

No cop swap for Halifax

By EVA HOARE and MICHAEL LIGHTSTONE Staff Reporters | UPDATED 5:56 p.m.

Halifax regional council Tuesday decided not to change the municipality's policing services.

Council voted in a closed-door meeting to stick with Halifax Regional Police patrolling urban areas and the RCMP covering suburban and rural districts.

Mayor Peter Kelly said an overwhelming majority of councillors supported the status quo, though results of the private vote won't be released.

He said council doesn't plan to review policing again anytime soon.

"Both RCMP and HRP operations will stay as they are," Kelly told reporters after the in camera session at city hall.

"Based upon the current system, and current funding module from the province and the federal government, . . . this is the proper approach in which to maintain," the mayor said.

Council made the decision even after hearing that keeping the RCMP could cost close to \$24 million more over the next three years, sources said. That information is contained in [the report of the Halifax police commission](#) submitted to councillors on Monday.

The vote comes at the end of two days of hot debate amongst the councillors who got the report from the municipality's police commission that recommended the removal of the RCMP.

That recommendation sparked an uproar among Mountie supporters and some residents in areas that would be turned over to municipal officers. It also fostered a divide amongst councillors.

The police commissioners made the recommendation based on cost and delivery of service, as the region faces a possible increase in the price tag to keep the RCMP on duty here.

Currently, Halifax pays 70 per cent of the cost to have 178 Mounties do their jobs in a 70-30 split with the federal government.

But the municipality, including Mayor Peter Kelly, have been concerned that the federal government will download more of the cost onto Halifax in what could be a 90-10 split.

The police commission's report to council was confidential until its release today. The report

states that it will cost \$23.9 million over three years if the RCMP price tag for the municipality rises to 90 per cent of the total cost. The federal government is studying the cost-sharing structure to provide RCMP services to municipalities.

Earlier in the day, Mayor Kelly said the issue has been very divisive, adding that savings would be gained from going with one option over the other.

In the report, board chairman Russell Walker said to councillors that the “one force one municipality” approach is best for numerous reasons, including chunks of the two forces patrolling different areas. For example, the RCMP currently presides over Cole Harbour, Tantallon and Lower Sackville.

“A dual agency model (HRP and RCMP) based on geographical boundaries fails to recognize the impact of transportation corridors and the consequent rapid movement of those who would commit crimes within HRM from one area to another,” the police commission wrote.

The report also addresses costs and duplication of police administrations. “...Maintaining two agencies prevents HRM from achieving a ‘seamless’ model and inevitably results in duplication of overhead and administrative costs.”

The police commissioners stressed that HRP has “successfully served” rural communities in the Sambro loop area since 2005, adding that HRP already owns and operates most of the “critical infrastructure” to support policing in the region.

In many cases, the commissioners argued HRP taking over policing in Lower Sackville, Cole Harbour and Tantallon areas would be “straightforward.” “The board has been advised that ‘for the most part (the transition) simply involves replacing RCMP Patrol Officers with HRP Patrol Officers. In fact, it is likely some Patrol Officers will simply change uniforms.’ ”

The Municipal Association of Police Personnel (MAPP), which represents HRP officers, had already agreed that all Mounties who want to make the move would be accepted into the HRP fold, the report states.

The board, however, said while the idea of the RCMP policing the entire jurisdiction would work after a transition period, it would be far too expensive.

“The costing attached to the RCMP’s proposal by the RCMP itself, was, however, the most significant factor in the board’s decision to remove Model D (all RCMP) from consideration,” commissioners wrote.

The impact on disbanding the HRP would be prohibitive due to severance and other obligations, plus the pension impact could soar to between \$35 and \$50 million depending on the financial markets at the time, the commissioners said.

The police board said it would be a “natural progression” for the HRP to expand into the whole municipality, the report said.

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