



POLICY UPDATE

News and views from the Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce February 19, 1999

Chamber Supports Difficult But Necessary Choices in HRM Budget

The Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce believes the proposed 1999-2000 budget for Halifax Regional Municipality represents another important step on the road to long term fiscal health for our community. This budget reflects the difficult but necessary choices that need to be made.

The proposed budget reflects the Management Principles and service priorities approved by Council over the past few months. These principles commit Council to a conservative fiscal approach based on business planning and corporate efficiency and innovation.

This approach, if followed, will see the first reduction in HRM's debt since amalgamation. If the budget is accepted by Council, we should see our overall municipal debt fall by \$16.2 million, or 4.7%, by March 31, 2000.

By reducing our debt, instead of growing it, we will be in a position to secure the level and quality of municipal services that our community needs. This progress must not be a one-time occurrence. Council and staff must build on the progress they have made in the past six months to develop a long term plan and

firm targets for paying off our municipal debt. The money that is currently spent on debt servicing, some \$55 million in 1998-99 alone, would be much better spent on reducing taxes, driving economic development, and delivering needed municipal services.

In putting forward this year's budget, staff and Council set aggressive time lines for internal delivery of financial information and the tabling of the budget. They have also made many improvements in the handling and distribution of information to stakeholders and decision makers.

To date, the deadlines have been met and decisions and discussions have reflected the fiscal priorities and financial principles which Council has set for itself. Council and staff can be justifiably proud of the progress they have made in implementing a sound, responsible approach to fiscal management at HRM.

These fiscal principles will be put to the test over the next few weeks as Council debates the proposed budget. It will be critical for Council to follow the path they have set for themselves and make the hard fiscal choices that are in the long term best interests of the people they represent.

The only long term solution to our fiscal problems is to get our

expenditures under control. This proposed budget demonstrates that by working together, Council, staff and the community at large can achieve this goal.

Editor's Note: We would like to thank our members who have been staying in touch with their Councillor. Your support and encouragement has been very important to HRM as they have made the hard decisions necessary to put us on a strong financial footing.

It is critical that you, our members, as individual residents and business people who live and work in this community, continue to supply this direct support to Council as they deliberate this first budget under the new fiscal regime.

We encourage you to call your Councillor to voice your support for the commitment Council has shown to date and urge them to continue to build on the progress they have made.

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