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Item No. 13.1.2
Executive Standing Committee
May 27, 2024

TO: Chair and Members of Youth Advisory Committee

SUBMITTED BY: - ORIGINAL SIGNED -

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 11, 2024

SUBJECT: M200 - Communications Strategy – Youth Advisory Committee

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On June 26, 2023 the following motion was put and passed:

THAT the Executive Standing Committee direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare a staff report, in consultation with the Youth Advisory Committee, on developing a communications strategy on By-Law M200, Respecting Standards for Residential Occupancies, and other housing related guidelines targeted to youth, first time renters and newcomers.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter - Parts VIII (Planning and Development) and IX (Subdivision), and clauses 7A (a) and (b), as follows:

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;

RECOMMENDATION

1. It is recommended that the Executive Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council endorse the communication strategy outlined in the DISCUSSION section of this report.

BACKGROUND

On May 18, 2023, staff met with and gave a presentation to the Youth Advisory Committee on *By-law M-200* and how violations of the by-law are reported and managed by the business unit. [*By-law M-200, Standards for Residential Occupancies*](#), contains provisions for fire and life safety as well as occupant and building health.

On February 15, 2024, staff attended the Youth Advisory Committee to discuss the draft communication plan created from feedback at the original meeting. The committee was pleased with all the items as they were presented. The committee suggested, in addition to the draft plan, to create lapel pins to create awareness (e.g. using “Warm Safe Dry” message, which has been used to reference the M-200 By-law for many years now). This suggestion will be assessed as a potential component of the strategy moving forward, pending further consultation with Corporate Communications.

Many By-law M-200 complaints that Building Standards receives are from new renters (e.g. students) and a growing number are from newcomers. It is not uncommon during the inspection of a building to encounter residents in the building that are unaware of the existence of By-law M-200. It is believed that increasing awareness among these demographics will increase inspections therefore increasing the standard within many residences in the municipality.

This report will provide a communications strategy targeted toward newcomers and new renters. The goal will be to communicate key information from the by-law and other housing-related guidelines using simple, plain language in a variety of accessible locations and in multiple formats (e.g. print, digital, social media). The potential use of multi-language communications materials will be informed by the municipality’s Multilingual Policy, targeted for completion in winter 2024.

DISCUSSION

Providing information about the standards set out in *By-law M-200* can support renters in ensuring their homes are a safe and healthy environment. Recommended actions are as follows:

Phase one: 0-6 months

- Update the existing *By-law M-200* information brochure, with new imagery and enhanced accessibility (e.g. plain language, visual approach, font size, etc.).
- Identify organizations that support newcomers, international students and young people to help cascade key information through their networks. Organizations may include the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), universities, community/social services like foster care, adult protection and mental health services, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and employers or support groups for people living with disabilities.
- Contact the municipality’s Parks & Recreation business unit and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion for engagement support.

Phase two: 6-12 months

- Work with Corporate Communications and Halifax Transit to identify transit routes and bus shelters that are located in areas with high-density housing and post-secondary schools and explore available promotional opportunities via transit assets and facilities (e.g. buses, bus shelters, terminals).
- Work with Corporate Communications to leverage a variety of print, social and digital channels (e.g. newspapers, posters, digital screens, digital ads, youth Instagram account hfxnextgen), to communicate at municipal facilities (e.g. recreation centres, Halifax Transit terminals, Halifax Public Libraries, municipal workspaces).

- Work with Parks & Recreation's Youth Section to distribute information (e.g. posters, rack cards) to the Multi-Service Youth Centres (e.g. The Den, Power House, Spryfield Youth Centres) and youth rooms.
- Work with Corporate Communications to leverage municipal social media channels to communicate key by-law details.
- Share information with Regional Councillors in format(s) optimized for sharing (e.g. via their newsletters and social media accounts).

Phase three: 12-24 months

- Engage with post-secondary schools and attend student introduction fairs/expos.
- Form a partnership with Dalhousie Legal Aid Service as they commonly represent clients of substandard housing. Through the partnership it is expected the client will benefit from the information sharing and accelerated compliance.
- Tenant Awareness Nights – explore conducting public *By-law M-200* “warm, safe and dry” presentations/open forums.
- Work with Corporate Communications to develop messaging to address specific issues that are more common at different times of the year (e.g. no heat, rodents, bed bugs, etc.).

Building Standards received 2,292 reports of suspected *By-law M-200* violations in the past year. To help measure the outcome of these efforts, complaint numbers will be compared before and after each phase of the communication strategy. An increase in reports at the outset would be typical, reflecting increased awareness of the existence of *By-law M-200*. A subsequent reduction in reports is anticipated as a result of inspections increasing the standard within residences.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The actions listed in this report can be accommodated within the current approved budget.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no risk considerations as this program is considered an added benefit to existing communications and exposure to the Bylaw.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Many of the activities described in this report meet the definition of community engagement.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications to the activities in this report.

ALTERNATIVES

The Executive Standing Committee can choose not to endorse the Communication Strategy or endorse the strategy with changes.

ATTACHMENTS

None

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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