

Who would've thought the humble vending machine had a role to play in slowing climate change, not to mention keeping HRM's costs down? Well, it's true!

We've installed a \$250 device called the VendingMiser on 30 vending machines on our corporate property, where we pay the power bill.

The average vending machine emits about 4 tonnes of greenhouse gas annually, the equivalent of a car. The VendingMiser cuts emissions almost in half in refrigerated pop machines and by 30% in electrified non-refrigerated machines dispensing things like chips and chocolate bars.

Then there's the cost-saving. Refrigerated machines use \$500-worth of electricity annually, an amount the VendingMiser cuts significantly by intermittently shutting off power.

Since there are about 2,000 refrigerated vending machines and 1,000 electric ones throughout HRM, the annual reduction would be around 5,200 tonnes of greenhouse gases while the cost-saving to HRM and the private sector would total about \$500,000.

A bylaw revision will come before council soon, making it mandatory that all vending machines in HRM be fitted with these devices.

As well, I shall be writing to the presidents of Coke, Pepsi and other vendors, telling them what we're doing and asking for their cooperation.

Council and I always appreciate constructive criticism and informed suggestions to help us steer HRM to a better tomorrow.

That's why we welcomed the latest "scorecard" awarded to the Halifax Regional Economic Strategy by the Halifax Chamber of Commerce

In 2005, Council adopted a five-year economic plan of action for HRM and set

ourselves some lofty goals. It was a brave move, partly because we set ourselves up for much scrutiny and potential criticism, partly because we were at the mercy of economic events beyond our control.

Quite frankly, we didn't meet all the targets we set ourselves for 2009, as the scorecard shows. Like most other centres, we felt the aftershocks of last year's global economic upheavals, particularly in respect to tourism.

Even so, the Chamber's scorecard shows HRM did well last year in a number of key areas. We had a noticeable decrease in crime rates and registered increases in population growth and employment rates.

I'm proud to report our economy held its own in 2009 and weathered the recession better than most other cities in Canada, a fact supported by a number of other outside sources.

The CIBC ranked HRM first nationally in overall economic activity during the third quarter last year, up from fifth spot, half a year earlier.

The Conference Board of Canada predicted HRM's economy would avoid slipping into recession in 2009 and that our real Gross Domestic Product, the value of all the goods we produce and all the services we provide, would be the highest in the country.

Another vote of confidence came from Statistics Canada which indicated we've done better in job creation than most Canadian cities, posting a net job gain of 9,300 last year over the previous 12-month period. Our unemployment rate is 6.8%, well below the Canadian average (8.5%) and less than Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver.

Successes like these give Council the impetus to set the bar even higher, when we adopt the next five-year economic plan.

And finally, here's a chance to put ourselves on the map in a really big way. Well, on the board, actually, the Monopoly board.

Hasbro, the maker, is launching a Canadian edition and wants the public to decide which places should be featured.

Sixty-five centres, including ours, have been pre-selected and Canadians are being invited to cast ballots for their three favourites. The top 20 nominations will appear on the game board.

It's very simple: you just log onto www.monopolyvote.ca and start voting for HRM.

What fun if we win a spot on the world's most popular board game, not to mention one of my own personal favourites.

To me, Monopoly is the game of life, just like politics!

[] Get in touch with me here at City Hall at kellyp@halifax.ca or by phoning me at 490-4010. You're also most welcome to join me on my Facebook or Twitter pages.