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**Item No. 15.1.1**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**June 20, 2023**

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed

**SUBMITTED BY:**

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Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** May 23, 2023

**SUBJECT:** **Voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry**

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#### **ORIGIN**

January 24, 2023 Halifax Regional Council Item 15.2.1:

MOVED by Councillor Deagle Gammon, seconded by Councillor Outhit

THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report directing the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to consider an HRM Voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry for residents of HRM.

The report is to include the definition and parameters for the registry with a jurisdictional scan of other successful Municipalities.

The report is to include the cost of creation and maintaining, as well as confirmation of the protection of the information under the Privacy Act and to be used only for purposes of Emergency Management.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

#### **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, 2008 SNS, c 39:*

#### **Part X FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

##### **Municipal role**

**304** The Municipality may maintain and provide fire and emergency services by providing the service, assisting others to provide the service, working with others to provide the service or a combination of means.

##### **Powers where fire**

**308 (1)** When any fire, rescue or emergency occurs, the fire chief or other officer in charge, and any person under the direction of that officer, shall endeavour to extinguish the fire and prevent it from spreading, conduct the rescue or deal with the emergency and, for that purpose, may...(f) generally do all things necessary to respond to the emergency.

**RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2**

*Municipal Government Act, 1998 SNS, c 18:*

483(1) Personal information shall not be collected by, or for, a municipality unless ... (c) that information relates directly to, and is necessary for, an operating program or activity of the municipality.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry to be used for Emergency Management purposes in HRM to support residents who experience exponential increase in life safety risk due to extreme weather and other crisis events throughout HRM.

## **BACKGROUND**

Vulnerable individuals such as those with physical or mental disabilities are at an increased risk of harm during emergency events. Vulnerable Persons Registries are used to record pertinent information of vulnerable individuals, for first responders or volunteers to use during emergency events, such as prolonged power outages or severe weather events. Information within Vulnerable Persons Registries can be used during an emergency, and that information can be used for emergency management staff when preparing emergency plans.

During the Northeast Blackout of 2003, the community of Sault Ste Marie experienced the tragic loss of a young adult specifically vulnerable to power outages and dependent on electricity to survive. After a workplace incident resulting in substantial burns to most of his body, Lewis Wheelan was left dependent on external heat and cooling sources to regulate his body temperature. Without electricity to power his air conditioning unit, and no ability to communicate for assistance, he tragically succumbed to that emergency.

After 8 years of research, development and stakeholder partnership, Sault Ste Marie Innovation Centre developed a Vulnerable Persons Registry (VPR). Incorporating lessons learned from many jurisdictions impacted by disasters like New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina, the VPR was developed with specific intent to save the lives of the estimated 1% of community that are likely to perish without support during large scale disasters.

VPRs have been a focus of discussion in the Emergency Management field for many years and have been identified as a necessary support to those who have unique challenges and increased life safety risk to certain hazards. Due to the recent increase in severe weather events across Canada, there has been a significant gap identified by HRM community members and many advocacy groups to support vulnerable persons during emergencies. An effective response strategy is diversifying community preparedness tools that provide equitable access to emergency support. Vulnerable populations may not be able to assist themselves during times of crisis. Having a system in place which provides responding agencies limited health information on an individual may save their life.

The recent power blackouts experienced during Hurricane Fiona demonstrated that there is a need to know where vulnerable persons who may rely on power for medically assisted devices live.

Bill 202, Vulnerable Persons Registry Act was recently introduced in the Nova Scotia Legislature, to develop a provincewide registry for vulnerable persons in Nova Scotia, to be included in changes to legislation governing emergency management and 911 service. That Bill has yet to be scheduled for second reading. The registry discussed here is a separate registry which would be for HRM's Emergency Management staff, to be used only for purposes of Emergency Management.

## **DISCUSSION**

The few local governments that have implemented VPRs across Canada have been very successful in collecting critical information and integrating procedures and standard operating guidelines into their existing emergency plans. Emergency Management staff held meetings to review specific VPR programs in similar local governments within rural communities and a large urban centre. Each community reported an increase of community trust in the organization, resident peace of mind, increased public awareness during times of emergency and examples of situations where potential impacts of medical emergencies or further harm to community members who may become more vulnerable during emergencies were mitigated or avoided all together.

### **Successful Vulnerable Persons Registry Programs**

Kings County REMO, NS

- Established: 2018
- Population: 60,000 (the system serves the incorporated towns of Wolfville, Kentville and Berwick and the greater municipality of Kings County).
- Registered Participants: 30

Sault Saint Marie Innovation Centre, Ontario

- Established: 2011
- Population: Est 140,000
- Registered Participants: 452

Jasper, Alberta

- Established: 2021
- Population 5000 – 20,000
- Registered Participants: 53

Although every organization had a different operational approach when providing this service to their communities, Sault Ste Marie Innovations Centre's program and procedures are most aligned and consistent in likeness to HRM. Although they are a non-for-profit organization, they are funded by the government and the United Way to provide this program to multiple local governments. Their program involves the participation of different Business Units in the participating government structure, including their Integrated Emergency Services (IES) 911/Dispatch, IT, Privacy and all of their Emergency Management Departments. Sault Ste Marie Innovation Centre has offered to provide HRM with a copy of program documents. Other municipalities that have opted to adopt the Sault Ste Marie Innovation Centre's VPR Program are the Municipality of Wood Buffalo (Fort McMurray, Alberta) and Kings County Regional Emergency Management Office in Nova Scotia.

### **Proposed Program Description**

Software allowing important household information on specific vulnerabilities of individuals will be provided to first responders or volunteers through designated staff during large scale emergencies for wellness checks. This would ensure that Emergency Management staff would have up to date information to help ensure the municipality can respond appropriately to the residents within a more isolated response in addition to larger scale disasters.

The Emergency Management Division will maintain overall administration capacity over the VPR including public education provision, hfxALERT contact list updates, support to community and other first responding agencies. IT would maintain operational software and database management and website development. 311 and 211 would be provided information on how to assist community with registration on the system.

The program will be based on self-referral. This registry would be available to any resident who are without 24-hour support who experiences severe difficulty with any of the following:

- mobility;
- vision impairment;
- hearing impairment;

- developmental disabilities;
- cognitive impairment;
- mental health conditions; or
- any resident who requires electricity for life-sustaining equipment such as life support, oxygen, dialysis, etc.

Residents who are not eligible:

- residents receiving 24-hour support from a caregiver or home care aide (exceptions may apply);
- residents receiving care or assistance from a long-term care home or supportive housing facility;
- residents under the age of 18 and receive parent/guardian support (exceptions may apply).

However:

- Children with intensive needs or children that require electricity for life-sustaining equipment can be considered for eligibility.

Potential registrants would call 311, EM staff or complete an online form, providing information. Once received, designated staff would then reach out to confirm/verify the information. At this point, if the registrant met the proposed applicability requirements, they would be added to the registry.

During an emergency event, Emergency Management staff will be able to run a report from the registry with an overview of vulnerable persons address, and notes on vulnerability. EM staff will then engage with the appropriate resources (HRFE, police, volunteers, etc) to organize a vulnerable person's wellness check or other applicable response.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Program Operation**

An FTE would be required to support the Emergency Management Division in providing this VPR to HRM residents. Currently, Emergency Management does not have the capacity to provide this very important service. This would need to be a new FTE, which would need to be vetted through the talent and total rewards assessment process but is estimated to be approximately \$53,130 which is the starting cost of a non-union level 3 employee including benefits.

### **Public Education / Program Launch**

Costs associated with media coverage and community outreach will require funding of approximately \$10,000 annually. Kings County has indicated that after they launched their registry, they found more community outreach was required to increase citizen sign up.

### **Technology**

IT will develop a registry using a platform modality that is supported within HRM to ensure we have the skillset and knowledge to continue to maintain the system over the course of its lifecycle.

To enable IT to provide a rough order of magnitude technology estimate IT representatives met with Emergency Management's Erica Fleck, to capture high level workflow and functional requirements needed in a VPR.

The high-level technology requirements captured are outlined below:

Registration: ability to have staff (311 or EM) enter data, as well as an online form for members of the public to access and enter data. Designated staff, after following up to verify information with potential registrants, will then need to be able to record notes and classify individuals as active or not.

System Integration: at this point, there will be not be integration with any emergency systems including

IES/911 dispatch systems. Future integration will be considered with NextGen911 once NextGen911 is available in Nova Scotia.

**Privacy**

A Privacy Impact Assessment will be required once the IT system has been chosen or is being developed. Due to the high-sensitivity nature of the information of the personal information involved, it will need to be protected accordingly, with Legal approval for collecting and safeguarding of the information.

**4-Year Financial Impact:**

Expense	Source	2023/24	2324/25	2025/26	2026/27	4-Year Total
FTE	TBD	\$56,130	56,972	57,827	58,694	\$229,622
Public Education	TBD	\$10,000	10,150	10,302	10,457	\$40,909
Technology	TBD	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
Total		\$76,130	67,122	68,129	69,151	\$280,531

The 4-year financial impact is estimated to be \$280,531. Funding is not currently available in C801 so this will be a pressure and an increase to the C801 budget will be required.

IT has provided an estimate of \$10,000 per annum to account for Microsoft Licensing for HRM staff in EMO and 311 to access, update and administer the software in support of the vulnerable persons registry program.

**RISK CONSIDERATION**

Citizen and community risk. The risk of not proceeding with a VPR is that vulnerable residents are at increased risk during crisis events and HRM has no way of knowing where they are located or what their needs are.

The risk of proceeding with a VPR is that there could be an increased expectation of support from Halifax Regional Municipality, beyond the abilities or resources available from HRM. VPRs are used for a variety of purposes in different jurisdictions such as police services, community services or mental health services, whereas this would be limited to Community Safety purposes. To mitigate this risk, the sign-up process would include information to participants outlining what the registry is not and not for.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Feedback during crisis events such as hurricanes and extreme weather events from volunteer organizations as well as advocacy groups have recommended a registry in order to decrease risk.

Staff recommend that a public education and program promotion campaign be developed to launch this program. Due to the nature of the service, staff intend to target audiences and organizations that provide special care support.

Emergency Management Joint Emergency Management (JEM) Teams will be integral in helping distribute information to communities in addition to traditional media releases. VPR information will be distributed to public libraries and other public facing HRM facilities for circulation.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

**ALTERNATIVES**

Halifax Regional Council may:

1. Refuse to direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a a voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry in HRM as outlined above and maintain status quo.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry in HRM, subject to additional modifications. This may include uses or eligibility criteria. This may require a supplementary staff report.

**ATTACHMENTS**

None

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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