

Hello again, and thank you for joining me.

A few days ago, I delivered a formal apology on behalf of Regional Council to all those citizens whose lives have been affected by the loss of Africville, some 50 years ago.

By making the apology, Council and I sincerely hope this marks the start of the healing process for all those who still grieve the loss of the community which sat on the shores of Bedford Basin for 150 years.

(You can read the text of the apology at: <http://www.halifax.ca/Africville/apology.htm>. If you'd like your own copy, please contact me at the number at the end of this column.)

The past cannot be changed but it must be remembered. We must ensure that we learn from the mistakes of history, so we never repeat them.

That is why, as well as the apology, Regional Council has pledged the following: the contribution of \$3 million toward the reconstruction and operation, by a trust, of the Seaview United Baptist Church; the provision of 2.5 acres of land at Seaview Park; the renaming of Seaview Park in recognition of Africville; and the creation of a position responsible for African Nova Scotian Affairs within HRM.

We hope this commitment, offered in good faith and in the spirit of reconciliation, will create a lasting beacon to the past as well as a signpost to a better future for everyone.

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Probably the most important responsibility faced by Regional Council is establishing the municipality's annual budget. This year's process started last week when staff

presented Council with what's known as "the Fiscal Framework," an outline of where HRM is headed, financially, in 2010/11.

This information, and more to come, will help Council ultimately decide the levels of service our municipality needs and the revenue required to support them. A draft budget should be ready for review by April/May.

The budgetary task is never easy but, frankly, this year may be more challenging than most, given today's fragile economy.

Indications are that we face a revenue shortfall of more than \$30 million this year, largely due to cost pressures from transit, the solid waste operation and wages.

Residents have begun expressing their concern to me that, among the proposals brought forward by staff to balance the budget, is a tax increase of 3% to 4%.

It is the feeling amongst Council that such an approach would be excessive and we will ask staff to explore all other options.

If you'd like to learn more, you'll find the Fiscal Framework at www.halifax.ca/budget, along with details of HRM's many service expansions since amalgamation.

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And finally, have you recovered yet from the excitement of the Vancouver Winter Olympics? I'm still bleary-eyed from staying up late to watch the events, especially the hockey, bob-sledding and speed skating, but it was all worth it. I'm sure we're all proud of Canada's participants, especially those from this part of the world, people like Sidney Crosby and Sarah Conrad.

Congratulations to all our athletes for their performances. They were a real credit to their families, their communities and their country.

Meanwhile, good luck to three Nova Scotians contenders for Team Canada in the March 12-21 Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver. They are para-Alpine skier Luke Donovan and para-Nordic skier Mary Benson, both of Halifax; and para-Nordic skier Tyler Mosher of Wolfville.

These certainly are exciting sporting times and, just think, next February, we'll see many of those fine athletes, right here in Halifax, when we host the 2011 Canada Winter Games.

I can hardly wait!

Reach 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.