The Executive Standing Committee shall act as a review committee for matters related to the general self-governance and administration of the Council as directed by the Council.

BACKGROUND

On January 16, 2017, the Municipal Clerk's Office (MCO) provided an information report and presentation introducing Open Government to the Executive Standing Committee. The report focused heavily upon the theoretical approaches to the concept of Open Government. Open Government stems from the freedom of information movement of the 1990's, the increased use of technology, and how technology has changed the way residents interact with their government. Open Government has three guiding principles, Open Data, Open Engagement, and Open Information. The report took the guiding principles, and the business of the Municipal Clerk's Office and created five pillars of support.

1. Increasing Opportunities for Participation/ Participatory Democracy

The Municipal Clerk's Office will seek to promote the various existing inputs that members of the community can access, and to create new ways to foster open and inclusive dialogue.

2. Strengthening Partnerships/ Collaboration and Information Sharing

The creation and strengthening of partnerships with stakeholder and various community groups to help foster information sharing and cross-promotional opportunities.

3. Improving Access to Information

Understanding that information is vital to decision making, the Municipal Clerk's Office will work to improve access to information that is made available to Regional Council and to the public.

4. Building a Policy and Procedure Framework

The Municipal Clerk's Office will develop a policy and procedure framework, which will allow for all primary Clerk's functions to be open, transparent, and accountable.

5. Outreach through Education/Youth Programing

The Municipal Clerk's Office will work with internal departments to inform youth and adults about local government and the various ways to engage, contribute and participate, may also include partnerships with education institutions and organizations.

DISCUSSION

Within the past two years the Municipal Clerk's Office (MCO) has made incremental changes, which support the pillars. This report provides an overview of the work completed, and is organized by pillar. There are some projects with a scope which relates to two or more pillars, and the update is included under the most relevant one, alternatively some larger projects have been broken out into various descriptions, and assigned to multiple pillars.

1. Increasing Opportunities for Participation and Participatory Democracy

The Municipal Clerk's Office will seek to promote the various existing inputs that members of the community can access, and to create new ways to foster open and inclusive dialogue.

HRM Get Involved Guide

Created a plain language guide which outlines the main input/outputs for residents in connection to the MCO. The guide is based on a series of conversation circles completed during the 2016 Municipal Election with African Nova Scotian communities. In preparing the guide, care was taken to ensure that information was communicated in plain language, icons and design work were employed to break out the information and make it accessible to the public. The guide has three focus areas, Be Informed, Have your Say, and Serve. The guide has been produced multiple times and used for many of the MCO engagement touchpoints.

Public Presentations to Standing Committees of Council

In Fall 2017 Regional Council approved changes to Administrative Order 1 which established a process for public presentations. Once approved staff worked to revamp the 'Communicating with Halifax Regional Council' page, with the intention to clearly communicate the policy change in plain language, and to remove potential barriers to participation. At that time, staff reviewed the page and how information was organized to ensure that all information related to communicating to Council was refined. A detailed entry on the policy change is included in the Building a Policy and Procedure Framework section of this report.

Building Surveys and Public Feedback into Clerk's Office Projects and Service Enhancements

The MCO has increased consultation through surveys to enhance projects and to get feedback on its services. Surveys were completed on Election Campaign Financing, the 2016 Municipal Election, the Council Chamber Technical Upgrade project, and a closed survey to public appointees to Committees of Council on MCO services. These surveys have influenced projects and have led to service changes. Surveys will continue to be used in the future.

Gender Neutral/ Non-Binary Minutes and Reports

In April 2017 the MCO reformatted its minutes for Regional Council and Committees of Council to remove gender pronouns, to contribute towards a more inclusive environment. In eliminating pronouns, it was anticipated that this may reduce barriers that may have prohibited individuals from interacting with Council. Originally the scope was limited to Regional Council and Committee minutes (supported by the MCO), however, with time, the scope was widened to include public information meeting minutes, corporate reports, future administrative orders, and by-laws. In creating an equitable and inclusive environment, it was anticipated to encourage residents of diverse backgrounds to participate in HRM political processes.

Stage Share with Green Network Plan

During the Summer of 2017 the MCO partnered with the Green Network Plan project team to do a stage share. A stage share is when another department does a short introduction to their engagement outreach at another municipal engagement event. This method can increase awareness, at a minimal cost, and may increase outreach. This strategy has allowed the Campaign Finance Engagement team to reach a rural audience, at minimal cost.

Public Appointments

Recruiting for public appointments to board and committees is a core function of the MCO. In the past two years, staff have made iterative changes to communications outreach and tactics to augment the promotion of the opportunity to serve. In 2016-2017 the campaign was under the banner "Connect with Community" in 2018-2019, based on feedback, the MCO modified its approach in attempt to encourage inclusivity and changed its banner to "A Seat at the Table," our way of opening up to everyone, to have a seat at this table. The new banner represents a step towards removing barriers in our approach. In consultation with Diversity & Inclusion the application was amended to be more inclusive with changes to the gender field, non-visible minority identification and clarifying minority groups.

In addition to changing the overall themes of public appointments staff have worked to streamline print ads, and to re-allocate funds to target community/rural papers. During the Fall 2018 recruitment staff placed public notices in 11 newspapers, which included several local papers (9/11 local papers). This shift in approach was made possible from feedback received from rural residents during the previous appointment process.

The MCO also created unique materials, for specific committee recruitment. For example, with the Youth Advisory Committee several key materials were re-produced with youth-friendly language and design. Based on feedback from the youth advisory leadership team, physical recruitment packets were developed and distributed to members of the team. The members were challenged to provide packets to individuals or organizations they felt could further promote or apply to serve on the Youth Advisory Committee. At the close of the recruitment period, the Youth Advisory Committee received 97 applicants. For the Design Review Committee, due to the technical nature of the composition a direct mail campaign occurred wherein the MCO worked with professional organizations to distribute the call for nomination.

Staff have also met with advocacy groups to speak about the process, get feedback on the application process, and to advise about upcoming recruitments. With flexibility in the process, the MCO has worked with stakeholders and staff to try new tactics, measure and re-align. This has helped to increase the number of overall applicants, and increase diversity.

Survey of Board and Committee Members

A survey of board and committee members was held in 2018 with the aim of hearing from current members on the appointment process, onboarding and training, MCO secretariat services, recognition and value. At the close of the survey, 51 out of 104 responses were received. The responses were favourable, and provided insight into Municipal Clerk's Services. Staff have been reviewing the data and have made a few quick changes, for example: members not returning for a term receive a letter of appreciation from the Mayor not from the Clerk, and the MCO recently hosted a designated new member orientation geared at onboarding new appointees. Larger tasks and service enhancements are being completed by small teams

in the MCO and will be introduced in the upcoming year. All of the work completed is in an effort to fill gaps, and augment existing services.

2. Strengthening Partnerships/ Collaboration and Information Sharing

The Creation and strengthening of partnerships with stakeholder and various community groups to help foster information sharing and cross promotional opportunities.

Municipal Archives Connections to Organisations

The Municipal Archive has worked with various institutions to amplify services and build connections. Over the past two years the Municipal Archives has worked collaboratively with the Africville Museum, the Explosion Anniversary Committee, the NSCC Information Management program, and various local memory institutions through a co-operatives acquisition strategy.

Archives Crowd Sourcing

The HRM Archives used its FLICKR account to crowd source archival photos requesting assistance to identify the contents of the photos. Two albums of photos were posted one in 2017 which featured 21 images which garnered over 3000 views, some pictures were identified. In March 2018, an album of 91 archival images of Dartmouth Houses was posted which garnered over 1000 views, and all were identified in the first few days.

Networked Approach to Promoting Opportunities

The Municipal Clerk's Office has embraced a networked model when promoting opportunities to serve on board and commissions. Staff have partnered with local community organizations to promote the public appointments opportunities, with an emphasis placed on reaching marginalized and under-represented communities. Information is disseminated to over 1100 organizations, with a general email to inform about board and committee recruitment. Of those contacted, 85 identified community partners were sent a detailed email advising of the campaign, and requesting them to help promote the current opportunities to their membership. In addition, advertisements were translated into French and emailed to 33 Francophone and Acadian organizations in the Municipality.

During the Campaign Finance engagement sessions (Summer 2017), several democratic minded organisations were invited by the project team to participate, and encouraged to share the invitation with its membership. Using a networked approach is cost effective way to promote opportunities to participants by leveraging the strength of community based organizations.

Leveraging Partnerships to Increase Reach of Public Appointment Recruitment

The MCO has also worked with Corporate Communications to ensure that all HRM Social Media accounts are working towards promotion of its large public engagement campaigns. In addition, when recruiting for external boards, the parent organization, such as the Halifax Public Library, or Halifax Regional Police are requested to use their social media channels to help leverage awareness on current vacancies on their associated board.

A recent amendment to the public appointment policy has also afforded the MCO to work collaboratively with external organisations to refine expressions of interest and skillsets. In addition to asking for input on the mandate or skillset, the Executive Director and the Board are asked to suggest applicable professional/volunteer associations that the MCO should reach out to when recruiting. This strategy has helped to identify area or specific groups to the MCO that may not have been apparent.

3. Improving Access to Information

Understanding that information is vital to decision making, the Municipal Clerk's Office will work to improve access to information that is made available to Regional Council an to the Public.

Digitization of Historical Records

The Municipal Archives with the assistance of grants has been working to increase its holdings available online, through the HRM website, Memory NS, and through Flickr. Since March 2017 there has been just

over 1,000 images loaded to Flickr with over 2 million views. The Municipal Archives receives requests for images from local business, to international clients.

Use of Social Media to Enhance Archives Awareness

The Municipal Archives has worked with Corporate Communications to use archival images to create digital content for Throwback Thursdays. These images are placed on Facebook and Twitter, and have been popular on both platforms. It has also allowed residents to engage with the material sharing memories and having online discussions on images. The use of social media has increased the awareness of the Municipal Archives and its holdings.

Public Appointment Guidebook/Increase in Take Away Materials

In late 2017 the Municipal Clerk's Office created a Public Appointment Guidebook, as a take away from public engagements. The Public Appointment Guide featured a detailed, plain language account of the public appointment process, and included overviews of committee and board mandates. In addition, the MCO worked with Corporate Communications to develop takeaway materials such as postcards and business cards featuring the public appointment process, Five Easy Steps design. In 2018, materials also included hard copies of the PowerPoint on the public appointment process, flip books with additional information, and hard copies of the web-postings.

Annual Town-hall Meeting on Accessibility

Although the Town Hall is an annual event, the MCO works each year to enhance the event accessibility. This year agendas were placed on USBs and provided at the meeting for those with screen readers to follow along, volunteers served as guides/assistants to either describe what was occurring at the meeting for individuals with sight issues. The MCO live streamed the meeting through Facebook live and have kept the post active, 4,000 people tuned in for at least some of the broadcast.

Council Chamber Technology Upgrade Chamber Technological Upgrade

The Council Chamber Technology Upgrade was a project to replace all end of life technology (implemented 2008) in the Council Chamber and the broadcast room, along with technical infrastructure which includes all wiring and cabling. On January 15, 2019 the new Council Chamber system was unveiled. The system was upgraded to enhance the viewers experience, with HD cameras, new displays, the inclusion of a graphics package which will display names of speakers, motions, and vote results. In addition, accessibility in the Chamber was enhanced through the installation of a hearing hotspot solution.

Facebook Live Pilot Project

During the Council Chamber Technology project (above), to offset a reduction in streaming services of standing committees of Council, the MCO piloted using Facebook live. The venue of Halifax Hall presented challenges. At present staff are looking at leveraging other social media technologies to broaden the reach of the Regional Council broadcast.

Posting of Declassified In Camera Reports

As of June 2018, the MCO changed an office standard regarding the posting of declassified In Camera Reports to the Municipality's webpage. Once the document is approved to be declassified, the Municipal Clerk's Office will post the report to the Municipal website in the agenda that they were dealt with. It is anticipated that this may reduce enquiries for the report after it has been declassified, and provides direct access to the public.

Public Notice Landing Page

At present, there are five sections on the Halifax Regional Municipality website which provides some form of public notice of municipal business. A landing page was created with links to each section, and the page was weighted to have some prominence on the Municipal website which allows the public to find it with ease. The page features the following notice pages:

By-law notices
Real Estate and Land Management

Tax Sale notices
Active Planning Applications
Street Closures

Translation of Core Publications into French

In working with the Franco-Partnership it was made aware of some barriers to service, or access could be removed by translating key publications into French. In 2018 the MCO worked with Diversity and Inclusion to translate several core pieces of its publications into French. On each document there is a provision which confirms that business is conducted in English. There are four translated brochures:

Regional Council
Community Council
Public Hearing FAQ
Planning Advisory Committees Public Meeting Guide

The MCO will ensure the brochures are distributed accordingly, copies will also be sent to each Customer Service Centre, and offered to members of Regional Council. Public appointment information has also been translated (the five easy steps for applying), and will be issued during a large recruitment. In addition, the Public Hearing FAQ document has been reviewed (both in English and French) and updated to ensure that the document was written in plain and accessible language.

Posting Regional Council Action Summaries

To provide greater access to information, the Municipal Clerk's Office decided to release the Regional Council Action Summaries, (formerly an internal document) and post to the web. This document is generally uploaded before noon the next day of a Regional Council meeting. A tweet is issued when the document is available, to afford for greater awareness to provide additional information on the actions of Regional Council in advance of the minutes being approved.

Awareness Campaign – for Board and Committee Meetings

In Summer 2018 the Municipal Clerk's Office worked with Corporate Communications to create a standard, to ensure that all agendas were tweeted from the @hfxgov account, and to create a series of images to accompany those tweets. In addition, once a month the calendar of public meetings is promoted, and a tweet providing information about an advisory committee mandate, and to highlight some of the work that they have completed (rotates monthly).

Revamp of some Board and Committee Pages

In 2018 the Board of Police Commissioners webpage was updated through direction by the Commission and the upon approval of the Board manual. Information on the webpage provides greater clarity to residents on the role of the board, and the various ways in which to connect. In late 2018 the Municipal Clerk's Office partnered with Parks and Recreation (Youth Services) to create a Youth Advisory Committee page, which was youth focused. The webpage features a FAQ document, additional youth oriented materials regarding the appointment process, and links to various Youth Parks and Recreation areas including the Youth Services Plan.

4. Building a Policy and Procedure Framework

The Municipal Clerk's Office will develop a policy and procedure framework, which will allow for all primary Clerk's functions to be open, transparent and accountable.

Amendment to Administrative Order One – Presentations

In Fall 2017 amendments were made to Administrative Order One, sections 44 and 45 to provide more context to the public on how presentation requests are determined, the rules regarding presentations, what one could expect after a presentation has been provided, and greater transparency by requiring the publication of the request for presentation from the individual/organization and their PowerPoint presentations. The amendments provide a path for presentation requests, which will assist presenters,

committees and the public. Upon the policy being approved the HRM website was revamped to reflect the changes, in plain language.

Campaign Financing By-law C-1100

On October 30, 2018 Regional Council approved second reading of By-law C-1100, the Campaign Financing By-law. The By-law established a framework, and act in concert with the campaign finance provisions listed in sections 49A and 49B of the Municipal Elections Act. The By-law represents a first step towards greater accountability and transparency in campaign finances. In drafting the By-law staff focused on the following areas contained in the HRM Charter Amendment (60A); election campaign spending limits, maximum contribution amounts, disclosure requirements, eligibility to contribute and dates for making contributions. Staff are currently preparing minor amendments to the By-law, which once passed will trigger a public education campaign to build awareness for the new rules.

Amendments to the Public Appointment Policy

July 2018 amendments were applied to the Public Appointment Policy to provide applicants to external boards and committees with a better understanding of what is required and what may occur after their application is submitted. The amendments included language to increase consultation with administrators and boards of external agencies on desired skillsets, and identify potential skill gaps in board compositions. Increasing communication with external agencies that receive HRM appointees has lead to greater collaboration when recruiting for volunteers.

5. Outreach through Education/Youth Programing

The Municipal Clerk's Office will work with internal departments to inform youth and adults about local government and the various ways to engage contribute and participate, may include partnerships with learning institutions and organizations.

Class visits to the Municipal Archives

The Municipal Archives has worked to provide space and materials for a local high school class and a Professor at St. Mary's University for educational field trips. In working the local high school the Archives partnered with the Africville Museum and featured Africville and African Nova Scotian archival items for the students.

ISANS Educational Programming

The Municipal Clerk's Office collaborated with educational staff at the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) to create an education program for newcomers. The program is aimed at learners in advanced ISANS classes, and introduces the participants to municipal government. The visit also includes a tour of City Hall and is usually planned during a standing committee meeting, which affords participants the ability to come and observe government at work. There have currently been two sessions of the City Hall Educational programme.

Annual Chairs Meeting

The Municipal Clerk's Office has worked with several internal offices to provide board and committee chair training. This is an annual meeting, and has been in place for two years. Chairs of all boards and committees supported by Municipal Clerk's Office staff are invited to attend and participate. It is an opportunity for board and committee chairs to meet one another, learn together, and from the experiences of one another. Training includes, Administrative Order 1 refresher, current HRM policies applicable to volunteers, conflict resolution, diversity and inclusion and media training.

New Member Orientation

In response to the board and committee member survey, the MCO has adopted a uniform approach to onboarding new members. In creating a service standard it ensures that all members are properly oriented. In supporting a dedicated, new member orientation it allows for individuals to learn and ask questions outside of a committee setting. The first new member session was held in January 2019 and focused on, committee 101, conflict of interest, diversity and inclusion, and HRM policies applicable to volunteers. In

addition, all members of MCO supported boards and committees will receive a standard orientation binder with policies, information on MCO services, and committee specific materials.

Coady Institute Education Session

The Municipal Clerk's Office works with the Coady Institute to hold an engagement session to highlight Open Government and increasing access to information. The session usually incorporates a member of Council who may also speak to public engagement. The session is provided to international students usually with a municipal background who are taking Coady leadership courses.

Doors Open

The Municipal Clerk's Office hosts the Doors Open at City Hall. Customarily, the Municipal Archives are in Halifax Hall, with a display of archival documents and images which help tell the story of City Hall. The Municipal Clerk and legislative assistants receive in the Council Chamber, which afford residents to get a chance to see where local government occurs. This helps to break down barriers that residents may have with government, residents are encouraged to attend a meeting or to watch online.

Next Steps

The Municipal Clerk's Office are working on several initiatives to improve services provided to residents of Halifax Regional Municipality. Many of the upcoming enhancements will stem from the board and committee member survey which occurred in late 2018. In preparation for 2020, several smaller municipal election policies will also be brought forward in the upcoming year.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As the report is for information purposes, there are no financial implications.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As this is an information report, there has been no community engagement completed.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca> then choose the appropriate Standing Committee and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Kevin Arjoon, Municipal Clerk, 902.490.6456