

Mayor Mike Savage
Halifax Regional Council
Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021

Good morning colleagues, staff, and others. I am not chairing today's meeting because I am away with my family, but I wanted to be here at the start of the meeting. Thank you to Deputy Mayor Outhit for stepping in to chair the balance of this meeting.

I want to take this opportunity to say a few words about the events of the past couple of weeks as well as ongoing efforts to address the need for crisis housing, permanent supportive housing and the range of approaches that are required to address the real and pressing need for affordable housing. Just about everyone on this screen I have talked to in the last week or so and I know how deeply you feel about it.

Everybody deserves a home, a place with a bed, a source of heat, and sanitation. This should be more than a tent or a structure in a park.

This is a point on which most of us likely agree, including those who have found themselves unhoused; those who advocate on their behalf; agencies that work so hard to provide alternatives; park users; local business owners; and political leaders regardless of party stripe or order of government.

While it is true that the municipal mandate does not include social housing or the delivery of community services, we have a duty to all residents of this municipality. It is one of our strategic priorities and beyond that, I know every member of this Council believes we have a moral obligation to do more to help people who are unhoused and to help improve housing affordability so more people can remain secure in their homes or find a home.

The events of August 18, culminating with the confrontation that erupted between activists and police at the former Memorial Library site, has caused great concern and anger from residents and many social agencies that we have long seen as valuable community partners.

This Council believed people staying in the parks would be treated with dignity and empathy and that everybody would be offered safe, clean accommodations that would bridge them to supportive housing. While some have been housed, clearly this was not the case in all instances, and we have been working to close that loop and ensure that everybody has a real option.

As the municipality we don't have the appropriate skillsets and capacity to manage the complexities of the unhoused population; and we have seen the passion with which those who desire better were willing to insist upon it.

In my view, ultimately, we allowed what began as a **mission** to get people into better circumstances to devolve into an **operation** to remove them from parks for reasons of health and safety. I know many good people on our staff and around this virtual chamber know we can do better.

It's too easy to pile on police who were first tasked with enforcing a bylaw and then outnumbered in a park. Once officers called for backup, it came in volume, and we all saw how it played out. It is not something that we wanted or want to see again.

So, what do we take from this? In the face of lost faith and criticism in our intentions, we must recognize that it is time to recommit to the mission: To be a real partner in getting people housed. It absolutely is not, strictly speaking, a municipal mandate, but it is absolutely something that we have shown we are willing to do and something we have shown we can do.

People within this municipality are working tirelessly to review and deliver a range of housing options, through the Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) as one example. The Rapid Housing Initiative is a Federal government initiative, a very important one and a very positive one, and in this case, they grant directly to municipalities. They chose Halifax as a recipient even though it is not within the municipal mandate here. Fifty-two units have been approved through our first intake late last year, with exceptional community partners: the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre, Adsum House and the North End Community Health Centre. Round two of Rapid housing projects with 85 proposed units will be considered by Council today.

I want to indicate how appreciative I am of the of the significant investments the Federal government has made in making Halifax a recipient of RHI funding. I would have to say, and I have talked to some of you about this, how pleased I am to see that all parties have made housing and homelessness an early priority in this election campaign. I do not recall that before.

The past government as well as the new government at Province House have made commitments to heed the sweeping recommendations of the Housing Commission that HRM staff helped inform. This is a vital road map that takes into account the need for every order of government, community partners and social agencies to play a role.

For too many years successive governments have not met the test to house people who most need help.

I look to Nova Scotia's new government to work with all partners in getting housing built and helping people find a bed. I implore you to move swiftly on Charter changes that will allow us to bring in measures such as inclusionary zoning for affordable housing, which is one of the recommendations.

At the municipal level, it's time for us to pull out all the stops. If that means directing more money to deliver crisis housing, we need to do it. If it means using municipal land to rapidly address the immediate crisis, let's not waste any time. If it means hiring more people to move more housing stock from development application to construction, we need to do that as well.

We have shown - this council and previous councils - that we can take important steps to support vulnerable populations, including our work in food security, transit and in housing. Now, we must redouble our efforts to be better partners, to care for all members of this community, to lift everybody up and to invest in crisis housing solutions.

To that end I am asking Council's indulgence to suspend the rules of order so that I may bring forward a motion from added items. And I will hand the chair over to the Deputy Mayor so that I may take the floor.

MOTION, as amended

That Halifax Regional Council Waive the Rules of Order to in order to:

- 1. suspend the notice provisions associated with motions;**
- 2. waive the requirement for a Staff Report; and**
- 3. suspend the rules of procedure under Section 8 of Schedule 2, the Audit and Finance Standing Committee Terms of Reference, of Administrative Order One, the Procedures of the Council Administrative Order.**

That Halifax Regional Council

- o Direct the CAO to implement a range of emergency supportive housing and emergency shelter accommodations for those who are unhoused in collaboration with and based on feedback from community-based social services providers and the Province of Nova Scotia to address immediate and emergent needs including measures such as the fit-up of spaces for temporary accommodations, renting of hotel and other spaces and further, and to coordinate and collaborate with community-based social services providers and the Province of Nova Scotia in that respect;**
- o Direct that the CAO be authorized to spend up to \$500,000 from Fiscal Services in respect of addressing these needs, and report on the use of said funds through monthly public updates as an information report at Regional Council meetings until the end of the fiscal year and then quarterly at a minimum; and,**

- **Further direct the CAO to work with Department of Community Services and community service providers on a needs-analysis including determining how many people are unhoused, how many of them are currently tenting or occupying other forms of shelter within parks and other public lands in Halifax Regional Municipality and how many can be accommodated in a safer manner.**