

HRM and every municipality in Nova Scotia was shocked last week when the province tore up the seven-year agreement it reached with us in 2007. Under this pact, the province committed to a gradual takeover from us of mandatory costs related to the correctional service and public housing and had agreed to a cap on municipal contributions for education.

That has all changed. Starting in 2012 and for three years thereafter, local jurisdictions will once again be forced to assume these costs. In other words, the province clearly plans to balance its books on the backs of you, the municipal taxpayers. This is most unfair because municipalities basically have only one source of revenue - property taxes - whereas the province has many revenue streams such as income tax, sales tax, transfers from Ottawa and, of course, levies on municipalities like HRM.

This fiscal year, as things stand now, HRM is legally obliged to forward \$112 million to the province. That represents 25% of the property taxes we collect from residents and 10% of the commercial taxes. It's money badly needed to meet HRM's own obligations. With last week's provincial about-face, an already-stretched HRM will have to find an extra \$45 million over the next four years, (and who knows how much after that.)

I encourage you to call the premier (424-6600) to express your concern, as well as your MLA (NDP Caucus office 424-4134; PC Caucus office 424-2731; Liberal caucus office 424-8637).

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I'm pleased to report that HRM's push for a new stadium is gathering steam.

As you will remember, Council has set aside \$100,000 for an independent consultation and business planning analysis to be done into the feasibility of a multi-use facility.

Council has also appointed a steering committee to examine, among other issues, potential sites and workable designs for a possible 20,000-seat structure.

This citizen-led committee had its first meeting last week and will have its analysis and recommendations ready for presentation by late June or early July, at which point, Council will decide whether to proceed further.

If the decision is taken to build a stadium - and I believe it's only a matter of time – it will strengthen our bid to be a venue for the Women's World Cup of Soccer which is coming to Canada in 2015.

Stay tuned.

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And finally, with spring here, I'm really looking forward to getting my hands in the soil again. Last year, I had fun working with youngsters from St. Joseph's Children Centre growing a vegetable/herb garden, right here at City Hall. It was hard work but it was worth it because we were able to donate several harvests of fresh produce to the Parker Street Food Bank. We hope to do the same this year, but on an even bigger scale. I'm already planning an expansion to our location in the Grand Parade!

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