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Front page | Metro | Nova Scotia | Canada | World | News Columns | Nova Scotia Election

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Build the new convention centre

Wed, May 6 - 5:19 AM

WHATEVER the results of the June 9 election, the province and HRM need to move ahead with plans to build a new convention centre in downtown Halifax.

Hours before Premier Rodney MacDonald's Tory minority government was defeated on Monday, he and HRM Mayor Peter Kelly signed a memorandum of understanding to work together on having a new convention centre built by 2013.

That should continue to be the goal of whichever party takes power next month.

The current convention facility, the World Trade and Convention Centre, is simply too small to be able to compete for the business of many national and international conferences. According to data from the WTCC, and referred to by Mr. MacDonald, as many as 60 conferences that had eyed Halifax as a desired location in the last year passed on the city because the facilities weren't adequate.

That represents potentially \$65 million in lost business revenue.

Many companies and groups rotate conferences in Canada between eastern, central and western regions of the country. Halifax, as the largest city in Atlantic Canada, should be the prime location in this region. A new convention centre – plans are for a facility at least three times the size of the WTCC – would allow the capital to reclaim that position.

Before that happens, of course, a consultant's report will have to be approved by the two levels of government, perhaps by this fall, and the facility will have to pass muster under the city's planning regulations.

A cost-sharing deal will also have to be worked out with Ottawa.

A new convention centre in Halifax – estimated to cost up to \$200 million, a price excluding other parts of the proposal, such as a hotel and office tower – would also benefit the rest of the province, as large groups coming to Nova Scotia looked for additional places to see and things to do.

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 - Books
 - Religion
 - Science
 - The Nova Scotian
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 - Community News
 - NS Communities

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 - Editorials
 - Columnists
 - News Columns
 - Business Columns
 - Sports Columns
 - Arts & Life Columns
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 - Community Reviews
 - Posting Up Blog
 - MacKinnon Cartoon
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 - Obituaries
 - Births
 - Cards
 - InMemoriams
 - Milestones

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 - Community Photos
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