

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, February 2, 2010**

**Committee Room 1**

**Department of Community Services -  
Housing/Federal Stimulus Money**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Mr. Jim Morton (Chairman)  
Mr. Gary Ramey (Vice-Chairman)  
Mr. Leonard Preyra  
Mr. Trevor Zinck  
Ms. Michele Raymond  
Mr. Leo Glavine  
Ms. Kelly Regan  
Hon. Chris d'Entremont  
Mr. Alfie MacLeod

[Mr. Leo Glavine was replaced by Mr. Harold Theriault.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille  
Legislative Committee Clerk

### **WITNESSES**

#### **Department of Community Services**

Ms. Judith Ferguson, Deputy Minister

Mr. David Ryan, Executive Director  
Employment Support & Income Assistance and Housing

Mr. Gary Porter, Executive Director  
Housing Authorities & Property Operations

Mr. Dan Troke, Director of Housing

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2010**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN  
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, everyone. We've gone a few minutes past our start time so I think we'll begin. I'd like to call the meeting to order. I'm Jim Morton, the MLA for Kings North.

The first thing I'd like to do is welcome our guests from the Department of Community Services. In a moment, you'll have a chance to introduce yourselves. First of all, for the purpose of the record, could people please introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd also like to welcome everybody who is observing today.

We have some guests and the focus of our discussion today - the witnesses will be talking about housing. I guess I'd like to say, just as a way of beginning, that I think this is a really important topic. It just occurred to me as I was driving in here this morning that when we're talking about housing, we're certainly talking about a really important link in all of our interests in making Nova Scotia a better place.

Of course, housing is about a lot more than structures in which people live. There's a writer named James Alexander Thom who wrote an interesting novel in which he said, in part - he suggested that homes are central to who we are. He said when you have no home, you forget everything, even who you are. I think when we're talking about this we are talking about something profoundly important to the human condition.

Having said that, I'd like to introduce the Deputy Minister of Community Services, Judith Ferguson, and welcome. Judith, would you be willing to introduce the members of your team who are here.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Certainly, thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I proceed I'll introduce the people who will assist in answering the questions today and I'm sure have all the answers. To my left is Gary Porter, the Executive Director of Housing Authorities and Property Operations - it's our public housing units that Gary is responsible for; Dan Troke to my right, the Director of Housing Services in the department; next to him is Dave Ryan, Executive Director of Employment Support, Income Assistance and Housing; and behind me we have two of our communications staff, Kristen Tynes and Brooke Armstrong.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I could make this other comment to begin, I think you will be making a presentation and then we'll have an opportunity for questions. I'm thinking if this is acceptable to the committee, because we have a bit of committee business to look at, we'll aim at ending this part of the presentation and the questions around housing to about 2:30 p.m., to give us 30 minutes or so to deal with some of our committee, if that works. Is that an acceptable arrangement? Let's aim for that, okay.

MS. FERGUSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, and thanks for your comments. We're really pleased today to be here to talk about housing. It's been a very busy year in the department and we're going to have a very busy year next year, so we're really pleased to come and talk to you about the services that we're able to provide to Nova Scotians.

I have a presentation that I'll quickly flip through. There have been copies of the presentation circulated for all members of the committee and also we've circulated some photos for people. Sometimes it's easier to understand what we're talking about when you can actually see pictures, so those are some of our affordable housing projects.

What is affordable housing? It's either rental or ownership housing priced to be accessible to people who cannot rent or purchase a home at market rates. It is housing where shelter costs are 30 per cent or less of a household's gross annual income. As all of you are aware, we're currently undergoing one of the largest injections of affordable housing in Nova Scotia's history. Every year we help approximately 27,500 families find affordable accommodation and over 2,000 families have their homes modified or repaired so they can have a safe and affordable place to live.

The chairman spoke very eloquently to this at the beginning but obviously housing is fundamental to achieving a number of the determinants of health. It's important to have a place before offering other social services. People need to have a roof over their heads oftentimes before they can get back on their feet.

Who do we serve in our housing department? We provide housing for over 25,000 people - 18,400 in public housing, and you can see the breakdown there, including our co-ops, non-profits and rent supplement program. Over the past five years, we've helped approximately 12,000 families through our home repair programs. These repair programs cover everything from roofs to basements, ramps, grab bars and, in partnership with our colleagues at the Department of Health, it allows us to assist seniors to age in place and to stay where they are.

This is a map that's hard to read in the current font that you have but we have bigger copies of it that we're happy to provide. This shows what we've been doing since 2002, when we entered into the Affordable Housing Agreement with our partner, CMHC. Since that time over 1,400 affordable housing units have been created or preserved across the province. This represents an investment of about \$85 million, with more to come.

As you can see, that money and those units have attached to basically every community across the province and it's hard to read on the breakdown, but the colours in the dots tell you what the program was in each community. So if people find that difficult to read, which it is, then we can provide bigger maps to people.

We're very pleased to say that last Spring we renewed our partnership with the federal government by extending two successful housing programs - we renewed the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, which we call RRAP, and the Affordable Housing Program for another five years. RRAP helps low-income home owners living in substandard homes with the cost of helping to make their homes safe and healthy and these are people who without our help would often have to leave their homes. The Affordable Housing Program is continuing with more new rental units across the province.

You can see there it has been extended for five years and there has also been the new economic stimulus component, which I believe is the subject we were actually asked to come specifically to speak to today and we will speak to that in some detail. So it's about \$13.3 million to be invested by March 2011, and it's to be delivered through our existing programs.

In terms of the economic stimulus for housing for the years 2009-11, it's a total of \$128 million, which I said is the largest infusion into funding of affordable housing in decades. The purposes are to upgrade social housing so it continues to provide safe, affordable housing and to build new housing units for low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities.

The investments into the existing social housing - you can see the total amount there - is \$68.7 million, and \$20.6 million of that is to go to co-ops and non-profit housing projects. To date, \$9.3 million of that has been committed for a total of 466 units and there has been a commitment of \$48.1 million for our public housing units. We'll get into some more detail on that.

In terms of how we decided what we do in our public housing renovation stimulus, we were able to take a strategic approach. The department, through Gary and his staff, had done some very good work in order to look at what our capital asset management plan should be, where we actually needed to put dollars and where our challenges were. What this money allowed us to do was take five years of our top-priority maintenance based on the physical condition of the assets and deal with that through the stimulus, so that's really a wonderful opportunity.

We have also taken a focus on greening. Obviously over the past couple of years we've had volatile oil prices so it has made us think about how we can effect this money in ways that will improve our mechanical systems and reduce energy consumption, and actually provide return for us in the long term with our buildings.

We've been taking a strong look at Aging in Place. We've really been focusing on improvements to address the needs of aging senior populations, so that they'll be able to live longer and independently in units, which is best for them and certainly, best for the system.

So some pictures in terms of where we are with our public housing renovation, as of December 31, 2009. With the funds we've identified 1,847 projects, and we're calling them projects. They range in size from projects that are very small to projects that are very large, but in order for us to manage and keep track of them and make sure we're doing what we need to do, that's how we've divided them up. This number may change as actual cost once we get into the projects, maybe a little higher or a little lower, so we'll look at that as we go through. So far, we've completed about 406 projects totalling \$3.5 million and we have another 437 projects in progress. By the end of March 2010, we'll have spent approximately \$25.7 million and this is really incredible work that we're able to do in the public housing units and we're already seeing the benefits of that.

As I talked about earlier in terms of the greening activities, these projects are helpful in reducing our energy consumption and reducing our carbon emissions. There are 434 projects at about \$18 million and these include anything from windows, doors, insulation, siding, boiler updates, natural gas and insulation. So far we've completed 245 projects valued at \$2 million and have another 189 projects in progress with an estimated value of about \$16 million.

In terms of Aging in Place, we've had 117 projects complete or in progress valued at approximately \$2 million. Our approach to Aging in Place is to implement physical improvements to help people with declining mobility in everyday life, contributing positively to their ability to live independently. The typical types of improvements you'll see here are ramps, generators, automatic door openers, handrails and we'd say extremely loud fire alarms. So our goal in the process is to have all three-plus unit buildings equipped with an emergency generator on site and so far we've completed 44 of these projects and have another 73 in progress. So that's our public housing piece.

[1:15 p.m.]

In terms of our economic stimulus for our housing piece, we have new housing opportunities for low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities. This housing will be built and owned by the province. As you can see there are 96 units under construction and another 65 are being tendered to start in the Spring and those pictures that we passed out around the table are examples of those units.

We're building accessible units, almost all of the units will be visitable or have adaptive features. We're building a variety of different types of housing types, at grade semi-detached units and three- and four-storey multi-unit apartment buildings, so it's a range of different kinds of units depending on the need in the community.

In terms of moving forward, we're actively creating or preserving units through the affordable housing and the economic stimulus. As we said, each year we assist about 27,000 Nova Scotians with their housing needs. Obviously the people that I've brought with me today really are spending every day to make sure that we spend all of the monies that have been received by the province, that we do it on time, that we do it well, and that we ensure that we can provide housing to as many Nova Scotians as we can with the dollars we've received. With that, Mr. Chairman, I know I've gone through it quickly, but that's a brief overview.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Ms. Ferguson. I guess this is the point in which we move to questions. I see Leonard's hand to begin with.

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: Thank you very much; that was the fastest presentation I've seen at a committee in my brief term here. Thank you for that. I just had a couple of questions.

As you know, I represent Halifax Citadel, which is considered one of the wealthiest parts of the province and there's a big debate about what affordable housing can mean in my constituency. I can just ask you a specific question more about Aging in Place, really. In my constituency, there are a number of seniors who live alone because their spouses have died. They want to live in their homes so they occupy this relatively large, expensive home, but they want to live in it, so they are house-rich and cash-poor. Are there programs for dealing with seniors like that where they can continue to live in their homes and in their communities without forcing them to leave because they're apparently quite wealthy?

MR. DAN TROKE: Basically we have a whole suite of programs obviously that folks are well aware of on the repair side where they hear about the RRAP program and they hear about the provincial repair programs. Within that suite of programs is also several that help individuals age in place. We have programs from as simple as the Home Adaptation for Seniors Independence that help them widen doorways and put in new bathrooms, so everything from toilets to tubs that allow them to be able to stay in their own home.

Over and above that we also have several programs like the Access-A-Home Program, that allow individuals the opportunity to put ramps on the front of their home, again to widen doorways, but even to look at things like - as the deputy said in her presentation - grab bars and so on. Your point on the older homes is actually very poignant in that many older homes, when we get in and look at them, there's actually very little behind the wall in order to be able to attach a grab bar.

MR. PREYRA: That's right, and they're very cold.

MR. TROKE: That's right. What we've done is we have a partnership, we've been doing a lot of work with what was Conserve Nova Scotia to do energy-related repairs for individuals, if you will, so insulation and so on, while we're doing the adaptations to the home, so hand-in-hand both of those can work.

Most importantly, the simple things like a grab bar, we are able to do through these programs, so if you have individuals in your constituency who are expressing mobility challenges, please send them to our regional office. You know the folks down on Gottingen Street well. Basically, these programs are mostly in the form of a grant, so individuals, it's immediately forgiven but it allows them to get those simple repairs that will allow them to stay in their own home.

We do have an ability to get into some larger opportunities through the RRAP program. We have individuals across the province who have been taking advantage of this, RRAP has been around for almost 30 years, but there is a disabled component to that that does allow individuals with disabilities to be able to do some things inside homes. When you mentioned the older balloon-framed homes, that's where often you will get into the RRAP program because the repairs are more extensive, but in order to do simple things like move a bathroom around and so on, it can get expensive but these programs can help them do that.

MR. PREYRA: So they are eligible for support, regardless of the assessed value of their homes?

MR. TROKE: The provincial programs, yes, so Access-A-Home is certainly one that regardless of the assessed value of their home, as long as they are under the income limits they are eligible. The Access-A-Home Program is a \$5,000 grant.

You are absolutely right when you mention the RRAP program. There is an assessment cap that does change over time. So depending upon the value of the home, there would be some homes that would be disqualified because of the appraised value of it. But having said that, what we have been able to do, because of the mix of programs, often that individual who wants to stay there - their doctor is around the corner, their family is nearby and so on - we are able, through those provincial programs, to be able to help them out with the most immediate mobility challenges that they have when they're talking about aging in place.



Again, there are some opportunities there. If they're eligible for the income limits on the RRAP program, they'd be eligible under the provincial program and there are ways to work with that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Theriault.

MR. HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you for your presentation, Judith. It was quite speedy, I had a job to leaf through the pages behind you - good though, get her done, that's the way. (Laughter)

You spoke about helping families and seeing - I forget the figure, whatever, it doesn't matter. Down home in the Digby area, in the Annapolis area, I've had a lot of questioning about low-rental housing down there. When it came to families it seemed like they would rent to a mother with children rather than a family - you know, a mother and father - even renting to a father with children didn't seem to be eligible, a lot of them. Just what is the policy when it comes to families renting low-rental housing under Community Services?

MR. GARY PORTER: Well, there are a number of policies that would touch on that. The principal policy around offering units is based on the applicant's circumstances. The family's size would often determine the size of the unit they would require - two, three, four bedrooms. When we receive applications they are addressed on a chronological basis, so as people apply their applications are dealt with before others who apply later. We do the best we can to match the applicant's needs with the housing that we have available.

Sometimes we have experiences where in some areas the demand for certain housing is less so we're able to offer those units ahead of other places where there's higher demand. Our wait lists are based on the actual buildings themselves, so when people apply they provide their preferences of where they'd like to live, along with their needs.

MR. THERIAULT: But are there different policies for single mothers with children or single fathers with children? Are there different policies there?

MR. PORTER: Not that I'm aware of, no.

MR. THERIAULT: Interesting. Anyway, you mentioned, Judith, that \$13.3 million more is going to be spent in the province by 2011. Will that be matched with federal funding?

MS. FERGUSON: Those are 50-50 dollars. Yes, that will be matched with the federal funding - that's affordable housing.

MR. THERIAULT: So that will be \$26.6 million spent.

MS. FERGUSON: Yes.

MR. THERIAULT: Okay, thank you.

You spoke about generators in housing, generators and elevators.

MS. FERGUSON: I spoke about generators, I didn't say elevators - nice try though.  
(Laughter)

MR. THERIAULT: You didn't mention elevators? I thought I heard elevators there.

AN. HON. MEMBER: Don't we have elevators everywhere yet? I thought we did.

MR. THERIAULT: Will Community Services consider helping community buildings, such as community gathering places, whatever that community may have in that community for a shelter for the population? Will Community Services help in putting generators in that community, into a community building, and elevators?

MS. FERGUSON: By community buildings, do you mean our public housing buildings?

MR. THERIAULT: No, just the community building itself. Different communities have different community buildings that they gather in. There are a lot of communities around rural Nova Scotia that when the electricity goes out, they have no access to places to go to keep warm, comfort centres or whatever you want to call them. Right now there's one in Bear River in my area and they're looking for a generator for a building in Bear River, plus they're looking for an elevator in that building, just as an example.

MS. FERGUSON: Right.

MR. THERIAULT: Will Community Services help there?

MS. FERGUSON: I'll let these guys jump in, but my understanding is that our ability to fund the generators and elevators is restricted to our housing programs at the current time, so it wouldn't extend to the community centres. But having said that, in terms of the comfort centres, when things happen and there's a power outage and the Red Cross comes in and opens the community centre, I do know we've shared our generators - and Gary can - portable generators that we've had in some of our buildings with other centres, when there are emergencies in those areas. So I know that we've done some work that way through our partnership with the Red Cross, so I know that has happened.

MR. THERIAULT: Thank you.

MS. FERGUSON: You're welcome.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Theriault. I think I have it in order here, but I think next is Ms. Raymond and then we'll go to Mr. d'Entremont.

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you very much, and you did speed through this so I hope I'm not branching off too much. One of the things I was wondering about in the creation of affordable housing is I think at some point I understood that there are target areas throughout the province for the creation of affordable housing, that some areas are prioritized as needing affordable housing? Maybe I didn't understand that correctly.

MR. TROKE: Basically the way that it works, there are two pieces here that kind of marry up, if you will. The Affordable Housing Program works off of proposals from communities, individuals and not-for-profits. The dots you saw on the map there are largely representative of proposals that have come forward from community groups, non-profits and private developers, saying we would like to develop housing in our community. Essentially, they make the business case that we can build it and sustain it, so it's a long-term investment and an opportunity for people in their community who want to live in that particular space. Part and parcel with that is when the province itself builds its own buildings.

Normally what would happen is we would look at where we have the ability, number one, to build because of things like zoning and so on; number two, we also look at what are the lists of individuals who are coming to us saying, I can't find it any other way, can you work with us? So, for example, a lot of the buildings that you are seeing that we'll be building in the next little while are typically in areas where those communities or the private-sector developer didn't move ahead with a project, so we will because we have enough sustainability in order to do it. It's a combination of the need is there, we know we can actually build it in a speedy and efficient manner, and that demand is going to be there for a period of time. So it's the two.

We don't target specific areas to say we're going to do so many here and so many there, but what we do is look at those proposals and the ability to get it done, so that's one side; the other side is where we have the need and those proposals don't come in, we would look at constructing ourselves.

MS. RAYMOND: So the delineation of those areas is largely responsive to demand and to proposals?

MR. TROKE: Correct. Absolutely.

MS. RAYMOND: Okay, sounds good. Can I ask another quick one?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MS. RAYMOND: It's about the RRAP for landlords program. I understand that there is a contract which is negotiated between a landlord and the department for assistance. Are there sort of open guidelines for people to know how long they will be looking at limited rent and what those amounts are and so on?

MR. TROKE: Yes. When a landlord approaches the department that they are looking to make renovations to a building, essentially what the RRAP program is doing is ensuring that the cost of renovating that building isn't passed on to the tenants. What we're doing is trying to secure rents for individuals below whatever the average market rent is. Typically these are buildings, when a landlord approaches, that already have affordable rent, so it's about maintaining that level for the people who are in there.

[1:30 p.m.]

What would happen is that landlord would obviously have an explanation of the program and we have a list of what would need to be done. There is an operating agreement that gets signed because there is, for all intents and purposes if you will, either a second mortgage that's forgivable or a loan put against the building. Over time what would happen is that's forgiven as long as all of the operating principles in the agreement are met.

What we normally would do is not only explain it to the landlord to say this is how we do business and this is what's going to be required of you, and the obligations from a contractual perspective that are legally binding, we go through it, but then we normally would get them to go through it with their own solicitor as well. So there is a standard format that's used because CMHC is our partner in the RRAP program, so they have standard templates that are used across the country. We use these and then essentially there is a second mortgage, if you will, put against the building that's forgiven over time.

MS. RAYMOND: Okay, held by DCS?

MR. TROKE: Yes, correct.

MS. RAYMOND: So that formula is fairly transparent then?

MR. TROKE: That's right. The RRAP program, as I've said, has been around to the point that many of the landlords, even amongst their associations, understand quite well, so as a group there's a lot of ability for them to understand that if somebody had it, they understand very well what's going to happen. We take quite a bit of time in walking the landlords through it, but we also advise them to get their solicitor's advice to make sure as well.

MS. RAYMOND: Is there sort of a limit, a number of units below which you're saying okay, it's a RRAP creation and above that you should be going into a full-fledged proposal?

MR. TROKE: Yes. What happens is we would normally look at a rental situation of being no less than four units. However, once you start getting up into anything that's more than 12 to 15 units, what happens is through the Affordable Housing Program, we have similar-type programs that we would then normally look at, please give us a bigger proposal and we'll look at it. So it's really, if you will, an extension of the RRAP program

only because of the volume, it's one of those things that you need to really take a bigger look at how that's going to impact the community, the neighbourhood and potentially, as you can imagine, sometimes you are approached with a very large project or a very large complex and you need to look at how that fits . . .

MS. RAYMOND: If anybody lives there.

MR. TROKE: Right, exactly. You got it.

MS. RAYMOND: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Raymond. Mr. d'Entremont.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm just going to ask a couple of quick questions, more specific to Yarmouth County at this point. We have about three different issues happening in Yarmouth County right now. One of them is sort of a youth homeless issue that we've got where we have a lot of youths who are couch-surfing, for one reason or another. We have the issue that a lot of our landlords went out of business due to some kind of shaky business practices, so that put a bunch of people out. We also have the issue that I've talked about a number of times, and they're well aware, that even though there doesn't seem to be a housing requirement in the Argyle side of Yarmouth County, people end up moving from Argyle to Yarmouth in order to find that housing stock, so they don't get counted the same way.

I was wondering, with those three issues that seem to be going on, I didn't see a lot of Yarmouth County included in the new builds, the renovations or anything like that. I'm just wondering what the next plan for Yarmouth County might be.

MS. FERGUSON: Maybe I'll speak to the first two and then Dan can speak to the third. In terms of the youth homelessness piece, that's an issue that's going on in Yarmouth and I think in some other places across the province. We've been looking - as part of our Child and Youth Strategy, they've actually been going out and meeting with the communities because, as you know, the homelessness issues with youths can be very different community to community. We've been working with them to really try to identify what the issue is and what some potential pieces are that we may put together.

In some circumstances we're talking about, could we take some public housing units and put those together, would that work for that community or not? So we're aware of the issue. We're out and we're meeting with the communities and we don't have a solution at this stage, but it's something that our child and youth team are actively looking at and they're well aware of.

The other piece which you would know certainly is that the homelessness issue is not simply a DCS issue. We obviously need to liaise with our colleagues at the Department of Health on it and we need to look in terms of fully supportive pieces for these youths,

because often what we find is that the challenges they're facing, while housing is certainly an issue, there are other challenges. So we need to make sure that we can bring all of the resources to the table that we need.

We have been seeing some benefits resulting from the Child and Youth Strategy, that they're working with our youth navigators and they're working with some of the pilot programs we have going on. But we recognize that it's an issue we have to address in Yarmouth and a number of other communities, so we're looking at that.

The second piece is in terms of the issues around the landlord in Yarmouth. We actually had staff - Dave and Dan went down and met with the mayor and a number of people involved in the community. As soon as we heard about it - our office is actually in Yarmouth - they called us to let us know that they were aware of it. We monitored it very closely to make sure that we had services available for people who needed to come and see us and that they knew if people were having challenges they could come to see us. There were a number of people, I think, whose issues were resolved by coming to our office. We also kept tabs in terms of whether we were seeing increases in requests for public housing and increases in our income assistance. We did it through both offices.

We didn't see any big increases as a result of that but certainly went out to the community and through the mayor and with their staff to make sure people knew they could come to our offices and come and meet with us if they had issues. Like I said, these guys have gone down at least once - maybe more times, I'm not sure - to meet with the mayor. So if there are other issues around there that we're not aware of, we'd certainly be happy to talk about them. We have been kind of monitoring the situation to make sure we're doing everything we can in terms of working with the municipality.

MR. TROKE: I guess first and foremost, through the Affordable Housing Program, we have had a few proposals come to us from down around the Yarmouth area. Particularly, we do have one set of units that were developed over the last two years in Yarmouth, 14 new units. They were very targeted to individuals who, from the affordability perspective, we were looking at adding some to the stock, if you will, in the area.

We have, over the last number of years, been assisting individuals through obviously our own public housing stock, which you're probably aware we have a very large percentage of the total rental stock in Yarmouth - I think it's over 30 per cent. So from that perspective, we haven't had a lot of interest from a lot of developers or from non-profits. We do have a major renovation going on through some of our co-ops in the area, trying to ensure that individuals who are in the units are going to be aging in place, because you're probably aware that many of these folks who move in, this becomes home for 20 years. So the needs that they had when they moved into the unit are very dramatically different from what they are today.

We are putting a sizeable amount of money into the co-ops and the non-profits in that area, particularly from an emphasis of aging in place and also greening from a

perspective of trying to make them more energy efficient, so those co-ops can lower their costs and hopefully we'll be able to pass those savings along to the people living there.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Just to expand on that, again the issue is if you take two constituencies side by side, everything that happens in Argyle really happens in Yarmouth. If you want to go grocery shopping, you go to Yarmouth and if you want to pay your taxes, most times you go to Yarmouth - it continues on like that. But in a lot of cases we probably have a handful of single-family dwellings, we have the three seniors facilities and that's it. There's no opportunity for a low-income individual, let's say, to be able to find an apartment, or whatever, in the constituency of Argyle.

What I've said before, and we've had this conversation when I was minister, we need to find a way to hit these pockets. Argyle is not the only place that sort of has this problem, where you have a migration of people moving out of their communities to find a place to live. We need to have a little more targeted - whether that's the duplexes, quadplexes, whatever you want to call them, to be able to get them a little more targeted in some of the smaller communities where they don't have that opportunity of having these big centres or big apartment buildings or what have you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we'll go next to Mr. Ramey, and just so people can be prepared, then Ms. Regan and Mr. MacLeod.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for coming and speaking to us today. I have a couple but they're short - can I sort of . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, you may. Short is good.

MR. RAMEY: Have the people here ever considered working with Habitat for Humanity? Has that been something that has ever been considered?

MS. FERGUSON: We actually have worked on a number of projects with Habitat for Humanity. Dan could probably speak to the details but I know we've done it a couple of times.

MR. TROKE: Through Habitat, typically the way we work with them is through land. We are able to either acquire or access land that we have in the land bank and then we're able to work with Habitat. So they do the build and we help them acquire the land.

We have, on the establishment of two builds outside of metro, we did supply a capital contribution to help them expand their base, if you will. There have been some new board members at Habitat who have come back and initiated the discussion around, where do we go from here? I would suspect that if we added up the numbers we probably participated in over a dozen Habitat builds over the last number of years. If there is a way for us to continue to do that, we would continue with the same process. So again, new

board members, we establish a relationship, look to see where they go, and then try to help them move forward with their project.

Of course with Habitat, the big bonus that they have is that huge volunteer workforce, it's amazing, and their ability to not only provide the build but also the education for the homeowner to be able to go in and sustain that home. So normally we're involved more on the land acquisition or on some kind of a capital contribution, where we can. That's how we've done business with them for probably the last decade.

MR. RAMEY: Okay, thanks for that then. Now the second question is, if I may, we talked about the income level, the cut-off level - what is it? I'm sorry, I don't know what it is.

MR. TROKE: Well, the income level - household income limit is a number that's updated annually. It's based on a one-, two- and three-bedroom count. What happens is Statistics Canada provides information to CMHC and that information then is broken out into what income level you need for a one, two and three bedroom in certain communities. So we have metro, we have small towns and we have rural Nova Scotia. That number differs depending upon what part of the province you're in. It's just a straight statistical calculation.

Just to give you an example, in Halifax a three-bedroom count is around \$43,000, whereas a three-bedroom count in some of the small towns is just over \$28,000. It all depends on what 30 per cent of your income is and what the market is doing in your area. So kind of think about what a three-bedroom apartment might cost in Yarmouth versus what it might cost in Dartmouth versus - and that's all taken into consideration. So the number varies on where you are and varies on how many bedrooms you need for you and your family.

MR. RAMEY: Just looking at the repair part, let's say an elderly couple living in a house and they need something done to the foundation or whatever, what would be the income level there for getting assistance?

MR. TROKE: Well, the real short side of it, or the short answer is that the one-bedroom count, depending on where you are determines what that would be, but what we've also done is our Senior Citizens Assistance Program, which is a provincial repair program, we actually last year increased the threshold to \$23,000, which means anywhere in the province as long as your income is under \$23,000, you would be eligible for that program.

The benefit of that is that we were able to adjust the program so that if you had a couple on OAS, GIS, they would be eligible. So we review those limits each year and we continue to review them. I guess if you had a couple, particularly a senior couple who were looking for assistance, the first thing to do is make sure they get an opportunity to fill out an application. We'd look at what their income level was and also look at what the repair



is and make sure we have a program that matches up because that basement, depending on what it is, could be as simple as Permacrete or one of those companies, or it could be as intensive as actually getting into sump pumps and trenching and so on. So we would look at where they fit within those programs.

Most seniors who apply are, at a minimum, usually eligible for the Senior Citizens Assistance Program, which is a \$5,000 grant. Often that gets us on the road to where they need to be.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you very much. I have more but I should stop.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Ramey. It's good to be fair. So I think that will take us to Ms. Regan.

MS. KELLY REGAN: Every year we seem to see articles in the newspaper that indicate that money allocated for affordable housing hasn't been used up. I'm just wondering, why is that? Is it that we, or organizations like Habitat for Humanity, can't access matching funds? Why doesn't the money get used up?

[1:45 p.m.]

MS. FERGUSON: The money that the province has for affordable housing is spent and the people beside me, on either side of me, work very, very hard to make sure that it is spent. Sometimes things happen on our end, particularly on bigger construction projects, so it takes a little longer for the money to get spent in one year than the other year. We have been experiencing some issues around construction delays but that's only delaying the expenditure of the money. We can get into this discussion about committed funds versus spent funds, but we spend all of the affordable housing money that we get in the province.

MS. REGAN: Some members of our caucus did meet with Habitat for Humanity and I'm wondering about the Affordable Housing Program parameters. How much latitude do you have to tailor programs to the existing programs of groups like Habitat?

MR. TROKE: I guess first of all, in the past Habitat has been their own organization with their own rules. The discussions that we've had is that Habitat has always come to us to assist with things like land or is there any technical resource that we can help them with - do we have plans that might be able to help them with a particular lot, if you will, because we have other units in the area that look and feel like something they're interested in? When that has happened, we've been able to assist them without even having to go into any of our programs. This is talking about development of affordable housing, if you will, just within the confines of a group and can you, as a department, work with us to talk about sharing your expertise and helping us with some of the land you may hold?

In other circumstances where Habitat has come to us and said, we'd like to look at expanding our operation, maybe going to Bridgewater, going to Cape Breton. What we had

in the past is an opportunity where we had the Affordable Housing Trust, a program that allowed us to actually use direct contribution to Habitat in order to do that. So we were able to help them with two of their projects to get groups off the ground, if you will.

From an affordable housing perspective, we have the discussion anytime there is a new board established with Habitat, to talk about what we do and how we do it and if there's an ability to partner. Again, quite honestly the experience has been that normally, rather than accessing those programs, they find much more benefit in utilizing their own mortgage program and seeing if we can help them with land, and that has been the way we've been able to work. If we have a new group at Habitat that is looking to have any kind of discussion over and above that - in fact, we've already met with the new group and will be meeting with them again shortly - that's an open discussion and if there's a way to make that work, we certainly would take it into consideration to see if we can do it.

MS. REGAN: How much money do we expect Nova Scotia to spend on affordable housing over, say, the next five years? Do we have any idea?

MR. TROKE: If you take the economic stimulus program that's out right now, that's \$128 million - that's less than five years. What happens is these programs that we get into are normally renewed every few years. For example, the RRAP program, which has been around for almost 30 years, has a new two-year renewal piece. When you think about the kind of money that's going in right now, we're looking at over the next two years spending \$128 million in affordable housing, both on what the province owns, what we'll be building and also what we'll be working with, third parties, non-profits and so on to build.

The short answer, I guess, would be that right now we know that we're going to be moving ahead with \$128 million worth of affordable housing within the province. What agreements, and so on, look like after that will depend on what those future agreements would look like.

MS. REGAN: I'll stop there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Regan. Mr. MacLeod.

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Thank you for the presentation; just a couple of quick things. You say we have about 18,400 people in public housing and that 8,500 of those are seniors. Would those be the ones living in the senior complexes as we call them? Is that correct?

MS. FERGUSON: Yes.

MR. MACLEOD: So when you're looking after people who are in them, are we talking about helping the aging in place or are we talking about the Provincial Capital Assistance Program?

MR. PORTER: When we're talking about those projects, we're actually helping the aging in place for our current tenants.

MR. MACLEOD: Am I correct in understanding that \$128 million is the biggest influx we've seen in an awful long time? Okay, so now we get back to Junior's question about the elevators. If indeed we're trying to keep the aged in their homes, most of these units are two-storey and most of these people are older and when they come home with groceries or they're suffering with arthritic pain and other things - we have more funding now available than we've ever had before.

Would it not make sense, if we want to keep seniors in their own areas - these are their homes, now - would it not make sense to get into a program that would put in, if not at least elevators, some kind of a dumbwaiter so that these people aren't lugging heavy groceries up to the second floor? Is there ever going to be a better opportunity than right now when you have this type of funding available to do such a program for them?

MR. PORTER: Thank you for the question. There's not a short answer to that question so I'll kind of take it piece by piece. With this influx of money we have identified three elevators that we will build within the next two years as part of the stimulus money. The specific locations of those elevators are in Margaree, in a building that has three storeys and also has limited other options in the community. So people in that building will likely be there for a long time and it makes sense. It's our only three-storey building left in an area like that which does not have an elevator.

Our second priority is in Shelburne, it's a 30-unit building and is one of the few remaining three-storey buildings that don't have elevators. The rest of our buildings are typically 15 units, two storeys. In Shelburne, again, there are limited options for people in that community, so it makes sense that we make that investment in that building.

The third area is in Great Village. Again, it's a community where there aren't many other housing options. The people who are in our buildings will be staying there and the elevator will serve its purpose well in that community. So that's kind of what our plans are.

Elevators are difficult; they typically take longer than two years to build. Adding them to existing buildings gets complicated because of the structural changes you need to make in order to accommodate them, often building pieces on and digging foundations, and so on, that prove challenging and difficult. When you're building an elevator to serve seven or eight units it's a really high cost on a per-unit basis.

There are a couple of other things we have done and do on a continual basis. Where we find there are individuals with mobility problems - and we have good relationships with our tenants, we understand their needs and we pay attention to them - we will typically, if they're facing mobility issues and are in a second-floor apartment, we will look for alternatives for them. We'll find a building that we can move them into the ground floor.

We'll put them on sort of a priority wait list for a unit that becomes available on the ground floor. So a lot of times we're able to manage people's needs just by doing that.

The second part of that question is, with this money elevators are fine, some of the other challenges we can't ignore. If you have a large steel-framed door that's hard to open, the elevator is not much help if they have difficulty getting in and out the door. So we've really focussed a lot of our attention at looking at our buildings and what small improvements we can make that will make a difference in people's lives. A large number of automatic door openers that we're doing, simple things like handrails to ensure people have something to hang onto and able to ease their navigation through our buildings. I think the deputy mentioned a few other things like our audible alarm systems, making sure that we have those designed for people who are hard of hearing and a few other things like ramps, et cetera.

The question around the dumbwaiter, we have investigated that and we've really found no commercial application for a dumbwaiter that would actually assist in making an application in public housing; also keeping in mind the existing infrastructure doesn't easily allow for chairlifts to be brought up in existing stairwells. So you get into some fairly complex issues with putting them in and they're really not designed for that purpose. I hope I've addressed each one of your questions, but that's kind of where we are.

MS. FERGUSON: Just to add to what Gary said, it comes down to making choices sometimes in terms of what we looked at. Elevators have become very expensive and we really ran the risk of not being able to do them within the time frame that we had the money. We really wanted to make sure at the end of the day that we could spend the money by the time frame that we had the money.

When you looked at the value of some of the other things we could do, plus when you looked at the risks in terms of the timelines - and we know that because we've experienced it with the other buildings we have - we had to make some decisions about what we thought was the best value of the dollars, what would help the largest number of people in our public housing units and that's where we came down. It's not that the elevators are important and we've done a lot of work within the department, as Gary said, really a lot, to try to ensure that we hear the tenants who are in those buildings, that we're respectful to their needs and that we can do whatever we can.

The buildings that don't have elevators, as Gary said, are mostly two-storey, 15-unit buildings at this stage. So those were some of the choices that we made and those are never perfect, but we really tried to get the best value for the money for the largest number of people and make sure that we can meet our timelines.

MR. MACLEOD: I appreciate everything you said and I think it's very worthy what you're doing, but I also understand that in my communities we have people who are living in places like Donkin or Marion Bridge or Louisbourg - that's home. They're not going to

move to Sydney where there may be more apartments; they want to be at home. To your point about Shelburne and other areas, it is a concern.

The only thing I'd ask is for the department to really try to look at this in these areas and try to address it. I know it's a concern you hear on a fairly regular basis but for these people, it is probably one of the most important things they can have because once they feel like they're trapped in their second-floor apartment, they stop going out to social events, then they start having more health needs, and the whole idea of trying to help people stay in their homes becomes not as helpful as it could be.

I understand there are a lot of constraints, I understand there are a lot of problems, but I also understand from the other side of the coin that there's a lot of people who really want to remain independent but need a little help. In some cases that help is an elevator or a dumb waiter or pay some big fellow to carry groceries upstairs once a month, I'm not sure what it is. But it is a real issue with at least four of the senior complexes in that area.

MS. FERGUSON: We hear you and I guess what I would say to you is if you know of any of those people, Mr. MacLeod, if you would ask them to call our office. We have been doing a lot of work with our clients to try to help. We understand there are challenges and we really do want to help them. They could contact our office and we could look at some options for them that might make it a little easier for them and we would be happy to do that.

MR. MACLEOD: And I will say it's my understanding, from discussion with them, they have been getting a good ear from the people who are property managing. They just need that extra help. If I could?

MR. CHAIRMAN: One more.

MR. MACLEOD: Who in the province is managing the First Nations housing and the funding that has been put in place for First Nations?

MR. TROKE: Anything that's on reserve is obviously managed by their own organizations. Off reserve, we have several groups that are responsible and work with the department. If we're talking in metro, we have groups like Tawaak Housing, but we also have several organizations that are participating in some of the off-reserve or some of the rural housing initiatives that happened back in the 1980s. So if there are some specific units or questions, we'd either answer that off-line if there's some specific thing and we can deal with it that way.

MR. MACLEOD: Okay, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. MacLeod. I think, from the show of hands I've seen, we'll go to Mr. Preyra next.

MR. PREYRA: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to follow up on the early question about seniors. As you know, people in the department have had a lot of contact with me about the two seniors homes in my constituency, Joseph Howe Manor and MacKeen Manor. This gives me a little window on the community but it seems to me that the buildings are structured for independent living and these programs for adaptive housing, adaptive construction, follow in that line. They might have some minor disabilities and they might have some health issues but they would still be able to stay in there.

[2:00 p.m.]

It seems like in recent months there have been more and more high needs - I'm not sure that's the right word for it - residents. There have been more residents with mental health issues and there are more residents that have health challenges, who are afraid they can't find a bed somewhere else so they're staying in their homes. I'm wondering, what impact is that having on existing housing in terms of adapting to those changing conditions in the interim? Has the department got plans in place to deal with the fact that more and more of the residents in independent living homes are now putting higher demands on the system?

MR. PORTER: Thank you for the question. I think it's probably fair to say we've been seeing increased challenges as residents in buildings like Joe Howe and MacKeen age, their needs become more complex and more demanding. Our housing is designed for independent living. Oftentimes there may be programs available to our tenants to help with some level of support. We have worked closely with other areas of the department, such as income assistance and other areas where there may be special needs of tenants.

We communicate effectively between the two groups, we have social workers on staff that try to assist with people's needs at an individualized level. I think some of the things we mentioned, like Aging in Place, I know that doesn't get at the support, but it takes away some of those challenges. Those are really our attempts at trying to respond to those changing needs.

MR. PREYRA: I have a question following Mr. d'Entremont's question about youth. We see a lot of that in my constituency and many of the young people who are there are there because they've fallen through the cracks outside Halifax, so they end up in Halifax. We've seen through the Navigator Program on Spring Garden Road and also through the Out of the Cold Program, that there is a real need for transition housing for youth who are in between, either they have moved from their own homes or they have moved from the outside to somewhere and they're trying to find their way back into the system.

Is there any plan in place for building sort of transition housing or supporting it in a different way or providing secure treatment facilities or anything like that? I know it's somewhat outside your area, but it seems to me that there's a real gap in that transition

from those who have left home for whatever reason and left their regions, to finding their way into a more secure place?

MR. DAVID RYAN: We have a committee of the shelter providers that we meet now pretty much monthly. We meet with the shelter providers group which is the actual five shelter providers and the Department of Community Services. We also have Health joining us for this month's meeting coming up to take a look at what are the gaps.

Right now in terms of the shelters, Phoenix Youth provides shelter and support for youths in particular. The other shelters, while they accept youths or at least with the parents at times, aren't really geared toward the youths, so we're taking a look at that. We also have the Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS) with the federal government that has a \$1.7 million tender on the street now looking at some transitional supports, particularly for men, which may include male youths, teenagers. We are looking at some creative ways to resolve some of those issues, both with Phoenix and shelter providers, as well as with HPS and the department.

MR. PREYRA: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think Mr. Ramey and then Mr. Theriault.

MR. RAMEY: Can you tell me to what extent the availability of private housing stock is evaluated when you're considering whether or not you're going to build additional public housing in the community?

MR. TROKE: When we look at a proposal from an independent individual coming forward, we look at several things. First, we look at affordability, whatever they're bringing forward, is it truly affordable. We also look at sustainability. If we have a community where there's an overabundance already of rental stock, then obviously there's some risk that you could be building something that could either (a) be empty or (b) have some challenges in operating. That's from third parties when we look at how this is going to happen.

When we look at where we're going to build units that are for the province, if you will, we have the added layer that we have the ability to not only look at those things, but also look at specifically what individuals have come to us looking for affordable housing. So you have your own list that would say, X number of people are looking for family housing in this particular community, or senior's housing, or whatever may be the case. Those are things that we look at when we're evaluating it.

The other piece that we're looking at is ability for people to operate. If you had a proposal that came through the door from a group that has never ever been involved with any kind of rental housing before at all, obviously you're going to look for a proposal that's smaller than larger because there's a learning curve here. So those are the kinds of things that we look at both from the non-profit sector and from the private development side of things.

We get, every day, solicitations from individuals looking either (a) for information or (b) saying they actually have a package, they've talked to their bank and so on and would like to look at moving forward. When we walk through those elements of what we do and how we do it, we typically get a lot of folks who then want to know what are the things you think we should be doing. Even the people who have been in the business for a while also like to know what's going on in the rest of the province because you may be a landlord in a particular area, you may be a non-profit in a particular area and you can kind of share some of those things that you're starting to see as things of interest, things that people are looking for.

So it's a bit of a collaborative process from that perspective, but at the same time, at the end of the day, we're trying to get as affordable a unit as possible and something that's going to be there for a substantial period of time in order to ensure that people can rely on that as safe and affordable housing in their community.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Ramey. Mr. Theriault.

MR. HAROLD THERIAULT: Something that hasn't been brought up here today is about assisted living. I know in my area alone there is a group of seniors who are taking up a lot of room in our seniors home who shouldn't really be there. I would say that probably 15 per cent to 20 per cent of those people are taking up beds where more severe seniors could be because there's a wait list.

There's a private sector that's looking at putting up an assisted living place down home and it's the old Tideview Terrace, I've been questioned a couple of times about it. They're thinking about renovating that to turn it into an assisted living home. Is that something that Community Services is involved in or could be involved in? I know we'd have to work with the Department of Health too because some help is needed from them, but is the Department of Community Services involved in assisted living?

MR. TROKE: I guess the first way I'd like to talk to that is that when we talk about proposals - and I know actually the one you're talking about, I spoke to some of the folks who are involved in that quite a while ago. I think there were some different iterations on what they were hoping to be able to do. What often happens is we would have individuals come forward and say, I'd like to build X number of independent apartments, but I'd also like to have a component where these folks can access different services.

What happens is, and I'll give you an example, several years ago we did an arrangement where Northwood, the nursing home here, was looking at also having some independent living. We were able to work with them to develop around 66 units, but the people in those units have the ability to then access services at Northwood - they don't live within the nursing home, but the nursing home provides them services. It's actually a model that has been around for a couple of decades in that you have communities who supply certain services like Meals On Wheels and all of the other pieces, but what happens is there's a relationship that often gets developed by either the non-profit group or the



developer who establishes a relationship in the community with another group who will bring services in.

Those types of things we look at all the time and they can make them work. It normally is the function of what are the services, so you're talking about normally individuals who still have mobility and so on, but still need some help. It might be, how do I get to blood collection, how do I get to the bank, or is there an ability for me a couple of times a week to buy a meal that if someone could bring it to me that would mean then I don't have to deal with full grocery orders at the beginning of the week and so on, so it can happen.

When you start talking about more support services then it's a relationship with the Department of Health, if you need more services brought in or if you need someone to physically be in a setting where those services are extensive. So it can work, if you have proponents or somebody who - and I think I already talked to the folks you were talking to, it was a while ago, but I think I already spoke to them. That kind of thing can work, but you need to lock up that arrangement early on and say what you're looking for. Obviously, building the units is an important thing, but also ensuring that relationship is going to be there for a long time. Normally as the needs continue to grow over time it's not uncommon in that situation to have everybody in a building to start accessing those services, right, as people age, as mobility challenges happen. We do enter into those arrangements for the construction of the building and then what typically happens is that arrangement between the tenants and a service provider gets into place and then becomes part of how they do business.

MR. RYAN: Can I just add a bit to that? We do have some of our seniors public housing located and built next to nursing homes where they provide those assisted services, for instance, meals where they purchase on a daily basis in conjunction with a nursing home. It's not-for-profit, obviously, so there are discounted meals, laundry, nursing, and social functions a lot where we have, in one particular place in Dartmouth, the nursing home provides those services on a sort of per diem basis for the seniors who want to take advantage of that and those that don't, don't have to. We have a couple of examples across the province where that is working. The nursing home has to be available to have the capacity as well, so as we build new units and things like that we have to make sure that they're supportive of that as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I was thinking we had reached the end of our questions, but I saw Mr. MacLeod's hand a moment ago. You have the floor.

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: I'd like to go back to the question about Habitat for Humanity. I know they are trying to start that up in Sydney and I've actually been involved. They did an auction, I was their auctioneer and we had a wonderful night. One of the challenges and I think you mentioned it, is about acquiring land.

One of the thoughts that we had in our area was acquiring units that are owned already by the province and upgrading the units because sometimes we are falling behind in the upgrades and whatnot. I don't know what challenges that brings, but I guess it's something that would be very useful for the people who require housing and to make the job of these people easier and, of course, the workforce that they have.

A lot of times I get complaints from people who are looking for housing and they say, gee, there's a unit empty and the response seems to be, yes, it's empty but we haven't had a chance to get in and do the upgrades before we let anyone move in. There might be a way here to help people on both sides of that coin, not knowing if there's a ramification with contracts with the unions and those types of things, but it might be an opportunity that's worth looking at.

MR. TROKE: The folks in Cape Breton, I've had an opportunity to speak with them, particularly around the revitalization committee that, of course, is doing their work in CBRM. They have done their inventory on the number of empty units that are owned throughout the area, both private and non-profit and so on. Habitat had at that point spoke with us, was there an opportunity to look at either (a) a piece of property or (b) the opportunity even to look at a vacant house somewhere, could there be an ability to partner. So we've told the individuals that we're happy to meet them at any point in time to have that discussion.

I think part of where we were looking at was - transportation is, of course, a big issue, but also where there is such a large inventory of empty houses. I think at that time the discussion with them was, if they could find the appropriate unit and line up a family who was looking at it, could we come to some kind of an arrangement to work together to buy, renovate, whatever.

[2:15 p.m.]

To be honest, the last discussion I had with them was just before Christmas when the revitalization committee was trying to finish up some of their inventory work and then we had committed that when Habitat was ready we'd get back together again and have that discussion to see if there wasn't a piece of property that might have been identified either through that work or whatever. Any point in time they want to sit down and talk, we're happy to do it.

MR. MACLEOD: Great, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The well is not dry yet. Mr. Ramey and then Ms. Regan.

MR. RAMEY: Just very quickly. I noticed in the pictures here - and I realize this is an exhaustive list, you gave it to us so we can picture the kind of housing you're doing - but I was looking at Liverpool and noticed there were eight, seven and 20 or something, about 39 units or something like that for Liverpool. I have the Town of Bridgewater, of

course, in my riding which is about 7,600 people. I know this question does come up and I know there are units there, don't get me wrong, you've looked after us too, but are there future plans for doing anything specifically in Bridgewater?

[2:15 p.m.]

MR. TROKE: Well, we did a couple of projects in Bridgewater, I think there were a couple of phases done to them, more in the downtown area. We have a number of proponents who have come to us over the last two years - I think they're working through a couple of different development options with the town so I don't quite know where they are. We do get proposals from Bridgewater and we have a number of proposals that we're still working with individuals to see if they're going to kind of land.

The only thing I can say is that we are aware that there seems to be demand in the Bridgewater area. We are aware that we have some proponents who are working to try and put stuff together. I guess basically when that happens or if it happens, we would sit down and evaluate it like any other proposal. We have done some units.

The pictures here, these are basically stuff that has literally been done within the last 12 months. Actually you'll notice in some of them you can see rafters in some cases. The day we were out taking our pictures that is where they were in the construction process but most of what you see is stuff that actually has been completed right now and done through programs like the Affordable Housing Program.

Bridgewater has, I know that we've done somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 30 to 40 units in Bridgewater but I do know there has been some interest and whether those proposals come through or not, we'll have to wait and see.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Regan.

MS. REGAN: Just some sort of general dollar amounts. The department Web site states that in the period between 2002 and 2012, the Province of Nova Scotia and its partners will invest over \$196 million in affordable housing. Then the department announced a joint federal-provincial investment of \$128 million over two years and that was on April 29, 2009. Is that \$128 million part of the \$196 million?

MR. TROKE: I'd have to take a look at it but I guess \$128 million is essentially, if you will, the renewal of the Affordable Housing Program and the economic stimulus. Prior to that, when you look at 2002 and then in 2004, there were two earlier phases of the Affordable Housing Program that had a ballpark range of around \$50 million. So I can't speak specifically to the exact reference on the Web site, I'd have to take a look at it.

I guess it's important to point out that the Affordable Housing Program in 2002 was originally a two-year program in partnership with CMHC. It then was expanded and now expanded a third time, as part of the economic stimulus and so on. It sounds to me very

much that - and I'd have to take a look at the reference - it sounds like that may be a reference over and above whatever the economic stimulus was. I'd have to take a look at it, to be honest.

MS. REGAN: Perhaps we could have those numbers broken down. I'd just like to get an idea of what is being spent by Nova Scotia, not Canada, each year for affordable housing.

MR. TROKE: Yes, we can do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Troke, is that something you could provide to the committee at a later point?

MR. TROKE: Absolutely.

MR. RYAN: One thing I could add, not to interrupt you, but the \$128 million since April 1<sup>st</sup> and what we saw in the Affordable Housing Agreement is a renewal - \$31 million of that was renewal of the RRAP we've already talked about and the affordable housing, that's \$31 million. The other \$96 million was new to Nova Scotia, for a total of \$128 million for these two years.

In addition to that we also have our provincial programs, we have the senior citizens, SCAP, the PHERP and these other programs that we have. That money is in addition to, and they're up around the \$10 million range, in addition to the \$128 million, so we have our existing programs that we deliver in addition to the \$128 million.

MS. REGAN: In terms of sort of an average, if someone needed to get into affordable housing, how long would they wait? Is there a ballpark that you could give me? Is it weeks, months?

MR. GARY PORTER: No, it would really come down to the individual circumstances in that community. Oftentimes people will have a preference for housing; in other words, they will want to live in a certain building. We may be able to offer them an apartment in another area but they will choose to wait until their preference becomes available.

I would be happy at any time to sort of field any inquiries about specifics of the situations or specific buildings, if you like. Generally it is very difficult to provide an answer to that accurately.

MS. REGAN: Do we keep any kind of stats on this at all?

MR. GARY PORTER: Absolutely, yes, we keep a list of eligible applications. We have seven housing authorities throughout the province, it is important to note. Those housing authorities are somewhat independent from government. In other words, they are

not civil servants but they report through the Department of Community Services. They manage the application process for public housing and manage the buildings.

We rely on them to provide us information with respect to the number of eligible applicants, the number of transfer requests that we receive, as well as other information about vacancies in particular areas.

MS. REGAN: The last one. One of the challenges we've noticed has been to do with the CMHC requirements for the Affordable Housing Program. It states that funding can only be used for urban area revitalization and according to the department, the only place in Nova Scotia that qualifies for that is Gottingen Street. So I'm just wondering, have we had any talks with CMHC about addressing this issue?

MR. TROKE: Well the program as a whole actually doesn't have that requirement; it's only the home ownership component. So there is, if you may recall, a number of years ago six units were developed in that area that were home ownership units so the home ownership program has that criteria. For rental, rental preservation, any kind of a subsidy program, they don't have that requirement so the rental units can be built anywhere in the province where affordability and demand can be demonstrated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Preyra also signalled that he had a question and we have time to make that possible.

MR. PREYRA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to ask a question about some of the churches in my constituency. As you know, the churches have fallen on hard times, many of them, but they have great land. They have great space, it is often in a good location. Recently I have had meetings with three of the churches in my constituency that are considering selling land but they want to find a way to meet their mission, which is to provide a service and to help the needy. As part of that process, they are asking their congregations and they are asking developers if they can come into a partnership arrangement where the land can be developed and a certain amount of space can be reserved for community purposes, like affordable housing and for youth in transition and all that.

I'm wondering whether or not there's any possibility for the same kinds of arrangements that we have with private sector developers, long-term lease arrangements or providing for support beds or anything like that. I know this is a general, rambling question but is there any way we could come up with partnerships to allow them to meet their mission, for the department to meet some of its Community Services objectives and, at the same time, not set precedents that would get us into a lot of trouble down the road?

MS. FERGUSON: I think it's a really interesting question, actually. Dan and Dave meet with people all the time who may have questions about what is possible within the realm of the housing services we provide so I would encourage them to give us a call. I don't know at the end of the day whether it will fit but certainly we'd be very prepared to

sit down and talk to them and look at what they're planning and then look at what our ability is to do that, so I would just encourage them to give us a call.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we may have reached the end of the questions that committee members wish to ask. Are there any summary comments or other points that any of you would like to make?

MS. FERGUSON: No, Mr. Chairman, except to say thank you very much, thanks for everybody's interest in housing. We're always happy to come. There are really some fabulous things that are going on in the department in housing which we've very pleased to talk about so thanks very much for the invitation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I want to thank you all for being here today and for responding to all the questions, thank you.

I think if you can then move yourselves out of the room (Laughter) and while you're doing that, perhaps we can continue with our business. If I could call us back to order, we have a few pieces of business that we should turn to. You'll see under Committee Business a few things that are listed. One item just for clarification purposes, we had been scheduled to meet on January 19<sup>th</sup> where the witnesses would have been the Department of Community Services to talk about the second line of questioning around the Poverty Reduction Strategy. That meeting has been moved to our usual date, March 2<sup>nd</sup> at 1:00 p.m. We don't have any witnesses at this moment scheduled for beyond March 2<sup>nd</sup>, so I think it would be helpful if we could take a few minutes to discuss that.

What I would like to propose is that perhaps if there are suggestions that people around this table would like to make at this point that we could kind of maybe take those away and use our time on March 2<sup>nd</sup> to actually make some selections, rather than have everybody try to choose it on the spot. I know one of the things Kim Langille just passed out to you is a document that looks like this one which is colour-coded and gives us an indication of what we've done as well as what was proposed and might still be of interest to the folks.

The items in green are still what is left to do on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and what's in black is what we have not done to date. So I don't know if those are still items that generally you are interested in considering. The ones in black are items that each caucus has proposed but we did not select those because they weren't as high a priority at the moment we were making these decisions. Some of them may still be important to people around the table.

MS. RAYMOND: Well, I certainly remain interested in Residential Tenancies and children's mental health.

MR. MACLEOD: I would be interested in No. 3, the update on services for people with disabilities.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MS. REGAN: I would be interested in No. 1, enforcement of court orders related to child support and maintenance. I'm swamped with those right now.

[2:30 p.m.]

MS. RAYMOND: I think we've just dealt with affordable housing kind of, right?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, I think so. Now having said that, maybe we should go away and talk about this. What it sounded like to me was we identified four things that seem to have some interest to people around the table. Would those be four to continue moving in that direction, using those four areas of selection of witnesses.

MR. MACLEOD: It works for us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there actual witnesses? I'm just wondering to what extent have we identified witnesses for those particular items?

MS. REGAN: Perhaps for No. 1 we could have the director of the MEP program appear before us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that acceptable? Any other thoughts about who might be able to provide good information?

MR. PREYRA: The chairman in consultation with the clerk perhaps can identify people who are relevant and who might be able to help and bring that back as recommendations.

MR. MACLEOD: It might be good to have the Deputy Minister of Justice involved in No. 1. At the end of the day, he's the guy.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other comments about the other items, both the update on services for people with disabilities, the Residential Tenancies Act, and Children's Mental Health Services? Any other comments? Kim and I can work at this but if there are suggestions, I'd be certainly interested in hearing them.

MS. RAYMOND: Linda Smith on children's mental health.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Linda Smith, yes.

MR. PREYRA: I was going to say that certainly in the Child and Youth Strategy, there might be someone there who is dealing with children and youth mental health and also, as Mr. d'Entremont was saying, at the IWK there is a unit there that . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes and I think it might be interesting as well, just thinking about this, to consider more rural child mental health services as well. The services are delivered around the province in different ways.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Linda would be able to bring in her expertise, she would know who to bring, put it that way.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Absolutely. Any other comments about witnesses? All right, we will bring some suggestions perhaps to the next meeting and we can refine it at that point if we need to.

MR. PREYRA: Gerald Hashey is the person with the Residential Tenancies, I think.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It sounds like we have a plan. We will review these four recommendations and come back with some suggestions for witnesses for the next meeting. Thank you for that; that's great co-operative behaviour.

I think that takes us to three items of correspondence that we've received, those pieces of correspondence are now all in front of you. I would suggest, unless anyone has a comment otherwise, we should take those away as pieces of information. If there are reasons that we should be discussing any of those items further, please let me know and they can become part of a future agenda. Mr. Ramey.

MR. RAMEY: Just a question related to the meeting structure. If the House resumes again, we wouldn't be able to meet - ever - I shouldn't say if I should say when, but that would be something we should discuss in terms of the meeting times.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Ramey for reminding me of that. Our plan has been that when the House is not in session to meet in the afternoon to make travel a little more convenient, that's why we met at 1:00 p.m. today. Good for many of us, I think. When the House is in session we would revert to our usual 9:00 a.m. meeting time. So should the House be in session before March 2<sup>nd</sup>, you will get notice and if that's happening - we'll know by the end of today. Certainly, we'll provide notice if there's any change in the meetings. Perhaps by the time we meet next we'll have a clear idea of how that schedule is going to work.

There being no further business, I declare the meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 2:35 p.m.]