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## HRM to hire own auditor general

By AMY PUGSLEY FRASER City Hall Reporter

The federal government has Sheila Fraser scrutinizing its expenditures and the province has Jacques Lapointe poring over its books.

Now Halifax city hall is getting its own auditor general.

Regional council unanimously approved the creation of the new position and the authorization of an external headhunter search during its regular weekly meeting Tuesday night at city hall.

The hiring of Halifax's first-ever municipal auditor is necessary, Mayor Peter Kelly said in an interview outside council chambers.

"We are to the size now, where we're over that half-a-billion-dollar value of budget, that to have a fresh set of eyes look at things is not a bad idea at all. It's a wise and prudent approach."

And the idea has been around for years, he said.

"When I was a councillor, there was talk about it. And since I've been mayor, there's been more talk."

Mr. Kelly was elected to the first Halifax regional council in 1996 after a decade in politics in Bedford.

The extra pair of eyes will ensure that Halifax gets value for its dollars and that it's accountable to its taxpayers, he said.

The new auditor general will direct his or her gaze, and sharpened pencils, "wherever they need to go," Mr. Kelly said.

"Whether it's police, fire, recreation or outside agencies that we're involved with, this individual will go where they deem it's appropriate to go," he said.

The inaugural auditor general, who could be in place as early as April 1, will also work with council and the municipal audit committee to address any issues that need extra attention.

But don't expect a lot of public debate on what they find.

While it's council's preference to deal with auditing issues behind closed doors, the mechanism

to permit that secrecy isn't in place yet. The only issues that council can discuss in private now are those dealing with land, legal or personnel matters.

Changes could be around the corner. One of council's approved motions authorizes the city solicitor to seek amendments to the municipal charter to allow for closed-door discussions when the issues involved have the potential "to expose the organization to a threat or a risk."

Further explanation of that motion wasn't available Tuesday night as council had discussed the issue during a private session earlier in the day.

The auditor general's salary and the length of his or her term will be set with the help of the audit committee, which is already in place.

Although Premier Rodney MacDonald heralded the position in a November 2007 speech, the necessary legislation was passed more recently with the creation of Halifax's own municipal charter.

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