

Hello once more. Can you believe it's June already! No, nor can I.

[] By now, I'm sure you're aware that HRM's budget for 2010/11 has been approved by Regional Council.

What you may not be aware of, however, is the positive impact this budget is expected to have on the municipality's future financial health. It contains approximately \$14 million-worth of savings, new revenues and operational efficiencies; all of which will be ongoing and will help to reduce budget shortfalls which we would otherwise have been facing over the next few years.

In another positive initiative, Council has directed staff to find another \$13 million of efficiencies or service reductions by this fall, savings which will be the starting point of next year's budget deliberations.

As always, setting a budget is never easy. Council tries hard to cast as wide a net as possible to meet as many of your needs as we can, all without taxing a penny more than we have to.

Frankly, there isn't a budget system in existence that's perfect, (politicians hate to admit it, but it's true.) Even so, I want you to know that, each time we sit down to balance the municipal books, we *are* striving to do better; we *are* searching for greater efficiencies.

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It's just amazing how much clutter a home can accumulate these days.

Well, here's our chance to de-clutter! HRM has organized its first-ever Curbside Giveaway Weekend (www.halifax.ca/curbsidegiveaway), set for this Saturday and Sunday as part of Environment Week.

Here's how it will work. On those two days, simply place all your unwanted items at the curb with a "free" sign on them and then wait for other people to come by and help themselves.

This weekend, get ready for the biggest yard sale you've ever seen - all for free!

I can hardly wait.

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Here's an update on the encouraging progress being made by Harbour Solutions, the \$333-million project to treat metro's sewage before it goes into the water.

Here's how things stand:

HRM has assumed ownership of the Dartmouth treatment facility from the contractor after the plant met all test criteria during its commissioning stage. The three-year warranty coverage has begun.

The Herring Cove plant is at the commissioning stage and has been treating wastewater flows since mid-December. The mandatory 14-day performance test has been completed and members of staff are reviewing the data.

As for the Halifax unit, I'm pleased to report recovery operations are well advanced. In fact, by the time you're reading this, we should be doing tests running actual waste water through the equipment and, all being well, we anticipate the plant being back on line by late spring.

Get those bathing suits ready; you and I will have a date to go for a swim, soon! (Well, we will if the weather ever stays warm enough, long enough!)

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And finally, on a personal note, I'm happy to report that I survived my recent Scotiabank Blue Nose Marathon experience in one piece.

I took part in the 10-k run and finished in one hour and 10 minutes which meant I didn't need that flashlight I mentioned the other week, after all. My time was almost double the winning one but I didn't mind because it was a personal best for me. (It had to be, since this was my first marathon!)

Actually, I almost didn't make the run: I forgot to bring my official number with me to the start, along with the little chip participants get to clip to your sneaker to keep track of your time. (I forgot both in all the excitement.)

Now I've started training for the Dartmouth Natal Day Road Race coming up in about two months. (Oh, my aching feet. I must be crazy!)

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