

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, October 2, 2012

Committee Room 1

Organizational Meeting

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Mr. Jim Morton (Chairman)
Ms. Becky Kent (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Sid Prest
Mr. Gary Burrill
Ms. Michele Raymond
Hon. Karen Casey
Ms. Kelly Regan
Mr. Keith Bain
Mr. Eddie Orrell

[Hon. Karen Casey was replaced by Ms. Diana Whalen.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2012

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call this meeting to order. The clocks in this facility continue to be at slightly different times, I think we might be five minutes past our start time.

My name is Jim Morton and I'm the chairman of the Standing Committee on Community Services. I'd like to welcome you all here and to welcome those people who are here observing today.

First, let's have some introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. You have an agenda in front of you which deals with the issues of setting the agenda and meeting schedules, and I would like to make a couple of comments as we get started with that. One is that when we met the last time, we did have a plan to have a discussion today on housing, with witnesses from Windsor as well as from the Department of Community Services.

It turned out that both of those possibilities just couldn't work with today's date. The deputy, in fact, who was planning to present today on housing strategies is in Montreal at a housing conference and the group from Windsor also had difficulty in being present. I decided that it would be best for us to meet in any case because we need to have a plan for the year ahead and to get that underway so we can perhaps avoid those problems in the future - we really didn't have anywhere else to go but that one topic.

The other item that might be worthwhile to add to your agenda so we don't forget to discuss it is, we received a letter from the Face of Poverty, which we took away last time and I think probably we should go back to that toward the latter part of our meeting, because that group was looking to hear from us about what we would be doing in the future.

The other thing I would like to say is, let's start with a meeting schedule while the House is in session because that will maybe help organize how many topics we need and so on.

The practice of this committee has been to meet while the House sits. We've adjusted our schedule to meet in the mornings between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. as opposed to the afternoons as we're doing at the moment. I guess I'm interested in the will of the committee as to whether you're willing to continue that arrangement or whether you would rather see something else. Mr. Bain.

MR. KEITH BAIN: I agree, Mr. Chairman, 9:00 a.m. is fine.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm seeing nods. Ms. Kent.

MS. BECKY KENT: Just to be clear, we'd still be on the first Tuesday, is that correct?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, we might need to do a little bit of fine-tuning around that, but I think typically the first Tuesday. I think the first Tuesday of January is January 1st.

MS. KENT: Okay, so we'll have to adjust that one. The House won't be sitting either. Well, maybe - maybe not. Not on January 1st.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So Ms. Kent is willing to be here on New Year's Day so long as it is in the afternoon. (Laughter) I think we've got agreement that we'll continue to meet.

That brings us to setting the agenda and selection of witnesses and you've found in front of you today a list of possible witness ideas, which has been collected by each caucus and brought forward. As you know, we went away from the last meeting creating the opportunity - at least for those who wanted it - to review this with their various caucuses.

I think I'd like to propose, as we go forward in selecting, that we maybe use a rotational basis that would start with the government caucus, go to the Liberal caucus, go to the Progressive Conservative caucus and then around again. Given what we've just agreed to, I think that gives us eight possible topics to get us into and including June 2013. Is that an acceptable procedure? I'm seeing nods again.

I will go to my colleagues on the NDP caucus and ask for the initial suggestion.
Mr. Burrill.

MR. GARY BURRILL: Mr. Chairman, I would like to put forward for the first subject in this roster, the Face of Poverty and for us to hear about their concerns and their work.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm not sure that we need motions on these. Is there any discussion? Okay, then we will select that as the first item and that will take us to the Liberal caucus.

MS. KELLY REGAN: For our first one, we'd like to have Claudia Jahn from Community Action on Homelessness.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion? I'm seeing none so I think that means that would be our second selection.

Again, I would like to make a comment about this. I know one of the reasons for selecting witnesses in advance is to have a list from which to work. I guess I understand there might need to be some flexibility in which actual month a witness would appear, but we might try to take them in the order for which they have been selected. Would that be reasonable? We can review this as we go forward, of course. Okay.

Let's move to the Progressive Conservative caucus.

MR. BAIN: Mr. Chairman, we've like move to number one the Department of Community Services, Early Childhood Development.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, so that would be our third selection; any discussion on that? Hearing none, then I think that will - we're moving on quite nicely.

Let's move back to the NDP caucus.

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: Mr. Chairman, I would like to suggest that we bring in as witnesses the Department of Community Services to speak about the housing strategy.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, any discussion about that? Thank you very much.

The Liberal caucus.

MS. REGAN: The Elizabeth Fry Society.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion? The Elizabeth Fry Society is proposed. I'm seeing no discussion - okay, good.

The Progressive Conservative caucus.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: The Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion? I hear agreement all around, I think.

For the final selection, the NDP caucus.

MS. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to put forward that we bring in the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm seeing nods. Any disagreement or comment about that? I'm seeing none.

I think that gives us our list of eight. Is that what you've got, Kim?

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): I have seven.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, we have one more, I think. So we go to the Liberals, is that correct?

MS. REGAN: That's right.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Three for the NDP and two for each of the other caucuses, that is seven.

MS. KENT: No, that would be three for the Liberal caucus as well. (Interruption) Well, in fact, Mr. Chairman, what I was thinking, knowing that we have potential for eight but also in the interest of the rotation and the fair practice, that offering to the Liberals and then even one more for the Progressive Conservatives offers that alternative, should something come along that says we just can't get anyone, we certainly have that extra.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, so that brings us back to the Liberal caucus.

MS. REGAN: Early Intervention N.S.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion? Agreed.

The Progressive Conservative caucus for one more.

MR. BAIN: Easy choice, Entrepreneurs With Disabilities.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion on that? Then hearing none, that gives us nine, I guess, to work with.

MS. KENT: Can I ask a question of clarity, just to be clear, for the record or just for my consideration? In the list that we've gone through in that priority, we would have assigned November, December, January as such and the goal would be to request that list in that order and then come back to the committee if at any point one of them is not available? Or would you just be automatically bumping them forward? Let's say January's is not available, would it be an assumption for the clerk to then bump the list forward or would it be that we would have another conversation?

MS. REGAN: That's what I would think. I don't want to see us coming back and wasting another meeting for us to sit around and discuss what we're going to do. I think we want to be hearing witnesses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right, I agree.

MS. REGAN: I leave that to the clerk's discretion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm seeing some nods. Any disagreement with that? I think the understanding that I guess I had as we were going through this is we will start with the order in which the selections were made. If that can work out, that's wonderful. If there are complications in that schedule, the clerk will have discretion, maybe in consultation with the chairman, to work out where we go next but try to respect the integrity of our decisions here.

MS. WHALEN: Just one comment on the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, if they're going to speak about their alternative budget, when you phone them, there may be a time that's best for that. You are booking now for the entire year, really; you've got nine months there if everybody comes in. So I just make that comment that you might find that if they're going to speak about the budget, it might be best to do that in, I don't know, March or April; something like that. That's only because on the NDP list, it does suggest that's what they were coming to discuss.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And I guess in the kind of rotation of things that might take us, roughly there, roughly.

MS. WHALEN: It may. I would think when they're contacted they may have some preference so I just raise that today. I think the others are less time-sensitive in the sense that if they are changed it won't make an impact.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any other comments about scheduling? The only other thing that's kind of left hanging is we had planned - I haven't had any discussion with the clerk about this, but we've had discussions with the group in Windsor that we had been planning to meet with today. They assumed they were going to be able to come at some point but weren't here. I'm not quite sure what we do with that. Is there any understanding that we have with that group in a formal sense?

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): Not really, other than the committee approved them to come in. I guess it's up to the committee to make a decision further.

MS. KENT: What has been communicated to them?

MS. LANGILLE: The last conversation that I had with them was that I would be back in touch with them.

MS. KENT: Which group is it?

MS. LANGILLE: The Town of Windsor has an affordable housing committee and they were going to come and talk about what sort of initiatives they are trying to develop on that issue in their area, is my understanding.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Whalen.

MS. WHALEN: I'm just wondering, if they intended to be here today they were going to come with people from DCS, the deputy minister?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That was our plan.

MS. WHALEN: So that was the plan or the suggestion for today, so could they not be invited as sort of a subset of the meeting on housing strategy? It's up to, of course, the NDP caucus which have chosen that subject.

MS. RAYMOND: Actually, I'd be very happy to hear an approach from the municipal end of things to complement that, so yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Given that, I know one of the things the DCS would talk about in terms of housing would be a strategy and by that point, I guess, there will be quite a bit of community consultation which might have some influence on community groups as well. So I guess I'm hearing there is a kind of willingness to co-locate those two witnesses? Okay, wonderful.

Finally, or almost finally, that takes us back to the Face of Poverty - the letter which I think has been placed in front of you. I guess the suggestion I would make - and I have

had some conversation with representatives of the Face of Poverty following receipt of the letter - is that it would perhaps be appropriate to respond to this letter with a formal reply, indicating what we plan to do over the coming months, so that organization can perhaps organize itself to be present here to monitor our processes. Are you all okay with having a letter of that sort prepared? Okay, great, thank you.

The only other item of business that I have to deal with here is just confirming the date of the next meeting, which would be November 6th at 9:00 a.m., in this room. Is there any additional business?

Hearing none, I declare the meeting adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 1:18 p.m.]