

Hello everyone; I hope your week is going well.

I'm pleased to tell you that an important process has begun, one with enormous economic benefits for the heart of our municipality and, consequently, for all residents of HRM.

In a major vote of confidence in the downtowns of Halifax and Dartmouth, Council has authorized the creation of an imaginative initiative called the Strategic Urban Partnership. It's a key component of "Capital Ideas," a new HRM strategy to encourage development and investment in the Regional Centre.

With this Partnership, we have set in motion a procedure which will bring together major governmental, institutional, social and private sector interests, each of which has an important role to play in rejuvenating our downtowns.

Our core area is the cultural, social and commercial driver of our entire region.

Unfortunately, for a number of reasons - not least ongoing international economic uncertainty - our downtowns are taking a beating, despite our best efforts.

Construction projects valued at more than a billion dollars are waiting in the wings but nearly all of it is on hold, due to today's uncertain business climate. For its part, Council has encouraged investment in the core by creating an economic strategy as well as a comprehensive Regional Plan with its HRMbyDesign component which streamlines the approval process for downtown development.

And let's not forget the major new public library which has been given the go-ahead for the downtown (www.halifaxcentrallibrary.ca) or the world-class Convention Centre (<http://conventioncentreinfo.com/>) which is proposed for the Halifax core. (We're talking 3,000 construction jobs for that project alone!)

As hard as staff and Council have worked, however, we can't do this all on our own. We see the Strategic Urban Partnership as a forum, a meeting place where those organizations, institutions and individuals with a stake in our downtowns can discuss and coordinate their objectives and priorities.

In order to strengthen and grow the heart of our municipality, we need to come together to focus our resources, our funding, our energy and our imagination.

Happily, that process is about to begin.

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I've got my swimsuit ready; how about you?

Yes, now that Halifax, Dartmouth and Herring Cove sewage treatment plants are operational, it's time for my swim in the harbour.

Staff is monitoring water quality and the good news is, it's safe to go swimming at metro's beaches and everywhere else.

Sometime in the next few weeks, I'll be inviting you to a harbour celebration we'll be hosting at the beach in Dingle Park, just off the Purcell's Cove Road in Halifax.

I'll try and confirm everything through a public service announcement in the media. As well, please feel free to keep checking HRM's Call Centre (490-4000) for the time and date.

I'm looking forward to us making a big splash together but please, easy on those thongs and Speedos!

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And finally, on a personal note, I thought you might be interested to know that I'm gradually making headway with the three goals I set for myself this year.

The first was to exercise more and start eating better. Frankly, this is proving to be an ongoing struggle but I think I'm slowly getting there.

My second goal was to take a couple of courses at Mount Saint Vincent University so that I could inch my way toward completing my Bachelor of Tourism degree.

Here again, it hasn't been easy. (If nothing else, I've developed a great respect for people who hold down fulltime jobs while getting an education!)

Now for my third goal: trying to learn the piano. Frankly, even after several lessons, I'm hopeless. Ah well, I'll keep trying because I'd really like to become good enough one day to be invited to play at the Halifax Jazz Festival.

(Actually, the only invitation I'm ever likely to receive for my piano playing is from the Halifax Comedy Fest!)

Reach me at kellyp@halifax.ca or on my personal website www.peterkelly.ca or by phoning 490-4010. You're also most welcome to join me on my Facebook or Twitter pages. Or talk to me on my blog at <http://mayorpeterkelly.wordpress.com/>.