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Item No. 15.1.2
Halifax Regional Council
September 12, 2023

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: August 22, 2023

SUBJECT: Mill Cove Library

ORIGIN

March 21, 2023 Halifax Regional Council motion (Item No.18.1):

MOVED by Councillor Outhit, seconded by Councillor Mancini

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare a staff report investigating options for the size of the Bedford waterfront library prior to proceeding with the Mill Cove Ferry Terminal.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39 as amended

79 The Council shall adopt an operating budget and a capital budget for each fiscal year.

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.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to plan and budget for 21,000 square feet of functional library space within the planned Mill Cove Ferry Terminal.

BACKGROUND

In 2022 Halifax Transit began the conceptual design process for a ferry terminal at Mill Cove. Halifax Public Libraries were engaged to explore the option of integrating a library within the ferry terminal as a partial solution to the shortage of library space in the Bedford area. Due to the growth in other areas of Bedford and some limitations with the Mill Cove site, it was determined that the location was not ideal for a full-sized library branch but was well suited for a medium sized neighborhood branch.

Through the collaborative conceptual design process, a 14,160 SF Library was designed to be located in the public areas of the ferry terminal. It includes public areas shared between the ferry terminal and the library (like washrooms, circulation, public concourse) as well as dedicated library spaces. The preliminary conceptual library elements include indoor and outdoor spaces, an open seating area, a preschool play area, a performance space, library collections, a community meeting room, small study rooms, washrooms and a staff work area. More detailed conceptual drawings will be completed once funding is secured.

On September 29, 2022, Halifax Transit presented a report to Regional Council that outlined 3 investment scenarios for a Mill Cove Ferry Service. The first was a 'Base Case' which was a 30,000 square foot (SF) facility but included costs only for 15,000 SF of building space to house ferry operations. The second option was a 'Reduced Case' that provided for a reduced size of ferry terminal at 11,000 SF. The third investment scenario was a 'Do Minimum Case' that provided for a further reduced ferry terminal of 4,000 SF.

All three of the above investment scenarios assumed that funding for the Halifax Public Libraries (HPL) portion of the building was not included in the Halifax Transit funding application. The Transit funding would cover most of the common areas that users of both the terminal and library would have access to such as lobby areas and washrooms.

Regional Council passed a motion to submit an application to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) for the implementation of the Mill Cove Ferry Service based on the 'Reduced Case' investment scenario. This provided for a reduced terminal building of 11,000 SF and did not include the 14,160 SF of building envelope to house the library, the 2,500 SF of outdoor library or the interior fit-up costs for the library space including mechanical and electrical requirements, fixtures, furniture or equipment.

DISCUSSION

Halifax Public Libraries has undertaken a review of the Mill Cove site to consider options for additional space to be dedicated for library use, beyond the 14,160 SF identified in the original proposal. It is recommended that a medium sized library branch with a total of 21,000 SF of function space be considered to support library services for this site. The space would include 2,500 SF of outdoor library space, 4,101 SF of shared public spaces between the Ferry Terminal and the Library (including public washrooms, a shared concourse, and other amenities), and 14,160 SF of dedicated interior library space to be located in the proposed Mill Cove Ferry Terminal building.

The early concept designs for the Library at Mill Cove propose an iconic waterfront structure that integrates elements of the natural environment in the design of the two-story building. The building will allow access from transit routes, vehicles or by an integrated mobility trail along the Bedford waterfront.

The library will include a combined open public concourse where commuters and library users can linger, explore the collection, use the Wi-Fi, and connect with each other. A proposed 150 seat performance space will be used for community productions, concerts, and other arts & culture activities, drawing the community to the Bedford waterfront. The Library will also include a café, preschool play areas, quiet study rooms, and medium sized community meeting spaces.

The overall size will be similar to the Keshen Goodman Library, with much improved performance and community programming spaces to support waterfront cultural engagement.

Due to the high population growth in the Bedford/Hammonds Plains area, the Bedford Branch, which is currently located in a leased building on Dartmouth Road will continue to operate at that location until the Mill Cove Library is opened, at which time an alternative leased location will be found, and the Bedford Library will relocate from Dartmouth Road to a new leased location in the proximity of the Hammonds Plains Road. The current cost to operate the Dartmouth Road location is \$730,000 per year.

Size Options

Halifax Public Libraries recommends that 21,000 SF (14,160 dedicated library space, 2,500 SF of outdoor library space, plus 4,101 SF of shared space) is the optimal size for the proposed Mill Cove Library. This size maximizes community impact while taking into account the Mill Cove site limitations.

Site Limitations

Halifax Public Libraries believes that a medium sized neighbourhood branch integrated into the Ferry Terminal is the best option for the Mill Cove site. A larger or stand-alone library at Mill Cove is not recommended due site limitations including:

Location – The Mill Cove location is optimal for drawing community members to the Bedford waterfront and providing public facilities in a naturally beautiful environment that takes advantage of the municipality's connection to the water, and there are some residential neighborhoods nearby. However, it is not in the centre of the densely populated residential areas requiring service, nor is it located within walking distance of elementary, junior high and high schools and other public amenities.

Libraries are generally being built and renovated to support emergency service to the public during power or weather disruptions. This location would be limited for this purpose due to the proximity to the ocean and associated risks of flooding and accessibility.

Access – The proposed access to the Mill Cove site requires construction of an overpass that clears the CN railway tracks resulting in a long road/trail from the Bedford Highway to the proposed ferry terminal/library. Walking/wheeling access to the ferry terminal/library from the Bedford Highway will include significant grade changes and a longer walk/wheel distance. Similarly, accessing the branch on foot from DeWolfe Park is a 950m walk/wheel distance. The access to the site presents barriers for individuals walking or wheeling.

Parking – The current concept designs for the combined ferry terminal/library include space to accommodate paved parking for approximately 120 vehicles. The eastern side of the site, until such time as it is developed, could provide additional gravel surface parking. However, this area would have some accessibility limitations given its location and unstable surface. It is anticipated that most of these spaces will be filled in the morning by commuters, leaving limited accessible paved parking spaces for library users during the day. By comparison, the Keshen Goodman Library parking lot has 105 parking spots for library use only, and the Woodside Ferry Terminal has 515 parking spots for commuters. It is anticipated that the access challenges identified above and the limited parking spaces available at the site, will limit the number of potential users who will be able to come to this Library during the weekdays.

While access to parking during commuting hours will be a challenge, the Library feels that there is an opportunity to focus programming and offerings at this branch during non-commuter hours (i.e. evenings and weekends). Hence, excellent performance spaces, community meeting rooms, and gathering spaces are included in the design with an intention to make this location a cultural hub. Any charge for parking will negatively impact the number of library visits to this location.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Incorporating a public library within the proposed Mill Cove Ferry Terminal is included in the long-term

capital plan with \$10M in 2027/28 and \$5M in 2028/29 for a Bedford Library Replacement. These funds will need to be actioned earlier, depending on the ferry terminal project timeline. As well, an additional 12 FTE's and \$723,000 in annual staffing and operating costs will be required when the library opens for service.

Although space for a new library service is incorporated in the building design, the Mill Cove Ferry Service project \$260M budget does not cover the construction cost of the library's square footage. The Investing in Canadian Infrastructure Funding Program (ICIP) application does not include that portion of the building's design for cost share funding and therefore the entire building construction and fit-up cost for the library would be funded through the HRM capital budget. This level of funding would likely require an increase in taxes. The tables below outline tax rate implications using capital from operating and debt funding, as well as the annual staffing and operating costs:

Funding Source	Change to Capital Plan	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28-2032/33	Total Impact
Capital from Operating	\$(in thousands)	\$500	\$7,000	\$6,500			\$14,000
(Annual Tax)	\$ Change to Ave. Tax Bill	\$1.76	\$24.67	\$22.91			\$49.34
Debt	\$(in thousands)			\$280	\$1,932	\$14,868	\$17,080
	\$ Change to Ave. Tax Bill			\$0.99	\$6.81	\$52.40	\$60.20

Operating Budget Impacts	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
New Library Staff & Programs (\$ thousands)			\$723	\$723
\$ Change to Ave. Tax Bill			\$2.55	\$2.55

Incorporating space for new library service within the Mill Cove Ferry Terminal, would be conditional on HRM securing land acquisition and approval of the ICIP funding application within current budget limits.

RISK CONSIDERATION

No risk considerations were identified.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council could choose to direct staff to plan for an alternate sized library. This is not recommended due to the reasons stated in the report.

ATTACHMENTS

N/A

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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