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COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, November 2, 2010

Committee Room 1

**Department of Community Services,
Cape Breton Island Housing Authority &
Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia
Re: Housing**

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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[Mr. Maurice Smith was replaced by Mr. Mat Whynott]
[Mr. Chris d'Entremont was replaced by Mr. Allan MacMaster]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Ms. Judith Ferguson
Deputy Minister

Mr. Dan Troke
Executive Director -
Employment Support, Income Assistance & Housing

Ms. Joan McKeough
Director - Cape Breton Island Housing Authority

Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia

Mr. Grant Wanzel
Acting President

Ms. Claudia Jahn
Executive Committee Member

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2010

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. I think we'll start - I know that one of our witnesses may still be in transit but, hopefully, will arrive soon. We have a busy morning planned. It is a little bit past time, so it is probably wise for us to get started.

I'm Jim Morton, and I'm the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Community Services. I think what we'll do to begin with is just have some introductions of the committee members and then, since we have lots of witnesses, we'll have the witnesses introduce themselves later.

I'd like to start with Geoff MacLellan and welcome our newest member to the committee, but you might want to say something yourself.

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Yes, I'm Geoff MacLellan, MLA for Glace Bay. This is my first official meeting, so I'm looking forward to making a contribution with my colleagues. Let's get it going.

[The other committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to welcome our guests and observers here this morning as well. We have, as I mentioned, a number of guests this morning from Community Services, we're anticipating a guest from the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority who is here with Community Services as well, and we have guests from the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia.

Judith, would you like to introduce yourself and your colleagues, perhaps?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Certainly, Mr. Chairman, thanks very much. I'm Judith Ferguson and I'm the Deputy Minister of Community Services. I have with me Dan Troke, who is the Executive Director of Employment Support, Income Assistance and Housing. He is relatively new to that position so we're thrilled that he is now in that position. Also coming any moment - and we know she is already in town - is Joan McKeough, who is the Director of the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority.

I am sensitive to the time and I know you have a packed agenda, so we're fine to start, Mr. Chairman, if that works for the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Claudia, if you could introduce - and maybe at the microphone - yourself and your colleagues before we get started, just so everybody knows who is here and observing.

MS. CLAUDIA JAHN: My name is Claudia Jahn and I am an Executive Board Member of the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia and, fortunate enough, Grant Wanzel joins me here today to co-present with me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we'll begin with Judith and your presentation from the Department of Community Services.

MS. FERGUSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I should also introduce Susan Tate from Communications who is here with us as well this morning.

I say thank you very much to the committee members. We're very pleased to be back at the committee talking about housing, which is obviously a very integral and important part of the work we do in Community Services. We've started, if that's okay, with a bit of a presentation and, although we've done a number of presentations in the past, we thought that since we were doing so much in terms of the affordable housing money and the stimulus money that we would focus a significant amount of time on the presentation showing some pictures so committee members and those present can get an idea of actually what we're doing in the department. I'll go relatively quickly through this so we can open . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before you do, your coffee cup is in front of your microphone.

MS. FERGUSON: Sorry about that - I can keep my coffee, though, right? (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you and, yes, you may keep your coffee.

MS. FERGUSON: I don't think you'd want me if I didn't have that. (Laughter)

Okay, so we'll begin. Generally I know this is not news to members of the committee but just to set the context for this morning - what is affordable housing? It's either rental or ownership housing priced to be accessible to people who cannot afford to rent or purchase a home at market rates, and it's housing where shelter costs are 30 per cent or less of a household's gross annual income. So in terms of how we define affordable housing in the department, that's the definition that we use in terms of looking at our programs.

Obviously housing is a significant issue for all Nova Scotians - it's a fundamental when you look at population health work, when you look at any of the work we do with our clients in the department. Similarly our colleagues across departments, whether it's Justice or Health, or Education - housing crosses all of those departments. Housing is fundamental to achieving healthy child development, stable family relationships, education and literacy, and family wealth and social status. It's the base upon which to provide other supports, and here we've used a few examples - job training, daycare, education, and home care. So the bottom line for us is that housing is fundamental in order to provide a stable platform from which people can go on and make significant contributions in their community.

In terms of who the department serves, we provide housing to more than 25,000 Nova Scotians - 18,400 live in public housing units and if we break that down, 8,500 in seniors' housing and 9,900 in family housing. There are 6,600 Nova Scotians living in co-ops, not-for-profit and rent supplement housing. We also help families, seniors, and individuals undertake their home repairs and adaptations, and we've assisted over 12,000 households in the past five years. Just some general statistics.

In terms of summary of action to date and where we are - in April 2009, committee members will recall the Government of Canada and the province jointly announced \$128 million in affordable housing funding initiatives. This investment in affordable housing has created jobs, assists to strengthen the economy in Nova Scotia, and has improved the quality of life for Nova Scotians.

It has been decades since we've had this scale of funds to invest in affordable housing - it's been a significant piece for us and has provided great benefits. Staff in the department and the housing authorities have been very busy to ensure the funds are invested within the allotted time frame, that we spend the money we need to within the time periods that we have had to do that. It has been the main priority of both our housing

services staff and our housing authority staff and I'm very pleased to say that at the present time, we will spend all of the money under the stimulus. To date we've committed approximately 82 per cent of the \$128 million, but we're on target to have all the money spent by the deadlines.

The next couple of slides are really in terms of what we've been doing. Sometimes pictures are valuable, so I hope you find these interesting and it gives everyone an idea of the kind of work that has been going on in the department. The department and the housing authorities, as I've said, have been very busy to ensure that we've spent the funds within the time allotted and we've invested in creating and preserving 312 affordable homes. The funds are being delivered through our existing affordable housing programs, through the programs that previously existed. Those programs include things like new rental, rental preservation, home preservation, and home purchase.

Our main emphasis, as you can see in the slides that are up there, is in creating as many new rentals as possible. Someone living in a rental situation is three to four times more likely to be in core housing need than someone who owns a home, so obviously that's why we've put a major thrust in terms of our rental housing. We've achieved a great deal since we've entered into the Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Agreement in 2002.

Now, we recognize we still have a way to go, but we have made some significant progress, and I believe we have handed out a map to everyone, and all committee members, because we wanted to provide an overview for you. You'll see it's done by program to show exactly how the funding has been allocated across the province and where we've been over the last 10 years of the Affordable Housing Program.

In addition, under the economic stimulus funding, we had \$20.6 million to invest in upgrading existing non-profit and co-operative housing, and all of those funds have been committed. The investments involve over 1,000 homes located across the province and the kinds of improvements we have done have included replacing roofs, windows, doors, and bathrooms. These improvements will ensure that the housing will be safe, more energy efficient, and more physically and financially sustainable. That's a picture of the North End Co-Op in Halifax, where we've invested about \$3.1 million to retrofit about 131 existing homes.

Again, another example of where we are. In Sydney - obviously near and dear to my heart - 28 new semi-detached units for seniors and individuals with disabilities in the Sydney area. In terms of where we are with that program generally, to date we have committed \$24.1 million of the \$27.4 million, so that is 88 per cent of the available funds that have been committed. Our investments involve 171 new affordable rental units and these units will be managed by our regional housing authorities.

We've completed housing projects in North Preston, Port Hawkesbury, and New Minas, and projects are underway in Sydney, Middleton, Millwood, Sackville, Spryfield,

and Amherst. The developments include semi-detached units, three-storey apartment buildings, and extensions to some of our existing seniors' housing projects. Again, this shows pictures in Sydney and 28 new semi-detached units.

[9:15 a.m.]

We're also building housing that is accessible and age-friendly. We're trying to think ahead of what the demographics are going to look like in Nova Scotia, anticipate that and make sure that we're accounting for that now. So an example of that would be practically all the unit bathrooms are wheelchair accessible, have showers with seats instead of bathtubs, the doorways are wider, and the electrical outlets are located at least 18 inches from the floor. As I said, we're trying to think ahead. There was a fair bit of time, although we were on a tight timeline in terms of our planning for these units, recognizing the challenges that the province is going to face.

This project is under construction and prior to construction we met with our new neighbours. The 59 units will specifically add opportunities for seniors and those with mobility challenges to have a new affordable unit. This is our most recently designed project and actually all of the bathrooms here - and we can speak to this a little bit later - have roll-in showers, so it's an actual unit and technology that we've incorporated into the building. We've also included space on each floor to park battery-operated scooters. One of the issues we have now is so many of our residents have scooters and the halls aren't wide enough to accommodate the scooters and it has become an issue in terms of what we do - and there are OHNS practices to that, so we've actually incorporated that into the design of the building.

Overall we have \$48.1 million to invest in the province's public housing stock and so far 91 per cent of the available funds have been committed. We've tried very hard to strategically target our public housing investments and we've focused primarily on three areas - we've looked at greening initiatives, general building upgrades based on our capital asset management plan, and through the work of our Housing Services staff and our housing authorities folks we actually have a capital asset management plan for our public housing. It is a five-year plan, so we know exactly where our priorities need to be, what our top priorities are, so we were able to relatively quickly decide with the stimulus money where we should really focus our efforts. The other piece that we're focusing on, in addition to those, are aging-in-place initiatives, and I've spoken a little bit about those.

These photographs actually illustrate some of the greening initiatives we're looking at to make our buildings more sustainable into the future. To date, we've committed \$25.6 million to conserve water and energy. Some of the greening-type projects include things like replacing windows, doors, siding, insulation, connecting to natural gas, boiler upgrades and pipe insulation, all the kinds of things that down the road will make our buildings more sustainable. Obviously there's a return on investment for these kinds of investments as well.

So far we've committed \$9.7 million to general capital improvements. Again, these are based on the priorities we had previously identified in our capital asset management plan, things like roof repairs, underground infrastructure replacement, and site repairs so we've done concrete and asphalt work as well.

We're also working to make our public housing buildings better, to meet the needs of the seniors who we're trying to serve today, and we've committed \$8.4 million to aging-in-place-related retrofits. These projects would include things like ramps, automatic door openers, fire alarm improvements - in terms of being able to hear those - handrails, and also generators. We have three elevators in seniors' housing projects and we've installed elevators in Margaree Manor in Inverness, MacCaul Villa in Great Village, and Northwood Apartments in the Town of Shelburne.

Obviously I want to talk about the stimulus, but there are other aspects to housing. We wanted to talk for a moment on homelessness. We know, and certainly our colleagues who will speak after us know, that homelessness is a complicated issue and the solutions for homelessness do not sit solely within the Department of Community Services. However, I'm very pleased to say that we've been collaborating with our colleagues in other departments. Our colleagues at Health and Justice and Education and Health Promotion and Protection, in actually looking at the broader pieces around homelessness, are trying much harder to actually look at the clients we serve and say, what are the needs of the clients who are facing this situation and how do we, as a government, need to put our projects and align the programs we have so we can better serve them from a client perspective?

We still have some work to do that way, but I am very pleased to say that we are all meeting as a group and that there's a lot of support from our colleagues in other departments, in terms of really trying to address the core issues around this. Everybody has a role to play, so I think we are working better as a government horizontally to try and resolve these issues in a way that actually brings it from the client perspective, as opposed to the government program perspective.

In terms of action and what we're doing - and we recognize that we still have a lot of work to do, but we're moving down a road - we are expanding our efforts. Not only are we providing emergency services, but we are working to transition individuals who are homeless to permanent housing. We've been working in a collaborative fashion with others to develop viable and sustainable affordable housing for individuals who are homeless or individuals who are at risk of being homeless.

We have some projects underway. We've committed funds for a maximum of 15 rent supplements to help shelter providers in the Halifax area move homeless individuals into permanent housing. We've committed funds for an 18-unit project sponsored by St. Leonard's Society, and together with our federal government colleagues, we've committed

funds in Halifax for a 10-unit transitional housing project and in Cape Breton for six units to help move individuals who are homeless into permanent housing.

The other thing I would like to add to that is, in terms of meeting with our sector partners in the homelessness, we actually have a committee now where all of the shelter providers meet with colleagues in our department on a regular basis. We started this a couple of years ago, but have tried to move it forward in a way that works for our colleagues in that sector. It has been a very useful group. We've gotten a lot of movement forward in terms of identifying the issues, really drilling down and looking at what the needs are globally, really working together so that we all understand the services everyone brings to the table. When issues arise we go to that group and we try to work together and problem-solve them together.

Sometimes there are things governments can do, sometimes there are things within that shelter community that they can do. I actually hold it up when I'm talking because I think it's a really good example of government and community working really well together to try to resolve problems. It doesn't mean that we don't have some difficult discussions sometimes, but I think we've built and worked hard for the relationship piece. Obviously that's ongoing, but working with our partners to build a place where we know we can come in, people can have frank discussions, and we can really try to work to resolution for the people who everyone is trying to serve - that's something that I think we're proud of, and that the groups that sit around the table with us come knowing that we are prepared to help work with them on solutions.

In terms of moving forward, I'd just like to stress again that the department has really - its main priority and focus since receiving the stimulus funds has been to ensure that we spend those funds within the time allotted. There are tight timelines associated to those funds, and really every staff person in housing services and in the housing authorities - that's been the main priority, to ensure that we commit those funds and that we make sure that we use that money for the best intention.

We obviously appreciate and respect how important housing is to the people who we serve in our department and across government. We will continue to ensure that these investments are increasing the supply of affordable housing and to make sure that it is more physically and economically sustainable.

With that, Mr. Chairman, that concludes our presentation and we're very happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for that overview, Ms. Ferguson. I have one person on my list at this point - Mr. Whynott.

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: When I knew the department was coming, I wanted to come today because I'm very excited about the 59 units that are going into the Millwood project in my constituency.

I want to specifically talk about that project if you don't mind. I don't know if it will be Judith or Dan answering questions?

MS. FERGUSON: Probably Dan.

MR. WHYNOTT: Okay. Dan, can you just talk a little bit about what the original plan was for that site?

MR. DAN TROKE: There are two pieces of property in Millwood that were held since the initial project documents were created. If anybody knows any background around the area, it was broken up according to zones that allowed for single family homes and then multi-unit construction. The department held a number of parcels. There was always an intention on the last two parcels that are left in the subdivision, to utilize them to create multi- units. One parcel in particular, we're still talking with HRM around how the document would move forward.

The second one, which is right across from the high school, is a parcel of land that we always looked at either creating family or some kind of seniors' housing on it. As the demand rose, particularly in Sackville and Millwood, around individuals now looking to be able to retire either in that community or transition into more affordable retirement within that community - when the economic stimulus came about, there was an opportunity for us to kind of enact one of those sets of plans we were looking at.

Really, we are developing the back end of that site so that effectively at the end of the day it minimizes the impact on the number of homes that would be around it. The phone is ringing literally off the hook from people looking to access that building. It's fantastic. Really, we're trying to incorporate not only the requirements of those individuals in there but Judith mentioned things like scooters and so on. It's become an incredibly important part of individuals' lives who have mobility challenges, being able to maneuver around their community in a way that even just gets them to the bus stop or even down to the curb.

A lot of those things have been incorporated into the design of that building and so we have a lot of individuals with mobility challenges that have been coming forward saying, if there's an opportunity, that's where I would like to have a chance to rent and be part of that community. Interestingly enough, I think, one of the side effects is that a lot of the people - I know you knocked on their doors as well as my staff - have now been having their parents and their grandparents and folks come forward and saying they'd like to have an opportunity to get into that.

Those two sites have always been part of a multi-unit development plan. It was always just about, when was the right opportunity. Right now with the way the demographics are going, particularly in that area, it was the right time to try and move forward a senior's project. We're actually ready to start framing up the first floor of the building so it's moving quite rapidly.

MR. WHYNOTT: Dan, can you pull up that photo because I'm really proud of it. Not that I built it or anything, but I'd like to pull that up because it's actually a beautiful building. I've seen some of the drawings from the very beginning. I know exactly what you said, the people who live around that area, they want their parents to get into that building. I'm getting phone calls trying to get people in there.

It's interesting you note that those two sites, and particularly this one, has always been planned for some sort of multi-use. I think it's good, five years ago my understanding was that there were concerns in the community around low income housing and that sort of thing. I think it's good that the government was able to listen to the community and say, let's work with you and try to build something that makes sense. In particular, the former MLA for the area back in the 1990s, Bill MacDonald for Sackville-Beaver Bank, he in fact had to leave our community because he wanted to move out, he wanted to get rid of his big house but he couldn't find anywhere to go so he had to move out of Sackville, a community in which he grew up and raised his family, and now he had to leave because he couldn't downsize to an appropriate sized home. Just an example of one prominent person in our community who had to leave so it's certainly a good thing to see.

Can you talk a little bit about the project in particular and a few things like how much is this project going to cost and when - timelines - that sort of thing. As well, what sort of things have you done to work with the community?

MR. TROKE: Well, the building is, I believe, 59 units. We were trying to get as close to 60 as we could from a development perspective. Approximate value is about \$6 million. Because there is an extensive amount of infrastructure to put a long driveway in and so on, we took a little extra time in the planning stage. Certainly from a perspective of working with the community, there was literature put around in the community that said, here's what we're hoping to do, if you have questions and so on. There was a door-to-door visitation and you were part of that process. In fact, I know you fielded a lot calls from folks, then directed them to who to call for when they're interested in units and so on.

[9:30 a.m.]

Recently there also was a session that took place for individuals looking for information that gave them an opportunity to find a little more information about the building itself. Obviously the Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority will manage the building, like many of our seniors projects and so any individual looking to either access it or having questions about it, that's your best resource to go to.

Interestingly enough, HRM was incredibly helpful in being able to move this project forward. As you are aware, sometimes development agreements can be quite a lengthy process. We did have a project agreement that dated back some time on this particular piece of property. However, HRM worked very diligently to make sure that we were able to not only get advice from them with setback requirements and water course and all the other pieces of information but also made sure that, as rapidly as possibly, we were able to get our development permits to move forward. It really wasn't just about even the province moving forward quickly on this. This project, as well as all the other projects that are underway right now in HRM, the development staff from the municipality had been really great to work with and have really done a great job in helping us move forward quickly. At the same time also, letting folks know in the various areas what's going on and how we're working.

I think one of the keys and we've learned a long time ago is the best thing to do is go knock on somebody's door and let them know what's going on. You can do community consultations until you drop but really knocking on those doors is one of the most important things that can happen.

MR. WHYNOTT: Timeline?

MR. TROKE: Yes, right now we're looking at early next summer and that would be move in. As you can tell right now, as soon as we get the envelope on the building up, the inside stuff, cold weather doesn't matter so much. All the drainage and so on has been put in place so we're at a point now where rain and snow really don't matter. The first floor is ready to frame up so all the concrete is in, so this will be something that you'll see. We're expecting the completion date of the building probably by June with probably move in date in July.

MR. WHYNOTT: Great, thank you. Mr. Chairman, I apologize for taking the time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You were certainly talking about something that's close to your heart.

MR. WHYNOTT: Absolutely.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I do have an extensive speakers list and I also understand that Ms. McKeough is on her way.

MS. FERGUSON: Yes, unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, I think she misunderstood in terms of the time but she's on her way right now, so I apologize for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I understand, we'll see how that works out. As I said, I have quite a long speakers list. Next will be Mr. Preyra followed by Mr. MacMaster.

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: Sorry Mr. Speaker, I thought I should probably defer to Mr. MacLellan since we did take up a fair amount of time on question number one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It will be Mr. MacMaster next, I think.

MR. PREYRA: Sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you'd like to defer.

MR. PREYRA: I would defer, I'd like to come back after we've gone across the other side.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think, just if I could, I should clarify the process that I'm using, and that we have used over the course of the past year, is a show of hands. I create a list and I follow that list, trying to keep an eye on it, and I think I'll continue to follow my pattern. The notion I have is that everybody needs to get a fair chance to examine the witnesses - I don't think we're examining, we're trying to better our understanding. Mr. MacMaster.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Preyra. The question I would like to ask is, some people have said that there is not enough supply of affordable housing, why aren't private developers engaged or interested in meeting the affordable housing demand? Do you have any thoughts around that?

MR. TROKE: I think, first of all, one of the interesting circumstances here in Nova Scotia is that we have enough houses and units to accommodate the number of people we have, just over time, they're in the wrong place, right. So what happens is typically the market - and not just private developers but even non-profits typically move to address whatever they're seeing in their community.

So one of the things is the Affordable Housing Program. In the slide deck, you are due to talk about our emphasis on new rentals and developing affordable apartments throughout the province. You see in front of you a map that kind of shows where we have hit. Right now we're past 1,600 units and heading toward 1,700 units. We're creating about 200 units a year. That is a mix. It's about two-thirds private sector and one-third non-profit, roughly, and, of course, often what happens is the lead time to develop a project can often take several years or, even for some groups, as much as five or six years to get from that initial idea phase to actually getting a building underway.

One of the things that you'll note is that here in Nova Scotia, we actually have a little bit of an anomaly to the rest of Canada. People are still building apartment buildings and the rest of the country has a very different mix of what their rental stock and what their housing stock looks like. So one of the things that we've found here is that we do have - I probably get about three to four inquiries per week of individuals who have projects they're

looking to move forward. Normally they do that in partnership with some seed funding from CMHC but not necessarily. What you're seeing is that usually you would have units built somewhere around 20 to 24 units at a time.

At any given time you might have about eight developments on the go to give you about your 200 units, but you're continually working with individuals to try to get to where they want to be and, again, it might be six months, it might be five years. So in some cases we have proponents that we've seen early in the Affordable Housing Program, say in 2004 - we're just at the point now where they're getting their development permits and moving forward. So it's tough, it's not always easy, but certainly we've had a lot of interest and we're starting to see more and more non-profits develop to capacity to get this done as well, which is one of those things that has taken a bit of time, but once you get past that hurdle of creating your first couple of units, it is then an opportunity to do the second round, so to speak. There is interest. Certainly we would love to see more come forward but the challenge is always, you know, demand pretty much drives where you will see units pop up and certainly, yes, there are some challenges in some markets.

MS. FERGUSON: If I could just add to what Dan said because I have watched him and his staff work. Often we'll get proposals in and there are some challenges with the proposals. So what our staff will do is go back and work with the developer and say, okay, there are three areas that we need to work on, but if we can work on those three areas, then we can go out and have a proposal that we can move forward.

So, you know, sometimes there's a fair bit of work that needs to be done and the developer and the department come together and we've seen some good results from that work. So to Dan's point, some of these pieces continue to be a bit of a work in progress for awhile in terms of really getting it to the stage where we know it can move forward. So I guess I would just say that we're committed in those instances to do that work with the developers and we've seen examples of how that has resulted, at the end of the day, in putting units on the ground. So I think that's a good thing and we'll continue to do that in the department.

MR. MACMASTER: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we'll go to Mr. Glavine next and then to Mr. Preyra.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: One of the things pointed out here this morning, which is of no surprise, is that the Annapolis Valley and HRM remain two high demand areas. I was just wondering if you could provide me with a little bit of an overview of the demand in the Annapolis Valley. I haven't had an update for a little bit so if you are able to do it now, it would be great. If not, I would get the information later.

MR. TROKE: First, yes, there has been a huge amount of interest in the affordable housing program in the Annapolis Valley. The Annapolis Valley through Kings County is

an area of huge population growth and you have more and more individuals who are commuting but also working in some of the upcoming sectors.

The development in that area has been steady. We've had a lot of interest from private sector developers. One of the things we've done, to go to some of the communities where we've had additional demand is now under the economic stimulus, we are adding some additional capacity. For example, in Maggie Drive in Middleton we're doing an extension onto Maggie Drive. We've also done four units specifically in the New Minas area. We've had some individuals who are looking for the adaptive housing and they were having struggles in being able to find that, so we were able to put some of those units on the ground.

In total, we're looking at, I believe, 19 units kind of being added by the province in that area but we've had, I believe, somewhere close to 125 units constructed through the Affordable Housing Program in through that corridor area. I do know that we have a handful of folks who have been working with us to continue adding capacity in that area. So again, it's one of those pieces that we have a lot of interest, we have a lot of folks who are kind of looking to do that 20 units at a time. Where individuals are building, typically through the Affordable Housing Program, for families we've kind of been offsetting that with some of the new construction for seniors and individuals with disabilities, through the economic stimulus program.

MR. GLAVINE: A couple of areas I was interested in - the fact that the stimulus money came, I felt, when I looked at some of the housing in my area, Lincoln Street, the cottages on Cottage Street, seniors in Berwick and so on, a very high need for repairs and renovation. I'm wondering if there is, especially now with a lot of new housing, is there a life cycle repair plan or is it ad hoc? I certainly have the impression - and a lot in the community do - that sometimes the housing is not kept up to the extent that it should be. I'm just wondering your comments around a life cycle approach, versus an ad hoc, as repairs are made.

MR. TROKE: You heard Judith talk about the capital asset maintenance plan on public housing. The same actually exists for any kind of a building that you would be running. Right now typically you have items - roofs, siding, whatnot - that you get into that 20- or 30-year replacement cycle. One of the things that we've done is make sure in replacing items that we've put specifications around what we're buying that has the maximum lifespan possible but also the highest energy efficiency rating. So it's not about buying as much as you can as cheaply as you can but buying things that are really going to have a good bang for the buck over a period of time but also give you that opportunity to refresh.

One of the other places, and I know that you have very intimate knowledge with a lot of the co-ops and non-profits, that certainly has been an area that they've had some struggles in kind of keeping buildings up-to-date. Right now we're at the point where under

the Social Housing Assistance Repair Program, and that's part of the economic stimulus, there's almost \$21 million going into the co-ops and non-profits. Effectively these are energy upgrades for the buildings but also major repairs - windows, doors, roofs.

We've heard from almost every co-op. In fact, I think there's only one or two that really haven't. What they're really looking for is if they're not situated right now, ready to go, how could we be in a position a few years from now, if that's the case, what do we need to be doing? So we've been working with them not only prioritizing what they're doing but also if we can move now with them, we've been able to move now under the economic stimulus. It's a good balance and it's also about making sure that as you're moving ahead, you're doing the things that you really need to be doing in a proactive way.

MR. GLAVINE: I have just one more quick one. I had some other questions, could I send a few off to you?

MR. TROKE: Yes, absolutely.

MR. GLAVINE: One of the things that has happened, I know in one community that I represent and I hear about it as well, is that we know housing is so critical to people's health and well-being, it's really one of the basics of life. We need to get people into affordable housing, but in the process sometimes we have created some ghetto effects in our housing communities. I'm wondering if we moved in a bit of a different direction to try and address that? Or do you still see that as a struggle area?

MR. TROKE: One of the things that we've absolutely tried to do as much as possible is, even within buildings, to look at the whole idea of mixed income. The rationale certainly behind it is as you stated. There has been a bit of a history -some places in the 1970s and the 1980s around, let's just create an entire neighbourhood or what have you.

Under the affordable housing program we've specifically designed a program so that, in most cases, we would only look at maybe a maximum of half the units in any given project that would be classified as under the affordable housing program. What it does is that creates the mix of both affordable and market rent. If you're a non-profit or a for profit developer, it gives you an ability to kind of balance out your portfolio. At the same time, what it allows you to do is blend the units seamlessly in the project. You don't know which units or how much income anybody is making within that project.

The second thing is we've used a lot of what's called rent supplement which, effectively, is we're able to allow individuals to blend within the private sector in the non-profit portfolios that exist. They show up, enter into an agreement, it's a three way agreement between the housing authority, the landlord and the client.

[9:45 a.m.]

At the end of the day, it's a unit like anybody else would have, but the rent is made more affordable effectively through this supplement to those units. That's another tool that allows us to have a better mix of where clients are residing but also a better mix within buildings itself.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you.

MS. FERGUSON: If I could just take a moment and introduce Joan McKeough from our Cape Breton Island Housing Authority.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for being here. On my list at this point we'll go to Mr. Preyra next and just so people can be a bit prepared, Mr. MacLellan would follow, followed by Mr. Ramey who's been impatiently waiting.

MR. PREYRA: I have one larger philosophical question about the model for delivering affordable housing and I have a smaller question if I have time at the end.

When we first immigrated to Canada, my family lived in the Jane and Finch area, it was always known as the Jane and Finch corridor and it was notorious for the kinds of issues they have. We always resented the fact that it was called a corridor because we always saw it as a community. It was really a self-functioning community where there were lots of great stuff happening. A lot of the challenges people faced there related more to their socio-economic status and their background more than who they actually were.

I'm happy just to follow up on the question from the member for Kings West about the delivery model and the change in the model. In particular, I want to ask about two specific initiatives. There used to be a shelter-type of arrangement on Barrington Street with the YWCA program and when the W Building was created those women were redistributed - I don't know what happened to them, but they were redistributed. One question relates to what happened to them?

I heard from the shelter and transition people that it was good, but I want to know how that model in particular is working. The other question relates to Ross Cantwell and the housing trust and their purchase of land in the North End. The question is, to what extent will this new model work and what kinds of challenges does it face?

MR. TROKE: With regard to your questions around the YMCA, my understanding is that the YWCA created what was called the WISH Program, which is Women In Support of Housing. As part of their model in moving forward, they did develop some supported housing units. Those units allowed them to have not only independent living for those individuals, but a way for them to have some supports particularly while trying to attend university or trying to get some additional education. Many of the folks, as I understand,

who were in that supportive environment in the previous building, that's effectively the transition mechanism for them, so out in the community in their own units and so on.

With regard to the Nova Scotia Housing Trust, we have a large non-profit who is looking to establish a very mixed-market approach. They have purchased two large parcels of land and are looking to develop over 100 units of affordable housing that really would be one of two things. First of all, an ability for individuals looking to access affordable housing within the north-end community, but second, also an ability for other individuals who are going through some of the other transition units.

For example, in the presentation there was a reference to the Saint Leonards Society and Adsum House and so on, really it's kind of that multi-step approach of individuals who might be looking to access their first housing unit with some supports, then potentially maybe moving to another unit that would have a little less support and so on. That is kind of the approach and that's where the Nova Scotia Housing Trust model will likely fit. I know that they're working with the municipality to move forward with their construction plans. Really, it was an opportunity for a non-profit to exercise an option.

As you know, in that community, land is going very quickly and so it was an opportunity for a group who has some experience and some players at the table who have an ability to move large projects forward to develop some mix. Again, the expectation is at the end of the day that about half of the units in those two buildings would be what we'll call affordable and the other half being closer to market rent. It will allow non-profit to balance the funding mechanism that it needs to make sure moving forward that it is sustainable.

MR. PREYRA: Do I have time for a quick question?

MR. CHAIRMAN: A quick one.

MR. PREYRA: I want to do a follow-up on a question I asked the last time which was about the Navigator Program, principally the one on Spring Garden Road and Barrington Street. The Spring Garden Area Merchants Association and the Downtown Halifax Business Commission had this great idea to set up a Navigator Program that would identify street-involved people, principally young people and find out what their issues were and what kinds of services were available. That program - I've seen their monthly reports and it has been a great success. My question is, how do we go about moving that from a pilot phase to something that gets a little bit more support from some of the partner departments and what would be the next step for them and for us to sort of put that program on a much more firm footing?

MS. FERGUSON: I think the next step would probably be actually bringing the partner departments together and talking in a very serious way about how we could collaborate with the services we currently have and probably broader than we typically

think of the social departments. I think of our colleagues at Labour and Workforce Development, for example, being at the table and looking to make sure that we've maximized all of those opportunities, so I don't think that would be difficult. In fact, we meet on a regular basis anyway, the deputies of all of those departments get together to talk about joint and horizontal issues, I definitely think that's something that we could do and that wouldn't be difficult to do in terms of looking at moving that forward.

I also should say you talked in your earlier piece about your experience at Jane and Finch and I just wanted to tell you that over the last couple of years we had a small group of representatives from our department, from Justice, from local community policing partners and have looked at some of our public housing areas. We've gone in worked with the tenants associations, primarily, to look at how we can help them in terms of moving some of their initiatives forward.

We've had some small successes in terms of really helping develop the community for those areas and in terms of really working with the tenants associations to say, what are the needs of your community? What are the kinds of things you want to move forward, how can we help you work with your agenda? It has been an interesting group and we've done it at a high level, we've also kind of done it on the ground.

We've had our Housing Authority staff, for example, working directly with the community police people, working directly with our Income Assistance staff, with our child care staff, with our colleagues at the Department of Education. So we have been doing some pieces like that again to really say to the community, what is the major need that you have and how can we help move that forward, so we've been quietly doing that as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Just to put some time boundaries on things - about seven minutes before we need to make a transition so Mr. MacLellan and then we will go to Mr. Ramey.

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Okay, I just have two very quick ones. I'm fortunate my constituency office is next to a Tim Horton's in Glace Bay so I get all the gossip and the goop so this is connected to that. Joan, since you're just coming in, I can put you on the hot seat. Some of the things that we hear about the regional housing units in the Bay and I guess in Cape Breton - and this is a bit of a long-standing issue - is related to asbestos and some of the asbestos removal. Is there - I guess, for those gossip hounds - an assurance? Where are we on that process of completely renovating those units and clearing the asbestos? Is there still a time line or what do you know about that?

MS. JOAN MCKEOUGH: Sure, the primary areas where we've had asbestos in the attic insulation are units in the Sydney area and in two groups of family housing. Of course, asbestos is also in day-to-day products like your gyproc compound, drywall compound. In terms of the family units, there has been a removal and that's completed in our family units in the Sydney area. The strategy that all of the experts recommend is really seal in place

when it's inaccessible to the public, and where there's not safety concerns in doing that, and remove if you're doing demolition or significant projects where there is risk of disturbance. We were doing some roof replacements and some other work in those family units, that was removed last year.

There is a management plan around how you manage asbestos in place and that goes from everything from floor tiles to your drywall compound. Obviously you can't remove drywall compound so it's really around knowledge of where it is, education of your staff and contractors, and procedures in place to manage in place. That's the strategy that we've employed around the remainder of that asbestos containing products.

MR. MACLELLAN: From my information and the numbers I've received recently, there is a waiting list of about 800 for regional housing units of various types and formats in Cape Breton and in the ballpark of about 300 vacant units now. I know there are renovations that have to take place and the fit is always important and you can't jump the processes there. Is there a set strategy or is there a big push, if you will, to get those units renovated, to get families and people and seniors in those homes?

MS. MCKEOUGH: In terms of our application numbers, you're right on the mark there. Currently we have about 400 senior applications and 300 family applications. In terms of our vacant units, to date - and this was basically within the last couple of days we looked at these numbers - our total vacancies were just over 200. Of those, 60 are in rural areas where we just don't have demand for our units and another 60 were what we consider not rentable. Because of some of the economic stimulus work that we're doing - and you may have seen a slide in one of our high-rise buildings that has significant exterior work - for those reasons we have to leave some of those empty to move tenants around during that work. It really leaves us with a core of about 120 units that, today, aren't occupied by our residents. Of those, we have 40 that are ready with people assigned to them waiting to sign their lease. There's another 51 in progress and 29 that are basically not started. That's the core group that in order to properly manage and meet your demand, you need to add resources to.

Currently what we're doing is we have casual staff beginning to work on those units and the overall strategy is to determine when you've reached a point where your regular resources can't turn those units over in the month, then we know we need to add those casual resources. Geoff, I can provide you with some of that detailed information at a later time through your constituency office.

MR. MACLELLAN: Sounds good, thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ramey.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Thank you for the presentation and for coming in today. My question sort of relates to something my colleague from Kings West was getting at and

something that my colleague from Halifax Citadel-Sable Island was getting at, I guess, as well. Like my colleague from Kings West, I live in an area now that's growing rapidly, the Bridgewater area, the Town of Bridgewater specifically. There was an announcement there a week or two ago by the federal member, Gerald Keddy, and Minister Peterson-Rafuse, to talk about investments - particularly in my community, which I was greatly appreciative of. Like my colleague from Kings West, some of the housing there was getting pretty tired and some of this money is going to renovate it and fix it up. Also there's a co-op there called Crystal Grange which received significant amounts of money.

I really have two quick ones here. One is, somewhere at the very beginning of this presentation we mentioned the fact that this was the most significant amount of money put into housing in decades. I guess I was trying to figure out when the last infusion was. The second thing is, I have long felt - and I may be totally wrong on this, and I'm willing to admit it if I am - but I've long felt that, for instance, solving the poverty problem in Nova Scotia cannot be the purview of one government department. The one that is usually hammered on or picked on is Community Services. I think poverty is a Health problem, an Education problem, a Justice problem, a Community Services problem, and I feel that way about housing, too.

I know Deputy Minister Ferguson talked about this breaking down of the silos in the department and working together. I just wonder if you could say a bit more about that, deputy minister, about how that is being broken down to address this - I think you mentioned a committee of different people getting together - and also when the last infusion of capital was. That will be it for me.

[10:00 a.m.]

MS. FERGUSON: Maybe I'll start with barriers, and I'd like to thank you for your comments around the fact that it is an issue that government really needs to look at holistically. I guess what I can say is that certainly with my deputy colleagues people are there, people understand that, people appreciate that this is an issue, that poverty is an issue that transcends government departments. We all have a responsibility to look at that - not only look at it as it relates to our departments, but more importantly, look at it in terms of how it affects the people who are living in poverty and the clients that we serve.

We trying to do that much better, in terms of how we look at issues generally, so I would say that is an issue that comes to the table in our department or comes to the table in the Department of Health or comes to the table in the Department of Justice, that we are trying much harder to work together and recognize a couple of things. One, that what we do can impact our colleagues in other departments, but more importantly, it can sometimes impact in a negative way in terms of how we're trying to deliver services to a client.

So there is an overarching perspective that our responsibility is to really look at the programs government provides and say, how do we provide them in the best way we can

for the clients? That may differ in HRM or in Bridgewater or in Sydney or in Yarmouth, so we're also trying to look from a community-based perspective because there are different services in different communities.

I guess I'd say with any issue the deputies themselves are now structured so that the social departments actually meet on a regular basis and actually talk about a large list of horizontal initiatives that require everyone at the table to be involved and talk about them, and poverty is certainly close to the top of the list of those initiatives. There's also a committee co-chaired by our minister and Minister More, in terms of really looking and guiding the poverty piece, but this group of social deputies actually meets on a monthly basis and we discuss, as I said, a number of horizontal issues.

So I would say a couple of things: One, there's a recognition that we need to work better together; and two, there's an actual structure so we're accountable to do that, and there's also a team of senior government officials who help support that committee. So if, in our department, we were looking at developing a new program or looking at how an existing program could work better, I can think of a number of times just in the last week where we've met with our colleagues at the Department of Health on issues or we've met with our colleagues at the Department of Education on issues, to really look at how we can work better together.

I think if you look at initiatives in a number of departments today you'll see that on the senior committees that are guiding those initiatives through, you will have staff from a large number of different departments. That wasn't necessarily the case a number of years ago. So it's not perfect and we still have a way to go, but I know that we have the commitment. I know that we have an understanding. I also know that people are very focused on trying to deliver.

Certainly in the current fiscal realities that we're facing as a province, we're obligated to make sure that we're doing the very best we can with the dollars that we have to make sure that services go to the clients in a way that makes more sense to the clients. So, in fairness to people receiving government services, they shouldn't have to worry about which department they're getting the services from. They should have to worry about accessing those services and then we in government should have to figure out how we do that in a way that makes sense for the clients.

So, it's an ongoing piece of work, but I certainly can see a significant difference in how government is working together to try to resolve these issues, and I would also say that there is very much a recognition that poverty is not an issue that's solely within the Department of Community Services. I have significant support, I know, both from my colleagues in other departments and certainly our minister has support from her colleagues around a recognition of that fact.

MR. TROKE: From an infusion perspective, really short of this economic stimulus, which coincided with the tail end of development under the Affordable Housing Trust, it has been the first time since the mid-1990s that there's really been an opportunity to construct new social housing. From a perspective of the investments that are being made in both co-ops and in the public housing sector, it's really like getting five years worth of capital maintenance done literally per year. So it's fivefold what the normal process would be and it's simply because there are extra dollars available that are not part of that 1997 social housing agreement. So it's really literally four to five years worth of work being able to be done all at one time. It's huge.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We've gone a bit beyond the time that I was planning for but you may have some closing comments that you would like to make, Ms. Ferguson.

MS. FERGUSON: No, Mr. Chairman, I don't want to take up time from our friends who are here to provide their presentation. I would just like to say thank you and, again, if any of the members have questions that they didn't have time to ask, we're always happy to receive those questions in the department and get back to the members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for being here. I think we'll just take a moment so we can make the transition but, please, nobody go very far because we should get back to work right away.

[10:05 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:10 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call us back to order, please. I think we've got everybody in place, so we can get started. I'm concerned about time, it's now about 10:10 a.m. and just to put things into perspective, we probably need to move to some business that we need to deal with at about 10:50 a.m. That gives us the next 40 minutes for both presentation and questions.

I'd like to welcome Claudia Jahn and Grant Wanzel to the committee. Perhaps you could introduce yourselves, I think you're going to make a brief presentation and then we will have some questions.

MS. CLAUDIA JAHN: Thank you very much for having us here today, it's quite nice for us to be here and be able to present on behalf of the Affordable Housing Association. As we heard from the Department of Community Services, many positive developments have happened over the last couple of months, thanks to some capital investment and some funding from Ottawa.

As the Affordable Housing Association, we are more concerned about the systemic need of affordable housing and in spite of all the best efforts that have been done, certainly

from the department, we see that we are still in a housing crisis in Nova Scotia. When we hear there is a waiting list in Cape Breton already, 200 people, 300 people, 400 people, the waiting list is even longer in Halifax. There is a large number of people homeless, 1,700 individuals are without a home. We see that the best effort for 200 new units per year is really not sufficient to address the issue on a long term.

The Affordable Housing Association is really trying to assist in developing a strategic plan and a mechanism that would address this issue in a more strategic way. That is why we circulated a paper that was produced by us a couple of months ago that is proposing as one step to restructure the system so that we can address the issue more effectively.

At one time in this province, there was a fully staffed stand-alone ministry of the provincial Government of Nova Scotia. At present, as we all know, housing services is a branch of the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. From its location one might deduce that in Nova Scotia, housing is itself a community service, one amongst a host of many other services. Furthermore, from its now diminished presence and relative isolation, one might also conclude that in Nova Scotia housing is of peripheral importance.

As we all know, and acknowledged in the previous presentation, housing has a very important role in our society. Justice, health, we are all affected by the poor quality of housing so far from it, access to decent and appropriate housing is a basic human right. Housing is far more than a social service. Housing is a major sector of the province's social economy.

In 2008, residential construction accounted for approximately 2.36 per cent of the province's gross domestic product. Housing secures jobs and generates revenues for the construction and related industries as we now see. Thanks to the stimulus package, we see what it can do for our community and our economy.

Housing requires an independent agency, perhaps its own minister. The minister and director of such an agency would benefit from the advice of a properly represented housing secretariat. The agency would embrace all segments of the housing sector and use its resources to leverage all the community capital available to it. The agency would play the lead role in encouraging much needed inter-governmental collaboration and co-operation. Meanwhile, in the short term, the government may wish to sponsor a province-wide housing consultation, which asks the right questions in the right places as we acknowledge the problems are always different from community to community and it is widely consultative and transparent as possible. The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia would be pleased to play a lead role in such a process.

[10:15 a.m.]

As we acknowledged earlier, housing is a basic human right and we all have to work diligently to bring this to realization in Nova Scotia. Housing is more than a social service; it's only one of many roles housing plays in our lives. In fact, only a small fraction of the province's housing stock is under the brief of the Minister of Community Services. More to the point, it is affordability, accessibility, sustainability and well-being of the province's housing stock as a whole that must be the principal concern for the Government of Nova Scotia. Thus, as important as they are and as modest as is their extent, the effectiveness of the housing programs administered by the Nova Scotia housing services can only be assessed in relation to the performance of the whole housing sector and all its parts - the public sector, the private sector and the non-profit sector.

Who speaks for the housing sector as a whole at the moment? At the present, no one. The province's housing sector is a very large system of many interacting parts and includes the bits that fall under the brief of the Department of Community Services. Logically, housing is - in its most representative sense - that of the housing sector as a whole, inappropriately placed in the ministry of the Department of Community Services. The form of its independence must be open to dialogue. I think we all as a province and all individuals should have an input how it should be administered but what shouldn't be open to dialogue is the independence of the province's agency responsible for housing and its ability to be creative and responsive. Failing the above, housing would fall more appropriately under some ministry other than the Department of Community Services, for example Economic and Rural Development.

At this point, I would like to pass it on to Grant to continue the presentation.

MR. GRANT WANZEL: Thank you. You'll have to adjust to my baritone voice. This is my professorial voice. I'm going to pick up on a number of the points that have been raised in the preamble, first, with respect to representative housing secretariat.

As a reflection of housing's major importance to the province's social economy and its nature as a broad-based system of interacting parts, an independent housing agency or ministry would benefit greatly from the advice of an appointed secretariat widely representative of the province's housing sector. Existing examples might be the Youth Secretariat and the Senior Citizens Secretariat. The secretariat would monitor need and supply, monitor the existing stock and report regularly on its condition, report to the minister of housing, both to advocate for the sector and advise the minister annually on the priority of housing needs and supply, where and how best to distribute the province's housing resources.

The secretariat would also be a resource to the sector and on the basis of best practices would advocate for the sector. It would be proactive in its advocacy, animate discussion and debate, and would support such through its research and networking

activities. The secretariat would animate the development of a provincial housing strategy and action plan with targets and performance indicators. The secretariat would have a staff and the financial wherewithal, provided by the minister, necessary to support it.

Who's in and who's out? Privileged access has been granted to the housing industry's biggest private sector players from real estate, banking, development, construction, to long-term care providers and so on. Housing authorities, which report directly to the Department of Community Services, may appear to be in but still have the status and appearance of necessary evils. On the other hand, the constant complaint of community-based, non-profit housing developers, owners and managers is that they feel left out, underfunded and patronized by a housing services department, which for its own part seems immune to criticism and short on imagination.

Leveraging all of the resources: this is in part an answer to one of the questions that was asked earlier about the private sector and development. A bit of a preamble - I've been involved in affordable housing development since the 1970s and I have, over the years, become aware of the enormous difficulties that are involved in development work. In the private sector, the estimate is that one out of 10 projects actually succeeds in being developed. I daresay that in the private sector the difficulties and the risks are much higher. You have a whole lot further to go and a great many more difficulties, the principal one being the absence of funding or the absence of capital. The only kind of capital that we have is social capital and in a way that's what this next point actually speaks to.

The private sector has neither the will nor the capacity to operate where it can't make a profit. By the same token, governments have neither the human nor the financial resources to meet all of the urgent needs unmet by the private sector and I think that's amply evident in the presentation that has preceded our own. Nova Scotia's housing system is simply not working to its full potential. Were it to do so, it simply could not afford to treat housing as a social service. Moreover, it could ill afford not to leverage all of the resources available to it. For its part, Nova Scotia Housing Services maintains a low profile and frequently relies on its own forces. In doing so, it has failed at great cost to leverage all the sources of human, material financial capital available to it in the province's public and non-profit community-based sectors.

In dramatic contrast, for example, the housing agencies of New Brunswick, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador have been particularly adept at strategically deploying their limited resources to leverage significant additional resources from their respective communities. In those provinces, proactive leadership has served as a catalyst in mobilizing broad support across the housing sector as a whole. Indeed, as models of co-operation and collaboration, their example is both illuminating and informative and for us in Nova Scotia, somewhat embarrassing.

This next section speaks to the issue of intra-governmental collaboration. It was interesting to hear Mr. Troke speak about the last infusion of capital into housing. I

remember back in the 1990s, after the federal government had basically devolved responsibility to housing to the provinces and the province, in turn, devolved a whole bunch of responsibility to the municipalities, I can remember being in meetings with representatives from all three levels of government and we basically had to relay messages from one member of, let's say, the municipality, to someone from the province, because they wouldn't talk to each other and the legacy of that is still with us. I mean I have to say that there is a serious problem, I think, in the relationship between the levels of government.

In Canada three, sometimes four, levels of government operate simultaneously. In housing, provinces are required to lead. In Nova Scotia leadership through research and informed policy making and program development has been largely absent, in part because the concentration has been on social housing and public housing and not on housing as a whole. When it has been present, as in the recently released Poverty Reduction Strategy, the results have been most disappointing at least from the sector's point of view. The three levels contend with one another when good sense and our limited resources would clearly demand active co-operation, collaboration and mutual respect. Instead, our three levels of government trip over one another and when they're not doing that, they're so distant that matters of urgent concern often fall between them for want of champions. The situation is unacceptable and must be addressed. What's more, protocol requires the province both to make both the first move and thereafter to lead.

Province-wide housing consultation - asking the right questions in all of the right places. Experience and the ready example of others tell us that we could be making far better use of our limited resources to far great effect and for the greater benefit of all Nova Scotians. In this regard we are reminded of the stated intention of the Housing Services branch to launch a province-wide, affordable housing consultation. Mindful of the disappointing results from earlier consultations, AHANS proposes that the government embrace this initiative warmly, accelerate the process, broaden its mandate to include the housing sector as a whole, and to that end appoint a panel of six to eight persons broadly representative of Nova Scotia's housing sector.

Whereas transparency and widely-inclusive consultation will ensure broad support and smooth implementation, the panel should consult widely across the province and where appropriate, with counterparts and colleagues throughout the Atlantic region and elsewhere in Canada. The panel should be given a time frame of no more than 12 months in which to research and prepare a final report. AHANS would be pleased to participate in such a panel and would be more than pleased to assist in developing its configuration and mandate.

The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia is a registered, non-profit society. We've been around for 25 years, we estimated the other day. I think we may be celebrating our 25th this year, a little bit of research will reveal whether or not it's this year or next. In addition to its work in the fields of research, education and policy development, and criticism, AHANS is directly involved in the development of decent and affordable

ownership and non-profit rental housing. We have been a member of the Creighton-Gerrish Development Association since its inception in 1998.

In addition, AHANS has commissioned two important studies which we will be pleased to share, *The State of Affordable Housing in HRM* and *The State of Affordable Housing in Rural Nova Scotia*. We are currently putting together the results of a consultation that were held across the province in late 2009, early 2010, which basically is a follow up to *The State of Affordable Housing in Rural Nova Scotia*.

The latter document arose from a province-wide consultation involved seven round tables and a day-long symposium. AHANS would be pleased to share its experience and stands ready to play a leading role in the upcoming affordable housing consultation. Thank you on behalf of AHANS.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you both. I have started a list of questions that were happening during the presentation. I think that puts Mr. Whynott at the top of the list.

MR. WHYNOTT: I believe it was last week or the week before someone said to me and some of my colleagues said, so now that you're in government, have you found the New Jerusalem yet? I guess when you hear a comment like that that change isn't going to happen overnight when it comes to all of the social issues that have arisen in our province over the last 252 years.

What I've seen over the last 17 months anyway is that the government is committed to affordability and issues of poverty for Nova Scotia families, in particular around - from what I've seen in my own community - the investment in seniors housing for instance.

The affordable housing investments that have been made, in my opinion, are significant and for the first time in many years these types of investments have been made. The preliminary stages of a provincial housing strategy is another good, next step and again, something that has never been done, in recent years anyway from what I understand. We understand that affordability piece is crucial to our social and economic framework in this province. My question is around, do you see or is your group involved in the development of the housing strategy?

MR. WANZEL: The housing strategy?

MR. WHYNOTT: The preliminary stages of a provincial housing strategy. Has there been any discussion going on about that right now?

MS. JAHN: No, we haven't. That's what we are advocating for, right? For the affordable housing strategy. We see that there are some Band-aid solutions and we recognize fully that the department is doing the best they can with the means they have, but we see that the means are just not enough.

Of course, we have limited resources and we are not asking for things that are just not there. What we are asking for is to do things, to look at the whole picture, develop a strategy and do things differently and be brave enough to really restructure things and to make it more effective.

MR. WANZEL: Perhaps I would just add, Nova Scotia at one time did have a ministry of housing. We had a housing plan, a housing policy, and it delivered literally tens of thousands of affordable home ownership units across the province. A lot of Sydney would not exist had it not been for the AHOP program and the old builders' co-ops. Lower Sackville and Forest Hills would not exist, and so on and so forth. That was a significant initiative, but it did give the province - that is, the provincial government - the opportunity to have an influence over how our communities were planned.

[10:30 a.m.]

The question about the private sector still comes to the fore when we want to talk about affordable home ownership and creating conditions under which that's possible. In the old days when the province used to have a land bank, before it was sold off, the land bank was a very important device for actually controlling the price of housing. It had a significant impact. It was released in a kind of constant way and it mitigated some of the excesses of real estate speculation.

The other thing I should say about planning is that the stimulus money is gone. It's finished. The affordable housing program, as a federal program, is reliant on a government that has yet to take the step back into housing as a national issue. We're talking about it, but we're not there yet. Looking just a few years down the road, what happens when there is no stimulus money? What are we going to do? How do we actually affect development?

One of the concerns that we have - and one appreciates that there is pressure in Bridgewater and in the Valley, one can see that, but a lot of that pressure is also creating pressure for more highways. At the same time we want to find ways of intensifying development in HRM, but we have an HRM that is probably one of the largest municipalities in Canada, geographically, and we have people commuting every day for an hour and a half or two hours into the city. It doesn't make a lot of sense, and it's very expensive. We know that from an infrastructure point of view.

To refer back in time, housing gave us a lever to actually think about the physical and social form that the province was going to take. If we had it to do over again, I'm sure we would do it differently. We would not necessarily encourage suburban development all over the place. We might want to encourage a much more dense form of development and rely more heavily on public transit and find ways of actually reducing our carbon footprint rather than spending it like it didn't matter.

I think all of these things, in a way, provide compelling arguments for actually thinking about housing as a whole, thinking of it as fundamental to the social and economic well-being of the province, and finding a mechanism that would enable us to do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. MacLellan and then Mr. Ramey.

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Thank you for your presentation. I just want to ask you before I get into some of my comments. Are you familiar with the Affordable Housing Renovation Partnership that's coming out of CBU, basically as we speak? Have you heard of that at all?

MR. WANZEL: I've heard of it, that's all.

MR. MACLELLAN: Essentially what it is, is the Political Science Department at CBU coming together to construct a very comprehensive business plan on some of these issues. I just want to talk briefly about that and ask you a question on that. From my perspective, and what I've learned so far and some of the stuff I've gotten from the CBU folks, this is never going to work without community partners and there is no amount of money to solve these issues, just like health care and just like education. With housing and homelessness, if we don't have community partners, we're sunk.

The key component in Cape Breton that the CBU professors are looking at is that we have homes - get ready for this - that you can get for \$3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000 because they are company homes, they are 120 years old, they are the duplex style and they go for tax sales and nobody wants them. The other side of that is it gives the ability for private sector "slum lords" to come in, buy them, make very minimal upgrades and then charge a pretty high rent for those buildings.

What the AHRP requests are, in a nutshell - and again it is very comprehensive - but they make three specific requests. First, a renovation revolving fund which basically allows them to purchase these units, make upgrades, rent them out, flip that revenue back into the fund and keep it going and support some of these additional purchases. Secondly, what they ask for is, because these units are so cheap and you can get them on these tax sales, more people would buy these and donate them to a body, if they had the opportunity to do so. They don't do that a lot because of the red tape involved. So you buy it, you try to get it and the sale has to go through a process that is basically a year and expense and then it becomes legal issues. If there was an easier way to transfer these deeds, then it would be done. So the second request is that we figure out a way to expedite that process.

Finally, they would ask the Department of Community Services and Housing to create a few flexibilities with the RRAP program, so that rent-to-owns and co-ops could get access to these funds quicker, a different sort of strategy, so just a few tweaks on the rules of eligibility.

Basically giving that as quickly as I could, in the Reader's Digest version of it, does that sound like a workable model in terms of what you've explained today? Could that be a platform for a strategy moving forward? If you saw that business plan - it would probably help - would that be something that seems . . .

MS. JAHN: I heard of the initiative when we coincided in Sydney, we organized a round table there, the Affordable Housing Association last year. That is when I was introduced first to that concept. Interestingly, in every community there were some groups coming up with really unique ideas. We are at this two years already then, sadly enough, most of these projects don't really come to fruition because there are always some hurdles. As you mentioned, they would like some tweaks here and some tweaks there. So if there is no willingness by all levels of government to make some concessions and to be flexible, sadly enough these non-profit or community-based initiatives hardly come to realization.

My sense from every community is they really know best what is needed and what would work, it is really the best need and demand study you can get. There's always human capital, as Grant mentioned - ideas, or people who have great ideas who are willing to volunteer and put a lot of hours into these kinds of projects. They are really able to community-based to leverage other resources, so I know from Sydney they were involved then to engage the university to bring experts to the table who volunteered their time and all these kinds of resources. I think if there would be a facilitator who would really facilitate these processes and bring them to reality, it would be really a great form of leveraging other resources.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We go to Mr. Ramey, just to give a perspective, then to Mr. Glavine and then to Ms. Raymond.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your presentation. I listened with interest to what you, sir, particularly, were saying regarding the lack of co-operation between the different levels of government. I have to concur that, historically speaking, I have noticed that. However, in some areas of the province - and I'll pick mine because that's where I am - I've tried to pretty much kill that off to the best extent I can. By that I mean I meet regularly with the mayor of the Town of Bridgewater and the mayor of the municipality in my region almost bi-weekly and sometimes more often. I also try to meet with the federal member every chance I get.

The mayor of the municipality was a former Liberal finance minister and I think everybody knows that the federal member is a Progressive Conservative member of Parliament. I care so little about any of that, that it's hard to describe it here. I just don't care what political stripe anybody is and I also don't care what level of government they represent. All I want to do - where I live anyway - is do whatever I possibly can to make that place a better place to live, work and play and I want the province to be like that too. To that extent, I think some of those barriers are being beaten back and I would be very shocked if the Mayor of the Municipality of Lunenburg had to ever come and say to

somebody, I wonder what Gary Ramey thinks about this because he would know. I'm hoping that's changing. At least it is in certain pockets.

The other thing is, I want to see the economy, in the area where I am, grow. I do know people are buzzing back and forth on the 103 everyday, because I travel that highway to come here, and it's getting busier and busier, but I think as we grow the rural economy - and it's slowly starting to take shape, and I mean slowly - some of that will stop as well.

I think you were in the room when I made my comments previously about the government departments in silos and all that sort of thing, where I might - and I wouldn't say, disagree because I don't necessarily disagree with you. I was very interested in what you both had to say. I'm not sure a separate entity is the answer and I'm sure you're not convinced at all that the way I'm looking at it is the answer either, but I was very interested in what you said. I am very interested in having government departments - as the deputy mentioned in response to my last question - tackle this together because I don't see it as a uni-dimensional problem. I see it as a multi-dimensional problem and, I guess, we may or may not agree on what the best solution is, but we know that we have a significant issue, and we know we're going to have to try to work together to solve it.

I am to a question now, sorry about all that, it was kind of long-winded, wasn't it? I think you mentioned Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec and New Brunswick as being, in your opinion, producing good models of dealing with this issue. Do you want to just pick whichever one you want and tell me what they do?

MS. JAHN: Yes, Newfoundland and Labrador, for instance, I know from our current counterpart in my day job - I'm the Program Director of Community Action Homelessness - we deliver in partnership with Service Canada, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, so I'm familiar with Newfoundland and Labrador from my counterparts there. I know that earlier Newfoundland adapted an affordable housing strategy, they realized right away that housing is an economic driver. Absolutely important, in order to attract people to Newfoundland and Labrador you need good housing, so it was quite a way from the economic boom. A lot of percentage was invested into housing and the renovation of housing.

All levels of government work really closely together as part of this affordable housing strategy, which was actually developed by all levels of government, asking all levels for their contribution over the next 15 years. I think this is really a key issue first and foremost, to have a strategy, which is really developed in consultation with all the players, so you have the buy-in and the commitment from everybody so it cannot be put use in isolation by one department and then hope that it will be adapted and supported by the rest of the province.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you. I was recently at a parliamentary conference and I was speaking to the Speaker of the House in Newfoundland and Labrador who told me prior to

becoming a have-province - which I think most people know Newfoundland is at this point in time - I was talking about roads. Roads are a big issue in rural Nova Scotia. Trust me on this, it's the truth. He said, prior to the boom he had a budget of \$80,000 for roads in his constituency and after the boom he had a budget of \$8 million for roads in his constituency. So there is a significant piece there related to the state in which Newfoundland and Labrador currently finds itself which I would describe as very good financially.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In terms of time, I'm thinking Mr. Glavine next and that will then take us to Ms. Raymond. I'm thinking that will be the only questions possible but could you both think about keeping yourselves relatively brief. I've seen other hands but I'm not sure we're going to get there.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Chairman, I just have one question and thank you for your presentation today. It's always good in this committee to have a different perspective on the same issue for sure. One of the areas that housing does provide some assistance and program help to is, of course, emergency repairs and seniors' home grants.

Now, in the riding that I represent, and generally in the Annapolis Valley, we have not only some of the oldest housing stock in the province in Atlantic Canada but actually in all of North America. A tremendous number of old farm homes. We know that the oldest baby boomer is 63 or 64. Like your anniversary date, you know, it depends on where you start from but we will have a tremendous wave of requirement to keep some of that old housing stock so that people can remain in their homes. We know that overall is the least costly and the least burden on a province that has challenges.

[10:45 a.m.]

So I'm just wondering how, you know, as you look at that particular area, how would you look at addressing some of that wave that's going to come at us from the perspective of how you see some restructure for housing in the province and specifically to that type of requirement?

MS. JAHN: Yes, I think the department is working with this issue probably on a daily issue on a daily basis and I don't envy them because Nova Scotia has a very old housing stock. Since there is no maintenance plan and not sufficient funds there to do these kinds of maintenance on a regular basis, you come up with a backlog of renovations and mold issues and they need to be addressed with limited resources.

That's why we think, for the future, it is really important to look at how do we build new construction - are we really careful in the products that are being used? Will it be energy efficient and do we have a maintenance plan over the next 25 years of their cycle? So are those maintained without any money? You can't really do anything in this regard and I see the stimulus package, it is terrific what was invested now but I know at the same

time for the co-ops and for other social housing and private sector housing as well, there are many families and individuals living really in devastated situations.

MR. GLAVINE: Just to follow up for 30 seconds, I have, and I will again this winter, visit homes where people are living just in two or three rooms of their home. They can't afford to heat and look after the entire home. So you're talking about a very real - I go into those homes and I'm quite overcome to be honest.

MS. JAHN: Right, yes, I can share this with you as well because this is our experience working in the community and seeing this. That's why I say it's not even fair to staff of Community Services because they see the same on a personal level and, of course, you want to do something. You have to really make excuses for something that is not your fault and everybody would like to address these situations and would like to invest and nobody is really able to do so. It's a very difficult situation for everybody working in the field.

MR. GLAVINE: I'll hold my fire.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have a very big topic and very little time. (Interruptions) I would like to turn the floor over for a moment at least to Ms. Raymond who has not yet had an opportunity to ask a question, recognizing that there are others who will not be able to.

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: Again, thank you for a very thoughtful presentation which really does look at sort of the broad perspective of housing as one of the things that is the absolute drivers of the shape of the province.

A couple of very quick questions or observations first. I represent an area which I have watched change from rural to central Halifax, in essence. One of the biggest changes in that has been increasing population mobility, as well as an increasing set of demands upon the actual properties and people continuing to live in ways that they always have. When we talk about the very high percentage of housing ownership in the province and we talk about the old housing stock, those things exist but they also exist in the context of a very changing or a very much changed regulatory environment - particularly since amalgamation and service exchange - which have served to silo-ize social services from physical services. I can see that this is some of the problem that one is dealing with.

Also, a couple of things. One of those is about the impact of large scale zoning and the impact which that has upon property taxes and the distribution of infrastructure in these very large planning units which we have now - well, I guess those would be the two things. Also, if you have a second afterward, if you could tell me just a little bit about the dates that I don't know, which would be the abolition of the housing department, the provincial land bank and the origins of those things.

MR. WANZEL: I've giving a seminar in February. (Laughter)

MS. RAYMOND: Well, if you have to choose one, the dates of the abolition of the land bank and the housing department.

MR. WANZEL: The housing department - I came across a number and I don't know whether it's true or not. Maybe Dan might be able to help us here. I think it was in the year 2000 that it ceased to be a ministry, but I may be wrong. The land bank was sold off prior to that.

MS. RAYMOND: Okay, and how old was the land bank? Was it of long duration?

MR. WANZEL: It was assembled in the 1950s and 1960s. There's a wonderful book on land banks in Canada that was written in the early 1970s by Peter Spurr, who worked at CMHC for a long time. He basically looked at the impact of land banks on housing prices. Specifically in Nova Scotia, the land bank was large enough and administered carefully enough that it actually reduced the cost of housing.

MS. RAYMOND: Do you have any kind of figures about the percentage of housing which meets the definition of affordable and how that has changed over the - well, maybe if we just choose amalgamation, for instance, and the blanket zoning as a measure date, has that broader zoning had any impact?

MR. WANZEL: I wouldn't want to answer it right off the top, but I'd be pleased to do a bit of digging and bring that back to you.

MS. RAYMOND: That would be great.

MR. WANZEL: CMHC uses a measure called "core need," and a core need measure, interestingly enough - I mean, despite what we've done over the last 10 or 15 years in Canada, core need continues more or less at the same total numbers. I would imagine, then, we really haven't dented it. We've done a lot but we haven't dented it, so we actually haven't even caught up with immigration, for example.

MS. RAYMOND: I'm going to give this to someone else.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we're done. We've used the available time and I want to thank you for your presentation and for your responses and for everybody's excellent observations and questions. Is there a last word, as presenters, that you might like to have?

MS. JAHN: Again, I'd like to thank everybody for listening to a new idea. I think some of these new ideas are actually old ideas so we are always grateful, as Grant said, with all his background and knowledge . . .

MR. WANZEL: It's because I'm so old. (Laughter)

MS. JAHN: Not really, just experienced. (Laughter) I think that's always very valuable to everybody, because we are not inventing anything new - just things that we have tested and tried in the past, and maybe we should take a closer look at these mechanisms. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for coming. Thank you, Community Services personnel, who are here for being here. We do have a bit more business to complete, so please don't - if you could keep your places, that would be great.

If you look at the section under Committee Business, there are a number of things that we probably need to look at. I would just like to comment for the record that our last meeting was actually a visit to the Kings Regional Rehabilitation Centre in Waterville. We had a good visit, I think, and were able to see a good part of the work that organization does. It might be helpful for us to have a conversation with each other at some point about what we observed there. I thought it was useful.

One thing that came out of that visit was that each of us who attended was given a copy of a book that's called *Our Voices - Hopes, Dreams and Struggles of Persons with Challenges* that was written collaboratively by residents of Kings Rehabilitation Centre and the students of Acadia University. Because we made that visit, I used my role as Chairman of the Committee to present a copy of the book to the Legislative Library so if anybody would like to see it, it's now in the library, just for your information.

The other thing I want to say and this is maybe not on the agenda, but there is a change in our practice that begins today. Presentations that we received today, like the Power Point and so on, will go on the Web site immediately after this meeting. That's a benefit to those people who are monitoring our work here and acting as observers and this comes about from our previous decision. Again, just a reminder on that.

Under correspondence, you will see that we have a request from the Nova Scotia School Board Association to appear. We also received a request, addressed to me and arrived yesterday, from the organization called Dress for Success Halifax, which has asked to appear before us.

Just to put things in context, we have our December meeting scheduled, we have what witnesses we had determined for January and for February, then we would hold a meeting to choose subsequent witnesses. I'm suggesting that maybe we defer these two requests to that meeting so we can fit them in rather than trying to - we set our priorities already, but if we could move those two requests to that date, maybe that would be appropriate. I'm putting that out to see how you feel about it. I'm seeing nods so okay, good, that's how we will handle that.

I guess the next item is when will our meeting in January be held? The date we would usually meet is January 4th, that is the first Tuesday after what would be a holiday break. Typically we would meet when the House is not in session, in the afternoon between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. I guess the question (Interruption) between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m., excuse me, not to confuse anyone, which I already did. Is meeting on January 4th acceptable or should we be searching for another date?

MR. GLAVINE: January 1st, what day of the week is it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Saturday, I think.

MS. RAYMOND: I think the 4th might be a little better - there will be some holiday on the Monday because Saturday is the first.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's right, so I think that's the reason it's on the agenda, to give us a chance to consider that.

MR. GLAVINE: What's the issue on the 11th, Kim, that you have a picture of from . . .

MS. KIM LANGILLE: Let's see here, the next Tuesday - on the 11th, Economic Development does meet in the morning, but we meet in the afternoons when the House isn't in session, which we're presuming it won't be in January. So that would work if we wanted to move it to the . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: So the afternoon would be free for this committee?

MS. LANGILLE: Yes, on the following Tuesday, the 11th.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the 11th then acceptable as an alternative, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Wonderful. Okay. I think the only other item on the agenda is that our next meeting is on December 7th and our witnesses will be dealing with child care issues.

Is there any other business that I have not understood? Hearing none, I declare the meeting adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.]