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Information Item No. 2
Community Planning and Economic Development
Standing Committee
November 18, 2021

TO: Chair and Members of Community Planning and Economic Development
Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: *-Original Signed-*

John Traves, Executive Director, Legal & Legislative Services

-Original Signed-

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: October 13, 2021

SUBJECT: City Historian for Halifax Regional Municipality

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On March 27, 2019, the following motion of the Heritage Advisory Committee was put and passed regarding item 10.1:

That the Heritage Advisory Committee recommend that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee request a staff report to examine the appointment of a Halifax Historian Laureate to promote the cultural heritage of the Municipality, and that the position be developed with a mandate, objectives, and terms of office similar to that of the Halifax Poet Laureate.

On April 18, 2019, the following motion of the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee was put and passed regarding item 12.2.3:

That the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee request a staff report to examine the appointment of a Halifax Historian Laureate to promote the cultural heritage of the Municipality, and that the position be developed with a mandate, objectives, and terms of office similar to that of the Halifax Poet Laureate.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, 2008 SNS c 39:

Purposes of Municipality

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to...(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...

Municipal expenditures

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.

BACKGROUND

The Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) initially discussed the possibility of an Historian Laureate position during its January 31, 2019 meeting, and again in more detail during its March 27, 2019 meeting. The HAC requested that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) consider the matter and request a staff report to examine the appointment of a Halifax Historian Laureate. The HAC submitted a report which was considered at the April 18, 2019 CPED meeting (item 12.2.3). CPED passed a motion requesting a staff report to examine the appointment of an Historian Laureate program to serve as a promoter and educator in all aspects relating to the Municipality's history and heritage.

Pre-amalgamation city historians

Prior to amalgamation in 1996 and the creation of the Halifax Municipal Archives in 2005, the former cities of Halifax and Dartmouth and the Town of Bedford had honorary historian positions. Dr. John P. Martin served as Dartmouth's Town/City Historian and Lou Collins served as Halifax's Civic Historian (1968-1996). The *Heritage '80* group served as Bedford's Town Historian (1993-1996).

Current Municipal culture and heritage strategies

The Municipality currently has two strategic plans underway which are relevant to the discussion of an Historian Laureate program. Due to COVID-19, the completion dates for both strategies have been moved forward to 2021.

"Sharing Our Stories" - Cultural Heritage Priorities Plan

The 2014 Regional Plan identified the need to create a strategy to clarify the Municipality's vision, principles, and priorities in order to effectively guide investments and decisions related to culture and heritage. The Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan (CHPP) project was established to respond to this identified need. The CHPP will clarify the Municipality's role in supporting culture and heritage by reviewing the Municipality's current programs and policies supporting the provision of culture and heritage services; conducting best practices research; engaging with and soliciting input from targeted stakeholders and the broader public; and establishing a set of actions to improve how the Municipality supports culture and heritage where required.

The CHPP has been developed with comprehensive interdepartmental cooperation, as well as significant stakeholder and public consultation. The plan will provide a cohesive strategy to improve how the Municipality supports culture and heritage activities. A key component of the CHPP will be a set of prioritized actions with associated timelines and an estimation of required resources for implementation. These actions will be presented to Council for review. Following Council's direction, staff will develop individual programs

and initiatives to support these priorities, which will again involve further stakeholder and public consultation to ensure community needs are fully addressed.

Regional Museum Strategy

The Regional Museum Strategy (RMS) is being developed with the goal of identifying gaps in current capacity and programming of museums within the Halifax region, and to develop a Municipal standard for funding and supporting these institutions. A major component of the strategy is to consider the role these museums and collections play in the stewardship of the Municipality's heritage and historical interpretation. The RMS is currently in Phase 1, which consists of an in-depth analysis of the current state of the more than thirty museums currently operating within the Municipality. Upon its completion, recommendations will be presented to Council for the consideration of Phase 2 of the strategy. Phase 2 will consider models of municipal support for museums, interpretation, and collections. As the RMS is a subordinate report to the CHPP, it is more appropriate to consider the potential of an Historian Laureate position within the broader context of the broader CHPP.

Poet Laureate program

The Municipality appointed its first Poet Laureate in 2001. Initially administered in cooperation with the Mayor's Office, the program is currently operated through Culture and Events. The Poet Laureate is selected by a peer jury from an open application process. Current and former Poets Laureate are professional artists with a known body of published works and a strong connection to community and promoting literacy. The Poet Laureate acts as an ambassador for poetry, literacy, literature, and the arts, and represents the Municipality as an artist and advocate for culture and community through public appearances, readings at local events, and through other public presentation platforms. The position serves a three-year term and receives an honorarium of \$5,000 per year.

DISCUSSION

Establishing an Historian Laureate program requires determining what the specific mandate, activities, and governance structure of the position will be, how such a program would integrate with the Cultural Heritage Priorities Plan and the RMS initiatives, how it would complement the mandate and activities of the Municipal Archives, and whether the Poet Laureate program is an appropriate model for emulation, particularly given the subjective, artistic nature of the Poet Laureate as compared to the objectivity and neutrality required of a Municipal historian.

Mandate, functions, and governance

An Historian Laureate position will require a clear mandate and expectations regarding its functions and activities. Previous examples from within the Municipality, as well as elsewhere in Canada, do not provide a clear directive of what exactly is expected of a civic historian, nor of how such a program might be administered. The role of Poet Laureate is well-established in other jurisdictions, and the mandate is consistent across those examples. The role of an Historian Laureate is far less common, however, and what examples exist do not provide sufficient guidance as to what functions and activities it should perform and what amount of administration is required.

A governance structure will also be required to administer an Historian Laureate position and its activities. An administrative body—whether a board of Council or a Business Unit division—will be required to administer application and adjudication processes and to oversee and coordinate the program's activities. Budget allocation will also be required for the administrative and operational costs of the program. The Poet Laureate program is administered through the Parks & Recreation Culture & Events division, which is a logical fit given the division's mandate and the cultural and artistic nature of the position. The Municipality currently lacks an appropriate board or Business Unit division with both the mandate and resources required to administer an Historian Laureate position.

CHPP

The possibility of establishing an Historian Laureate program will be considered within the wider framework of the CHPP rather than as a stand-alone initiative. This will ensure that the Historian Laureate program is holistically integrated and works in tandem with the Municipality's strategic cultural and heritage goals, and future program development and implementation plans, as defined in the CHPP. Given that the

consideration of an Historian Laureate program will require engagement with internal and external stakeholders to determine what resources, outreach, research, and education activities should be mandated, it would be most efficient to leverage the on-going engagement processes of the CHPP. This engagement can help identify the most appropriate mandate and governance structure required to effectively operate the program.

Halifax Municipal Archives

Civic historian roles in the pre-amalgamation municipalities largely functioned to fill a gap in services which the Halifax Municipal Archives (HMA) has provided since its founding in 2005. These include preserving municipal records and artifacts; responding to questions from Council, staff, and the public; and serving as a focal point for research into local history. Many of the services provided as rationale for developing an Historian Laureate position are currently being provided by the Halifax Municipal Archives' (HMA), such as promoting and increasing awareness of the Municipality's history and heritage to both staff and the general public. While an Historian Laureate position would present an individual public face for such work, it would also introduce concerns of a singular historical perspective being presented on behalf of the Municipality. Prioritizing the work of the HMA as a neutral conduit to historical material may help mitigate these concerns.

Poet Laureate and other Historian Laureate programs

The Historian Laureate programs in Edmonton and Calgary may not provide suitable models for Halifax to follow (see Attachment 1 for additional information about these programs). Both programs have been administered in conjunction with external heritage organizations and have different mandates and governance oversight from what has been proposed in the current motion to consider a Halifax Historian Laureate program. It may be difficult to find a suitable organization to align with should the Municipality seek to adopt a similar model. Based on an environmental scan, Edmonton and Calgary appear to be the only Canadian cities to have had Historian Laureate positions. Indeed, city or civic historian positions appear to be exceedingly rare across North America.

The current Halifax Poet Laureate program also may not be an appropriate model for emulation. As an artistic endeavour, it is expected that the output of the Poet Laureate will be subjective, and their beliefs and opinions will be interwoven with their modes of expression. While some interpretation is part of all historical research, the general expectation is for historians to be more broadly objective. An historian operating on behalf of the Municipality, however, could easily be construed as promoting the Municipality's official interpretation of history. Given the current socio-political climate and efforts to reframe the historical narratives of diverse communities (such as African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities), the Municipality needs to consider whether it is willing to embrace more subjective historical interpretations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - The City of Edmonton and City of Calgary Historian Laureate positions

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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Attachment 1 – The City of Edmonton and City of Calgary Historian Laureate positions

Edmonton

The City of Edmonton created the first Historian Laureate program in Canada in 2010. Edmonton's Historian Laureate program is jointly administered by the Edmonton Historical Board, an advisory board of Council, and the Edmonton Heritage Council, a not-for-profit organization which supports and promotes heritage in Edmonton and the surrounding region. The Historian Laureate acts as "the City's official ambassador on historical matters and promotes the history of the city and its citizens by documenting, researching, interpreting and speaking about the people, places and events that have created Edmonton's distinctive heritage and character." Historian Laureates are selected by a jury comprised of members of the Edmonton Historical Board and the Edmonton Heritage Council, and serve a two-year term. The Historian Laureate is required to submit an annual report of their activities.

Calgary

The City of Calgary seems to have established a similar position in 2012, and has had at least one Historian Laureate. It does not appear the program has been continued, however, and there is no current information available through the municipality's website. The program was established in conjunction with the Calgary Heritage Authority, which rebranded in 2019 as Heritage Calgary. Heritage Calgary is a charitable organization and civic partner of the City of Calgary whose mission is to identify, preserve, and promote Calgary's diverse heritage (though its activities appear focussed almost entirely on built heritage). Heritage Calgary operates a six-month Historian in Residence program in partnership with Calgary Public Library which supports historians and researchers working in any genre related to Calgary's social, cultural, or built history. The resident is encouraged to work out of the Central Library and engage with the public through activities such as open office hours, interactive workshops, school group tours, and lectures.