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Item No. 12.1.3
Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee
November 19, 2019
Audit and Finance Standing Committee
November 20, 2019

TO: Chair and Members of Community Planning and Economic Development
Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Denise Schofield, Director, Parks and Recreation

Original Signed

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: October 9, 2019

SUBJECT: Halifax's Regional Destination Development Plan

ORIGIN

Request from Discover Halifax to engage in and support the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan for Halifax.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* 2008, c. 39, s. 1 permits the municipality to undertake a variety of economic development activities.

The *Halifax Regional Municipality Marketing Levy Act* permits the municipality to impose a levy to be used to promote the municipality as a tourist destination.

RECOMMENDATION

Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee:

It is recommended that Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council endorse the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan by Discover Halifax.

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Audit and Finance Standing Committee:

It is recommended that that Audit and Finance Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council approve a contribution of \$50,000 towards the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan by Discover Halifax.

BACKGROUND

Tourism can be defined as the activities of people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for leisure, business or other purposes for not more than one consecutive year. From a policy perspective, tourism development includes governments, community and the private sector efforts to increase tourist visitation and spending, thereby growing jobs, increasing wages, and realizing other community benefits. Conventions, festivals, sporting events, cruise ships, air travel, out-of-province marketing, local tours, and other assets and efforts play a role in attracting tourists to Halifax.

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is a significant tourism stakeholder in Halifax. It owns the Scotiabank Centre, a concert, sports, and special events venue in downtown Halifax with a 10,000+ seating capacity. HRM is a 50% shareholder in the corporation that operates the Halifax Convention Centre. Furthermore, HRM provides approximately \$2.9 million in annual tax relief to the Halifax International Airport Authority which operates the Halifax Stanfield International Airport; and, HRM provides funding to attract and host exceptional large-scale sporting and tourism events that create significant economic impacts, promote Halifax as a diverse event destination, and attract tourists to HRM for multi-day visits. HRM also provides operational support to Discover Halifax to promote the municipality as a year-round destination of choice for business and leisure travelers. More broadly, municipal activities across business units including transit, transportation and public works, planning and development, and parks and recreation, among others, can have a significant impact on tourism.

Discover Halifax is leading the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan. The primary purpose of this proposed plan is to help prioritize efforts and investments related to tourism to increase economic growth. As the municipality is a key player when it comes to tourism, Discover Halifax is seeking HRM support for this project.

Key deliverables of the plan will include:

- Current state assessment of Halifax and its constituent communities as a destination;
- Market-based opportunities assessment;
- General opportunities assessment in consultation with key stakeholders across HRM;
- Destination vision and strategic goals; and,
- Five-year implementation, monitoring, and evaluation plan.

Outputs of the project are expected to include:

- A shared vision for the development of the tourism economy for the region;
- Identification of leading opportunities and challenges facing each of the regions in HRM;
- Clear articulation and understanding of the selling propositions of HRM's regions;
- Identification of prioritized opportunities and investments including tourism-related policies, planning frameworks, and infrastructure investments;
- Action plan including defined roles and shared responsibilities; and,
- Identification of required resources and defined process for the prioritization of future investments.

The project will be led by Discover Halifax (DH) with a project manager supported by a working group that includes DH and HRM staff. The project will be overseen by an advisory committee. The board of Discover Halifax have authorized DH staff to proceed with the project and will own the final plan, ensuring the plan's implementation, monitoring, and reporting. It may not "own" all aspects of or actions in the plan. Similar to the Economic Strategy, responsibility for aspects of the plan will likely be shared among major stakeholders, particularly DH and HRM. Plan development will take place through fall/winter 2019 and the plan is expected to be completed in early 2020.

DISCUSSION

Growth in the tourism industry is a means by which Halifax contributes to the provincial and regional economies. Halifax is an important tourism market in Nova Scotia, accounting for more than half of rooms nights sold in the province. HRM is home to 59 major hotels/accommodations, 147 other accommodations, over 1200 AirBNB properties, more than 1000 restaurants, and over 200 tour operators. It has the international airport, has a critical mass of accommodations, and is home to many leading attractions within the province.

A Regional Destination Development Plan could also contribute to Halifax's broader economic growth goals. The Economic Growth Plan has a vision to grow Halifax's GDP to \$22.5 billion by 2021 and to \$30 billion by 2031. Tourism growth could help achieve this vision. Tourism expansion is also one of the goals of the Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, known as the Ivany Commission Report. It aims to grow province-wide gross business revenues from tourism to \$4 billion by 2024. The Atlantic Trade and Investment Growth Strategy (2017) and Atlantic Growth Strategy (2016) seek to promote export growth and economic development with tourism as a key area of focus.

As noted in the background section there are a variety of links between municipal assets and activities and the tourism industry. At a strategic level, the Halifax Economic Growth Plan (2016-21) has a goal of making Halifax a better place to live and work. Tourism-related objectives under this goal include:

- 3.1 Ensure access to arts, culture, recreation and natural assets in Halifax,
- 3.3 Make Halifax more family and children friendly,
- 3.5 Improve mobility so that people can live and work more effectively,
- 3.6 Foster cultural proficiency and social inclusion, and
- 3.7 Showcase Halifax to encourage people to visit, live and work here.

Regional Council endorsement of and municipal staff involvement in the development of a tourism master plan would be a means to further identify and articulate these links and understand where municipal activity can support tourism development.

The Economic Growth Plan also includes an action to refine HRM's approach to event attraction and hosting. Staff have had extensive discussion with stakeholders on this action item and a related Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) committee motion of March 1, 2017 and are preparing a report to CPED and Council on this in the coming months.

Discover Halifax (DH) has requested a financial contribution of \$50,000 towards the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan. This would leverage provisional federal funding of \$195,000 with Discover Halifax funding the next largest share of the project at \$145,000. Total project costs are estimated at \$390,000 and include project management, consulting, communications and marketing costs. DH is also seeking Council endorsement of, and municipal staff involvement in, the development of the plan. HRM staff involvement at the working group level, and possibly elsewhere, would ensure the master plan is aligned with existing and future municipal strategic priorities and plans.

In order to leverage existing and potential tourism related municipal activities and assets, and given the importance of Halifax's visitor economy to the province and region, staff recommend that HRM contribute towards the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan with a financial contribution of \$50,000 and with staff participation in the development of the plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding for HRM's contribution of \$50,000 is available in cost centre M310 – Other Fiscal Services. Staff participation can be provided within existing resources.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Risks associated with support for the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan are low. A Regional Destination Development Plan will help to identify strategic risks in the area of tourism.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement will be undertaken by DH in the course of the development of the Regional Destination Development Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications directly arising from the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan.

ALTERNATIVES

1. The Audit and Finance Standing Committee may recommend that Halifax Regional Council not support a financial contribution to the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan or to provide a different level of support than that recommended by staff.
2. The Community Planning & Economic Standing Committee may recommend not to endorse the development of a Regional Destination Development Plan.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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