



**HALIFAX CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE**

**MUNICIPAL
ACCOUNTABILITY
REPORT: 2012-2013**

CHAMBER FACTS

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is one of the largest Chamber's amongst mid-sized Canadian cities and considered one of the leading and oldest chambers in North America, dating back to 1750. As the voice of business in Halifax, the Chamber advocates on behalf of over 1500 members and the 90,000 men and women they employ.

With over 100 networking and educational events each year, an impressive benefit package and the strongest voice for business in Halifax, the Halifax Chamber of Commerce stands alone as Halifax's premiere business organization.

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce conducts all operations under the guidance of its strategic plan. Every three to five years, a comprehensive strategic planning process is undertaken to ensure that members' views are reflected in all aspects of Chamber operations.

Our strategic priorities are:

1. Helping businesses take advantage of our provincial and municipal economic strategies, and
2. Making Halifax more competitive.

PREAMBLE

The fundamental purpose of this document is to inform council of member issues and to hold to account the mayor and councilors' for commitments made throughout the 2012 election campaign. The majority of the information on the commitments comes from the Halifax Chamber of Commerce 2012 Municipal Election Questionnaire which was sent to all council and mayoral candidates. The questionnaire was composed of key themes: taxation, fiscal responsibility, development, transportation, competitiveness and leadership. Our members expect that council and the mayor will follow through on these commitments. The Chamber will advocate on behalf of its members to ensure that these expectations are met over the next four years. If commitments and expectations are not met, the Chamber will seek reasons and justification as to why the municipal government has failed to follow through.

TAXATION

Unfair, regressive, tax grab, archaic, discriminatory. Those are the words that have been used to describe our current municipal tax system. The citizens and businesses of Halifax deserve better. No tax system will please everyone, however, having some of the highest residential and commercial property taxes in the country is not a policy to be proud of or continue. In our election questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of municipal candidates and now current mayor and councilors' were strongly in favour of a reformed tax system. Of particular note, is the imbalance between the commercial and residential taxpayer, with the commercial taxpayer paying almost 4 times the tax rate for far less service. If our mayor is to be the Salesman in Chief for our City, a reformed tax regime is necessary for Halifax to become an even more vibrant business hub of Atlantic Canada. We need progressive action now.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Chamber will be monitoring the spending of this municipal government throughout its mandate to ensure that the principles set out in the Multi Year Financial Strategy are met. Also, the Chamber will continue to assess if the government is living within their means, paying down our debt, and focusing on a long-term financial plan to replace and renew infrastructure. Generally speaking, previous councils have done a good job with regards to financial management, and the expectation is that sound financial management is carried on and improved upon in the years to come.

DEVELOPMENT

During the election, the current mayor and council clearly indicated support for strategies to spur development. Development cannot occur to its fullest potential without timely approvals and an open for business attitude. We need more red carpet and less red tape. Numerous councilors and the mayor have stated publicly that tax reform and timely approvals are required for increased development. HRMbyDesign has been applauded as a step in the right direction, however, it requires an open for business approach. Our mayor has stated that in order to have successful development, a leader who executes a plan is needed. The Chamber will be scrutinizing councils proceedings to ensure actions are executed in a timely way.

TRANSPORTATION

Study after study has indicated that the top priority for citizens is improving the public transit system. One possible way to improve our transportation system is through an integrated transportation authority. Such a group will ensure we have a City Transportation Strategy and implementation plan. This authority , which includes transit, will align with the province, coordinate decision making and use taxpayer dollars to execute the objectives of this strategy. Our questionnaire results indicate that the mayor and the majority of councilors are supportive of such an entity. Efficient and effective transportation is key to a prosperous city. Citizens have made their voices very clear, council is supportive of such an entity. It is time for progressive action on a city transportation strategy.

COMPETITIVENESS

In order for Halifax to become more competitive, City Council needs to assist in releasing and alleviating the shackles of red tape and uncompetitive taxes so aspiring entrepreneurs and existing businesses see Halifax as a city that is open for business. Opening a business in Halifax should not be a daunting or obstructive task. Our mayor and council have indicated that they are in favour of rolling out the red carpet for business and creating an attractive international business savvy brand for Halifax. The Chamber will be monitoring council proceedings to ensure that City Council does in fact encourage this entrepreneurial spirit in our city.

GOVERNANCE

Collegiality, cooperation, vision and accountability have been words used by the mayor and council throughout the campaign. At the council table, it is easy to micromanage and become engaged with matters more appropriately left under the purview of the CAO and staff and to focus on issues with solely your constituents in mind, and not the greater good the city. This is not the way to create a strong unified vision for our City. The current mayor has stated he has a vision and will implement strategic plans to move Halifax forward. Over the next four years the Chamber will be encouraging and willing to assist council in executing this vision, in an effort to ensure that Halifax is governed with strong, effective leadership.

GOING FORWARD

Improving upon and reforming the key issues outlined throughout this document is crucial for the future progress of our city. When city council begins to waver on commitments made, the Chamber will be asking why. If our mayor is not the Salesman in Chief for Halifax, the Chamber will be asking why. In four years time, the Chamber will be reviewing the commitments made in election 2012, with the expectation that commitments made are commitments that are to be followed through on.

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