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Item No. 15.1.3
Halifax Regional Council
April 29, 2025

TO: Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 31, 2025

SUBJECT: **2025-26 Events East Business Plan – Halifax Convention Centre**

ORIGIN

March 31, 2025 Attachment 1, letter from Events East Board Chair, Norm Mensour, requesting approval of the 2025-26 Events East Business Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council approve the 2025-26 Events East Business Plan for the Halifax Convention Centre Corporation, submitted to the Municipality on March 31, 2025, as set out in Attachment 2 of the March 31, 2025 staff report.

BACKGROUND

The Halifax Convention Centre Corporation, established under the *Halifax Convention Centre Act* (the Act), operates under the name Events East Group (Events East). Since April 2017, Events East has managed and operated the Halifax Convention Centre, Scotiabank Centre and Ticket Atlantic. The legislation outlines that the activities of the Halifax Convention Centre be maintained and managed in a manner that will promote and develop economic development, tourism and industry in the province generally, and the municipality in particular.

Norm Mensour, Board Chair of Events East has submitted the attached business plan for the approval of Halifax Regional Council and the Minister of Growth and Development. The plan was developed by Events East and has been approved by the Events East board of directors. The Act requires that Events East submit to Council and the Minister for approval, a detailed business plan for the following fiscal year, including estimates of budgetary requirements.

DISCUSSION

On March 31, 2025, the Events East Board Chair submitted the 2025-26 Business Plan for Events East Group approved by the Board on March 19, 2025.

The plan has five strategic priorities which are summarized as:

1. Business Growth

With a well-established brand and track record of successfully meeting booking and performance targets, this year will focus on keeping momentum and finding new ways to maximize impact through the events Events East attracts and hosts. In addition to economic benefits, events add community vibrancy and create opportunities to showcase Nova Scotia.

2. Guest Experience

This year Events East plans to focus on maintaining high levels of client satisfaction with event experiences, while ensuring the consistency of their newly established approaches to service excellence and feedback collection. Events East remains committed to reinforcing local partnerships and purchases, and to showcasing local throughout the venue and its events.

3. Community Connection

Events East will continue to work collaboratively with partners to enrich the vibrancy of our community, celebrate the impact of events, and demonstrate the unique experiences our province has to offer. Events East will do this through initiatives such as broadening the impact of our Local Program showcasing Nova Scotia's culture and tourism offerings, developing a multi-year approach to environmental sustainability, expanding their communications approach and engaging community and industry partners about potential events, long-term vision and expanded impacts.

4. Talent & Culture

Events East is committed to attracting, growing, and retaining the best talent in our industry. They will continue to nurture a culture of inclusion and diversity and lay groundwork for new tools, insights and programs that will help our employee experience continue to evolve.

5. Accountability & Sustained Performance

Events East will maintain its commitment to governance, accountability reporting, and operational excellence, while collaborating with Shareholders, board and key stakeholders to formalize and initiate the path to 2030.

The 2025/26 business plan includes 17 actions and initiatives supporting the 5 strategic priorities noted above.

Strategic alignment

Staff have reviewed the Events East's business plan in relation to the HRM strategic plans and priorities including the Inclusive Economic Strategy 2022-2027, Halifax Regional Integrated Tourism Plan and Council's Strategic Priorities Plan 2021-25.

Notable areas of alignment between the Events East 2025-26 Business Plan and these plans include:

- Inclusive Economic Strategy 2022-2027
 - Business plan priorities align most especially to the strategic goal to promote and maximize inclusive and sustainable growth, as well as the strategic goal of making Halifax a better place to live and work, the strategic objective of strengthening the dynamism of our downtowns, main streets, and rural centres.
- Halifax Regional Integrated Tourism Master Plan
 - Business plan priorities align to the Tourism Master Plan, particularly as related to the strategic themes of being vibrant and alive 365 and attracting highest yield and growth markets.
- Council's Strategic Priorities Plan 2021-25
 - Business plan priorities support Council's strategic priority related to Prosperous Economy and within that priority area the outcome of economic growth: Economic opportunities are seized to promote and maximize balanced growth, reduce barriers for businesses, support local economies, and showcase the region's strengths to the world.

Through the equity and diversity work identified under Community Connection and Talent & Culture strategic priorities there may be opportunities for the work of Events East to align to and connect with objectives and actions under the Road to Economic Prosperity for African Nova Scotian Communities. The plan also supports the Events East's five-year strategic plan approved by Regional Council and the Minister in July 2019. Events East's five-year strategic plan concludes on March 31, 2025, and they are in the process of finalizing a new five-year strategic plan that will set priorities to March 31, 2030.

Outcomes and Measures

The 2025-26 business plan includes core outcomes & measures associated with each of the priority areas. They show business growth with target for annual direct spending, associated with conventions and events, of \$70M in 2025-26 which is an increase of \$10M from 2024-25. Associated with this, the target number of events is holding at 165, while an expected increase of delegates from 85,000 to 90,000. This marks a restoration of historical event volume and mix. Other measures include programs in place for both client and staff feedback to be received, which will support future improvements and stakeholder engagement.

Business Plan

Next Steps: The business plan is required to be approved by the Minister of Growth and Development and Regional Council, as provided for in the *Halifax Convention Centre Act*. Each government shareholder is in the process of approving the 2025-26 business plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Halifax Convention Centre is funded as per a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and the Province, under which each party shares equally in all costs including the annual lease costs (\$5,380,000) and the operating costs of the facility. Under the MOU, HRM pays its share of lease costs directly to the Province of Nova Scotia.

Annual business plans, including budget estimates, are required to be approved by Halifax Regional Council. HRM is responsible to contribute half of the total anticipated funding requirement which is estimated at \$2,187,500. HRM's funding for the Convention Centre is withdrawn from the Halifax Convention Centre Reserve.

Budget Summary: Convention Centre Reserve Q521

Projected Net Available Balance, as of Q3	\$ 8,081,270
Projected Interest 2025/26	\$ 143,500
Budgeted contribution 2025/26	\$ 8,519,000
Budgeted withdrawals (HCC rent) 2025/26	(\$ 5,380,000)
Budgeted withdrawals (Events East)	<u>(\$ 2,250,000)</u>
Net Available Ending Balance	\$9,113,770

Expected reserve withdrawals, for both rent and Events East operating funding, were included in the 2025/26 Reserve budget and approved by Council in April.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Risks associated with approval of the Events East Business Plan are low. Annual business planning and budgeting are means by which risks can be identified and mitigated.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVE

Regional Council could choose not to approve the annual business plan or to request amendments to the business plan.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Convention Centre Act, S.N.S. 2014, c. 8

Business plan

Section 29

- (1) Annually, as required by the Council and the Minister, the Corporation shall submit to the Council and the Minister for approval a detailed business plan for the following fiscal year, including estimates of budgetary requirements, for the operation of the Corporation.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Letter to Minister and Council-EEG 2025-2026 Business Plan

Attachment 2: Events East Business Plan 2025 – 26 Final

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Brendon Smithson, Director, Regional Recreation Services 902.478.2086



March 31, 2025

Hon. Minister Colton LeBlanc
 Department of Growth and Development
 M103-1809 Barrington Street
 Halifax, NS B3J 3K8

Halifax Regional Council
 Halifax Regional Municipality
 P.O. Box 1749
 Halifax, NS B3J 2V9

Dear Minister and Council:

RE: Events East Group 2025-2026 Business Plan

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Events East Group, please find enclosed the 2025-2026 Events East Business Plan as approved by the Board at its March 19, 2025, meeting. The Board respectfully requests formal approval of the plan (consent document attached).

With a strong mix of events that will drive community and economic impact for Nova Scotia for years to come, the 2025-2026 Events East Business Plan is focused on the strategies, programs and partnerships that will position us for continued success well into the future.

The Board and Executive Management Team of Events East Group appreciate your ongoing support, and if you have any questions, comments or require additional information please let me know.

Yours truly,

Norm Ivensour
 Board Chair

c: Kellianne Dean, Acting Deputy Minister Dept. of Growth and Development
 Jeremy White, Executive Director, Dept. of Growth and Development
 Melanie Fewer, Director, Crown Relations, Dept. of Growth and Development
 Mike Queripel, Director, Dept. of Growth and Development
 Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer, HRM
 Maggie MacDonald, Executive Director, Parks & Recreation, HRM
 Brendon Smithson, Director, Regional Recreational Services, HRM
 Carrie Cussons, President and CEO, Events East Group
 Suzanne Fougere, EVP, Strategy & Business Development, Events East Group
 Denise Schofield, Vice President, Corporate Service, Events East Group

Att/

Events East

2025-26 Business Plan

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Message from the President & CEO

We enter the 2025-26 year with a confident and optimistic outlook, inspired by the momentum and results that have been consistently building over the last few years. Having successfully delivered on the priorities and outcomes within our last five-year strategic plan, we see significant potential for continuing to grow our impact and contributions to community vibrancy.

Clients from across the country and around the world are choosing our province and Centre to host their events, and our team is passionate about creating memorable event experiences for delegates from near and far. Event bookings are well-established from April through to December, and national and international events are booking into 2029.

As we prepare to welcome new and returning guests in 2025-26, we remain committed to maintaining high levels of client satisfaction. We are incredibly proud of our team's commitment to welcoming guests with signature Maritime hospitality, and of the extra care we take to deepen our impact on the local community and economy. We have a proven track record of collaborating with Nova Scotian suppliers, farmers, and producers to source fresh ingredients for our menus, and of working with partners to highlight Nova Scotia's expertise in the sectors of natural resources and oceans, life sciences, clean technology and hydrogen, and defense.

Whether we're welcoming a national conference for visiting delegates or hosting a local community celebration, supporting and collaborating with local businesses, suppliers and partners is at the heart of our approach.



Carrie Cussons
President & CEO
Events East

Purpose & Mandate

WHO WE ARE

Events East Group is a special purpose government agency that manages and operates the Halifax Convention Centre and Scotiabank Centre.

We are an impact-focused organization known for attracting and hosting the best events in the region, generating economic impact, and driving community vibrancy.

We were created as part of a government partnership between the Province of Nova Scotia and Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and we work in collaboration with them to manage our business in a responsible and transparent manner.

We were created in 2014 through the [Halifax Convention Centre Act](#) to operate, maintain and manage the activities of the Halifax Convention Centre in a manner that will promote and develop economic development, tourism, and industry in the province generally, and the municipality.

In April 2017, our mandate expanded to include the continued management and operations of Scotiabank Centre and ticketing.

Consistent with legislation, our Shareholder approved strategic plan will conclude on March 31, 2025, and we are in the process of finalizing a new five-year strategic plan that will set priorities to March 31, 2030.

Planning Context

This business plan is presented for the management and operations of the Halifax Convention Centre, which is the region's premier venue for large meetings, conferences, conventions, and community celebrations. It is jointly owned by the Province of Nova Scotia and HRM, and managed and operated by Events East. As operators of Halifax Convention Centre and Scotiabank Centre, we are proud to be entering the 2025-26 year having recently achieved a significant milestone: a combined \$500 million in economic impact generated by hosting 1,600 events and 3.2 million guests in our two venues since 2018.

Nearly 1,000 events were hosted at Halifax Convention Centre in this timeframe, generating more than \$300 million in local economic impact and welcoming half a million guests. This includes more than 150 national and international meetings that are aligned with key sectors of economic importance and helped our province's signature hospitality become better known across the country and around the world.

Although geopolitical uncertainty is increasingly becoming a focus across industries and governments, our business outlook and projections remain positive. Our value proposition as an inclusive and welcoming venue that can deliver exceptional events while integrating Nova Scotia's tastes, talent, crafts, and culture is attractive to clients both within and beyond our borders.

This year, we will work with our Shareholders, board members and industry partners to finalize our next long-term strategic plan, which will define the growth opportunities

ahead of us and formally initiate our path to 2030.

Over the last few years, we've made significant strides in our corporate commitments to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, local suppliers and partners, and employee engagement. This includes a recent Rick Hansen Accessibility Certification, and a well-established network of local food and beverage suppliers. Our corporate commitments in these areas will continue, and we'll evolve our approach as needed to ensure we're maximizing the impact we can have as an inclusive employer, community champion, and industry leader.

We'll stay aligned with the Province and HRM, and their priorities and visions for growth. We know many of our partners in the tourism and economic development sectors are developing future-state visions and multi-year plans as well, and we'll continue to collaborate and align our resources where needed.

We believe the road ahead holds significant potential for continuing to grow our impact and drive community vibrancy. This will require nurturing the relationships and credibility we have established with partners and clients, while pursuing new strategic opportunities.

This year will be about maintaining momentum, while getting oriented to where we're going next. Our future will be built on a stable foundation of governance, accountability, excellence, and continuous improvement.

Strategic Priorities & Activities

BUSINESS GROWTH

With a well-established brand and track record of successfully meeting booking and performance targets, this year will focus on keeping momentum and finding new ways to maximize impact through the events we attract and host. In addition to economic benefits, events add community vibrancy and create opportunities to showcase Nova Scotia.

Key Initiatives

- Continue actively implementing our international attraction strategy, including alignment to sectors of economic importance to the province.
- Maintain focus on securing national corporate and national association events.
- Develop our approach to optimizing Halifax Convention Centre event bookings in the winter months.

GUEST EXPERIENCE

This year will focus on maintaining high levels of client satisfaction with event experiences, while ensuring the consistency of our newly-established approaches to service excellence and feedback collection. We remain committed to reinforcing local partnerships and purchases, and to showcasing local throughout our venue and events.

Key Initiatives

- Fully integrate our service excellence program into daily operations, following its development and launch in 2024-25.
- Maintain a consistent approach to collecting, analyzing and responding to client feedback, and creatively engage clients in helping to define new areas of opportunity.
- Continue working with our network of Nova Scotian suppliers, farmers, and producers to deliver unique food and beverage experiences and showcase local flavours.
- Submit re-certification application for the International Association of Convention Centres' Gold Standard, an industry-specific program for evaluating key areas of convention centre performance.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

We will continue to work collaboratively with partners to enrich the vibrancy of our community, celebrate the impact of events, and demonstrate the unique experiences our province has to offer.

Key Initiatives

- Broaden the impact of our Local Program by showcasing Nova Scotia's culture and tourism offerings and connecting our guests with a variety of authentic Nova Scotian experiences.
- Develop a multi-year approach to maintaining and improving our environmental sustainability, including a food sustainability program.

- Communicate proactively with our community and industry, celebrate and share successes, and identify opportunities to effectively expand our communication approach.
- Engage community and industry partners in conversation about the future potential of the events industry, and our long-term vision for continued and expanded impact.

TALENT & CULTURE

We're committed to attracting, growing, and retaining the best talent in our industry. We'll continue to nurture a culture of inclusion and diversity and lay groundwork for new tools, insights and programs that will help our employee experience continue to evolve.

Key Initiatives

- Develop a multi-year plan for integrating a culture of safety across our venues, building upon existing orientation and training programs, emergency preparedness, and workplace policies and procedures.
- Plan for a 2026 employee engagement survey while continuing to implement our Employee Pulse Program, a multi-year response to 2023 survey insights.
- Complete phase one implementation of a technology solution that will modernize our approach to recruitment and onboarding, administration, and employee communication.

ACCOUNTABILITY & SUSTAINED PERFORMANCE

We'll maintain our commitment to governance, accountability reporting, and operational excellence, while collaborating with Shareholders, board and key stakeholders to formalize and initiate our path to 2030.

Key Initiatives

- Submit a five-year strategic plan to Shareholders for approval, including outcome measures.
- Continue to make accessibility improvements and update our Accessibility Plan, as required by the *Nova Scotia Accessibility Act*.
- Develop a multi-year capital planning and investment process for the Halifax Convention Centre, in collaboration with our Shareholders.

Core Outcomes & Measures

In 2025-26, we will monitor and measure our performance in the following priority areas, in keeping with our practice of the last several years. Our approach to measurement may evolve as we finalize our next five-year strategic plan, and any changes will be implemented in 2026-27.

Priority	Measure	2025-26 Target
Business Growth	Total direct spending and economic benefit	Through the conventions and events we host at the Halifax Convention Centre, generate annual direct spending of \$70M.
Business Growth	Number of events attracted and hosted at the Halifax Convention Centre	Host 165 events with 90,000 delegates, including a minimum of 40 national and international events. Secure a cumulative total of 90 national and international events with an estimated 60,000 delegates for 2026-27 and beyond.
Guest Experience	Customer satisfaction	Maintain average customer satisfaction score of at least 80%.
Community Connection	Perception of organization	Maintain stakeholder confidence score of 90%.
	Local Program at the Halifax Convention Centre	Direct 60% of food and beverage purchases to local suppliers.
	Social impact	Establish benchmarks for social impact measurement.
Talent & Culture	Employee feedback	Monitor employee engagement and maintain average engagement score of at least 80%.
Accountability & Sustained Performance	Strategic plan	Five-year strategic plan, including measurement framework approved by Shareholders.

**Direct expenditures measure the estimated impact of the events we host, using a methodology and calculation developed through analysis of historical and average attendee, exhibitor, and event planner spending.*

The calculation used to estimate direct expenditures was updated in March 2025 to reflect inflationary factors following an analysis conducted by HLT Advisory, which included a review of regional market data and Statistics Canada Consumer Price Index data. As such, this updated calculation has been applied to the economic impact target and performance analyses.

Economic Impact & Budget Context

The Halifax Convention Centre is mandated to attract and host events that create economic and community benefits for Nova Scotia. As such, our business and success are reflected in the economic impact generated by the events we host, as well as the combined number of events and guests who attend them.

Economic impact measures the benefit of new money being spent in the Nova Scotia economy, as a result of the events we host and the number of people attracted to spend time in, or travel to, downtown Halifax or Nova Scotia as a result. The projected economic impact for 2025-26 is \$70M, due to a strong event mix that includes a variety of national and international events, which are critical to generating higher revenue and driving incremental and significant impact.

To fulfill Events East’s mandate of generating significant economic and community impacts through event hosting, annual investment is required by the two Shareholders. Historically, the annual Shareholder investment has been budgeted to fund the total building costs and property taxes required for the convention centre. Consistent with 2024-25, the budgeted Shareholder investment for 2025-26 is \$4.5M, which is lower than the \$6.6M in budgeted building costs and property taxes.

Revenues for 2025-26 are estimated at \$18.1M, resulting in a budgeted operating income before building costs, property taxes and depreciation of \$2.4M. Property taxes of \$2.3M are included in the budget, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Province of Nova Scotia and HRM.

Economic Impact Summary

	Target 2025-26	Forecast 2024-25	Target 2024-25
Total Events	165	166	165
Total Attendees	90,000	87,000	85,000
Total Direct Expenditures*	\$70M	\$75M	\$65M

**Direct expenditures measure the estimated impact of the events we host, using a methodology and calculation developed through analysis of historical and average attendee, exhibitor, and event planner spending.*

The calculation used to estimate direct expenditures was updated in March 2025 to reflect inflationary factors following an analysis conducted by HLT Advisory, which included a review of regional market data and Statistics Canada Consumer Price Index data. As such, this updated calculation has been applied to the economic impact target and performance analyses.

Operating Budget Summary

(For the year ended March 31)

	Budget 2025-26 (\$)	Forecast 2024-25 (\$) Note 1	Budget 2024-25 (\$)
Revenues	18,050,000	17,911,000	16,803,000
Expenses			
Event Operations – Fixed Costs	2,120,000	2,285,000	2,124,000
Event Operations – Variable Costs	7,220,000	7,186,000	6,196,000
Salaries and Benefits	4,413,000	4,210,000	4,337,000
General Operations	1,872,000	1,853,000	1,847,000
Total Expenses	15,625,000	15,534,000	14,504,000
Operating Income Before Building Costs, Property Taxes and Depreciation	\$2,425,000	\$2,377,000	\$2,299,000
Building Costs (Note 2)	4,280,000	4,191,000	3,858,000
Operating Loss before Property Taxes and Depreciation	(1,855,000)	(1,814,000)	(1,559,000)
Property Taxes (Note 3)	2,320,000	2,205,000	2,441,000
Operating Loss Before Depreciation	(4,175,000)	(4,019,000)	(4,000,000)
Depreciation	200,000	181,000	200,000
Estimated Shareholder Investment (Note 5)	\$4,375,000	\$4,200,000	\$4,200,000
Investment Required from Shareholder – HRM	\$2,187,500	\$2,100,000	\$2,100,000
Investment Required from Shareholder – PNS	\$2,237,500	\$2,150,000	\$2,150,000

Note 1: Figures reflect the latest approved forecast which was completed in January 2025.

Note 2: Halifax Convention Centre building costs include the contractual lease operating costs related to the Nova Centre. The annual lease payment is the responsibility of the Province of Nova Scotia and is not reflected in the above values.

Note 3: Property taxes are calculated pursuant to the MOU between the Province of Nova Scotia and HRM.

Note 4: Revenues and expenses for Scotiabank Centre are not reflected in the values noted above. Scotiabank Centre is a facility owned by HRM. Events East operates the facility on behalf of HRM under an operating agreement. All operating income or losses generated by the facility accrue to HRM, and all capital improvements are funded by the municipality.

Note 5: The Shareholder investment is shared equally between the Province of Nova Scotia and HRM. As each Shareholder has different approaches for funding capital expenditures, the value of the annual investment required from each is different. Although the funding in any given year is different, over time each funding approach will result in the Shareholder investment being shared 50/50.