

It's Time for Tax Fairness, Incentives, and Efficiencies but not Tax Increases
By Councillor Tim Outhitt

I believe HRM is in the unusual and enviable position of not having to raise commercial or residential property taxes this year. This is the result of an approximate \$26M surplus this past year, and a 'lift' of \$11M in new revenue from residential and commercial growth. You may recall that I have not supported the last several budgets, as I felt that raising taxes should be a last resort. In addition, I believe our existing assessment-based only tax system is flawed. Our objective should be to live within our means, focus on finding efficiencies within the municipality, and to put an economic development lens on all our policies and decisions in order to grow our tax base instead of tax rates. We are starting to move in this direction under the leadership of our CAO and Auditor General, but Council must have the vision and fortitude to support them.

I am also committed to ensuring that residents can become more involved in budget preparations, beginning next year, through public consultation during the budget preparation process. You have ideas, answers, and concerns to share.

To improve and protect our future fiscal well-being, I believe that HRM must launch tax fairness for small businesses and for condo owners. This can be positioned as tax fairness, or more wisely as incentives to promote density and to encourage smart development in the areas identified in the Regional Plan of 2006 as cost effective to service and sustain for growth. These areas often have many of the required services, infrastructure and facilities already in place. If it is economically and environmentally advantageous for growth to occur in certain areas versus others, then why wouldn't the municipality then encourage and reward that preferred growth? We should not dictate where all development must occur, but it is not unusual for cities to implement tax and permit incentives for their downtown or other struggling areas to facilitate density.

We have a bright future in HRM, particularly if we search for efficiencies and partnerships, maintain our existing infrastructure, improve our tax competitiveness, and encourage responsible and sustainable growth. This is part of my vision for our city, but I want to hear your reaction and your ideas. Please contact me at outhitt@halifax.ca, or at 229-6385.