

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed by   
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** November 3, 2020

**SUBJECT:** Participation in COP26 Conference in Glasgow, 2021

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## **ORIGIN**

On July 7, 2020, the following motion of Regional Council regarding Item No. 12.2 was put and passed:

*“THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report examining the process to register the Halifax Regional Municipality as a participant for the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) COP 26 (Conference of Parties) which was to be held in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2020, but has been postponed, because of the COVID Crisis until November 2021. The staff report shall include a recommendation of what is the most appropriate level of participation at COP26, the number of delegates (staff and Council) to be sent, the associated costs, and participation with other levels of government and NGOs attending.”*

## **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, clause 3 (bea) and subsections 20(3),(4), and (6)

- 3 In this Act,  
(bea) “reportable individual” means an individual who holds one of the following positions:  
(i) Mayor,  
(ii) councillor,  
(iii) Chief Administrative Officer, including an employee of the municipality appointed to act in place of the Chief Administrative Officer pursuant to subsection 35(5),  
(iv) a position prescribed by the regulations;
- 20 (3) The Municipality shall adopt an expense policy and a hospitality policy.  
(4) The expense policy must...(d) apply to every reportable individual; and  
(6) An expense may only be reimbursed if that expense is authorized pursuant to the expense policy or the hospitality policy.

Administrative Order Number 17, the *Council Member Remuneration Administrative Order*, section 4

4. Members shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred as a Member in the same manner and to the same extent as employees of the Municipality on filing written proof that the expenses have actually been incurred.

*Employment Expense Reimbursement Policy*

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to not participate in the COP26 conference to be held in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021.

## **BACKGROUND**

The global response to the threat of climate change is supported by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) secretariat which has a near universal membership of 197 parties. The UNFCCC secretariat was established in 1992 and the UNFCCC is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement's main goal is to keep the global average temperature rise this century to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Under the UNFCCC, the objective is to "to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system, in a time frame which allows ecosystems to adapt naturally and enables sustainable development."<sup>1</sup> Essentially, the secretariat works towards implementation of the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement. Each year, the secretariat organizes and supports negotiating sessions, the largest and most important being the Conference of Parties (COP) with approximately 25,000 participants attending on average.<sup>2</sup>

COP21 was considered a major success with the signing of the Paris Agreement. However, it took years of diplomacy and two years of preparation work to come to that agreement.<sup>3</sup> The most recent conference, COP25, took place in 2019 in Madrid, Spain and was attended by 26,700 people which included 13,600 government delegates, nearly 10,000 observers, and over 3,000 media members. COP25 was the longest climate change COP, running over time by nearly 40 hours and failed to adopt decisions and language related to various issues. It was reported that high-level consultations failed to facilitate progress and that agenda items were left unresolved including Article 6 discussions (rules on how countries can reduce their emissions using international carbon markets), common time frames, long-term finance, transparency issues for the Paris Agreement, report of the Adaptation Committee, and report of the Consultative Group of Experts.<sup>4</sup>

The upcoming COP26 was scheduled to take place in Glasgow, UK in November 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, COP26 was postponed until November 2021. COP26 aims to tackle climate change with a coordinated approach, bringing together heads of state, climate experts, and campaigners to join forces and inspire action.<sup>5</sup> The conference is deemed to be significant, as it is the first "global stock take" to report on international progress since the Paris Agreement in 2015.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unfccc.int/about-us/about-the-secretariat>

<sup>2</sup> [Ibid](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=COP26&docid=607992658712199831&mid=CFEBB5E10A3BC348059FCFEBB5E10A3BC348059F&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

<sup>4</sup> <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/chilemadrid-climate-change-conference-closes-with-limited-ambition/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ukcop26.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thenational.scot/news/18738669.cop26-westminster-slammed-implicit-failure-announcing-all-male-team/>

## **DISCUSSION**

In June 2020, Regional Council unanimously passed HalifACT, a plan committing Halifax to prepare for current and future climate impacts by reducing emissions, switching to clean and reliable energy sources, and demonstrating local leadership. The plan contains 46 actions to address the climate crisis and is currently being implemented with a focus on 7 key areas of action. This ambitious plan strives to align with the 1.5-degree levels as outlined by the Paris Agreement. As part of the HalifACT agenda, Council has requested staff to investigate the process to register the Halifax Regional Municipality at the most appropriate level of participation at COP26, the associated costs, and participation with other levels of government and NGOs attending, and the number of delegates (staff and Council) to be sent.

### **Levels of Participation**

Conferences are not open to the public. However, sessions of the Convention may be attended by three categories of participants. These three categories include representatives of Parties to the Convention and Observer Status, members of the press and media, and representatives of observer organizations.<sup>7</sup>

Observer organizations are further divided into three types: The United Nations System and its Specialized Agencies, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Once IGOs and NGOs receive observer status, they can register as delegates. Representatives from NGOs include a variety of interests including business and industry, environmental groups, farming and agriculture, indigenous populations, local governments and municipal authorities, research and academic institutes, labour unions, women and gender and youth groups.<sup>8</sup> As a local government, HRM would have to apply for observer status as an NGO.

In order to attend sessions, an organization must make an application and be granted observer status. This process involves submitting required documents which are reviewed by the Secretariat and organizations may be given provisional admission to attend COP. The application deadline for observer status consideration for COP26 was initially planned for August 2020 but was extended to December 31, 2020.<sup>9</sup> As the application is an extensive process, there will be little time to apply for observer status.

In terms of the number and composition of delegate representation, for COP25, there were 77 delegates from across Canada consisting primarily of high level federal level government officials (negotiators, legal advisors, directors, coordinators primarily from Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and Global Affairs Canada), various Indigenous/First Nations associations/governments, NGOs, industry leaders, health representatives and a few high level provincial/territorial government level officials (Government of Manitoba, Government of Northwest Territories, Government of British Columbia, Government of Alberta, Gouvernement du Quebec and Province of Nova Scotia). There did not appear to be any Canadian municipal participation on the provisional list of registered participants.<sup>10</sup> From a Canadian perspective, municipal staff and council members did not participate in the previous COP conference.

As this conference is promoted to be a global stock-take and negotiation venue for countries, Halifax could only participate as an observer. Although COP conferences could be a learning opportunity, there are more cost-effective learning opportunities such as reported outcomes from COP conferences and other virtual conferences being offered worldwide.

The COP 25 conference held live webcast and enabled virtual participation in the 2019 UN Climate Change Conference in Madrid, Spain. They also utilized social media community tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Flickr. It is likely that COP 26 would engage similar tools and be available for

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<sup>7</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/how-to-engage-without-observer-status>

<sup>8</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/overview>

<sup>9</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/overview/how-to-obtain-observer-status>

<sup>10</sup> [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/COP%2025\\_Provisional%20List%20of%20Participants.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/COP%2025_Provisional%20List%20of%20Participants.pdf)

virtual participation.<sup>11</sup> Information on past conferences is also available online which includes webcasts, documents, speeches and statements, social media releases and newsletters.<sup>12</sup>

### Associated Costs of Participation

HRM could potentially participate in the COP26 conference provided the application for observer status was submitted prior to December 31, 2020 and HRM's application is accepted and approved.

It is difficult to determine the associated costs given the unpredictable state of international air travel post-COVID-19. However, the Chief Economist for the International Air Transport Association (IATA) speculates that for industry to reach a break even point, there could be an expected fare increase of 43 to 54% based on 62% occupancy for social distancing depending on the region and its baseline average achieved load factor.<sup>13</sup> As reported by IATA, the demand for flights has decreased by 66% and the total of global flights in September 2020 have decreased by 51% compared to September 2019.<sup>14</sup> With this uncertainty in mind, current cost estimates for travel are highly unpredictable and subject to change. For example, current costs for air travel from Halifax to Glasgow priced in November 2020 for return flights range from CA \$800 to \$4,000 round trip. With a conservative estimate for an increase of 54%, a flight could range in cost from \$1,200 to \$6,000 per passenger. Similarly, costs of accommodations, meals, and local transportation are unpredictable at this time. In terms of registration fees, COP26 has confirmed that UNFCCC conferences are free of charge for participation as observers.<sup>15</sup>

The conference is scheduled from November 1 to 12, 2021 which would require a minimum of 11 nights accommodation for attendance of the full duration. In terms of accommodations, current prices for Glasgow suggest a range of CA \$1,300 to \$2,150 for 11 nights duration priced in November 2020. However, these prices could be low and may be currently underpriced due to COVID-19 restrictions and lack of travel. It would be prudent to consider a higher cost for accommodations in the event that accommodation prices increase post-pandemic. On average, visitors will spend approximately \$43/day on meals and \$27/day on local transportation in Glasgow.<sup>16</sup>

Considering air fare (\$800 to \$4,000), accommodations (\$1,300 to \$2,150), meals (\$473), and local transportation (\$297), the minimum cost for one individual to attend 11 days at the COP26 conference in Glasgow in 2021 ranges from about \$2,870 to \$6,920. If air fare expense increases by 54% and prices of accommodations increase due to increased demand, the cost per individual could be significantly higher (upwards of \$9,000).

### Virtual conferences opportunities

During the COVID pandemic, the world moved towards more virtual conferencing, webinars, and learning opportunities. There is no shortage of opportunities for Council and staff to learn more about the latest updates for working towards combatting climate change. A small sample of examples of virtual conferences from 2020 include:

- NY Climate Week virtual summit "Getting There from Here: How Transparency & Innovation are Driving the Climate Agenda"
- Canadian Urban Institute virtual conference "Art of City Building Conference: Under Water"
- ICLEI - Daring Cities 2020 virtual global forum on climate change for urban leaders tackling the climate emergency
- MEOPAR National Forum on Coastal Community Resilience

<sup>11</sup> <https://unfccc.int/virtual-participation-cop25>

<sup>12</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings#:606038e4-000c-47ee-8c49-4f590df37224:9b6196fd-b9b5-4b2c-a133-ab97ac611271>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/publications/economic-reports/covid-19-cost-of-air-travel-once-restrictions-start-to-lift/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.iata.org/>

- Smart Energy Event 2020
- 2020 Livable Cities Forum exploring the interrelated themes of climate change, economic resilience, equity, and advancing implementation

As mentioned in the Discussion section of this report, previous COP conference information/webcasts are also available online.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendation of this report as staff recommend that attendance at the COP26 conference not be pursued.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendation in this report.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

There was no community engagement conducted for this report.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

By not attending the COP26 in Glasgow, Council and staff are not contributing to greenhouse gas emissions from international air travel. As virtual participation or information sharing options become available, Council and staff can maximize learning opportunities from the conference without further contributing to climate change.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Regional Council can direct the CAO to apply for observer status to attend the COP26 conference. This is not recommended for reasons outlined in this report.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

None

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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