

I'd like to start by thanking everyone who took the time to become involved in the recent debate over proposed changes in the way HRM collects its garbage.

The controversial issue which came before council would have seen a reduction (from 6 to 4) of the number of bags permitted curbside; it would also have mandated the use of clear bags by everyone and disallowed the use of plastic grocery-store bags.

For the majority, the feedback that councillors and I received from residents and businesses alike was overwhelmingly negative. So negative that we voted not to proceed to a public hearing.

So thank you once again for contacting us and making your feelings and concerns known; it certainly was appreciated. Democracy at its best!

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Last week, I committed to tell you more about HRM's new chief administrative officer, Richard Butts.

Richard was selected from 60 candidates to lead corporate HRM and has more than 25 years' experience in municipal government and the private sector.

He comes to us from Toronto where he was deputy city manager. As such, he was responsible for an annual capital and operating budget of \$2.2 billion and 10,000-plus employees.

Richard is an experienced civil servant who advocates sound fiscal management. He encourages cooperation, participation and innovation from everyone around him and is a firm advocate of staff accountability and customer service.

Council and I look forward to working with Richard, who starts his new post March 28.

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I am sure the thoughts and prayers of everyone in HRM have been with the people of Japan, following the recent devastating earthquake and tsunami.

Hakodate in northern Japan is our twin city and was hit particularly hard. More than 30,000 people were evacuated ahead of a two-metre wall of water that smashed ashore. Given the strong ties between our two communities, I know we all feel great concern for the safety of people there, as we do for everyone in that country's affected areas.

I visited Hakodate in 2008 and, last July, I hosted Mayor Masanori Nishio here at City Hall, along with a delegation of 15 from the Hakodate Chamber of Commerce.

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And finally, with winter (hopefully) in our rear-view mirror, HRM's Operations' crews are turning their attention to removing seasonal debris from public areas.

Crews on both the day and night shifts in metro will be involved in the clean-up, which includes litter retrieval in parks and right-of-ways. In addition, we will be removing any traction sand that may have accumulated on streets.

If you are willing and able, I encourage you to do your bit in keeping our community beautiful by picking up litter when you encounter it, or by calling 490-4000 to report it.

And yes, in case you were wondering, we *have* started doing battle with the potholes!

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