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November 20, 2009

Ms. Valerie Payn, President  
Halifax Chamber of Commerce  
656 Windmill Road, Suite 200  
Dartmouth NS, B3B 1B8

*Valerie*  
Dear ~~Ms.~~ Payn:

**Re: Chamber Municipal Update - 2009**

We have recently completed our review of the Chamber's Municipal update issued last August and I thought it would be of benefit to provide you with a response. We do appreciate the considerable thought and effort devoted by the Chamber to the annual update. It provides valuable insight into what the business community considers to be the priorities of their municipal government. Previous experience indicates that in many cases we share common interests, and this has improved our mutual efforts in advocacy to other orders of government for follow up action.

The following offers comments under the general categories presented in your Update.

Financial Management - Debt and Spending

The update contains various recommendations about HRM's fiscal management, including a recommendation to review our Multi-Year Financial Strategy. HRM appreciates the Chamber's support in raising awareness about the importance of having a disciplined approach to managing our fiscal resources. We adhere to our Multi-Year Financial Strategy and review our fiscal policies when we consider it necessary and appropriate, particularly in responding to changing economic and fiscal conditions. As part of a broader review of the MYFS, the debt strategy was reviewed this year. Reviews of the reserve and capital sections of the MYFS will be the next step. Recent reports to Council on HRM's fiscal health and assessment of budget risks are good examples of how we are responding to shifting economic trends and fiscal realities. I am including with this letter copies of the recent reports on fiscal health and fiscal debt policy for your information.

HRM's last Standard and Poor's A positive rating was achieved by adhering to a strategy with clear goals, objectives and procedures that both Council and the administration fully support. The recent hiring of an independent Auditor General will add further discipline to our overall financial management. Our current strategy has yielded many benefits, including additional capacity for infrastructure and other investments that benefit the community as a whole. Standard and Poor's will once again be undertaking a credit rating this year.

### Transportation - Regional Planning

The Chamber has been a strong advocate for a coordinated approach to regional planning and transportation and your update calls for increased efforts to establish a regional transportation authority. We appreciate your participation in processes leading to Council's adoption of HRM's first Regional Plan, a detailed plan for downtown Halifax (HRM by Design) and in establishing the Strategic Joint Regional Transportation Committee (SJRTC). The SJRTC comprises senior representation from key transportation interests in the region as well as economic development stakeholders including the Chamber and Greater Halifax Partnership. The composition of the SJRTC is consistent with a guiding principle of our Economic Strategy to align partners using existing governance structures.

HRM has communicated to the Province our interest in establishing a Capital Transportation Authority and this matter is under consideration. We encourage your organization to do whatever you can to support our efforts in this regard. In the meantime, the SJRTC is an appropriate vehicle for discussing the transportation suggestions made by the Chamber and we encourage you to bring these forward through your representation on the committee.

For us, the master transportation plan is the Regional Plan and the five functional plans coming from that. Of those five plans, the Parking and AT plans are complete; Transit will soon be complete. The Road Network and TDM plans will be completed early next year, but their content is already outlined in the Regional Plan itself. The final functional plan documents will simply provide the background and rationale for what is already in the Regional Plan. All our planning efforts are coordinated via the Regional Plan. For example, the Bayers Road/Hwy 102 corridor study, the third Harbour Crossing Study and the Integrated Transportation Corridor all stem from examinations undertaken as part of the Regional Plan. Additionally, all of these studies were initiated through the SJRTC to ensure consistency with the Regional Plan.

### Transportation - Transit

We share some of the Chambers views on making transit a priority in HRM, and appreciate your support in convincing the Province to increase its funding to a level where it is in line with that of other provinces and territories. Metro Transit recently submitted a five-year operating plan for transit to Regional Council. A new Ragged Lake Transit Center is now under construction and will be operational in May 2010. HRM and Airport Authority Staff continue to discuss extending transit service to the airport.

### People/Governance

We were disappointed to see the Chamber update reference to a recent MacLean's magazine article which was based on an Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS) study. The assumptions, data sources and research methodology used for the AIMS study have been called into question by HRM staff and others, including the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. It is our position that the AIMS study does not provide an objective and credible analysis.

Your update outlines concerns with respect to progress made towards a target in the Economic Strategy “to improve Halifax’s brand recognition in national and international markets”. You recommend that a team be designated and tasked with creating a brand for the city, with a definitive deadline. It is our understanding that this is the mandate of the Quality of Place Council established under the Economic Strategy and that the Chamber would play a significant role in the work of the Council in terms of providing input on what you see as essential to advancing this initiative.

While I share some of your concerns with respect to the branding of our community, I am pleased to share with you some of the initiatives that HRM has undertaken. A review of key themes emerging from various branding initiatives undertaken between 2003 and 2007 was completed for the Greater Halifax Partnership in May of 2008 to support the work of the Quality of Place Council. More recently, Destination Halifax and the Greater Halifax Partnership hosted a lunch and learn session for HRM Councillors and senior staff and provided information about branding and quality of place.

Your update references a February staff report to HRM Council on the Good Neighbours Great Neighbourhoods initiative and suggests that the program has more potential. We agree with you on this point. This program is a good example of how HRM has used social marketing to support Council objectives related to community development and sustainability and how this supports efforts related to branding and quality of place. The entire Good Neighbours ... Great Neighbourhoods brand is a grass roots approach, engaging citizens at the neighbourhood level and conveying the message that building safe, healthy and vibrant neighbourhoods builds a safe, healthy and vibrant community. The program was launched in April, 2008, and year one was focused on awareness, building the Neighbourhood Toolkit and the website - myhrm.ca and developing partnerships. This year, our focus is on getting the message out to a wider audience through television and major publications, such as, Saltscapes and Business Voice. Also, we are in the process of building a database of existing Neighbourhood Associations in HRM.

We would be pleased to have the Chamber participate in this important initiative and our staff would be pleased to provide you a more detailed overview of the program and how you can engage, at your convenience.

#### People/Population

The Chamber update refers to a “people strategy” project that you are undertaking in conjunction with the Department of Labour and Workforce Development in order to promote the Department’s services and programs to local businesses. As you probably aware, the GHP is also undertaking a Talent Strategy and there appears to be some opportunity for cooperation and coordination between the two initiatives.

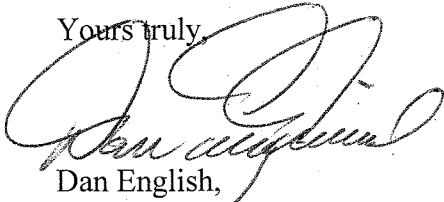
#### Economic Development

The final section of your update emphasizes a need for HRM to focus on our competitive positioning in areas of economic development, labour force/people and sustainability and recommends specific actions by HRM such as improving our commercial tax competitiveness, budgeting to support initiatives aimed at improving our business climate, increasing funding for economic development

and using taxes as an urban development tool to revitalize areas in need of rehabilitation. As you know, we will be undertaking a review of our Economic Strategy next year and the Chamber will be participating in the review process. We welcome any suggestions that the Chamber may have during the strategy review process that would lead to the development and implementation of specific strategies around these or other actions recommended in your update.

I wish to close by again expressing our appreciation to the Chamber for all of the work that you do in advocating on behalf of the business community. As always, I look forward to continued collaboration with the Chamber in advancing our mutual economic interests.

Yours truly,



Dan English,  
Chief Administrative Officer

cc: Mayor and Regional Council

Attachments  
Reports on Fiscal Health and Debt Policy

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