

**COLUMNS**

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Post a comment | **Let's bring forward a tax reform that's fair** **PETER KELLY (TAKE FIVE WITH THE MAYOR)**   
Halifax News Net

This week, I'd like to tell you about a recent stand which the majority of regional council took regarding tax reform. Charting a fair and responsible course for Halifax Regional Municipality is always a challenge, especially when council and I are continually balancing the best interests of taxpayers with the financial realities of running a corporation the size of ours. In this present fiscal year alone, our operating and capital budgets totalled \$729 million.

Council must be fiscally responsible; that's the bottom line. Every year, we strive to provide you with the services you need; at the same time ensuring that we balance the municipality's books. Frankly, our money-raising options are extremely limited, so limited in fact that they boil down to one main source: property taxes.

This brings me to council's recent decision regarding tax reform. By a vote of 13-10, we decided not to pursue the issue, at least in its present form. It was a decision I supported and so did many of you, judging by the positive feedback I'm receiving from residents concerned by the financial implications of the proposals.

In my opinion and that of a majority of council, the changes proposed to our present assessment-based revenue system — one used by most communities across Canada — would have shifted an unfair financial burden onto the middle class.

We are mindful of the stress today's difficult economic climate is causing residents and the fact that the recovery is still extremely fragile. Jobs that have been lost are slow to return, if indeed they ever do. Even those jobs that survived the carnage may not be secure. As politicians, we are keenly aware of the increasing tax load the middle class is already being asked to carry; it is stress upon stress.

In the name of simple fairness, a majority of council could not allow any further financial burden to be placed on those who are already carrying their fair share of the load. In one situation which came to my attention, one particular family faced a three-fold jump in its municipal taxes under this proposal.

That being said, those of us who voted against pursuing the tax-reform proposals did so from an informed position. We had done our homework and educated ourselves on the whole issue. We went to public meetings and open houses; we had briefings from municipal staff; and we attended special workshops.

We had also listened to you, the residents. You communicated your concerns to us and made it plain you believed the proposals were not the fair way to go.



There are other ways to proceed, you said. Let's take a closer look at this, piece by piece. Let's consider, for example, select fees or differentiated special rates for municipal services like solid waste, hydrants, sidewalks and future expansions to Metro Transit. Let's explore a greater role for the province in terms of its financial support for municipalities and or through supportive legislated amendments to our Charter, to allow us to meet our obligations.

Above all, let's bring forward a tax reform that is fair, so that we all share the cost as well as the many benefits of living and enjoying life in HRM.



Get in touch with Mayor Kelly at city hall at [kellyp@halifax.ca](mailto:kellyp@halifax.ca) or by phoning him at 490-4010. He's also on Facebook and Twitter.

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