



**June 16<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*Valerie Payn, President & CEO, Halifax Chamber of Commerce  
Speaking Notes for June 20<sup>th</sup> UARB Hearing on Council Size*

Greetings, everyone.

- I've been informed I only have ten minutes, so I'll get right to the point. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce has advocated for a reduction in the size of council to 15 councilors. But this is no bandwagon we're jumping on...
- The Chamber's involvement in the boundary review debate has been extensive. Since 2002, we have recommended that a smaller city council will lead to more efficient and effective governance for the municipality. This sentiment has been expressed repeatedly to us by our 1500 local business members who, collectively, employ about 80,000 citizens in our city. In our 2011 Spring Issues Survey, 81% of our members agreed that council was too large. This is also the general feeling of the overall population of Halifax, as recent citizen polls demonstrate: 64% of residents would like to see a smaller number of councilors.
- We've stated on several different occasions that "Reducing the size of council by merely three is not the solution to fixing our city council. Primarily because this proposed solution is some form of awkward "middle ground" which won't make anyone happy. Those who wish to maintain the status quo will be unhappy because change has been forced upon them. And those who long for meaningful change will be unhappy because change for the sake of change – in moving from 24 to 21 – is meaningless.
- Such a minor reduction in the size of council would not be enough to create any significant, long-lasting change or benefit. And isn't that the ultimate goal here? We believe that reducing the size of council by a larger margin will help foster more focused and efficient council meetings which, in turn, will have a positive impact on both the residents of our municipality and the way in which we are governed.
- We also believe that a council of 15 will lead to quicker and better decision-making, and less emotional arguments among councilors. This is significant for our local businesses who rely and depend on City Council to make the right choices for them

in a timely manner. Local entrepreneurs require stability and efficient decision-making for business planning purposes. This includes the many tax and development-related decisions Council faces on a regular basis, which often have enormous implications for local businesses.

- Our research tells us that Canadian cities with similar population densities most often govern with fewer councilors than Halifax. For example, Victoria BC – a city of 352,000 – is governed by 8 councilors. London, Ontario has a population of 489,000 and is governed by 14 councilors. Even the city of Vancouver, with a population of 578,000, has a Council size of just 10.
- If one were to take the cities that were used recently by our City Council itself to get comparable data for compensation analysis for Councilors, we would see that of the seven comparative cities used for this purpose, the average Council size was 15.
- Public perceptions of how effectively tax dollars are being spent can play a large role in determining the degree to which citizens are satisfied with their municipal government. The Chamber suggests that, if council were to reduce its size by a more significant margin, the public would recognize and applaud this as a commendable effort to reforming the current governance structure with the best interests of residents in mind.
- We have concluded that a 15-member council is sufficient in size to provide effective representation to our municipality of just over 400,000 people without significantly increasing the workload for each councilor or negatively impacting municipal democracy.
- A total of 15 voices around the council table will ensure that a good range of political perspectives are represented. At the same time, it will allow for greater functionality by operating with a more manageable number of participants, thereby making it much easier for the mayor to guide council meetings along to more efficient outcomes.
- I'd ask that you all keep in mind -- that the Chamber is not simply one voice. Rather, we represent the voice of over 1500 businesses in our municipality. We've received feedback that 81% of our members support a smaller council size. These thoughts represent the opinion of the Halifax business community.
- In closing, while it is prudent to benchmark ourselves against other Canadian cities – as we have done in this case. We should ask ourselves, “Why don't we create our own “Made in Halifax” solution?” Instead of playing ‘follow the leader’, let's be the

leader. Let's be brave. Be visionary. Let other cities look to us for our best practices.

- Clearly, our current structure is not nearly as efficient or effective as it could be – indeed, as it *needs* to be. We have an opportunity here to be bold and strong, and demonstrate the leadership that our city so desperately needs and deserves.
- I thank you for your time. Good evening.