

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Thursday, Sept. 20, 2007

Committee Room 1

Organizational Meeting

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Ms. Marilyn More (Chairman)
Hon. Ronald Chisholm
Hon. Leonard Goucher
Mr. Patrick Dunn
Mr. Gordon Gosse
Mr. Trevor Zinck
Mr. Keith Colwell
Mr. Leo Glavine
Mr. Stephen McNeil

In Attendance:

Ms. Charlene Rice
Legislative Committee Clerk

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2007

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll start the meeting. We are both sad and pleased because we're losing Rhonda, but we're gaining Charlene Rice as our new committee clerk. So perhaps we'll go around and make introductions. Pat, would you like to start.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So Rhonda, do you just want to fill us in on where you're going and then Charlene just briefly where you're coming from.

MS. RHONDA NEATT: Yes, I'm heading back to Hansard on Monday, that's where I came from. I've been filling in after Mora left. I would like to thank everyone for a great experience and I leave you in the capable hands of Charlene Rice.

MS. CHARLENE RICE: Good morning. I'm a little anxious about my new role. After speaking with Mr. Colwell the other day he welcomed me but he also, I think, feels a little sorry for me. (Laughter)

Nevertheless, I have spent the last almost 20 years with the Department of Health - the last five years I've been with the minister's office - and prior to that, I started when the Health Services and Insurance Commission was active. That was quite a long time ago but I used to look after a lot of the commission meetings, et cetera, a lot of subcommittee meetings. A very interesting job, a very interesting role at the Department of Health - a lot of changes. After looking at the agenda or some of the items here for discussion, I find that they're very close to things that I've been dealing with.

Prior to that I spent I guess eight years working in legal offices, so I have a bit of legal background. So that's basically where I've come from. I'm looking forward to this, I think it's going to be very interesting and thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Actually, we're a pretty good bunch to get along with. I think we'll treat you kindly. Rhonda, thank you so much for the last six months or so. We're pleased that we'll continue to see you in your regular role with Hansard, so thanks again for all your work.

I'd like to just rearrange the agenda a little bit to accommodate Minister Goucher. A couple of additions, besides choosing which topics and witnesses we would like to have over the next several months, there has been a request to change the time of our meetings. We also have to change the October meeting date. So I'm suggesting perhaps that we'll start with the change of time in case Minister Goucher has to go back to his Cabinet meeting.

HON. LEONARD GOUCHER: I'll stay as long as I can, though.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so it's a permanent change that government . . .

MR. GOUCHER: Thursday, 8:30 in the morning; it usually goes until probably noon or 1:00 p.m. That is the traditional time we used to have it, well, I know it was Wednesday for a while but Thursday is our normal day and if we could accommodate it, that would be wonderful. There are two of us - Minister Chisholm as well, who unfortunately is not here. There was a death, not in his immediate family but it was a friend that he had to return for. I think, speaking for him as well, if we could accommodate a time change or a day change it would be great, so that we could attend the meetings on a regular basis.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so the two government ministers on our committee will have a long-term conflict with our morning meeting time and generally we meet the third Thursday of each month. So can we have some discussion?

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: What day were we looking at? We're still going to keep it a third week?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You mean every Thursday, right?

MR. ZINCK: But we just have to switch it from a Thursday . . .

MR. GOUCHER: If we could accommodate the change from a Thursday, as far as the week, it doesn't matter, it is just a Thursday.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so you're not suggesting later on Thursday, you're looking at a different day.

MR. GOUCHER: A different day would be better for us.

MS. NEATT: I would say because Cabinet sometimes goes over, I would expect.

MR. GOUCHER: It does.

MR. KEITH COLWELL: Maybe the clerk could let us know what other committees are meeting the other days because this week typically there's Public Accounts every Wednesday, which I'm on and I can't attend here on a Wednesday, and we also have other meetings the third week of the month every month, so maybe we could shift it to the second week or fourth week or the first week, and whatever day, as long as it is not another - not a Monday or a Wednesday that would be fine - any other day that you would pick, as far as I am concerned.

MR. GLAVINE: Tuesday, first or second week, and we could just check to see if there are any conflicts with other committees. Resources, I believe, normally will meet on the third Tuesday of the month, which was this week. So first or second seemed like both the best . . .

MS. NEATT: Not the second. Economic Development meets on the second Tuesday and then Human Resources is the last Tuesday.

MR. GLAVINE: Is there anybody here who is on Economic Development?

MR. COLWELL: Me.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So is there a Tuesday morning that's open?

MR. GLAVINE: What's wrong with the first - the first week open. I would move that we have our monthly meetings on the first Tuesday of the month.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion?

MR. GOUCHER: Madam Chairman, I just want to thank the members for their consideration. We didn't bring this onto ourselves deliberately and I think this is an

important committee and we would like to be here for it so I do appreciate the co-operation. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well you might want to wait for the vote. (Laughter)

MR. GOUCHER: It's still important to us, no matter what the vote is.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, thank you. No further discussion, I'll call for the vote. All those in favour of moving our regular meeting date to 9:00 a.m. on the first Tuesday of each month, as much as possible.

MR. ZINCK: So there's nothing available on the third Tuesday, is that what you said?

MS. NEATT: That's Resources.

MR. ZINCK: So every other Tuesday is taken up except for the first?

MS. NEATT: Yes.

MR. ZINCK: Okay.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Gordie?

MR. GORDON GOSSE: I don't think I'll be able to be on the committee any longer on Tuesday because I have the longest to travel, so I think that will be my demise on the committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So Thursday is the only day that you're available?

MR. GOSSE: Thursday, yes because we have caucus on Wednesdays which means I would have to come up on Monday and I couldn't do that right now with my schedule for the Fall.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And later on Thursday wasn't going to work because we didn't know when your meetings were going to finish.

MR. GOSSE: So I would have to travel on Monday.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, I know. That week you would lose three days.

MR. GOSSE: I would lose three days out of my office and I can't do that. The people up here don't elect me.

MR. GOUCHER: Madam Chairman, just a thought, is there any way we could leave it with the clerk just to have a look at it for us and maybe get back to us, leave it on that basis. I know it's pretty difficult because everybody is busy, it's not just us, it's everybody. We've all got our committees, caucus meetings and everything else, so could we possibly leave it with them to maybe poll us and see if we can find a day that would be mutually agreeable because I think it's important that everybody stay on the committee, that everybody is accommodated.

[9:15 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, Rhonda is making a suggestion. What about the possibility of looking at Tuesday afternoon and then you could come up and you'd just have the two days?

MR. GOSSE: I could travel early Tuesday morning, rather than losing a full day in my office on Monday. I could leave 7:00 a.m. and be here - yes, that would be good.

MS. NEATT: During the House, that would be a problem.

MR. GOSSE: Yes, if the Legislature is sitting then.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, we've had some discussions about whether we should be meeting while we're in session, too. Of course, when everyone is in town it might be easier to do it on a different day. Do you want to revise . . .

MR. GLAVINE: Defeat the motion and ask for a reconsideration, I guess.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. Would all those in favour of the original motion, which was 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, raise your hands. All those opposed.

The motion is withdrawn.

Would someone like to move a new motion - what time do the afternoon meetings usually start?

MS. NEATT: Usually 1:00 p.m.

MR. GOUCHER: Is this still the third Tuesday? The third week or the first?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The first.

MR. GOUCHER: So, I move that the meetings be moved to the first Tuesday of the month starting at 1:00 p.m.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

MR. GOUCHER: Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Great. We do have problems with the next meeting date because that's October 2nd which is the by-election and I suspect a fair number of us will have other priorities that day, if I may put it that way.

MS. NEATT: There may be a problem getting someone that quickly, too, to line up witnesses.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. GLAVINE: Let's go with our plan for October.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Can we continue with the morning of the third Thursday for October and then we'll start the new schedule the first week of November?

MR. GOUCHER: If you can just understand that the next meeting I may not be here, that's the only thing. I just don't want you to think I'm . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes. So, shall we compromise that way and have the starting date? Good, thank you very much. That looks after the second additional item, which was changing the October meeting date because the government caucus is having their Fall retreat that week, so it's not a problem now.

Let's go to the original item on the agenda, which is to look at our submissions of potential topics and witnesses for the Fall and winter. I just want to make a change - the revised list from the NDP actually had Seniors' Pharmacare at the end of it and we'd also like to add autism, if you could just pencil those in.

So we have two lists here, how would you like to start making decisions?

MR. COLWELL: We have another addition we'd like to make to the list. There's four items I have here - I'm just going to give you another one, I'm going to add one on the top.

MR. GOSSE: Keith, is there anything in common there?

MR. COLWELL: I was just looking through that. There's one that the PC caucus has here, child welfare and one thing that we're going to talk about and want to talk about is adoption, so that really is sort of the same thing.

MR. GOSSE: The same with us, the child and youth strategy - the youth at risk would be the same as the child welfare.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's very specific, it's on what action has been taken on the recommendations from the Nunn Commission Report.

MR. COLWELL: We could maybe suggest, with permission from the Chair, maybe each caucus could pick one of our topics and move forward with those.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That would be the first three?

MR. COLWELL: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sure. Rhonda will be back in just a second with your list.

MR. GLAVINE: As a carryover from last Spring, we had talked about the autism groups for October, where it is Autism Month. Now a group from Cape Breton Autism has organized and they would like to have a representative here - obviously Metro and Valley as well. So there are three very quick, natural, easy groups to get in for October, if that is the consensus of the committee. Also, with this on the national agenda, having a provincial voice to push forth for greater national recognition of the need for a program at that level - I think October, as Parliament resumes - is timely, plus it being Autism Month as well. I would like to see that discussion we had in the Spring now be advanced to a firming up of that topic.

The other thing that I was wanting us as a committee to take a look at is, we generally in the past have dedicated our time to one group. I think sometimes there are some groups where an hour would suffice and we'd be able to hopefully accommodate a couple of the organizations. As you see, we can't come close to meeting the suggested witnesses that we'd like to bring in here. I'm just wondering at least having their voice and their opportunity to get their position and so forth presented to the committee, if there can be some of these areas, or as Gordie was suggesting, we could have maybe two or three organizations that pretty well have the same topic or theme for that day. I think we really do need to look at some way of trying to expedite the opportunity for groups to come before our committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We've certainly grouped organizations together on the same topic, but that's intriguing and very interesting about perhaps we could cover more issues by even bringing dissimilar groups in on the same day. I think that might be worth looking at.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So autism isn't on your original list.

MR. GLAVINE: I have presented that, we certainly would put that topic at the top of the list there. I guess I haven't told my colleague that that would be our first request.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, why don't you get agreement that that is your top priority from your caucus . . .

MR. COLWELL: It is.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It is? Okay. Certainly, autism was on our list as well, so we have some common ground there.

The suggestion has been made that we do the topic of autism for the month of October - it is Autism Month. Any discussion about that? We'll move ahead and we can work on what groups we think should be asked to attend, but certainly the Cape Breton group, for sure. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: Yes, they just recently organized and Michelle Gardiner is the president of the group. I spoke to her and that is why I asked the committee Chair this morning if they received a letter from her or an e-mail. If we look at what my colleague said about getting all of the different groups, if we can get them in at the same time, it sure does make a difference and will shorten the list up. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so we'll try to get representatives from the various organizations representing aspects of autism, the parents and the advocacy groups around the province and get them here. Hopefully, they'll be able to come on the third Thursday of October.

MR. GOSSE: And that date is?

MS. NEATT: The 25th. It's the fourth for that month.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's the fourth Thursday that month in order to accommodate, I made a mistake, yes. The third week the PC caucus will be away, okay, so it's the 25th.

MR. GOUCHER: Can I ask a quick question?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. GOUCHER: When we bring witnesses in for the issue of autism - and I'm just raising this because he's a friend, he has twins that are about five years old and they're both autistic - I'm just wondering if I could put the name, is it okay to give a person's name? Gerard Avery, if we could contact him just for the local chapter here in my constituency of Bedford. Gerard works there, I can give you a phone number for him later, but he has twin boys and both are autistic. He's a wonderful individual who can give this

committee a lot of insight into the whole issue and I think that's what we're looking for as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Hopefully he will be able to represent his organization because we've drawn the line at inviting individuals unless they're representing a particular agency or community group, so hopefully, they can work that out locally and it won't be a problem.

So moving around, do we have a suggestion from the NDP caucus?

MR. GOSSE: The Seniors' Pharmacare Program.

MR. ZINCK: I'd be very interested in seeing the child youth strategy, have Robert Wright come in and do a presentation for us.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: All right, shall we make that our first priority?

MR. ZINCK: And that's in accordance with the PC caucus, as well.

MR. GOUCHER: That is, yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll choose the youth at risk strategy, okay. And the PC members?

MR. GOUCHER: Yes, that one.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: What is your priority from your list?

MR. GOUCHER: That was actually our priority, the youth strategy.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll choose another one if you want to go with that. (Laughter)

MR. GOUCHER: Oh no, just give us one second.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sure. In the meantime, Leo, you came in a little late. Leo Glavine, this is Charlene Rice, she's our new committee clerk and she'll be joining us on a permanent basis.

MR. GOUCHER: Madam Chairman, we put forward the whole issue of child care, the non-profit directors and Child Care Connection of Nova Scotia, which is number four on our list on the second page.

MR. GOSSE: It's actually on our list, something similar, Child and Family Services.

MR. GOUCHER: No, it's not quite the same.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll get representatives from the three sectors.

MR. GOUCHER: That would be great.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good. So we're coming back to the Liberal members. What is your next pick?

MR. COLWELL: The Department of Community Services on adoption.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. And the NDP?

MR. GOSSE: Our last one written there is Child and Family Services Steering Committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. ZINCK: Madam Chairman, that could encompass the PC's number two as well with child care.

MR. GOSSE: We can somehow work the two of them in there, I think it's compatible.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, that's number five. Do you have another?

MR. DUNN: Maybe the number three, affordable housing/homelessness.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. Back to the Liberals.

[9:30 a.m.]

MR. COLWELL: Why don't we just leave it at six for now because that will take us six months forward and we can go a month or so and then we can come back and look at some other things because maybe things come up in the meantime.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. GLAVINE: Yes, I was going to echo that sentiment, Madam Chairman, that sometimes there is an issue that arises through the year that may need to get immediate attention or one at the end that has been on everybody's minds for some time that we could throw in.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I just want to mention that the only problem I personally have with that is the 211 system. We've had a request from United Way - the United Ways across Nova Scotia - to add 211 to our list of topics this year.

MR. GLAVINE: They could be our seventh.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Would that be possible?

MR. GLAVINE: That and another, maybe an hour on that would be sufficient, knowing what it is because we had a presentation during the Poverty Forum, remember, from United Way, advancing 211. So maybe that combined with one other may be a good idea.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, well I would suggest the Seniors' Pharmacare might be a match with that one. Would that be possible?

MR. GLAVINE: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so let me just double-check with you what I have. I have autism, then the child and youth at risk strategy, the early learning and child care sector, adoption, Child and Family Services Steering Committee, affordable housing and homelessness and then a split between 211 and Seniors' Pharmacare. Does that match the list that everybody else has?

So do we have consensus? Do we need a motion?

MR. ZINCK: With our suggestion on number five of the Child and Family Services Steering Committee, is there a way that we can bring together with that presentation somebody from the child welfare - like the PCs, you guys brought forward the child welfare and it's along the same lines. Maybe just a presentation to go along with the steering committee as well, to share that time.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sure. Which aspect of the child welfare? The PC members have suggested Nova Scotia Council for the Family, the Youth in Care Newsletter. We've dealt with Youth in Care Newsletters several times within the last three or four years.

MR. ZINCK: Okay, maybe that'll be fine because they also suggested foster care/ adoptions so we can cover that under the adoption one. Okay, that's fine, I'm fine with the standing committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So we'll try to arrange for the autism representatives for October. We'll have to keep in mind, as always, that depending on other schedules, some of these may have to be adjusted and they'll be out of the order we've chosen but they'll fit in with - it's like putting a jigsaw puzzle together, we have to match all those different agendas and schedules.

MR. GOUCHER: Could I ask if the clerk could just run down exactly what's coming forward, so we can have them - would you mind - starting out with autism in October, I take it?

MS. RICE: Yes, the autism for October. The second one I have is children's youth at risk strategy for November. Early learning and child care. Fourth, adoption; fifth, Child and Family Services; sixth, affordable housing/homelessness. Seventh, I have combined 211 United Way and Seniors' Pharmacare Program.

MR. GOUCHER: Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And we also reserve the right, as requests come in. We can interrupt that schedule if we think it's a higher priority to deal with the specific requests that come in from different organizations, similar to what we did over the past year or so. Any questions or comments?

Okay, we'll see most of you on October 25th.

MS. NEATT: The groups for autism, are you going to discuss what groups to contact?

MR. GOSSE: The Cape Breton group, the president would be Michelle Gardiner, do you have that one?

MS. RICE: We have that, yes.

MR. GOSSE: 902-562-8587, that's Michelle's number. If not, I'll get it back to you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, we need them to represent the province.

MS. RICE: Is it the autism group of Cape Breton?

MR. GOSSE: The Cape Breton Autism Society, and the Valley Autism Support, I think that Leo would be able to - the Valley Autism Support?

MR. GLAVINE: Yes, I have the contact for you. Metro shouldn't be too much of a problem, I can get the metro if you need it.

MS. RICE: Good, okay.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And that's where Minister Goucher is suggesting a specific person might come as part of their presentation.

MR. GOUCHER: Yes, Gerard Avery, you can reach him actually at the Smitty's Restaurant in Bedford. He is the general manager there. He is a wonderful individual, great experience, when you think - you have twins and both the twins are autistic.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do you know if he's on the executive of the metro area group?

MR. GOUCHER: You know, I believe he is, but if you'd contact him anyway just to - I think it would be great to show the interest because he has gone through some great difficulty.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Right. Now what about northern Nova Scotia and southwestern, do we know if they have groups? Well, we can research that and find out who the contacts will be.

MR. GOUCHER: I think it's a good topic, though.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, any further discussion or comments?

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:37 a.m.]