

Municipal Issue NoteOct 19th, 2017

Dear Mayor Mike Savage and Councilors of the Halifax Regional Municipality:

In our 2017/2018 pre-budget submission, we outlined many recommendations which we believed would help create a positive business environment in Halifax, encourage growth, and promote a vibrant city. As you begin discussions for the 2018/2019 budget, here are areas of interest from the past year's budget, we would like to bring forward.

We feel positive about the following City actions that align with the goals of our 2013-2018 Strategic Plan:

- The balanced and projected balanced multi-year budget.
- The creation of the Corporate & Customer Service business unit. As a positive move, we hope this unit can live up to its goal of building a corporate culture that provides better customer service for Halifax's businesses and citizens.
- Public accountability, timelines, benchmarks, deliverables and deadlines for the 2016-2021 Economic Strategy. Including;
 - Exploring new opportunities for underrepresented groups, like youth, to link to employment opportunities.
 - Completion draft of the Accessibility Strategy and presentation to Regional Council.
- Red tape reduction as an overall key deliverable with near-future estimated completion deadlines.
- Preparations of the draft Integrated Mobility Plan for presentation to the Transportation Standing committee in the Fall.
- The inclusion projects such as transit priority upgrades in the road network, Bus Rapid Transit and/or Commuter Rail, Active Transportation, upgrades and road network improvements in the Integrated Mobility Plan.

Halifax has made progress in numerous areas but we would like to see further improvement in areas such as:

- A balanced budget through expenditure reduction rather than tax increases. (The 2017/2018 budget showed a commercial tax increase of 1.3%.)
- Clear and direct communication between government departments and the business community.
- Timely approvals, such as the anticipated detailed Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law regulations for the Regional Centre Plan which would:
 - Provide transparency and predictability for our development community and other businesses.
 - Encourage future construction projects that will not impede businesses as has the Street-Scapes and Convention Centre. Our members, and other businesses within the current construction sites have made us aware of the negative impacts facing them and have asked for greater communication, regulation and support during future projects. Despite the strong support for growth, we can do better with large projects that impact nearby businesses.

- Red tape issues remain a continuing concern for our members. Particularly, related to service delivery to members. Members regularly experience lack of consistency, clarity and timely service standards.
 - For example, the city has complex regulations around sign by-laws. This is no clarity on fee structures for permits, the kind of permits needed or the timeline for approvals. Regulations and permits for temporary and permanent signage is not consistent and this lack of consistency can create unintended consequences for those in that sector. This sector has been working with city staff for some time, with good intentions by city staff and the sector, however minimal resolutions have been reached to support this industry sector. We are looking for a pro business approach and consistent service standards by the city.
- An update on your plans for commercial tax reform.

The Chamber has enjoyed a productive working relationship with Council in the past and we look forward to continuing this dialogue in the future. We strongly believe in the economic future of our city and will work with our 1,600 members and their over 65,000 employees to continue championing positive change in Halifax.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Sullivan', written in a cursive style.

Patrick Sullivan
President & CEO, Halifax Chamber of Commerce