



**METROPOLITAN HALIFAX
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**
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March 2, 2000

Via Facsimile: (902) 424-3919

Elaine Wagner
Clerk
N.S. Utility & Review Board
Box 1692, Unit "M"
Halifax, NS B3J 3S3

Dear Sirs/Mesdames:

RE: HRM BOUNDARY REVIEW

The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce would like to submit its comment on the review of the current electoral boundaries for Halifax Regional Municipality. The Report of the District Boundaries Advisory Committee, tabled at Halifax Regional Council on January 18, 2000, has been referred to the Nova Scotia Utilities and Review Board for your consideration.

The majority view expressed in the Report recommends an increase in council size from 23 to 24 councillors. A minority view, expressed on page 7 of the Report, urges that a smaller council of 16 is preferable. The minority view states that:

- The proposed level of 12,000 voters per district is considerably lower than the average for communities of a similar size to HRM and should be increased.
- A reduced number of Councillors would create a "more efficient, cohesive, effective governing body to better address regional issues."
- A reduced Council would "be less divisive on major issues and as a result, the cohesiveness on these key decisions would reinforce their ability to achieve the desired outcome from their decisions."

We wish to express our strong support for the minority view expressed in the Report.

In reviewing the Report, we note that the majority view does not dismiss the idea of a smaller council, rather, they "felt there was merit in this proposal". However, the majority felt that a reduction in council size "would require considerably more study

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than it had time to give to the issue at this time. The Committee felt that a process leading to (a reduction in Council size from 23 to 16) should begin at least two years prior to the 2004 municipal election."

The Board, in its decision dated July 28, 1995, determined the initial electoral boundaries for HRM. The decision set the current boundaries and a council size of 23 councillors. In its decision, the Board noted that the "tight time lines set out in the Act have precluded it from conducting additional research or circulating a preliminary decision for comment." In fact, the time from the filing of the Coordinator's report to the last day of public hearings was only a little over six weeks.

We are concerned that we are now again rushing into changes when the committee itself has suggested that more radical changes should be examined in the year 2002.

The Board noted in its 1995 decision the comments of the Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce in the June, 1995, Business Voice:

"A regional perspective offers a focused decision-making process based on cooperation. Cooperative coordination on regional issues such as transportation, water and sewer treatment, policing, economic development, industrial parks, and so on, enables decisions to be made that balance a range of considerations, rather than pitting one area against another. Also, a single decision-making body is capable of considering local concerns within a broad regional perspective. The status quo – protecting what we have at the expense of others must be replaced with the view that we will all do better if we work together ... a single decision-making body offers a single "point of entry" for decisions on regional issues.

Municipal representation based on population distribution will de-emphasize the former political boundaries and encourage communities to focus on a new regional vision."

The Board noted that the Act provided for a series of Community Councils, and recognized that "there is a danger that the community council concept may work against the optimistic notion of a regional vision."

We continue to believe that the overriding issue ought to be the ability of council to function in an effective manner, and to enable regional decision-making. It is regrettable that these important issues have not formed a part of the discussion or debate around the current boundary review. Indeed, the mandate does not direct the

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committee to consider whether or not the current structure meets the needs of the community. In the absence of discussion, debate or research of this core issue, it is our strong view that no change ought to be made at this time to the HRM district boundaries.

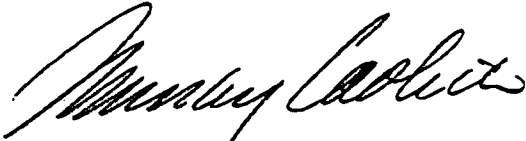
We would also like to make the following observations:

- The work of Councillors should be focused on the work of the Council. Participation on municipal agencies, boards and commissions should be left to the citizens of HRM. It is our view that this would improve decision-making, while addressing the concerns expressed by councillors regarding the time demands of addressing constituent needs.
- Historically, amalgamated communities see a decline in their elected representatives as the new unit becomes progressively more cohesive. The proposal to enlarge HRM Council is in stark contrast to this experience and creates the risk of continued division of council along the lines of the former municipal units. We must move towards a council that better enables regional decision-making.

In closing, the Chamber is opposed to any suggestion that Council size be increased and support the minority view expressed in the Report. The committee has recognized that a smaller council has merit, and in fact has recommended that a process leading to a 16 member council be started in 2002. In light of this, and for the reasons noted above, we urge the Board to order that the status quo continue as to the number of council members. It is our view that the municipality and its citizens would be better served by a full review of not only the electoral boundaries, but the role of community councils and the role of citizens in the decision-making process through the various boards and commissions.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our comment to you.

Yours very truly,



Murray Coolican
President