

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, September 7, 2010

Committee Room 1

Organizational Meeting

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Mr. Jim Morton (Chairman)
Mr. Gary Ramey (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Leonard Preyra
Ms. Michele Raymond
Mr. Maurice Smith
Mr. Leo Glavine
Mr. Geoff MacLellan
Hon. Chris d'Entremont
Mr. Alfie MacLeod

[Mr. Geoff MacLellan was replaced by Mr. Andrew Younger]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2010

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: I will call the meeting to order. I think the first thing to do is welcome you back and hope everybody has had an enjoyable summer. I expect it has been busy, but I hope it has been a little different and maybe somewhat restful. I know we've got a year of work ahead of us. Maybe we can start with introductions, with Kim.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Earlier, Leo made reference to a new member of the committee from the last time we met - Mr. Geoff MacLellan, who is the representative for Glace Bay. While he is not here today, he will be joining us and in absentia, I'd like to offer him a welcome. I guess we'll be expecting Andrew Younger to come in perhaps some time soon, as a replacement.

You have an agenda in front of you which describes some committee business and then setting the date for the next meeting, which we think will probably be October 5th, or at least that's what we're projecting.

Of the four items under Committee Business, I'm wondering if we can just defer the annual report to the last item there because it might involve a little more discussion. Is that an acceptable plan, take us from setting the agenda and selecting witnesses to correspondence to the rehab centre and then annual report? I don't see any objections so we will go that way.

I guess the first item then is selecting witnesses and setting an agenda for the next several meetings. I think you also all have in front of you now a list of possible witnesses that has been submitted by each caucus. Am I correct that that is in front of you? Just looking over this, maybe I'll give you a moment to look it over because some of you have perhaps only just seen it.

You can see as well that Kim Langille has provided us with some information on what we looked at previously - earlier lists that we examined and the witnesses that we've already met with.

I'm thinking, unless you would offer other advice, that there's a likelihood - if we follow our practice in the past year, we've met on a monthly basis whether the House is sitting or not. If we were to select four witnesses or themes that would cover the meetings in January, for example, and give us an opportunity to do some further planning beyond that. Does that sound like an acceptable limit or number? Just to project us to some extent into the future without requiring us to come up with a whole year's worth of ideas, and things may shift for us as time goes on in any case.

I'll just make a comment as I look at this list myself. It does seem that one area of commonality among the three lists has to do with housing. Each of the caucuses submitted some housing ideas, so I don't know if anybody has been able to think about a proposal in terms of how we might focus that, if we were to select housing as one of the topics?

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Chairman, that's one of our topics that we're very keen on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there some agreement on who might be witnesses in that regard?

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: We might want to have Dan Troke, who is the Director of Housing in Community Services. He would be a good person, I'd expect, to give an overview.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Chris.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: If you see from our submission that we've got a couple of other people, just people that are more out in the field than Dan. Dan is a great guy to listen to and has a lot of information, but it would be nice to have somebody from each district housing authority, from each end of the province. I suggested Kim Jacquard and Joan McKeough, one from Cape Breton and one from Yarmouth County - how they're seeing their authorities work too, just more outside the walls of Halifax.

MR. GLAVINE: We thought, of course, Claudia Jahn would help bring in the perspective as well of the lack of affordable housing, what progress is being made and where the deficiencies are, so that's why we put her forth as a witness.

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: Are you recommending that we have three witnesses?

MR. GLAVINE: We've often had that and sometimes from different branches of the same theme.

MS. RAYMOND: So if one were to have one person from each end of the province with housing authorities, somebody central, plus somebody from Affordable Housing, that would be four. So three entities or three witnesses, what would you prefer?

MR. GLAVINE: I think three witnesses probably. I think Claudia would bring a good sense of what's happening in metro, as well, to the table.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So, Chris, if we just picked one of the districts, that would be acceptable to you?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So that sounds like we have a level of agreement on that for one, okay? So where does that take us?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Child care. I see child care on there a couple of times.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Maybe I could ask the NDP caucus to begin with. Is there any thought about witnesses for child care?

MR. PREYRA: I think it would be good to have a broader look at the child care field - access to child care overall and issues relating to that, what kinds of initiatives are being proposed, what has worked and what hasn't worked. If there is a question about wages, that could be included as part of the overall discussion rather than have a full session just on that.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: We always put a number of names down, you never know how it's going to work. Virginia O'Connell for sure is a great resource within the department on that one. We just put a couple of extra people - one's more private and the other one is more public - so it's just which direction you want to listen to.

[1:15 p.m.]

MR. GLAVINE: Sort of along the theme that Leonard is presenting here, I think early intervention was one that, while we hadn't listed it here, we still had very strongly as one of the topics that we hoped for throughout the course of this year. I guess we put ours down based on the fact that we generally plan for only three or four months at a time. I think, again, early intervention as part of the whole development concept around childhood is an aspect that shouldn't be overlooked.

MR. PREYRA: I'm just wondering, similar to what we did with housing, maybe get an initial statement from the department that gives an overview and then having two groups respond with how they're experiencing it on the ground. That way we can get a sense of the larger policy area at the same time. I know I'm not all that familiar with it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I guess what I think I'm hearing is, perhaps have DCS plus a couple of other witnesses to offer perspective. Okay, we're making good progress. Any other points of similarity?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Family resource centres and women's centres - they sort of work the same.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So would women's centres be an acceptable way of phrasing that?

MR. GLAVINE: We put that forward, so definitely would be one that we would hope through the Fall we would get an opportunity on. Anytime we've had them in historically - and I've been on the committee now six or seven years - we usually get some really good insight as to what's happening collectively across the province. I know it has always been one of the very valuable presentations that has come before this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Leo, for the Liberal caucus, you proposed Bernadette MacDonald. I guess I'm interested in other people's thinking as appropriate witnesses.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: She used to run the Antigonish one and now she's in Yarmouth.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Preyra.

MR. PREYRA: This may be one of those areas where we approach the women's centres and ask them to bring it, rather than designate someone . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Through their association, is that what you're thinking?

MR. PREYRA: Yes because I know we've had presentations from them in the past and Bernadette hasn't presented, I think, so just to be more respectful.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, sounds good. I think we should try to identify one other, or maybe even two others because sometimes things fall through. Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: If I may, if you just put child protection services update and an overview of adoption system and how it works - I mean they kind of go together, they do, but they're two different arms of the same issue. I present that one as a possibility.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, as a combination. Any other thoughts about that around the table.

MR. PREYRA: Chris, are you talking about two separate sets of witnesses then, too?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: You would probably have to.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So if we had witnesses - I guess both of these are Department of Community Services areas, so the witnesses are both from the Department of Community Services. Yes, Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: The reason why I put the adoption system is because we do have a very complicated adoption system in the province. If you talk to any of your constituents on how they were treated as adoptive parents, it's a very difficult system that I think needs to be addressed. It would be nice to have an overview and see where we can go for it because I think it could get to a very large issue as you roll along with it, but one that would be justifiable in doing some work on it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sounds good. Is that sufficient or should we aim for one other, in case we have trouble with any one of these areas?

MR. PREYRA: I think four topics is good.

AN. HON. MEMBER: We're good for now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, okay. I think all these are probably manageable in terms of witnesses, I expect. It shouldn't be trouble to find people, the right people.

Wonderful, thank you very much for this level of co-operation. Kim.

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): Does it matter which order they are in? Would you like them in the order they are or just sort of whoever we can . . .

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Whoever you can scare up.

MS. LANGILLE: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's acceptable to the committee, so the order in which we can arrange it. Okay, good. Thank you for that.

I should say welcome to Mr. Younger.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: I apologize to the committee; I didn't know I was going to be filling in. I was on the Eastern Shore.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well I could say thank you for being here to help out on short notice.

That takes us to correspondence. Just to pull you back a little bit, we received a letter from the Face of Poverty Consultation - the date on the letter is April 22nd - asking us if we might make a couple of adjustments to the way that we do business. Kim is just passing out some information related to that now, I think.

One of the things that we did was respond to their letter, just letting them know that we were looking at some of the suggestions that they had made. In a letter that was sent with my name, on your behalf, we said that we agreed with the suggestion that making witnesses' presentations available on-line would improve the public's access. The committee also discussed the suggestion that witness presentations be made available to the committee prior to the meeting. We agreed at that time to request witnesses to provide their presentations to members to review prior to meetings.

From time to time, witnesses will not have an answer readily available in response to a member's inquiry was one of their comments. In those instances, as you know, we would ask for additional information to be provided. They wanted to know whether it would be possible to have that information available once it is circulated to members. Those are the things that they asked for.

You will see, too - I think you have in front of you the letter - we consulted with Gordon Hebb regarding one of those suggestions about transcripts being posted on the Web site. He says:

"I understand that all material filed with the Committee is available for inspection at the Committees Office unless the Committee has determined that the material is confidential. Therefore, unless a response has been determined by the Committee to be confidential (having regard to the nature of the material and any requests by the responder to keep the response confidential), I see no issue with posting the response on the Web site. I suggest it would be advisable not to do so until the response has been tabled at a meeting of the Committee. This would give the Committee an opportunity to stop any posting it thinks inappropriate."

That was the feedback we got from Mr. Hebb, so I think what we're looking for is just kind of our final thinking on the requests. I guess the one thing I think we've already agreed to is that we'll ask witnesses and presenters to make their written presentations available to us in advance of the meeting so we could have a look at them, as a way to be better prepared. I'm assuming we're still in agreement with that. Mr. Preyra.

MR. PREYRA: Just a question about - unless a response has been determined by the committee, does that mean a report or documentation or are we talking about something we receive after the meeting?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's something we receive after the meeting, so at times, as you'll recall, somebody may ask a question and witnesses don't have appropriate information to respond during the committee meeting so they agree to provide that to us in some format later, usually in the form of a letter or document.

I think what the Face of Poverty asks is if that actual material could be made available to the public. I think when we discussed this the last time we had no real opposition to that, but we just wanted some clarification about whether there were any kind of legal impediments to that. Mr. Glavine.

MR. GLAVINE: Very often it is statistical data, program information, it is not of the opinion variety so I wouldn't think there would be any major reason why it wouldn't be made available. I guess the committee chairman and the committee generally could also review what is going to be going out there as well, right?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll get to you, Mr. Smith, in a moment but the suggestion from Mr. Hebb was that we kind of wait to put that on-line until the committee has actually received it, giving us an opportunity to determine if there is something that might be of a private nature or for some reason should not be on-line, so it creates a bit of a safeguard. Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: That answers mine.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MS. RAYMOND: A separate question, actually. Regarding the comments of the Face of Poverty on follow-up and so on, my experience is that we do generally get fairly prompt responses. Is there a tracking system to ensure that, in fact, we do send out correspondence again . . .

MS. LANGILLE: Yes, I do have a bring-forward system and if I don't receive it within a certain amount of time, well I'm back on them.

MS. RAYMOND: That's why we get the answers then, that's why it's working.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I can attest to that because I get to see copies of those reminders, so it does seem to work very well.

I think that I'm seeing nods. I'm not sure that we need a motion in this regard. I think we're in agreement as we're discussing this that we'll move forward with these suggested changes. Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: Are you going to let them know that we've come to the conclusion?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, we have been in touch with them on June 2nd to tell them that we were looking at these things, so we'll respond to them again. I think perhaps we can copy members of the committee so they're aware of that, letting them know what has been decided and thanking them for their interest in the work that we're doing here.

MS. RAYMOND: This may or may not be appropriate. You mentioned providing us with copies of the responses. I often find that we get a copy of the responses and so on and then we receive another copy at committee. Would I be able to opt to have one or the other but not both? Okay, thanks.

MS. LANGILLE: Does everyone want the same thing? It would make it a lot easier.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think it's a good question. I think the point being made is that we may often receive a copy, through inter-office mail or in some other way, of correspondence that has been received. Then when we arrive, we have a duplicate copy for our availability. Would it be better to receive it here or would it be best to receive it in advance? Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: Here, for me.

MR. PREYRA: Unless it requires some kind of caucus discussion in advance.

MS. RAYMOND: If we're going to begin getting packages of pre-reports, perhaps we could - if that's all going to be coming to us, again perhaps we could consolidate it with that, so that we get even one mailing a month.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Maybe a way to kind of frame it would be that any correspondence would be provided with the package at the time that packaged material is provided, whether that proves to be at the time of the meeting or in advance. I expect sometimes witnesses may be asked to provide their material in advance and it just doesn't get to us in time. There may be issues like that.

MS. LANGILLE: Quite often it will be electronic I would expect in any event from witnesses, generally speaking. So you're going to get a hard copy anyhow.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. That takes us to what I've got on my list as item three, the Kings Regional Rehabilitation Centre tour. You'll recall we had planned to - I'm saying the agenda I'm looking at, that was provided to us was going to happen on July 6th.

As it turned out, very few of us when the day arrived were able to commit to be present. I recommended in the end that we postpone the meeting; it seemed to me that we were putting the organization to quite a lot of effort for very few people. One of those who

was available was Mr. Glavine, who knows the institution very well, probably better than any of us and myself. I once worked there many years ago, I'm relatively familiar with it so it just seemed to me it might be better to revisit this, which is what we're doing at the moment.

[1:30 p.m.]

I guess the only question is whether a tour of that particular facility is still of interest to members of this committee and whether it's something we should try to arrange for the Fall? Any comments or thoughts? Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: I got the sense that they were keen to have us come; that was the sense I had.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, I would concur with that.

MR. SMITH: So yes, I think we should do it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Raymond.

MS. RAYMOND: I may be throwing more monkey wrenches in, but I remember we were also invited individually to visit the Evergreen Home as well. Is that not relatively nearby or is it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes it is, it's within five kilometres.

MS. RAYMOND: Would people be interested in combining those two institutions?

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's a nursing home, a privately-owned nursing home.

MS. RAYMOND: Yes, it has sort of combined uses, but they had presented to us as well, as I recall and had issues. I just throw that out as a possibility.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We didn't have them as witnesses last year.

MS. RAYMOND: Okay, I'm sorry, it's a different committee.

MR. GLAVINE: No, I was going to say, we didn't hear from them in this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just as a point of information, the agenda that was worked out on our behalf by the rehab centre is a day-long agenda. It was beginning at 10:00 a.m. and ending at 3:00 p.m. so counting for a little bit of travel time, it's a day.

MR. PREYRA: That may be a little unrealistic. Maybe a morning or an afternoon?

MR. CHAIRMAN: They would provide lunch though. So I'm not sure what I'm hearing. I heard from Mr. Smith that it might be a good idea, I haven't noted with clarity whether this is something we should proceed with. It seems to me it would be wise not to sort of set them up again for a visit and not be able to follow through with it. Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I think it's still a valuable visit, it's a wonderful facility that does wonderful things for this province. If we can pull it off, we should pull it off, but at the same time if we can't all make it, then I wouldn't get all caught up in it as long as we have a decent contingent going. By the time you herd all these seagulls, you'll never actually get the date tied down and the shorter the better.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Glavine.

MR. GLAVINE: I was kind of thinking that if you could possibly arrive and just have a quick breakfast then we could get on the road early and go there and just have a coffee and muffin and then get on with the tour and a presentation.

The rehab stands out because of the fact that in many provinces, there are no longer such institutions whatsoever; they just don't exist. What is different about the rehab is the number of tentacles out into the community and how they have evolved and still remain viable in the midst of deinstitutionalization going on in a sweeping manner across other provinces. I think it's worth noting and experiencing the ways in which the community come into the institution and the way the institution goes back out into the community.

I think we'd be remiss as legislators in not having a look at what is taking place at the rehab. If we can do it in a smaller fashion with one rep from each Party, or whatever we can arrange, I think it's worthy and valuable for us to experience.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Preyra.

MR. PREYRA: It sounds like it could be a valuable visit and I'm wondering if maybe we can get any presentation-related information in advance so that we can have a look at it and then when we get there, just have a very brief presentation and actually see the facility. I know I find it more useful to talk to people there and to actually see what's there and if we can get the presentation and read it in our own time, I think that will save everyone a lot of time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just again, as a point of information, in terms of the time that they suggested, that involved moving from one facility to another. The rehab centre involves several locations. There is a sheltered workshop that is attached to the organization, as well as a whole series of small group homes or small options homes.

The plan was to show us the actual rehab centre as well as the workshop and one of the homes, which involves not much travel but moving from one place to another. So it is more than just a presentation, I would think, although that would be part of it.

I think I'm hearing at this point that there is an interest in setting up something else, that we should ask them to abbreviate the time a bit and to have some presentation material in advance. Am I hearing properly?

MS. LANGILLE: Is there a day that is better?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Tuesday.

MS. LANGILLE: Tuesday morning was suggested - mornings would be best?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Because all of our caucuses are pretty much always Wednesday, so that leaves Tuesday mornings kind of thing, or Thursday mornings but we've got Cabinet so I don't know.

MS. RAYMOND: We're used to dedicating Tuesdays to this.

MS. LANGILLE: I guess that was going to be my next question. Did you want to try to set something up for our next meeting date, which would be a Tuesday, of course, or just have something else thrown in there for another Tuesday?

MR. CHAIRMAN: So you're suggesting that our next meeting would be a visit? Well, that's an idea.

MS. LANGILLE: As opposed to a meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: At least then our time is committed; that's a creative suggestion. Anybody object to that?

AN HON. MEMBER: It sounds reasonable.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Mr. Preyra.

MR. PREYRA: Just a technical question. Do we have to ask for permission, then, to have a meeting away from . . .

MS. LANGILLE: It won't be a meeting per se, it will just be a tour.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Any other comments about the rehab tour or any other questions from your end, Kim?

MS. LANGILLE: No, I think that's it.

MR. SMITH: So we're looking at October 5th?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. Of course that assumes that the rehab centre, that that will work for them. Okay, thank you.

The next item under committee business is the annual report. I know that everybody received a copy of the annual report electronically and I think what I would like . . .

MS. LANGILLE: There are copies here if people want to have another look at it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: They are here, they are made, so the tree has been invested in this. This information was circulated to you in draft form, of course, with requests that you provide some feedback. Not much feedback has been received, which may mean that you found everything in order. Kim, would you like to comment on what you do have to date?

MS. LANGILLE: Just a couple of things. Before we go into the couple of changes that were suggested, you'll see that the copy that I passed around has no cover page on it. There's some discussion about whether there's going to be a revamped cover page yet to be finalized. It may go ahead and previously it looked similar to this, but there's talk about changing that, so that's why it's not there. That really doesn't have a great impact obviously on the contents of the document, so I just thought I would mention that.

The only changes that were sent my way were under Acknowledgements. The chairman suggested that perhaps my name should be there as the clerk, so that's one change. The other change or modification, I guess you could say, is under Transcripts. In all of the information regarding the meetings there's a little blurb having to do with transcripts - it says, "Further details of this meeting can be found". He suggested that we put "Full details of this meeting can be found" and then of course the Web site information is there. So those were the only two changes.

How do people feel about those? The only other thing that is changed from what you would have received is - I reviewed it again and I noticed that on the table of contents, the numbering was wrong so that has been rectified. Those were the only things that have been changed since you would have seen it initially.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This document, once we're ready to approve it, requires each of our signatures. I think maybe just to make sure we're kind of comfortable with what we have in front of us, I would entertain a motion to adopt this as our annual report. Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Well, I will make a motion to adopt the annual report with the changes that have been submitted by Kim.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. Ready for a seconder?

MR. PREYRA: No, just a question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could we have a seconder first? Seconded by Mr. Ramey.

Okay, your question.

MR. PREYRA: Just a question about procedure. Since we have now approved of putting things on-line, I'm wondering if that should be included in this report that not just transcripts, but other documentation as well is now available on-line?

MS. LANGILLE: I think the reason that it isn't there is because this is only up to a certain date and the next annual report that comes out that will be mentioned as to what has happened, that these things will now be available on-line.

MR. PREYRA: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So we have a motion on the floor, it has been seconded. Is there further discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Thank you, Kim, for all the work in preparing the document.

MS. LANGILLE: So can we circulate the statement of submission for signature?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I guess I'll sign it so you don't all rush out of the room before I get it done. The only other item on the agenda that I'm looking at is the date of the next meeting which we've already discussed. Is there any other business?

MR. GARY RAMEY: Mr. Chairman, I just have a comment and it's not related to business specifically. It is simply to say that as a member of this committee I personally appreciate the spirit of co-operation that seems to exist among the committee members, including today, when we very quickly could agree on a number of topics that we wanted to discuss. It could be much more difficult and truculent and everything else, but it's not and I just wanted to say that I appreciate that very much. I think that makes the committee work well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Ramey; well said. Mr. Preyra.

MR. PREYRA: Just another question. If we can't get the tour on the 5th, then we'll revert back to our list - is that the plan?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would think so and I think that's a good question. I wonder if we could agree if the tour cannot be arranged on the 5th if we could substitute that with one

of the topics that we've selected and perhaps aim at a future date for the tour or maybe another of those first Tuesdays? Okay. Is there any other business?

The meeting is adjourned but I ask that you stay around until your name is affixed to the paper.

[The committee adjourned at 1:44 p.m.]