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Item No. 15.1.6
Halifax Regional Council
February 21, 2023

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 10, 2023

SUBJECT: **Navigator Program Expansion – Request**

ORIGIN

Email correspondence (dated December 5, 2022) sent by Tim Rissesco on behalf of Halifax's Urban Business Improvement Districts requesting \$100K additional funding to support the Navigator program (see Attachment 1).

December 13, 2022, Regional Council motion (Item No.15.9.1):

MOVED by Deputy Mayor Austin, seconded by Councillor Mancini

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to provide a staff report on the potential expansion of the Street Navigator Program as requested by the Downtown Dartmouth, Downtown Halifax, North End, Spring Garden Road, and Quinpool Road Business Improvement Districts with a potential additional cost to HRM of \$100,000. The report should be provided to Council in time for consideration in the 2023/2024 budget.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED¹

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

HRM Charter, Section 7A: "Purposes of Municipality 7A The purposes of the Municipality are to (a) provide good government; (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities."

HRM Charter, Section 79A(1): "Municipal expenditures 79A (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if (a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality; (b) the expenditure is in respect of an emergency under the Emergency Management Act; or (c) the expenditure is legally required to be paid."

¹ See Regional Council [Minutes](#) December 13, 2022 (Item No.15.9.1).

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Allocate \$150,000 to cover salary, benefits and non-salary expenditures associated with adding a municipal staff position (Coordinator of Housing and Homelessness) with required funding of \$125,000 to be added to the 2023/24 budget adjustment list.

BACKGROUND

Outreach workers provide proactive, positive lifelines for individuals who struggle with securing and maintaining housing and employment due to addictions, mental health issues and homelessness. Workers may operate on-street, within the walls of service provider facilities, at warming centres or at shelter sites. Coordination among outreach workers relies on informal networking and use of a ‘text tree’ for communication.

Four service delivery models, currently operating in HRM, are outlined below (see Table 1).

Model	Description
HRM (In-House)	On-street Navigator employed by the Halifax Regional Municipality. This staff person (Coordinator of Housing and Homelessness) provides direct support to people struggling with homelessness and housing throughout HRM. Coverage is primarily focused on the urban core; however, this position provides limited support to suburban communities. Currently one (1) position. ²
BID	On-street Navigators jointly employed by four downtown Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). ³ BID-Navigators work with homeless persons on the peninsula and downtown Dartmouth. Navigators provide referrals and assist with finding and retaining housing, securing employment, accessing medication/treatment, and obtaining identification. These positions are financially supported both by the BIDs and by a municipal operating grant. ⁴ Currently two (2) positions.
Library	Off-street Navigators employed by the Halifax Public Libraries. These library staff (Community Navigators) work directly with homeless and unstably housed library patrons, helping to connect them with service providers. Libraries act as places to rest, access the internet, use public washrooms and to shelter from inclement weather. Community Navigators also offer training and support to library staff to better serve the needs of street-involved library patrons. Currently five (5) positions. ⁵

² See Attachment 2 for an overview of navigation services provided by both HRM and BID-employed navigators. Note: HRM navigator does not provide direct diversion support (e.g. first/last month rent).

³ Downtown Halifax Business Commission, Spring Garden Area Business Association, North End Business Association and Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission.

⁴ The most recent HRM-BID Contribution Agreement (\$140K/year for fiscal 2021/2022, 2022/2023 and 2023/2024) will expire in March of 2024. See [Item No. 11.1.3](#) Halifax Regional Council February 23, 2021 for background.

⁵ Library-based Community Navigators operate out of the following libraries: Keshen Goodman, Spryfield, JD Shatford, Sackville, Alderney Gate, Halifax North and Central.

Service Providers	Mixed off-street and on-street outreach workers employed by various service providers. ⁶ Roles vary depending on organizational mandate. Some workers focus on people with specific needs, others have a gender or ethnicity-based focus. Outreach work may also be restricted to a specific geographic area. All positions assess needs and help with securing housing. Most service-provider-based outreach positions receive provincial funding support. HRM staff occasionally provide these outreach workers with supplies (tents, sleeping bags etc.).
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DISCUSSION

HRM is acting to address homelessness in the municipality⁷ and has developed a long-term framework to guide the municipality's go-forward response.⁸ Funding for an additional outreach and navigation position is consistent with anticipated homelessness strategic direction. Likewise, augmenting homeless resources aligns with HRM's draft Public Safety Strategy (2023-2026) which identifies support for street-involved people as one of seven strategic priorities.⁹

One of the most significant challenges in building a holistic approach to community safety is creating capacity to respond to calls for service and to proactively reach out to vulnerable people. Staff note that the allocation of additional outreach funding is consistent with recommendations contained in the report *Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM*.¹⁰ Defunding is about identifying roles or functions of the police that they are not equipped to do, and transferring those tasks to the appropriate service provider, agency, or organization. This process is also referred to as "detasking."

A core component of detasking the police is a call to provide more structural, preventative, and upstream interventions to address public safety. The process of detasking is about ensuring the most appropriate responder is available to provide both proactive and reactive services to those in need of assistance. Providing the appropriate response may increase positive outcomes for the person in need and reduce harm. Responding to people in mental health crisis and addressing issues of poverty and homelessness are two spheres of police activity identified as candidates for de-tasking and re-tasking. Adding a homelessness outreach position will better position the municipality to respond to calls for service on a sustained basis and may lessen the need to dispatch police.¹¹

In 2021/2022 the municipality created an in-house staff position to enable HRM to better respond to homelessness. This outreach/navigation staff member has worked collaboratively with outreach workers and navigators employed by the libraries, the BIDs and homeless-serving organizations. Adding an additional in-house (HRM employed and funded position) would further enhance the municipality's ability to provide outreach and navigation services in partnership with those working with street-involved individuals. Employment by HRM would allow for navigator deployment in suburban or rural communities,

⁶ Service-provider outreach/navigation workers operate out of numerous locations including the [Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre](#), [North End Community Health Centre](#), [Shelter Nova Scotia](#), [Adsum House](#), [Out of the Cold](#), [Phoenix House](#), [Beacon House](#) and [Elizabeth Fry Society](#).

⁷ Steps taken include constructing modular homes, advancing inclusionary zoning and density bonusing, participating in rapid housing initiatives, and adopting a framework to support unhoused residents sheltering in municipal parks. For an overview of ongoing homelessness focused municipal activities and resources, see [Item No. 15.1.9](#) Halifax Regional Council May 3, 2022.

⁸ Regional Council has directed staff to develop a strategy outlining municipal roles and specific actions to support and prevent homelessness. See [Item No. 15.1.5](#) Halifax Regional Council June 14, 2022.

⁹ See [here](#) for a draft copy of the Public Safety Strategy (2023-2026). Staff anticipate that the draft strategy will be presented to Council in Spring of 2023.

¹⁰ [Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM](#) includes 36 recommendations (reforms to police practices, oversight, and accountability). The report was delivered to the Board of Police Commissioners in January of 2022.

¹¹ People experiencing homelessness are intensively policed. Research shows that, on average, people without stable housing have over ten times the number of police-interactions as people who are stably housed (see [here](#)).

including localities without a BID.¹² HRM staff have identified service delivery coverage gaps in the urban core (particularly weekends and evenings). An additional HRM employed/supervised staff position would enhance operational flexibility and supplement coverage at times (and in places) where service delivery is most needed.

Adding an additional HRM staff position (Coordinator of Housing and Homelessness) would require an allocation of \$150K in funding. This figure represents an anticipated \$90K/year for salary and benefits costs of employing an additional municipal staff person. Based on current practice, non-salary outlays are expected to account for an additional \$60K/annually for support-related expenditures.¹³

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The CAO business unit budget (GREA Navigator budget) has capacity to fund \$25,000 towards these costs and has requested the additional \$125,000 be added to the budget adjustment list. The \$125,000 cost over the existing budget is equal to an estimated \$0.44 increase to the average residential tax bill.

RISK CONSIDERATION

No risk considerations were identified.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was conducted.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Regional Council could choose not to approve the recommendation.
2. Regional Council could choose to fund a BID employed and supervised outreach position.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 Email correspondence dated December 5, 2022 sent on behalf of urban BIDs

Attachment 2 Key Navigator activities

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: Scott Sheffield, Government Relations, and External Affairs 902.430.3654

¹² Lived-experience consultations, with suburban homeless individuals, are ongoing. Feedback could inform navigator deployment outside the urban core.

¹³ Non-salary expenditures are estimated at \$5K/month and may include necessary work tools and/or clothing; specialized training programs; transit tickets; cold weather clothing; bedding; tents. See Attachment 2 for additional details.

ATTACHMENT 1

Email correspondence dated December 5, 2022 sent by Tim Rissesco on behalf of Halifax's Urban BIDs

Dear Mayor and Council,

I am writing on behalf of the Halifax Urban BIDs regarding the Navigator Programs. Currently, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) supports, the Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission (DDBC) Downtown & the North End Business Association (NEBA) with a shared Dartmouth/ North End Navigator Street Outreach Program (NSOP) and the Downtown Halifax Business Commission & Spring Garden Road Business Association with a shared Downtown Halifax/SGR Navigator Street Outreach Program.

The Navigator program has demonstrated results in our four districts and similar programs that exist in cities across North America. HRM currently supports each program annually with \$70,000 per year for a total contribution of \$140,000. The remaining budget for the program comes from the Business Improvement Districts.

The Navigator programs have experienced increased demands for service as more people face homelessness in our Municipality. Our districts have significant populations of street involved, homeless or precariously housed individuals that sometimes have difficulties accessing necessary services. The outreach program has also facilitated training and education for the business community to assist in resolving potential issues in a positive manner with street involved individuals.

We are writing to request HRM support for an additional Navigator to serve Downtown Dartmouth and North End Dartmouth enabling the two existing Navigators to focus on individuals needing assistance on the Peninsula. The cost to HRM for the additional Navigator would be \$100,000, each of the BID would continue to contribute \$15,000 to the programs. We would also like your support for offering Navigators to other BIDs as the need arises.

Halifax Regional Municipality's financial support for the proposal will make it sustainable.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Rissesco, MBA, LPM
(He/Him)
Chief Executive Officer
Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission
Pu'namoqwati'jk – Dartmouth, Nova Scotia
902-466-2997 (Office)

ATTACHMENT 2

Table 2: Key Navigator activities¹

Category	Description
Transit	Facilitating access to public transit (may include assistance securing a low-income transit pass and/or providing transit tickets).
Eviction prevention	Helping to keep individuals/families housed, including crisis support for people at imminent risk of eviction (may include landlord-tenant mediation or payment of damages/rental arrears).
Housing acquisition	Interventions that help homeless individuals/families to rapidly access new/appropriate housing (may include payment of first/last month rent and/or damage deposits). ²
Relocation	Helping precariously housed individuals to move/relocate (may involve support to set up a new apartment and/or moving related expenses).
Employment	Supporting individuals entering/re-entering the workforce (may include providing necessary work tools and/or clothing, ³ payment for specialized training programs, ⁴ assistance setting up a bank account ⁵ or facilitating relocation for the purposes of securing employment).
Identification	Facilitating replacement or first-time acquisition of official/government identification (may include ID-clinics). ⁶
Health services	Interventions that help homeless individuals/families to access primary health care, addiction treatment and/or mental health services (may include attending appointments with clients ⁷ , transporting clients to health providers, paying for medication and/or encouraging clients to access on-street health services). ⁸
Cold weather supplies	Ensuring individuals/families that sleep-rough are appropriately protected against the environment (may include providing cold-weather clothing and/or sleeping bags).
Food	Supporting homeless and street-involved individuals who are food-insecure (may include direct provision of food and/or facilitating food-bank/food-kitchen access).

¹ Not all services are at a financial cost. Navigators collaborate with local organizations that can either cover or defray applicable costs.

² Navigators support Halifax’s Coordinated Access System (CAS) and Housing First (HF). Both HF and CAS require effective outreach to ensure vulnerable individuals receive housing support. The trusting and mutually respectful relationships Navigators develop are critical to ensuring that individuals who refuse to use, or are denied access to, Halifax’s shelter system, receive needed housing support.

³ Including interview-appropriate attire, steel-toed boots and anti-skid shoes.

⁴ Including WHIMS, food handling, traffic control and fall arrest courses.

⁵ Bank accounts are necessary to accommodate direct deposit of wages.

⁶ Navigators offer ID-clinics in collaboration with Service Nova Scotia, that provide individuals with new or replacement identification. Identification is critical to accessing income assistance and the lack of official identification can be a barrier to becoming employed and/or housed.

⁷ Navigators will work with the individual (and other service providers) to set up and attend appointments to ensure that the user’s access to services is smooth and issue free.

⁸ Navigators play a key role in facilitating access to primary health care among street-involved individuals.

Community
education

Supporting members of the business/residential community vis-à-vis homelessness (may include clinics/workshops to address addictions and/or mental health among the homeless population).
