



**METROPOLITAN HALIFAX  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

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*Strong Business. Strong Community.  
Since 1750.*

**Key Issues  
Briefing Note**

**October 2001**

## **Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce Key Issues Briefing Note**

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The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce, a voluntary, not for profit business advocacy organization, represents almost 2000 corporate members in our region. The Chamber believes that through strong leadership and effective long-range planning, sustainable growth and a prosperous economy can be achieved.

The policy and advocacy work of the Chamber is driven by the efforts of 16 volunteer committees and task forces. For your information, the following document outlines key issues of concern to the Chamber.

### **Finance**

The Chamber of Commerce supports effective, efficient and accountable government. By being a strong voice representing the business perspective, the Chamber acts to promote a healthy fiscal climate in which business can grow and prosper. In order for long-term fiscal and economic stability to be realized our Province must reduce spending and actively pursue debt repayment.

Government must strive to balance the budget to keep us more competitive with neighboring provinces. The Chamber's fiscal priorities for the Province remain: 1. eliminating the deficit and 2. paying down the debt. Nova Scotia's competitive position to attract and retain new business and skilled labour is compromised until we eliminate our deficit and begin to reduce our debt.

### **Municipal Issues**

The Chamber works hard to promote our region and to ensure the economic and social prosperity of our community. One way we endeavor to do this is by supporting effective and efficient government both locally and provincially. We believe that by supporting and promoting economic and fiscal prosperity in our region, we are enhancing the prosperity of the province. The governments of the municipality and the province need to recognize the important relationship between their respective areas. The Chamber believes that by working together we can create a better community overall.

In terms of municipal governance, the Chamber is currently focused on two main areas: municipal equalization and professional administration.

#### Municipal Equalization

The Chamber of Commerce is adamant that property taxes not be used as a mechanism of redistribution in our province. Property taxes are, by their very nature, regressive, and, as such, bear no relation to the taxpayer's ability to pay. It is wrong and unfair to assume that the people of HRM can readily afford the increased burden of funding equalization payments.

Accountability and transparency in government are also compromised under an equalization program based on property tax. Transparency in governance and the electoral process provides the means through which taxpayers can hold government accountable for decisions that are made. Municipalities levy, collect and spend property taxes and are held accountable by the residents of the same municipality. Should a municipal government collect tax dollars, but have no control over the decisions on where these dollars are spent, the accountability would be lost. This is inconsistent with the very clear principle that municipalities are, and ought to be, treated as a responsible order of government. If the provincial government feels it is a priority to equalize the revenues of its municipalities it should be done through provincial income taxes within the current spending envelope. This would ensure direct accountability by provincially elected officials for provincial tax dollars transferred to the municipalities.

### Professional Administration

The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce, and its predecessors, has a long-standing history, dating back to the early 1900's, of advocating for, and supporting, the principle that professional managers should be responsible for municipal operations with the senior manager reporting to council. We remain committed to that principle.

It is our belief that HRM, a complex business organization with over 3000 employees and an annual budget of close to 500 million dollars, requires administrators with the skills and experience to effect efficient operations. In addition, the municipality is poised for unprecedented growth. Given the opportunities before us, we believe it is critical that our city continue to employ a highly capable professional, experienced in local government, who will ensure our city continues to be fiscally responsible and economically prosperous. As it is written, the Municipal Government Act clearly outlines the respective powers of the Mayor and Council and the Chief Administrative Officer. The Chamber does not believe that there should be any changes made to the Act.

### **Energy**

As a Chamber, we endeavor wherever possible to do what we can to support a strong business environment and to be a progressive voice on emerging issues. Realizing the importance of energy to our province, the Chamber struck a task force to examine and comment on the Province's discussion paper, "Powering Nova Scotia's Economy".

The Chamber submitted a comprehensive report to the Province's Energy Strategy Team with 26 recommendations. Following are the key messages of the Chamber as a renewed energy strategy is developed. In order to effectively manage the energy priority, focus and profile is required. There needs to be a Minister exclusively responsible for energy with a mandate to create the appropriate organization and strategies. The Province must act now to ensure that Nova Scotia is able to maximize the opportunities that are before us today. Government is in a position to make choices that can benefit Nova Scotians for many decades. We must ensure that we make the wisest use of our natural resources and choose models that suit Nova Scotia's geographic, demographic and economic situation. Government must also be prepared to invest the necessary resources to access the best and the brightest talent available.

Finally, if we are going to maximize the benefits from the offshore, government must have an integrated policy to develop our labour market over the long term. In order to ensure Nova Scotia's long-term economic stability, government must adhere to a debt reduction plan.

## **Health**

A major determinant of a strong business environment is an efficient and productive workforce. In order to ensure strong business, a healthy workforce is imperative. The Chamber believes that we must refocus our efforts to health, not health care. The Chamber has a role in promoting a healthy workforce in our region. By supporting a healthy workforce, we are also promoting a strong business environment.

With this in mind, the Chamber brought a group of business leaders together to review the issue of health care. The result was a report on the governance and management of health and health care in our province.

One of the key messages to come out of this work, is that we should be focused on improving the health of Nova Scotians and the provision of quality health care. We should be determining success by the health of our citizens as measured by the attainment of specific health targets. It is imperative that the systems governing health in our province are transparent and accountable.

## **Immigration**

Immigration is important to the economic and social prosperity of Nova Scotia. The Chamber continues to support the need for an effective immigration policy in our province that will maximize the benefits of immigration. Working with various stakeholders (including the Province) in collaboration, to promote the importance of immigration to Nova Scotia is a means through which we can have a hand in shaping the Province we want to see in the future. We look forward to the Province securing a provincial nominee program for Nova Scotia. It is hoped that the Province will be able to finalize such an agreement with the federal government to ensure Nova Scotia is able to benefit from a strong immigration policy that includes ways to attract entrepreneurs and skilled business people.

## **Transportation**

It has been suggested that Metro Halifax can expect to see significant growth in the years to come. Therefore, as a community we must be focused on strategic long-term planning. We are in a position to plan for and shape our future city. This is an opportunity we must embrace. As a community we must ensure that our region will retain its attractive qualities by setting the path so that our region can "grow right".

The Chamber has been monitoring and been involved with **port related issues** for several years. The Port of Halifax is a significant part of the economic make-up of our city and the province. The Chamber will focus efforts, with regard to port related issues, in the following areas: any plans for expansion/consolidation; consideration of ancillary

port and port related benefits and issues as any changes or improvements are planned and implemented; as well as ongoing promotion of consistency among constituent interests, timely and effective responsiveness to changing conditions and the pursuit of competitiveness.

**Air access** to and from our region is a primary concern to the Chamber as it effects our community's ability to grow and do business. The loss of several flights directly connecting our region to key markets that could impact our attractiveness to business and our competitive position is of great concern to the Chamber. As well, it has implications with regards to the long-term status of our region as an air transportation hub. In response to the loss of these flights, the Chamber has recently established an Air Access Task Force. The group will enquire into the development and sustainability of international passenger airline service into and out of Halifax; particularly through identification of any local incentives or disincentives (or barriers) that impact positively or negatively upon such service.

The Chamber strongly believes that the municipality needs an **integrated transportation strategy**. To this end, the Chamber has recently established a task force on transportation planning with a goal to bring key players who influence transportation planning together to provide leadership and to develop a common vision for transportation planning in the municipality. Our region requires a common vision for an integrated transportation plan.

### **Deregulation of Store Hours**

Nova Scotia has a lot to offer prospective visitors and business owners. With strategic, long-range planning, our province has the potential to become independently prosperous. One of the areas our Province needs to take a more progressive approach is with regards to Sunday shopping.

The provincial government should not be in the business of regulating store hours. The Chamber believes in a market driven approach to business. Individual business owners must be able to make individual decisions with regards to business operations if they are to be successful. The Chamber stands firm in the conviction that our region must deregulate shopping hours if we are to be a truly competitive province.

### **Community Relations**

The Chamber of Commerce believes that strong communities build a strong province. It is important that together, business organizations, community organizations and all levels of government recognize the significant role that we share in creating our future community. Open lines of communication and strong working relationships will enable us to achieve the common vision of our shared communities.

To this end, the Chamber of Commerce is working hard to promote a picture of a Halifax that is: economically and fiscally prosperous while retaining the "quality of life" aspects of a small city. Wherever possible we take action to promote our region and to ensure the economic and social prosperity of our community. Our picture of Halifax is one of a

vibrant, healthy and prosperous community. These are attributes that will help to attract and retain the business interest. As we have said numerous times, strong business is strong community.

Full text versions of all the Chamber's policy work is available on our website at: [www.halifaxchamber.com](http://www.halifaxchamber.com) under the heading "policy updates".