

HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
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Item No. 15.1.5
Halifax Regional Council
July 12, 2022

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: May 27, 2022

SUBJECT: 2022-2023 Events East Business Plan - Halifax Convention Centre & Ticket
Atlantic

ORIGIN

March 28, 2022 letter from Events East Board Chair, Nancy MacCready-Williams, requesting approval of the 2022-2023 Events East Business Plan.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Convention Centre Act, S.N.S. 2014, c. 8

Business plan

Section 29

- (1) Annually, as required by the Council and the Minister, the Corporation shall submit to the Council and the Minister for approval a detailed business plan for the following fiscal year, including estimates of budgetary requirements, for the operation of the Corporation.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that, in accordance with section 29 of the *Halifax Convention Centre Act*, Halifax Regional Council approve the 2022-2023 Events East Business Plan for the Halifax Convention Centre Corporation, submitted to the municipality March 28, 2022, as set out in Attachment 1 of this staff report.

BACKGROUND

The Halifax Convention Centre Corporation, established under the *Halifax Convention Centre Act* (the Act), operates under the name Events East Group (Events East). Since April 2017, Events East has managed and operated the Halifax Convention Centre, Scotiabank Centre and Ticket Atlantic. The legislation outlines that the activities of the Halifax Convention Centre be maintained and managed in a manner that will promote and develop economic development, tourism and industry in the Province generally, and the Municipality in particular.

Nancy MacCready-Williams, Board Chair of Events East has submitted the attached business plan for the approval of Halifax Regional Council and the Minister of Economic Development. The plan was developed by Events East and has been approved by the Events East's board of directors.

The Act requires that Events East submit to Council and the Minister for approval a detailed business plan for the following fiscal year, including estimates of budgetary requirements.

DISCUSSION

On March 28, 2022, the Events East Board Chair submitted a 2022-2023 Business Plan for Events East Group as approved by the Board. Focus will be on instilling client confidence while preparing to host significant conventions and events beginning in the Spring of 2022.

The plan has five strategic priorities which are summarized as:

1. **Business Growth**
Hosting strategic events that drive vibrancy into our city, supporting the recovery of our business community and events industry, working with national and international clients in the upcoming year to ensure they are confident and excited to host their events in Halifax, and securing significant events in the international market for future years.
2. **Guest Experience**
While working closely with our clients to create memorable, engaging events; conduct research to understand any shifts in the key drivers of decision-making and event experience. This will help to recognize impacts of the pandemic on clients and their business, and evolving needs.
3. **Community Connection**
Leveraging events to instill optimism, drive vibrancy and generate community pride with our partners and neighbours, including through an enhanced Local Program, which provides a platform for local businesses to showcase all that makes our province a great place to visit and live. Working with partners to and community to ensure venues and events reflect the diversity of our community.
4. **Talent & Culture**
Retaining and growing a workforce is a critical priority, supported by recruitment and retention strategies, fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce, a recognition program, and plans for workforce development.
5. **Accountability & Sustained Performance**
Operating the Halifax Convention Centre in a responsible and transparent manner with focus on the stabilization of business and the implementation of strategic programs and projects that align with our long-term strategy.

The 2022/23 business plan includes 19 actions and initiatives supporting the 5 strategic priorities noted above.

Strategic alignment

Staff have reviewed the Events East's business plan in relation to the HRM strategic plans and priorities including the Inclusive Economic Strategy 2022-2027, Halifax Regional Integrated Tourism Plan and Council's Strategic Priorities Plan 2021-25.

Notable areas of alignment between the Events East 2022-23 Business Plan and these plans include:

- Inclusive Economic Strategy 2022-2027
 - Business plan priorities align most especially to the strategic goal to promote and maximize inclusive and sustainable growth particularly the strategic objective to continue to support economic recovery and restore confidence post-pandemic; as well as the strategic goal of making Halifax a better place to live and work, the strategic objective of strengthening the dynamism of our downtowns, main streets, and rural centres.
- Halifax Regional Integrated Tourism Master Plan
 - Business plan priorities align to the Tourism Master Plan, particularly as related to the strategic themes of being vibrant and alive 365 and attracting highest yield and growth markets.
- Council's Strategic Priorities Plan 2021-25
 - Business plan priorities support Council's strategic priority related to Prosperous Economy and within that priority area the outcome of economic growth: *Economic opportunities are seized to promote and maximize balanced growth, reduce barriers for businesses, support local economies, and showcase the region's strengths to the world.*

Through the equity and diversity work identified under Community Connection and Talent & Culture strategic priorities there may be opportunities for the work of Events East to align to and connect with objectives and actions under the Road to Economic Prosperity for African Nova Scotian Communities. The plan also supports the Events East's five-year strategic plan approved by Regional Council and the Minister in July 2019.

Outcomes and Measures

The 2022-23 business plan includes core outcomes & measures associated with each of the priority areas. They speak to business growth that begins to recover from the significant effects of COVID-19 and associated public health measures. The target for annual direct spending associated with conventions and events is approximately \$40M. This is increased from the 2021-22 target of \$10—12M but does not represent a full recovery at the 2019-20 target of \$55M. Associated with this, the target number of events and delegates is somewhat lower than the 2019-20 target. Correspondingly there is a higher level of shareholder support budgeted than was the case pre-COVID-19 though this budgeted investment is expected to be lower than the 2021-22 level. Other measures include implementation benchmarks for programs such as revalidating client satisfaction benchmarks and setting targets for future years, and the implementation of a community and stakeholder engagement strategy.

Business Plan Next Steps

More broadly speaking, Events East, through activities guided by its business plan, is positioned to recover business rapidly as restrictions are lifted.

The 2022-23 business plan assumes that restrictions, including public gathering limits, ease as planned and travel guidelines remain clear and consistent, with delegates from other jurisdictions easily able to travel to Nova Scotia.

Employees who were redeployed to assist with the COVID-19 response have been returning to their regular full-time roles at Events East and others recalled as restrictions eased through the re-opening phases. The business plan has been approved by the Minister of Economic Development.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Annual business plans, including budget estimates, are required to be approved by Halifax Regional Council. HRM is a 50/50 partner with the Province on the Convention Centre and is responsible to contribute half of the total anticipated funding requirement which is estimated at \$3,725,000. HRM's funding for the Convention Centre is withdrawn from the Halifax Convention Centre Reserve.

Budget Summary: Convention Centre Reserve Q521

<i>Projected Net Available Balance, April 1/22</i>	<i>\$ 2,821,563</i>
<i>Projected Interest</i>	<i>\$ 37,630</i>
<i>Budgeted contribution 2022/23</i>	<i>\$ 8,214,800</i>
<i>Budgeted withdrawals (HCC rent) 2022/23</i>	<i>(\$ 5,380,285)</i>
<i>Budgeted withdrawals (Events East)</i>	<i>(\$ 3,724,715) *</i>
<i>Net Available Ending Balance</i>	<i>\$1,968,993</i>

****\$3,724,715 withdrawals from Convention Centre Reserve – Q521 are included in approved 2022/23 budget.***

RISK CONSIDERATION

Risks associated with approval of the Events East Business Plan are low. Annual business planning and budgeting are means by which risks can be identified and mitigated.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council could choose not to approve the annual business plan or to request amendments to the business plan.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 Letter of submission and 2022-2023 Events East Business Plan

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.

Report Prepared by: Maggie MacDonald, Executive Director, Parks & Recreation 902.490.4933

EVENTS EAST GROUP

(HALIFAX CONVENTION CENTRE CORPORATION)

WRITTEN APPROVAL OF COUNCIL AND MINISTER

UNDER SUBSECTION 29.1 of the

HALIFAX CONVENTION CENTRE ACT

TO: Events East Group
Attention: Board Chair and Secretary

RE: Approval of 2022-23 Events East Group Business Plan

Clause 29.1 of the *Halifax Convention Centre Act* (the "Act") states: *Annually, as required by the Council and the Minister, the Corporation shall submit to the Council and the Minister for approval a detailed business plan for the following fiscal year, including estimates of budgetary requirements, for the operation of the Corporation.*

The Corporation is hereby seeking approval of Council for the Events East Group 2022-23 Business Plan.

On _____ at the regular meeting of Halifax Regional Council, the following motion was passed by a majority vote of Council.

"That the Halifax Regional Council approve the 2022-23 Event East Business Plan for the Events East Group (Halifax Convention Centre Corporation) submitted to the Municipality _____ as set out in Attachment ____ to the _____ staff report.

Accordingly, the Business Plan of the Events East Corporation for the year 2022-23, as submitted, is hereby approved.

Dated:

Mr. Jacques Dubé, CAO
Halifax Regional Municipality

March 28, 2022

Minister Susan Corkum-Greek
N.S. Department of Economic Development
M103-1809 Barrington Street
Halifax, NS B3J 3K8

Halifax Regional Council
Halifax Regional Municipality
P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, NS B3J 2V9

Dear Minister and Council:

RE: Events East Group 2022-23 Business Plan

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Events East Group, please find enclosed the 2022-23 Events East Business Plan as approved by the Board at its March 23, 2022 meeting. The Board respectfully requests formal approval of the plan (consent document attached).

We are very optimistic about the year ahead, anticipating the strongest calendar of events we have seen since we first opened the doors to the new Halifax Convention Centre. The 2022-23 business plan assumes that restrictions, including public gathering limits, ease as planned and travel guidelines remain clear and consistent, with delegates from other jurisdictions easily able to travel to Nova Scotia.

The Board and Executive Management Team of Events East Group appreciate your ongoing support, and if you have any questions, comments or require additional information please let me know.

Yours truly,

Original Signed

Nancy MacCready-Williams
Board Chair

cc: Scott Farmer, DM, N.S. Dept. of Economic Development
Jennifer Church, ADM, N.S. Dept. of Economic Development
Melanie Fewer, Director, Crown Relations, N.S. Dept. of Economic Development
Mike Queripel, Director, N.S. Dept. of Economic Development
Denise Schofield, Deputy CAO, HRM
Maggie MacDonald, Director, Regional Recreational Services, HRM
Carrie Cussons, President and CEO, Events East Group
Suzanne Fougere, EVP, Strategy & Business Development, Events East Group

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Dated:

Mr. Jacques Dubé, CAO
Halifax Regional Municipality

Events East

2022-23 Business Plan for the Halifax Convention Centre & Ticket Atlantic

Approved by Board of Directors March 23, 2022

*Final draft as at March 25, 2022, pending final shareholder approval

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A Message from the President & CEO

As we look to the year ahead, there is a sense of optimism and positivity that our business, industry and community have been long awaiting.

Despite the prolonged impact of the pandemic on the events and tourism industry, the calendar of events for 2022-23 continues to grow; this year is shaping up to be the strongest we've seen since first opening the doors to our new convention centre. Further, our partners are creating events and activities that will drive animation into our communities, creating the opportunities for us all to get out and experience our great city and province.

Our clients are eager to return, excited to be hosting their events with us and attracting their delegates to our province. Our team is energized and thrilled to be back working with clients to plan and deliver events. And Nova Scotians, including our industry partners and communities across the province, are ready to get back to what we do best – welcoming and hosting.

While our attention over the past two years has been on sustaining our business, our commitment to our long-term vision and targets has remained unchanged. Our team has continued to retain and attract national and international events for our Centre, working closely with our clients as they prepare to host in-person events in Nova Scotia. They recognize that we will serve as a true partner to them as they navigate the ever-changing landscape of our industry. We have continued to foster similar relationships with our local and regional clients who continue to be critical to our success.

With the full return of events, we will focus on ensuring the impact of our business extends beyond our walls and into the community that we serve. The launch of our enhanced Local Program this year will provide a platform to showcase local products and businesses, connecting our guests with authentic Nova Scotia food, arts and culture. Similarly, an organizational focus on equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility will help us better understand how we can positively impact and reflect our population through our workforce, venues and events.

Looking to the future, we are committed and ready to welcome the world back to Nova Scotia. Together with our partners, shareholders and community, we will create amazing experiences for our guests that harness the power of live events and showcase the best our province has to offer.

Original Signed

Carrie Cussons
President & CEO
Events East

Mandate

WHO WE ARE

Events East Group is a special purpose government agency that manages and operates the Halifax Convention Centre, Scotiabank Centre, and Ticket Atlantic.

We are known for attracting and hosting the best events in the region through our commitment to event excellence. Our facilities allow us to attract new visitors and opportunities to Nova Scotia, connecting us to the world.

We were created as part of a government partnership between the Province of Nova Scotia and Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and we work in collaboration with them to manage our business in a responsible and transparent manner.

MANDATE

We were created in 2014 through the Halifax Convention Centre Act to operate, maintain and manage the activities of the Halifax Convention Centre in a manner that will promote and develop economic development, tourism and industry in the province generally, and the municipality.

In April 2017, our mandate expanded to include the continued management and operations of Scotiabank Centre and Ticket Atlantic.

Planning Context

This business plan is presented for the management and operations of the Halifax Convention Centre and Ticket Atlantic, which are jointly owned by the Province of Nova Scotia and HRM. At the Halifax Convention Centre, we attract and host meetings, conferences and conventions, with an emphasis on national and international event activity. Our focus is on events that promote economic development and tourism, driving positive impact and vibrancy for Nova Scotia.

While the pandemic has had a prolonged impact on the meetings and conventions industry, the demand for in-person events has remained strong among event organizers and attendees. National and international activity is returning to historical volumes and clients continue to choose Nova Scotia to host their events.

Through proactive collaboration and planning, we will work to instill client confidence as we prepare to host significant conventions and events beginning in the Spring of 2022.

Our team remains committed to delivering exceptional event experiences for our guests, re-introducing programs and service standards that support our guest experience vision. This commitment to service and partnership with our clients and community will help continue to position our city and Centre as an ideal destination for national and international events.

We will also work closely with event organizers and our industry partners to create authentic Nova Scotia experiences for our guests and a platform to showcase our province's diverse culture, flavours and experiences through our enhanced Local Program. Leveraging our venue and the events that we host to showcase what makes Nova Scotia unique not only differentiates us as leaders in the industry but creates opportunities for us to celebrate and generate community pride.

We will also continue to look for ways that our venue can serve as the backdrop for important conversations, connections and events that create vibrancy and support the recovery of our industry and province.

Note:

The 2022-23 business plan assumes that restrictions, including public gathering limits, ease as planned and travel guidelines remain clear and consistent, with delegates from other jurisdictions easily able to travel to Nova Scotia.

Re-introduction of restrictions or an additional wave of the pandemic would negatively impact event activity and may influence changes to strategic initiatives and budget.

Strategic Priorities & Activities

BUSINESS GROWTH

With the easing of health and safety restrictions domestically and globally, our primary focus this year will be to attract and host national and international event activity. This includes working closely with clients booked in the upcoming year to ensure they are confident and excited to host their events in Halifax, while also working to secure significant events for future years. Recognizing the importance of local and regional event activity, we will also work with our clients in these markets to host strategic events that drive vibrancy into our city, supporting the recovery of our business community and events industry.

Activities/Initiatives:

- Continued implementation of sales and marketing strategy to achieve long-term booking targets.
- Collaborate with strategic partners on a common narrative to ensure a consistent brand for Halifax as a host destination.
- Activate international sector-based event attraction strategy with strategic partners in alignment with government focus areas.
- Implement local/regional sales strategy to drive event activity during non-peak times.

GUEST EXPERIENCE

As we look to the upcoming year, we will focus on working closely with our clients to create memorable, engaging events for their delegates. This includes implementing service delivery standards that align with our service vision and ensure a consistent, seamless delivery of events. Recognizing the impact of the pandemic on our clients and their business, we will conduct research to understand any shifts in the key drivers of decision-making and event experience. Through client insights and ongoing collaboration with our industry counterparts across the country, our approach will be rooted in a commitment to guest experience and service delivery based on industry trends and the evolving needs of our clients.

Activities/Initiatives:

- Successful delivery of national/international event activity in partnership with our clients.
- Development of client research strategy to gather feedback and revalidate key drivers of decision-making and guest experience.
- Implementation and evolution of programs and operational standards that support delivery against our service vision.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

We recognize the important role our business has in supporting our community. As such, we will continue to celebrate and leverage the events we host to instill optimism, drive vibrancy and generate community pride with our partners and neighbours. This includes ensuring we have the right programs and strategies in place to support and reflect the community in which we do business. This year, we are focused on delivering an enhanced Local Program, providing a platform for local businesses to showcase all that makes our province a great place to visit and live. Additionally, through our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, we will work with our partners and community to identify ways we can ensure our venues and events reflect the diversity of our community, creating safe, welcoming spaces for all.

Activities/Initiatives:

- Launch expanded Local Program to showcase authentic Nova Scotia culture, flavours, and experiences for all of our guests, supporting Nova Scotia producers, businesses and arts and culture.
- Leverage and celebrate the events we host to instill confidence and drive activity for our business community and industry.
- Finalize organizational equity, diversity and inclusion strategy including ongoing engagement with our community and key stakeholders.
- Develop sustainable approach for year-round strategic use of the venue to support community needs and broaden our overall impact.

TALENT & CULTURE

With a strong calendar of events in the upcoming year, growth and retention of our workforce is a critical priority to ensure we can continue to deliver on our service vision. We will develop strategies to recruit and retain employees with a focus on our operational teams, including collaboration with our hospitality industry partners who are facing similar labour challenges in the current environment. This focus on our workforce will be supported by a commitment to an equitable, diverse and inclusive culture and a redesign of our internal engagement strategy to align with the needs and expectations of our employees.

Activities/Initiatives:

- Development and implementation of recruitment, resourcing, and training strategy to support event volumes.
- Roll-out equity, diversity and inclusion program including education and audit of HR policies and processes.
- Collaborate with community, industry and educational institutions on workforce development to meet the current and future needs of the industry.
- Redesign and implement internal engagement strategy, including recognition program, to support an engaged workforce and culture.

ACCOUNTABILITY & SUSTAINED PERFORMANCE

With the return to normal operations and a sustained volume of event activity, our focus remains on the stabilization of our business and the implementation of strategic programs and projects that align with our long-term strategy. In collaboration with our shareholders, the Province and HRM, we will continue to operate in a transparent, efficient manner, aligned with their expectations and the needs of our partners, community and industry.

Activities/Initiatives:

- Develop organizational accessibility framework in collaboration with Crown's Accessibility Committee and in alignment with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act.
- Ongoing collaboration with tourism and events industry partners on recovery strategy and stabilization of industry.
- Reconfirm risk governance policy and framework in collaboration with our Board of Directors.
- Development of long-term capital planning program for the Halifax Convention Centre.

Core Outcomes & Measures

In 2022-23, we will monitor and measure our performance in the following areas, aligned with the recovery of our business and organization:

Priority	Measure	2022-23 Target
Business Growth	Total direct spending and economic benefit	Through the conventions and events we host at the Halifax Convention Centre, generate annual direct spending of approximately \$40M.
Business Growth	Number of events attracted and hosted at the Halifax Convention Centre	Host approximately 120 events with 70,000 delegates, including 30 national and international events. Secure a cumulative total of 100 national and international events with approximately 80,000 delegates for 2023-24 and beyond.
Guest Experience	Client and delegate feedback	Revalidate client satisfaction benchmarks and establish targets for future years.
Community Connection	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion framework	Successful implementation of community and stakeholder engagement strategy.
Community Connection	Enhanced Local Program	Program launched and successfully delivered throughout the year.
Talent & Culture	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion framework	Complete audit of HR policies and processes; continued implementation of education program.
Accountability & Sustained Performance	Financial performance	Meet approved budget targets.
Accountability & Sustained Performance	Crowns accessibility framework	Venue-specific accessibility framework developed.

**Assumes all COVID-19 restrictions have eased by early 2022-23 and that there are no further restrictions introduced throughout the year.*

Budget Context

While COVID-19 had an impact on our industry and business, we are seeing a strong demand for in-person events with both event organizers and attendees. National and international activity is returning to historical volumes and clients continue to choose Nova Scotia to host their events.

Our 2022-23 budget assumes a return to a larger volume of national and international events which generate higher revenue. Based on our planning assumptions, budgeted revenues reflect some ongoing uncertainty in the early part of the year for national event activity and attendance and a gradual return to historical revenues. A diverse event mix with national/international clients will be critical in returning to sustained revenue generation in the long-term.

Historically, before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, annual shareholder investment has typically been approximately \$6.0M, relating to building costs and property taxes. As event activity rebounds and we continue to recover our business, a total shareholder investment of \$7.5M is estimated for 2022-23, which is jointly funded by the Province of Nova Scotia and HRM. This demonstrates a continued trend of improvement from \$11.3M that was required in 2020-21 at the onset of the pandemic, towards a return to pre-COVID total investment requirement of approximately \$6.0M.

This year, we are planning to reinvest in national and international sales and marketing activities budgeted at \$710K. This reinvestment comes after a period of reduced spending and a pause on activities due to COVID-19 and is critical to achieving our long-term booking targets.

Property taxes of \$2.1M are included in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Province of Nova Scotia and HRM.

**Assumes all COVID-19 restrictions have eased by early 2022-23 and that there are no further restrictions introduced throughout the year.*

Operating Budget Summary

(For the year ended March 31)

	Budget 2022-23 (\$)	Forecast 2021-22 (Note 1) (\$)	Budget 2021-22 (\$)
Revenues	8,850,000	2,172,000	4,414,000
Expenses			
Event Operations – Fixed Costs	1,911,000	1,754,000	1,794,000
Event Operations – Variable Costs	3,899,000	752,000	1,885,000
Salaries and Benefits	3,111,000	2,814,000	2,940,000
General Operations	1,519,000	1,021,000	920,000
Total Expenses	10,440,000	6,341,000	7,539,000
Operating Loss Before Building Costs, Property Taxes and Depreciation	(\$1,590,000)	(\$4,169,000)	(\$3,125,000)
Building Operating Costs (Note 2)	3,480,000	2,784,000	2,923,000
Operating Loss before Property Taxes and Depreciation	(5,070,000)	(6,953,000)	(6,048,000)
Property Taxes (Note 3)	2,080,000	2,018,000	2,040,000
Operating Loss Before Depreciation	(7,150,000)	(8,971,000)	(8,088,000)
Depreciation	300,000	292,000	286,000
Estimated Shareholder Investment	\$7,450,000	\$9,263,000	\$8,374,000
Investment Required from Shareholder – HRM	\$3,725,000	\$4,632,000	\$4,187,000
Investment Required from Shareholder – PNS	\$3,637,500	\$4,485,000	\$4,119,000

Note 1: Forecast reflects the impact of the temporary restrictions introduced in December 2021 associated with the Omicron variant.

Note 2: Halifax Convention Centre building operating costs include the contractual lease operating costs related to the Nova Centre. The annual contractual lease payment is the responsibility of the Province of Nova Scotia and is not reflected in the above values.

Note 3: Property taxes are calculated pursuant to the MOU between the Province of Nova Scotia and HRM.

Note 4: Revenues and expenses for Scotiabank Centre are not reflected in the values noted above. Scotiabank Centre is a facility owned by HRM. Events East operates the facility on behalf of HRM under an operating agreement. All operating income or losses generated by the facility accrue to HRM, and all capital improvements are funded by the municipality.

Note 5: Assumes all COVID-19 restrictions have eased by early 2022-23 and that there are no further restrictions introduced throughout the year.