

**HRM’s Charter Can Guide Change and Address Community Needs**

June 10, 2020

A growing number of business and community development organizations have been formed on the eastern side of Halifax Harbour over the past 10 years, and a common theme among many of them is that they feel their communities have “lost their voice.”

Results from a recent survey of residents located in HRM Districts 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 may well echo that sentiment.

In an independent survey conducted between May 29<sup>th</sup> and June 9<sup>th</sup> 2020, residents in the five Harbour East Marine Drive districts were asked about their level of satisfaction with (1) urban planning (2) affordable housing (3) economic development (4) road maintenance and (5) lake quality monitoring.

Specifically, residents were asked whether they thought these services were (a) good (b) average, or (c) needed improvement.

At 63%, affordable housing topped the list of services needing improvement; followed by road maintenance, lake quality monitoring, urban planning and economic development.

Question #1	How would you rate the following HRM services in your community?				
	Urban Planning	Affordable Housing	Economic Development	Road Maintenance	Lake Quality Monitoring
Good	16%	7%	17%	12%	16%
Average	35%	21%	37%	39%	23%
Needs Improvement	44%	63%	38%	47%	45%
Don't Know	6%	9%	8%	1%	16%

*N = 311. Communities surveyed: Dartmouth, Cole Harbour/Westphal, Eastern Passage/Cow Bay, Eastern Shore/Cherry Brook/Prestons and Other (4%)*

The next question asked if the Harbour East Marine Drive Community Council (HEMDCC) should oversee these services. Some of the HRM Charter provisions respecting the role of Community Councils include:

- S. 25 (a) monitoring the provision of services to the community and recommending the appropriate level of services, areas where additional services are required and ways in which the provision of services can be improved;
- S. 25(e) making recommendations to the Council respecting any matter intended to improve conditions in the community including, but not limited to, recommendations respecting:

- I. Inadequacies in existing services provided to the community and the manner in which they might be resolved, additional services that might be required and the manner in which the costs of funding these services might be raised.
  - II. The adoption of policies that would allow the people of the community to participate more effectively in the governance of the community.
- S. 27 (1) A community council shall hold an annual public meeting in the community in each year to report to the public concerning its activities and to receive the views of the public respecting all matters within its mandate.

61% of respondents want the Harbour East Marine Drive Community Council (HEMDCC) to oversee lake quality monitoring. Given the requirement to encourage people to participate in the governance of their community, what might that role look like?

Dartmouth has many qualified scientific, engineering and planning professionals as well as residents' associations who are doing their best as volunteers to help manage our lakes while advocating for better lake protection.

The HEMDCC can, and should, make a commitment to engage this expertise on a regular basis, establish a lakes advisory committee, and adopt lake protection as part of its mandate.

Concerning economic development, an annual public meeting would provide an opportunity to hear from local business and community development groups. The HEMDCC is required to hold an annual public meeting: why not encourage the participation of these groups in such a forum?

Across the board, most respondents want the HEMDCC to oversee these services outright. More respondents want the HEMDCC to oversee these services, as long as they can be delivered more cost effectively, than the status quo (no oversight).

Question #2	Should these services be overseen by the Harbour East Marine Drive Community Council?				
	Urban Planning	Affordable Housing	Economic Development	Road Maintenance	Lake Quality Monitoring
Yes	46%	44%	41%	41%	61%
No	20%	26%	29%	27%	14%
Only if more cost effective	33%	30%	30%	32%	25%

*N = 311. Communities surveyed: Dartmouth, Cole Harbour/Westphal, Eastern Passage/Cow Bay, Eastern Shore/Cherry Brook/Prestons and Other (4%)*

The above suggestions for lake quality monitoring and economic development should be relatively easy to implement, and in a future article, I'll describe how affordable housing might be better organized in Halifax Regional Municipality.

However, urban planning and road maintenance services would be more complicated to re-organize given the departmental structures that exist.

It is unlikely that changes to these services would be considered in a vacuum.

Using HRM's community councils as the basis for broader municipal reform is not really that far fetched. After all, lobbyists who promote spitting the Municipality into an urban government and a county government want municipal reform... but why only consider one option?

In contrast to splitting HRM into two parts, and all the issues that would entail, the Charter has the advantage of guiding change and supporting community needs within an established legislative framework.

Communities on the eastern side of Halifax Harbour should start demanding that Sections 25 and 27 of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter be better utilized to meet their needs, and that the potential of the Harbour East Marine Drive Community Council be more fully explored.

*Full survey results will be provided to candidates vying for office in the October 17<sup>th</sup> municipal election, in Districts 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.*



David Harrison, MCIP

*David Harrison is an award-winning urban planner and has 20 years experience working with Atlantic Canadian communities on their affordable housing, seniors housing and economic development needs.*