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Item No 15.1.4
Halifax Regional Council
December 12, 2023

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: November 23, 2023

SUBJECT: **HRM signing The Montréal Pledge – Cities United in Action for Biodiversity**

ORIGIN

July 11, 2023 Regional Council motion (Item No. 15.5.1):

MOVED by Councillor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a staff report on Halifax Regional Municipality becoming a signatory of The Montréal Pledge – Cities United in Action for Biodiversity.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Administrative Order One, The Procedure of the Council Administrative Order:

Rules Adopted and Suspended

4. [...] (2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), any one or more of the rules of procedures contained herein except for sections 5 and 41 and subsections 12(5) and 59(3) may be suspended by Council, Committee of the Whole, Community Council or a Standing Committee by the affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3rds) of the Members present and voting.
[...]

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, SNS 2008 c 39:

- 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.

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.

[...]

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Halifax Regional Council:

1. Suspend the rules of procedure under Schedule 5, the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee Terms of Reference, of Administrative Order One, the Procedures of the Council Administrative Order;
2. Direct the Mayor to write a letter of support to the City of Montreal for HRM to become a signatory of The Montréal Pledge.

BACKGROUND

First ratified in 1992 at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, The Convention on Biological Diversity of the United Nations (CBD) is an international agreement for the conservation of biological diversity that is now ratified by 193 countries (or 'Parties'), including Canada. In the language of the United Nations, a Convention is an international agreement, or treaty, and the governments who sign it are called Parties to the Convention.

In recognition that the conservation of biodiversity is a common concern for all humankind, the overall objective of the CBD is to encourage actions which will lead to a sustainable future for human life. Parties not only agree to meet the goals of the Convention, but from then on, together, they work out and agree on the ways and means to meet those goals. Parties are expected to make National Plans for their own country and to work together to find ways to preserve biodiversity across regions and worldwide.

The CBD's governing body is the Conference of the Parties (COP). This ultimate authority composed of all governments (or Parties) that have ratified the CBD meets every two years to review progress, set priorities and commit to new work plans. Observers representing cities, local authorities, indigenous and local communities, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, press and media and even some youth also attend.

As host city to COP15 (Fifteenth meeting of the COP to the CBD), the mayor of Montréal issued a challenge to cities across the world to make a commitment to protecting biodiversity, known as The Montréal Pledge¹. Specifically, the challenge invites cities to commit to 15 tangible actions towards pursuing and accelerating their efforts to preserve ecosystems and biodiversity in their region. Signatory cities of the Montréal Pledge are expected to demonstrate leadership and to act swiftly in order to protect biodiversity.

Currently, 61 major cities from across the world have already committed to the Montréal Pledge, including Paris, France; London, United Kingdom; Berlin, Germany; Sydney, Australia; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Boston, USA, among many others. Many Canadian cities have also signed the pledge including Windsor, Ontario; Vancouver, British Columbia; Toronto, Ontario; and, of course, Montréal, Québec.

¹ The Montréal Pledge can be found online here: https://portail-m4s.s3.montreal.ca/pdf/vdm_montreal-pledge_2022.pdf

As of yet, there are no cities in Nova Scotia that are signatories to The Montréal Pledge.

DISCUSSION

Becoming a Signatory to The Montréal Pledge

To become a signatory to The Montréal Pledge requires either an official letter from the Mayor or the adoption of a city council resolution to this effect.

Signatories are asked to commit to the following 15 tangible actions:

Reducing Threats to Biodiversity

1. Integrate biodiversity into territorial and regulatory planning.
2. Restore and rehabilitate ecosystems and their connectivity.
3. Conserve existing natural environments through protected areas and other effective and equitable measures.
4. Ensure the conservation and recovery of vulnerable species, both wild and domestic, and effectively manage their interactions with humans.
5. Control or eradicate invasive alien species to eliminate or reduce their impacts.
6. Reduce pollution from all sources to levels that do not adversely affect biodiversity, ecosystem functions or human health.
7. Aim to eliminate plastic waste.
8. Aim to reduce pesticide use by at least two-thirds.
9. Contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation measures through ecosystem-based approaches.

Sharing the Benefits of Biodiversity

10. Aim to ensure that urban agriculture, aquaculture and forestry zones are accessible, sustainably managed and contribute to food security.
11. Prioritize nature-based solutions to protect against extreme weather events and hazards and to regulate air and water quality.
12. Increase the amount of green and blue spaces and improve equitable access to them.

Solutions, Governance, Management and Education

13. Integrate biodiversity into governance frameworks and public policies, and increase financial resources allocated to its conservations and sustainable use.
14. Through citizen education and participation, help ensure that people and businesses are encouraged to make responsible choices toward biodiversity and have the resources and knowledge to do so.
15. Ensure the equitable and effective participation of Indigenous peoples and local communities in decision-making and in the process of knowledge acquisition and transmission.

After becoming signatories, cities are invited to voluntarily track their progress towards the 15 Pledge commitments by registering and using the 'CitiesWithNature' Action Platform.² 'CitiesWithNature' is recognized by the CBD in its Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity (2021-2030)³ as the place where cities should monitor and report on their voluntary commitments. Currently, there are 20 participating cities worldwide who are registered on 'CitiesWithNature' Action Platform, compared to the 61 signatories of the Montréal Pledge. Staff do not intend to register for this platform as it would be redundant to HRM's current tracking requirements for HalifACT and the Halifax Green Network plan.

² The 'CitiesWithNature' Action Platform can be found online here: <https://citieswithnature.org/actions/>

³ The Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity (2021-2030) can be found online here: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/8e46/a823/bf3446ed0f1d0d62d4c7f751/cop-15-l-22-en.pdf>

HRM's Ongoing Work to Support Biodiversity

As illustrated in Attachment 1, the Municipality is currently engaged in a variety of pilot programs, ongoing projects and strategic initiatives that align with the Montréal Pledge. Although most of the programs and projects listed in Attachment 1 were implemented for reasons other than biodiversity, they each have important co-benefits that support biodiversity. However, these co-benefits are not often stated in media releases, discussed in reports, or highlighted to citizens. Current efforts do not represent the only opportunities for actions that the Municipality can do with respect to the 15 pledge commitments.

For instance, the Halifax Green Network Plan (HGPN)⁴, which was approved by Council in June 2018, included a list of actions across 5 broad themes that the Municipality could be taking “to promote the long-term sustainability of the Region”⁴. Under the Ecology theme, which does explicitly recognize biodiversity as one of eight key functions provided by undeveloped land within the HRM, the HGPN provided a list of 18 actions the Municipality could be taking to “support a healthy and sustainable natural ecosystem”⁴. These present opportunities for the Municipality to further support biodiversity with the HGPN being incorporated into the Regional Plan update.

By incorporating the 18 suggested actions listed under the Ecology theme of the HGPN into the Regional Plan update, HRM would be demonstrating tangible actions towards many of the 15 pledge commitments and exhibiting a genuine faithfulness to upholding the spirit of the Montréal Pledge.

Requirements of The Montréal Pledge

There are no requirements associated with becoming a Signatory City of The Montréal Pledge. All commitments made under the Pledge are voluntary and there is no requirement for annual reporting or progress tracking.

Signatory Cities may choose to track their progress towards the 15 Pledge commitments by registering and using the ‘CitiesWithNature’ Action Platform, but this too is voluntary and not recommended by staff.

Environmental Impacts

In becoming signatory to the Montréal Pledge, the Municipality would be formally committing to continuing its work supporting and protecting biodiversity. While the Municipality is already undertaking projects and developing policies supporting many of the commitments of the Montréal Pledge, explicitly working toward its stated goals as a signatory will provide a rubric against which our progress can be judged, and a road map for improvement in areas where we are currently lagging and where more can be done.

Pledging to meet the commitments of the Montréal Pledge represents a positive environmental vision for the municipality that will directly and positively impact our local environment now and into the future, building further resilience to the effects of a changing climate.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations of this report.

If initiatives are actioned in the Pledge commitments, that are outside of the current Environment & Climate Change budget, a separate report will go to Council for approval.

⁴Halifax Green Network Plan (2018) can be found online here:

https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/about-the-city/regional-community-planning/HGPN-Final%20Report_20180726_updated.pdf

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant financial risks associated with the recommendations in this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required for this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The positive environmental implications are outlined in the discussion section of the report.

ALTERNATIVES

Halifax Regional Council could choose to:

1. Refuse to adopt the Recommendation as set out in this Report

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Summary of existing HRM initiatives that address one or more of the 15 Montréal Pledge commitments

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: Christopher Kennedy, Water Quality Monitoring Coordinator, Environment & Climate Change, Property, Fleet & Environment, 902.476.1853

Attachment 1: Summary of existing HRM initiatives that address one or more of the 15 Montréal Pledge commitments*

Pledge #	Pledge Description	HRM Program or Ongoing Project
Reducing Threat to Biodiversity		
1.	Integrate biodiversity into territorial and regulatory planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halifax Green Network Plan
2.	Restore and rehabilitate ecosystems and their connectivity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks Naturalization Pilot Program; Sawmill Creek Daylighting & Upgrades for Migratory Fish Passage; Shore Road 'Green Shores' Dynamic Revetment; and Yellow Floating Heart pilot and control at Little Albro Lake.
3.	Conserve existing natural environments through protected areas and other effective and equitable measures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halifax Green Network Plan
4.	Ensure the conservation and recovery of vulnerable species, both wild and domestic, and effectively manage their interactions with humans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halifax Green Network Plan
5.	Control or eradicate invasive alien species to eliminate or reduce their impacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated Pest Management Strategy; and Yellow Floating Heart pilot and control at Little Albro Lake.
6.	Reduce pollution from all sources to levels that do not adversely affect biodiversity, ecosystem functions or human health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HalifACT
7.	Aim to eliminate plastic waste.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solid Waste Strategy review and update to align w/ HalifACT

Attachment 1

8.	Aim to reduce pesticide use by at least two-thirds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated Pest Management Strategy
9.	Contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation measures through ecosystem-based approaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shore Road 'Green Shores' Dynamic Revetment
Sharing Benefits of Biodiversity		
10.	Aim to ensure that urban agriculture, aquaculture and forestry zones are accessible, sustainably managed and contribute to food security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Gardens & Boulevard Gardening; • Halifax Green Network Plan; and • JustFood Action Plan.
11.	Prioritize nature-based solutions to protect against extreme weather events and hazards and to regulate air and water quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal Urban Forest Master Plan; • Shore Road 'Green Shores' Dynamic Revetment; and • Spring Garden Road Stormwater Biocell Planters & Prince Albert Road Rain Garden
12.	Increase the amount of green and blues spaces and improve equitable access to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal Urban Forest Master Plan; • Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park project; and • Sawmill Creek Daylighting & Upgrades for Migratory Fish Passage.
Solutions, Governance, Management and Education		
13.	Integrate biodiversity into governance frameworks and public policies, and increase financial resources allocated to its conservations and sustainable use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halifax Green Network Plan • HalifACT
14.	Through citizen education and participation, help ensure that people and businesses are encouraged to make responsible choices toward biodiversity and have the resources and knowledge to do so.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Gardens & Boulevard Gardening; and • HalifACT

Attachment 1

15.	Ensure the equitable and effective participation of Indigenous peoples and local communities in decision-making and in the process of knowledge acquisition and transmission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Gardens & Boulevard Gardening• Halifax Green Network Plan
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*not intended to be a comprehensive list of all Municipal projects, but rather a short-list of the Municipal initiatives that directly relate to one or more of the 15 pledge commitments.