

HANSARD

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COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, January 8, 2013

Committee Room 1

Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia

Ms. Claudia Jahn,
Programme Facilitator

Mr. Jim Graham,
Programme Facilitator

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2013

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is 1:00 p.m. and I am going to call the meeting to order. We have a quorum. My name is Jim Morton; I'm the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Community Services.

Before we begin, one of the tasks that I have been asked to deal with each time is to remind all those people in the room who perhaps aren't typically here that in the unlikely event that there should be a fire or some other difficulty, the way to exit the building is through the stairwells adjacent to the elevators. When we exit the building we've been asked to gather in that kind of event at Parade Square in front of City Hall and to remain there until further instructions are offered. I hope you don't need that information but in the unlikely event that you did, that's how to handle it.

I'd like to begin - I guess I will say as we begin that our witnesses today are from the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia. I will ask them to introduce themselves in a moment, but before I do that, I would like to ask the members of the committee to introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much and Happy New Year to everyone as we begin a new calendar year. As I've said, our witnesses today are from the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia. We have two representatives present. I think the way I'll approach this is I'll ask them to introduce themselves and then I think you have a presentation ready to go, so please go ahead.

MS. CLAUDIA JAHN: Hello, everybody, and thank you very much for inviting me. My name is Claudia Jahn, I'm the program facilitator of the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, and my colleague is Jim Graham.

It's very nice to see some of you again and meeting new members. We thank you for the opportunity to once again provide you with an update of the work of our organization and to present some practical recommendations that hopefully will improve the situation in regard to homelessness and affordable housing.

The mission of the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia is to promote and support access to clean, safe, decent and affordable housing throughout Nova Scotia. Since 1990, AHANS pursued this goal through supporting research, facilitating dialogue, improving policy and programs, and promoting active and respectful co-operation and collaboration between all sectors.

As a social, economic and cultural good, housing impacts the lives of all Nova Scotians in countless ways. Arguably then, concerted action in the production, deployment, financing, maintenance, and management of housing goes a long way to addressing the government's three stated goals to bring us back to balance, grow the economy, and create better health outcomes.

As of August 2012, AHANS has been contracted by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to administer the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (Interruption) Oh, it should be just here. So AHANS has been contracted to administer the Homelessness Partnering Strategy with this allocation of \$4.6 million to March 2014. The program provides funding for projects that address homelessness in HRM.

Over the last 13 years, HPS has proven itself as a best-practice model for community-based program delivery in 62 communities across the country. Its success demonstrates the value and the capacity of community entities to administering such programs.

AHANS takes its mission in representing all parts of the province very seriously and has applied to become the community entity for the rural allocation of the HPS program as well. Previous AHANS province-wide consultations have confirmed that any strategy has to be able to respond to places as diverse as New Waterford, Antigonish, Pictou, Wolfville, Inverness and so on. As a community entity for both the rural and urban allocation, AHANS will be well positioned in developing place-specific housing solutions. Our work is guided by data that defines baselines and measures with science.

Key data tools are the *Health and Homelessness in Halifax Report*, the *Halifax Report Card on Homelessness*, and the *Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Plan*. I've got copies of each for everyone, so I can leave them behind for everybody who is interested in these.

The second edition of the Health and Homelessness report that we released in November 2012 - some of you might have seen it - aims to once again stimulate discussion, generate intervention that will reduce homelessness, and ultimately improve the health and lives of the most vulnerable population in our city.

Our existing health care system works at many levels very well, but its rigid structure lacks the ability to take care of the homeless. It simply does not have the flexibility to work in the context of people's lives, which is extremely unstable and chaotic: people who lack a home base, a phone, transportation, and the financial means for prescription drugs and quite often family support. Therefore, community-based, out-of-the-box services are required to fill these gaps.

The comprehensive data sets and detailed profiles of the first edition were instrumental in the development of a cost-benefit analysis in 2009. Thanks to the concerted efforts of the Department of Community Services, shelter and service providers, and private landlords, over 240 people were able to move from the shelter system directly into private-sector supportive units, just within eight months. So this is a demonstration of how a community-led initiative can result in real change.

The second instrumental data tool we work with is the Halifax Report Card on Homelessness in HRM. This document indicates the current state of homelessness using indicators that monitor changes in homelessness over time. The data supports the notion that providing a variety of affordable housing and support options is the key to moving people out of shelters and the prevention of homelessness in itself.

In 2011, this data tool - the report card - indicates for 2011 there were 1,973 individual homeless in HRM, just in Halifax. This relates to 70,311 used shelter beds. Each homeless individual pays a very high price in health, well-being and quality of life. As well, we as a community pay a very high price. As we have demonstrated in our last cost-benefit analysis, homelessness poses not only a burden on the Department of Community Services, but to the Department of Justice and predominantly the Department of Health and Wellness, with 75 per cent of the cost burden.

The total cost - including public service use such as prison, emergency home visits and ambulance use - amounted, in 2009, to \$27.4 million for HRM. Using very conservatively the same formula and the same cost, which was \$15,900 per person, per year, a total cost of homelessness for 2011 was \$31 million for Halifax.

Over the years, concerted efforts to address homelessness have been made by all levels of government, service and shelter providers, the faith community, and countless

volunteers who support the homeless. The homeless numbers would have been even higher without the existing and newly implemented services and programs such as Halifax Housing Help, the Housing Support Worker Program, and newly developed supportive housing units.

As much as research data is helpful for our work for policy and program development, it easily lets us all forget that behind each and every statistic stands a living, breathing person. The women and men who were gracious enough to share their stories with us - and there were over 148 individuals that we interviewed - they have placed their trust in us so that AHANS ensures - the shakers - that we all work collaboratively with you - the movers - to effect positive, life-changing advancements.

We all know there are better and more cost-effective ways to address homelessness so we are advising government to collaborate with AHANS and the community-based organizations on moving individuals not only out of shelters, but out of poverty.

With that I invite you to take a look at all these data sets and I would like to pass the microphone to my colleague, Jim Graham. Thank you very much.

MR. JIM GRAHAM: Thank you, Claudia. I'm going to just speak a little bit to the recently announced provincial housing strategy and talk about community perspective on that consultation and that announcement.

In 2011, AHANS published its report, *Housing Nova Scotians: A Fresh Look*. In that report were two recommendations that came from its travels across the province, looking at the depth and breadth of housing need. One of those recommendations was to have an affordable housing consultation province-wide that looked at a full range of affordability and also a full range of tenure, whether that be ownership, rental, co-op, shared equity options, lease-purchase options. The other recommendation in that 2011 report was that this consultation be overseen by a secretariat, a body made up of government, community, and the private sector. Some 18 months later the Minister of the Department of Community Services did announce a consultation and has spent October and November travelling around the province making her presentation, and I've seen it a number of times.

AHANS welcomes this announcement and we have already expressed our support for this directly to Minister Peterson-Rafuse. I'm not going to repeat the presentation, I'm not going to go through her presentation with you, but the four pillars that the consultation rests on are around home ownership, affordable housing, keeping seniors in their own homes, and those pillars are fine, they're absolutely fine as a way to start. The principles under which this consultation is undertaken and the way in which they'd like to move this strategy forward is fine as well. It talks about not being able to do this by itself; it talks about co-operation with the private sector, with the non-profit sector, and with the other two levels of government. That's fine, as well, you can't argue with that.

At AHANS we're not naïve; it has taken a long time for the housing situation in this province to get to where it is. There are extensive and long-standing needs, there are limited resources and it's going to take a lot of time. We think, however, that there are things that need to be done now to put this on a solid footing and to build on the tools that are available. The province has two very valuable tools right now in the legislation, in the Housing Development Corporation Act and, in fact, the Social Housing Agreement. Both of those provide opportunity and there are ways in which they can get more out of what they have.

One thing that's really important, I think, for the department to take under advisement, and I'll paraphrase the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland*: Any road at all will get you there if you don't know where you're going. So it's all very well to talk about four pillars, to talk about these initiatives, but the strategy has to be knowledge-based and outcome-focused. If it's not, they'll be by themselves.

Private sector, non-profit sector - we all work to budgets, we all work to plans; we don't work in a vacuum. The strategy needs to have that kind of framework and to build that framework; it's the province that has to do the research. I think there are a lot of unanswered questions. There are a lot of demands on resources. What is the quantum of deferred maintenance and capital improvement needed in 12,000 public housing units? How much money is it to bring that portfolio back where it should be? What's the extent of repairs needed to keep low-income seniors in their own houses? If that's a pillar, what's the target? How much money is that going to take?

When we talk about extending home ownership opportunities to low-income families, how many? Where? What is the measure of affordability?

A good, hard look at 60 years of public housing in terms of its outcomes, what has it accomplished - good, bad or indifferent? We don't know things. We don't know what we don't know. I think government has to undertake that research so that the strategy that it builds can have defined targets that everybody can see, and we all know in this new collaborative environment what it is we're working towards.

There are some things I think the department can do very quickly to demonstrate that it is serious in its desire to put this in place. One is: I think it can put more money into the housing system by stopping the current practice of subsidizing income assistance rents in public housing. People in public housing on income assistance do not pay the shelter component; they pay less. There are millions of dollars a year not in the housing system that would go to repairs, can go to investing in repairs to seniors' houses. That's a really easy thing for them to do; it's something that they should do.

I think the Housing staff of the government needs to start to participate actively with the sector. They need to join the HPS Community Advisory Board in HRM, they need to engage home builders, they need to engage with the Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia. They need to participate at those tables to understand what's

going on in those worlds so that they can apply what they want to do much more effectively. They need to look at different ways of delivering service.

For the past decade, HRSDC and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy have used third parties to deliver the program. They have established principles and some broad goals and objectives, and allowed communities to meet those. Once upon a time the residential repair program, RRAP - I don't know if you're familiar with RRAP - was community delivered. It wasn't delivered by civil servants; it was delivered by community, funded by CMHC. I think it's time to go back to a different kind of service delivery model. I think there are advantages on all sides that make that an attractive option.

The recently announced Community Interest Companies legislation is really interesting and it looks like it has promise, but I think government has to realize that - if I can use a Monopoly analogy - the private sector is on Pacific Avenue and the non-profit is back at Baltic Avenue. They need to think about ways in which they can invest in non-profit, community-based capacity to take advantage of that. Once upon a time CMHC ran a program called CROP, which was the Community Resource Organization Program - I think. The whole purpose of that program was to build capacity in community so the community had the skills in which they could actually develop and deliver. The province needs to look at that and try to find a way to bring some of that back in.

As I said, I've attended Minister Peterson-Rafuse's presentations a couple of times and I do not, for a minute, doubt her passion for this. I've talked to senior staff in Housing and I don't doubt for a minute that they really do desire kind of a different path. It has been 30 years since there was any kind of direction in Housing in this province.

I think there's a very great danger that Housing will do tomorrow what it did today because it's what they did yesterday. I spent 30 years in the civil service; for those of you who don't know, I should say that. The civil service is hard to move and significant change is very hard to implement. I seriously believe they need to take some direct steps quickly, to show that they are serious.

In Kentville, as the tables were presenting, somebody wound up his table presentation by saying to the minister: Beware, because culture eats strategy for breakfast, and that is so true. AHANS believes there are great possibilities here, we just need to see - and I hate to use this phrase - we do need to see the government, the DCS, walking this walk and not just talking. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Jim, and thank you, Claudia. I'm expecting there will be some questions that I wish will open up discussion further. I think I saw a nod from Ms. Regan to begin.

MS. KELLY REGAN: Thank you very much, Claudia and Jim, for coming in today and making your presentation. I have some questions but a few things were sort of raised for me along the way. You talked about "secretariat oversight." In this consultation,

did you have participation - did you participate in crafting what the consultation would look like? Are you part of what you would like to see as a secretariat, AHANS?

MR. GRAHAM: No, there is no secretariat now.

MS. REGAN: I understand that but would you be part of one? Do you absolutely see yourselves as being crucial to that?

MR. GRAHAM: Well, let me say that if we were asked, we would be so pleased to say yes.

MS. REGAN: But in terms of crafting what this consultation looked like, were you involved in that?

MR. GRAHAM: A group of people were invited to DCS to see the minister go through her presentation for the very first time and some suggestions were made about the way in which the information should be presented. But there was no consultation about what are the four pillars or what are the principles, let's put it that way.

MS. REGAN: When we talked about the principles on the slide there and you said there are limited resources and it will take time to achieve, I guess what I keep looking back at is my concern about strategies like jobsHere - there are no targets. So you can say we have this fabulous strategy but if there are no targets, how do you know that you've actually achieved what you set out to do if you don't know where you - oh my gosh, it's just like the Cheshire cat. So how do you know that you've accomplished what you were supposed to, if there are no goals?

MR. GRAHAM: We agree.

MS. REGAN: Okay, all right. In terms of other questions, when you administer the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in both urban and rural Nova Scotia, what do you look for in terms of project criteria? Do you have to fulfill a quota to house persons with disabilities or seniors or families or anything?

MS. JAHN: I can answer that. This is exactly guided by a strategy, so each community develops a community plan and this community plan is based on data. For instance, if we see there are 1,900 individuals homeless, we look at - what are their needs? Then we set the targets for two years by identifying - first priority would be any kind of housing support or shelter support for men, then families, that's how it was done two years ago, and then the amount is allocated for each priority.

The Community Advisory Board then issues a call for proposal and AHANS will review and pre-select and the Community Advisory Board will then give recommendations to AHANS which program will be funded. This is really community plan and delivery at its finest, that's what we really see as what works because on that table on the Community

Advisory Board there are representatives from the homelessness and shelter providers, First Voice individuals, all levels of government, and service providers. So these are really the experts in the field who can identify the needs for the next two years, they can set the targets and the priorities.

MS. REGAN: Did you get to meet with the Department of Community Services to present your research to them, you know, the things that you've been putting out? Were you able to meet with DSC to say, look, this is what's going on?

MS. JAHN: We do this on a project basis so there is a seat on the Community Advisory Board. This is for Community Services and other departments; it's always open for the city as well. We have consultation on projects; for instance, the seven Housing Support workers, that was the first partnership development that was very successful and is a demonstration as a pilot - again, how it should work.

We, as the non-profit sector, having all this data, having all this on-the-ground knowledge, we came up with this pilot idea, how about we move people out by working with the private sector. We established the relationship with Killam and all investment property owners of Nova Scotia, prepared the proposal for the department and then got the approval, so this is how it should work. There are many more ideas on our desk, of course, so we are working currently on a social enterprise model where we say how about the people who have moved now successfully into these units and are ready for work placements, so that's why we would like to initiate another pilot project.

MS. REGAN: So right now we have about 1,800 families waiting for public housing here in Nova Scotia. What would be the first steps that you would recommend that the government take to begin reducing that list?

MS. JAHN: Of course, there is long term and short term. So long term is definitely setting targets on an annual basis of how many affordable housing units will be developed every year, the areas, the sizes of the units needs to be determined all based on the data. Short term, there is a vacancy rate in this city from private units and as well public housing stock. The public housing stock most predominantly due to maintenance and repair needs, so this has to be looked at.

Our housing stock is a very small one, only 6 per cent of the housing units in Nova Scotia are publicly owned; the rest is really owned by the private developers that are doing their jobs very well, they are developers who can develop very quickly, cost effectively, but their business is to make business, so they're never in the business of providing affordable housing. That's why our recommendation from AHANS was always to have housing stock either in public hands or in the hands of non-profit housing providers. This way you ensure that it will be affordable in the long term.

MR. GRAHAM: If I could just interject there. The point about the public housing units and deferred maintenance, the fact that income assistance recipients are not paying

the shelter component is leaving - if I did a rough calculation in my head I would say there is \$3 million a year that's not going into public housing operations. You can imagine what \$3 million a year would do in terms of just rolling units over, keeping them refurbished and keeping them occupied, that's a significant amount of money.

MS. JAHN: Kelly, coming back to the short-term solutions, this all seems like a huge problem and where do you start? But if you really chip away at it - for instance, looking at these units, how many are there? That would be the first question, to me - how many units are there currently vacant due to maintenance issues? We learned, for instance, just last week that in some co-ops, right on top of the (inaudible) for one property manager, there are 30 units vacant for a couple of years now due to maintenance. This would cost \$900,000 to bring them back on-line. If government could even provide a loan to repair these units, 30 families could be housed within three months.

These are the kinds of actions that can happen. We see more and more that there is a lot of that with the existing resources - we all have limited resources and nobody is expecting really an injection, any capital injection, but there is a lot we can do with what we have, as we demonstrated with the 240 people who were moved out. If we look at the \$31 million for one year in housing people in the shelter, I'm sure that most of us here in this room could come up with better solutions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Regan, do you have a final question in this round?

MS. REGAN: Thank you very much for letting me go again. We were talking about the responsibility for the housing strategy should be within the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation, I think, previously. Now here in Nova Scotia the chairman of that corporation is, in fact, the minister and the CEO is the deputy minister. There isn't actually a board. Other provinces have actually appointed boards. I'm just wondering if you could speak to that, whether you think that's a good idea and whether it would be more accountable to actually have a board rather than two people being responsible for this.

MR. GRAHAM: I'm not sure there is anywhere - I can't think of anywhere else where public housing is administered quite the way it is administered in Nova Scotia. Normally it's board-based and normally it's community board-based in some fashion or another. Sometimes it's with the municipality; many places in the United States are that way and in England. But it's almost always community-based and at arm's length. Here, for some reason, residential property management seems to be a core government function and I'm not sure why. Certainly from the perspective of AHANS, a community-based board, a board, board-based management makes a lot more sense than the system we have here.

MS. REGAN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Burrill and then Mr. Bain.

MR. GARY BURRILL: Ms. Jahn, I just wanted to go back to what you were talking about - this business of having applied to become the community entity for the rural component. Would you mind explaining a little bit about what that is - the rural allocation - and what kinds of things it might mean if this selection happened?

MS. JAHN: Yes, certainly. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy is a federal funding program initiated in 2000. Initially, Nova Scotia had only the allocation for HRM at \$3.4 million. As of 2011, there was a separate allocation set aside for rural homelessness. Of course, this was after the federal department realized that the issues in rural areas are quite different from the urban homelessness issue, so there is approximately \$400,000 set aside for rural Nova Scotia.

Again, there is a Community Advisory Board established, consisting of shelter and service providers, government - all levels of government - the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, and others. It was then identified that there should be - instead of Service Canada administering the program as it happened in the past, this will change now to a community-based delivery model - the so-called entity. For AHANS this will mean hopefully by February this year we will be the entity, we will administer this program, we will support the rural Community Advisory Board and their work, we will issue calls for proposals.

Most important to us is, we will work closely and support any proponent because we learned from AHANS, from travelling across the province so many times and having a good understanding of the needs there, that we have to build the capacity of the non-profit organization; they know what to do, they are doing a lot of stuff without government funding and really struggling to do that and they could really be part of the solution so that's why we would like to support them, we would like to go back to all these communities, bring people together in a round table and explore practical projects.

MR. BURRILL: Does the word "rural" in this setting mean everything that is not HRM?

MS. JAHN: Exactly.

MR. GRAHAM: Or CBRM.

MR. BURRILL: I see, okay, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Burrill. Mr. Bain and then Ms. Raymond.

MR. KEITH BAIN: I just want to pick up on a statement you made, the federal program that you referred to has become more of a community-based program, is that what you're saying, whereas the provincial program is more government-based?

MS. JAHN: Yes.

MR. BAIN: You said earlier that we should close the gap between government and community and I guess with reference to what you just said, how do we close that gap? It's not just something that's going to happen, so how do you get there, how do you close that gap between government-based versus community-based?

MS. JAHN: Jim, would you like to start?

MR. GRAHAM: Sure, thank you. There are some easy ways to start and the first thing I would say is whatever way in which you decide to deliver your programs there are going to be some things you need to overcome, it doesn't matter what way you pick, there are always little issues to overcome. Right now there is a part of what DCS delivers through the civil service, it's called the Shelter Enhancement Program. All of the organizations in the Province of Nova Scotia who are eligible for shelter enhancement funding are also eligible for HPS funding. Here we are in community delivering HPS money for goals and objectives, and organizations with those goals and objectives can also apply to the DCS for shelter enhancement money.

I think there are real advantages for everybody if the Shelter Enhancement Program was delivered by the same folks that deliver the HPS money; they're the same clients. I don't want to name names, but the people that we're dealing with are the people that the civil service is dealing with. If you want the community's opinion on which is a better delivery model you can ask them - I know what the answer is going to be.

RRAP was delivered in the community. For anybody who's old enough to remember prior to 1991 or 1992, RRAP - Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program - money for rental properties and for homeowners to fix up their houses was delivered at a community level. There were close to 20 delivery agents in the Province of Nova Scotia delivering that program - there are none, it's civil service-driven and it doesn't have to be that way.

Here's an analogy. Here is what happens to community - and I've used this analogy before - let's suppose you live in a community and let's suppose your high school dropout rate is on the upper end of the bell curve, so your high school dropout rate is really high and as a community you want to address that. To address that you need to deal with education issues, you need to deal potentially with justice issues, you need to deal with health and welfare and nutrition issues, you need to deal with housing issues.

You have no way in community to actually access funding to achieve better outcomes. What you have to do as community is you have to figure out who has got what program for what purpose and how do I access that and make that program fit into my community's need, which is I just want the damn dropout rate down from 20 to 10.

You cannot go anywhere and apply for that funding, you can't. You can't because the need is diverse - and I left out transportation. The more that you can get those kinds of service delivery programs rooted in a community and driven by community, because some

other community may have a totally - they don't have a high school dropout rate that's that high, they have some other issue. Maybe there's way too many seniors living in poor housing, I don't know, but it's the same problem for every community - trying to figure out how many different places do I have to go to get what piece of money to fit into this puzzle, to get my outcome.

Government delivers programs, they don't deliver outcomes and it's outcomes that community wants.

MR. BAIN: I think that was a very good answer because you are correct in saying that community needs change from community to community.

MR. GRAHAM: Absolutely.

MR. BAIN: Therefore, it can't just be a blanket approach to everything for things to happen.

I guess I want to go back to when the strategy came forward and the consultation. Was your association asked - I think Ms. Regan asked this already - were you asked to make some suggestions as to how the strategy could go forward? Did you have the opportunity to provide material and information that you had at your disposal that would certainly help in bringing the strategy forward?

I know you did say that you made a suggestion as to how things should be presented. Were you satisfied with the way it was presented? That's a big approach to that question, I know.

MR. GRAHAM: No. Certainly AHANS was not consulted on the consultation content. We weren't consulted on the principles or we weren't consulted on the four pillars. Just the fact that it started is fine. Over time, those pillars will change, that's the nature of how these things go forward, and the principles may get massaged.

The important thing is they've been around the province, they've made the presentation, they've collected a lot of feedback and a lot of very good feedback from folks. Hopefully that's going to be distilled and then hopefully they're going to come up with a process that is going to engage everybody in how we go forward. I can't stress enough the need that this whole thing be knowledge-based and outcome-focused. It has to be or it will just be more talking heads.

MS. JAHN: I would like to add something to that point because it's important, your question, to see even though of course we are satisfied that the strategy is happening but in your regard, how it could have been improved.

The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia did two consultations, province-wide consultations. Then we put forward a report and requested basically that

there be a strategy developed and requested that AHANS could be a key player in that. So AHANS anticipated to be the secretariat-in-waiting. It's a 20-year-old organization with all the knowledge and the trust in the community.

Actually, our vision at that time was that we could develop a provincial housing and homelessness strategy in close collaboration with the province. That would have been really a vision that would be much better coming to community already with a non-profit organization representing the non-profit sector together with government. I think that would have sent - or still could send - a strong signal, and opens really the opportunity for all sectors to work together and to have the buy-in. This is really important. If you develop any kind of strategy in isolation, you will never have the buy-in because you need the non-profit sector; you need the faith community, the volunteer sector, the private sector. Everybody needs to get excited about it in order to make change.

We have seen this across the country with some communities that developed a 10-year plan to end homelessness. There was always a strong buy-in from the whole community, the whole city, and then they surpassed their goals. In comparison, if you develop any kind of strategy in isolation with some numbers and some targets and nobody knows about it, nobody feels strongly about it, this will just end up on a shelf somewhere. So that's why the Affordable Housing Association had hoped to do this in collaboration.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just to speak a moment to Mr. Graham's point about feedback from the consultation process, all of that information is posted at this point on the Government of Nova Scotia Web site, just in case anybody in the room might be interested. It's there, I think, in its unprocessed form - yes, it's there.

Ms. Raymond and then we will go to Mr. Orrell.

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you for coming in to present. I know we've talked many times over the years. Probably people around this table are tired of hearing me say that I represent an area which is really quite dynamic in terms of housing patterns and homelessness as well. I'll just restrict myself to a couple of questions.

Something that you mentioned is that 6 per cent of the Nova Scotia housing stock is public. How does that compare with other provinces and does that include non-profit owned or do you literally mean government owned?

MS. JAHN: This is non-profit, public housing stock and it's very low compared to other provinces. If you look nationally and internationally, any kind of housing crisis and affordable housing issue can only be solved by having a strong public housing stock and non-profit housing stock because it can never be done by the private sector.

MS. RAYMOND: I guess that's one of the things that I do have concern with because, as I say, I represent a very dynamic area and particularly since the greater concentration on urbanization of the last 15 years and the amalgamated municipalities and

so on, one finds that zoning does dictate where various forms of housing can be found and so we're looking at this.

I find myself dealing with a lot of what I call hidden homelessness. It's probably not what you would call hidden homelessness; I would actually say it's virtual homelessness because it is people who are being provided housing at public cost in private-sector housing. I am not quite sure - and maybe you can explain - why it is so difficult to look at quality control, at imposing quality control, when, in fact, taxpayers are subsidizing the provision of housing. You mentioned that a lot of public housing is, in fact, out of commission because it's not up to scratch. There's an awful lot of private-sector housing that is not out of commission, but it probably should be and it's not up to scratch, and people are making choices which actually render them homeless because this is not acceptable. What is the big block with having quality control over housing provided at public expense in private accommodations?

MR. GRAHAM: Because it's a program. The simple answer is because it's a program and so the acquisition of rent supplement stock is driven by program rules.

MS. RAYMOND: It's not even rent supplement stock oftentimes - simple shelter allowances.

MR. GRAHAM: But it's driven by what is cheapest. It's not outcome driven. It doesn't look at transportation needs; it doesn't look at school needs. It just looks at the housing shelter component of that part of it.

MS. JAHN: I would like to add that it's definitely a need and demand, right? So if you have a shortage, you don't have a choice, so that's why everybody can get away with it, the public sector and the private sector. If your tenants don't have choices, they just have to accept wherever they are. That's what I see for the private sector and the public sector, that people are living in unacceptable housing conditions in the city and in the province. We have heard from housing inspectors conditions that were Third World country conditions.

MS. RAYMOND: Another question I have is - I'm not sure if you know at what time the responsibility for building inspection became a purely municipal one and whether you have noticed any impact on homelessness rates since that time; in other words, since there became a division between the provision of housing and the assurance of quality of housing?

MS. JAHN: It causes a problem in this regard which I just learned last week because we had some issues with rooming houses. All the provincially-owned public housing stock doesn't fall under the municipal laws so there are no inspections. I couldn't call anybody, if I see in Uniacke Square some issues in public housing or in the public housing stock, so that is definitely an issue. There is nobody to call on so tenants don't have anybody to call, except metro housing authorities.

MS. RAYMOND: You just mentioned rooming houses, so these are not provincially owned, this is private stock?

MS. JAHN: It was in this content when the issue was discussed.

MR. GRAHAM: In my memory it has always been the municipality doing the property inspection. Fire marshal certainly is provincial but just in terms of building conditions, the municipality.

MS. JAHN: Not for the public housing stock.

MS. RAYMOND: I'm not sure about that but anyway, okay. Maybe we can talk later. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Raymond. Mr. Orrell and then we'll go to Ms. Kent although she's not here to hear that.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you very much for your presentation. You stated earlier that the consultations throughout the province were done in October and November.

MR. GRAHAM: I think so.

MR. ORRELL: Is that adequate time to do a presentation on such an important issue throughout the province? How many presentations were done in that time frame? Would you know offhand?

MS. JAHN: Seven.

MR. GRAHAM: There was one in Cape Breton, there was just one in metro, at the Waterfront Campus at NSCC, there was one in Kentville, there was one in Yarmouth, there was one in Truro and there was one in Antigonish.

MS. RAYMOND: Another one in Spryfield, next week.

MR. GRAHAM: Is there? Ok.

MR. ORRELL: So seven, eight?

MR. GRAHAM: Whatever that adds up to and for three hours, I guess.

MR. ORRELL: So would that give us an accurate picture of - we were talking rural housing a little while ago and if one was done in Cape Breton and it was done in the Sydney area, which I assume is where it would have been done because the population . . .

MR. GRAHAM: There was one done in Sydney.

MR. ORRELL: How could we get a real clear picture of the rural conditions - problems, I guess - by doing one consultation in one area, such as Sydney?

MS. JAHN: I think from our perspective it's probably sufficient. That's exactly what we did in the past, too, when we went two or three times, we identified seven communities and it gave us, for Yarmouth, it gave us this area. So I personally was very content with the number. We feel that we were given an adequate picture.

MR. GRAHAM: The one criticism I would have with the consultation process is maybe not so much the number. You don't know who arrived, from where, and participated, but it was very prescriptive in terms of the process. The way it was structured, the public who attended were broken up into small tables. The presentation was made and then those small tables were invited to comment on four specific questions. Then they reported back and all that information was collected. The questions weren't open for discussion - what questions shall we ask - these are the things we want you to comment on. Were there other questions that would have been better asked probably, I would say yes.

MR. ORRELL: Just a couple more. You talked earlier in your presentation about 240 individuals were moved out of the shelter system and into affordable housing, I assume, in an eight-month period. How did we go about getting those 240 out of the shelter system and could we apply that - I assume this is HRM?

MR. GRAHAM: Yes.

MR. ORRELL: Could that strategy be applied throughout the province in other areas? First, how would we go about that?

MS. JAHN: First of all we needed to get the private sector involved because from their numbers we heard from the investment property owners. With our vacancy rate in the city of roughly 2 per cent, that makes probably 800 units that are going to be vacant. Some of them won't be suitable because of the price range or the location, but they felt comfortable that they would have around 600 to 700 units that could be made available.

There would be a combination. Sometimes there's a rent subsidy required, which is still much cheaper than housing in the shelter system and, of course, ongoing support services. With some clients you don't need anything, there's just an economical reason for their homelessness, so you just move them into affordable housing and it's fine. Some others might need two or three hours a week on supports. The province extended that program actually with a youth outreach worker for rural Nova Scotia, which is then more suitable for this area because this is really different from the needs in the urban areas.

MR. GRAHAM: AHANS is not yet administering the rural homelessness money, but we know a little bit about what's going on. We know there are five contracts currently in place administered by HRSDC and they ran out in June. I do know that three of those projects fund Housing Support workers; there's one in Yarmouth, there's one in Kentville

and there's one in New Glasgow for sure. There may be others, but I know they're in place now and I know they run until this June for sure, that much I know.

MR. ORRELL: Now that the consultations have been done and information is posted, will you guys get to offer some more suggestions on how to deal with information that has been collected and where to go with that from there?

MR. GRAHAM: Whether we're invited to or not, I guess.

MR. ORRELL: I guess that's the big thing, have you been invited to do that?

MR. GRAHAM: Not yet. I think a general invitation has gone out for people to make submissions.

MR. ORRELL: But being the experts - basically, you're the experts.

MR. GRAHAM: Yes.

MS. JAHN: We certainly would welcome the opportunity.

MR. ORRELL: I guess if I could ask just one more, you talked about the cost of homelessness as \$31.4 million in HRM which worked about to be about \$15,000 per person. I guess my comment - I mean it's not a question as much as would that money not be better spent on affordable housing as to . . .

MS. JAHN: Exactly.

MR. ORRELL: Proactive instead of reactive.

MS. JAHN: That is what I'm saying. If we would spend a couple of hours here as a group, together we would come up with better solutions.

MR. GRAHAM: That last point you made is exactly right because right now that's treating symptoms and not . . .

MR. ORRELL: We're trying to do that with the health care system - we're trying to do prevention instead of reactive care.

MS. JAHN: Same idea.

MR. ORRELL: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a comment, Mr. Orrell, on your question around the number of presentations. There was whatever number - I attended only one - in Kentville. I

think there were people in Kentville that attended that presentation who came from probably Windsor to Bridgetown, for sure, maybe Annapolis Royal.

MR. GRAHAM: For sure, yes, I was there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That comment that you quoted from came from a man from Bridgetown, I remember.

MR. GRAHAM: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The other thing I understood about those consultation sessions was that they were open invitations. I know in my office we helped to make sure invitations were circulated as widely as possible to bring people out and my recollection is that, despite the fact that there were four questions that participants were asked to respond to, at least the table that I sat at wasn't all that co-operative, people tended to offer the opinions that they thought were relevant to the situation, but your point is well taken, nonetheless.

MR. ORRELL: The reason I asked that is that if it was held in Sydney, people on the north side and Glace Bay, the bus system and the public transit system aren't that effective in Cape Breton so people who should have been there, who deserve to be there, would have a tougher time to get to the consultations. That is the reason I'm bringing that up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Absolutely. I wanted to offer my reflection on my own experience.

I think we'll go to Mr. Burrill who is the next on my list at the moment.

MR. BURRILL: Thanks. Mr. Graham, I just wanted to ask you about a specific thing that you had suggested and I wasn't sure I understood what you said. You were speaking about specific things that the province might consider doing and one was - if I understood you right - that there was, I think you said, \$3 million or so that could be realized - did I follow you? - if social assistance recipients in public housing did not pay a rent less than the shelter allowance component? Is that what you said?

MR. GRAHAM: Yes, I think.

MR. BURRILL: Are you proposing that it would be wise to - in this way - increase the rent for social assistance recipients in public housing?

MR. GRAHAM: Yes. The net cost to the Province of Nova Scotia is zero and the net cost to the budget of the Department of Community Services is zero. If you have somebody on income assistance in the private sector and they're - I don't know if I brought those notes with me or not. I did. The maximum shelter component for - I didn't write that down.

The shelter component in the private sector, if you've got a family of three or four, is - does anybody know off the top of their head? It's like \$600, or \$625 - around that. Let's just say \$600 for easy figuring. If that same household is not in the private sector, but are in public housing, they pay \$263. What happens is that the income assistance budget is dinged \$263 for that person; the public housing operation budget has lost the gap between \$600 and \$263. For the province it's no different. For the province it's the same money. If you put that money in the shelter component, it's exactly the same. You just shift the budget. What you have now is you have the little bit of money the province puts into public housing subsidies, which is probably \$6 million or \$7 million or \$8 million - you have that budget subsidizing the \$600 million or higher income assistance budget.

Not only that, the lower the rent that income assistance folks pay in public housing, the more of the deficit is passed on to municipalities and I'm not sure that's what folks really want to see either. All of that money would simply go into public housing operations - into maintenance and capital replacement.

MS. JAHN: It's probably important to mention that it wouldn't have any impact on the tenant, so the tenant is not paying more. It's just shifting between budget lines.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Burrill. I think that will take us to Ms. Kent and then Mr. Prest.

MS. BECKY KENT: I certainly appreciate you coming in and I appreciate the passion actually that we certainly can feel coming from you. That's a good thing and really, to me it gives you credibility because I'm not as familiar with both of you and I can tell that you certainly have a knowledge and background that we absolutely should be tapping into and respect, so thank you for that.

Thank you, as well, for acknowledging that while I know that our government is getting things started and it's not perfect yet, I believe we're moving in a direction that is positive and you've recognized that, the pillars and the principles and such, but I think it is so important that we continue to incorporate the experience, knowledge, and partnerships that agencies like yours do provide, so thank you for that.

I have a couple of questions specific to some notes that we have and some comments that you've made - specifically about the 2011 federal funding, the \$400,000 to rural areas. You said that AHANS is the entity or will be the entity in February. Is that a decision that has been made and it's just now formalizing, or is there a competitive nature to this? Are there any other agencies vying for that?

MR. GRAHAM: No, right now it's in Ottawa waiting for the federal minister to sign.

MS. KENT: Okay, so it is as far as that and to your knowledge there are no other agencies in Nova Scotia in that bid, sort of thing.

MR. GRAHAM: No.

MS. KENT: Okay, thank you. I'll just follow my notes here. On your slide that has, I think, kind of thought of four specific things that can be done soon, one is to have a serious look at public housing. I think we've really covered that well and thank you for that. The second one is to have staff actively participate at sector-related tables. Can you just clarify that point a little bit more so I understand what you are saying?

MR. GRAHAM: Sure. The Housing staff at DCS, by and large, work in a silo. So there are sector-related tables that operate that Housing staff no longer participate in, in a meaningful way.

MS. KENT: Can you tell me what that would be?

MR. GRAHAM: One would be the Nova Scotia Home Builders Association; one would be - they don't participate in the Community Advisory Board for HRM - HPS.

MS. KENT: Did they at one point? You're saying they don't - did they ever?

MR. GRAHAM: Yes.

MS. KENT: Do you know when that might have changed?

MR. GRAHAM: Yes, roughly. What happened with the HPS, at the very beginning they had very senior staff actually participating and then it just gradually went down to none.

IPOANS, which is the Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia, have an organization. There's the Urban Development Institute, which is a group of planners and architects and developers, they have an organization. There's the Housing & Homelessness Network. There are a number of organizations that are sector-wide, focused on some aspect of it, and Housing staff don't show up.

MS. KENT: They don't show up or they . . .

MR. GRAHAM: Well, no. They used to; at one time they were part of these things. It's a way to demonstrate their intent, it's a way to demonstrate they're serious but, more importantly, it's a way for them to understand the issues. If you are the largest landlord in the Province of Nova Scotia, wouldn't it be useful to sit at a table like IPOANS to understand the kinds of pressures and issues that affect owners of rental property? You own 12,000 of them. It makes sense to me.

MS. KENT: Thank you. I don't want to - I know that others may have some questions. I guess before I go any further, and this can be just a quick answer - these four points that you've bulleted here, are they all the feedback you put into the housing

consultations? You say you've attended all these meetings, have you injected that already, this basic presentation?

MR. GRAHAM: Some of them.

MS. KENT: Some of them but not all of them? Okay.

On your point on "outsource program delivery," you spoke specifically about how government delivers programs but outcomes are what's required. Then you're saying here, "outsource program delivery" - I kind of get the impression that you're anti-programs . . .

MR. GRAHAM: No.

MS. KENT: . . . but you want to outsource them and maybe I'm just not putting all of it together, so thank you.

MR. GRAHAM: Maybe my language in there is not as clear as it could be.

MS. KENT: And maybe they're not connected, but I think they are, to clarify that.

MR. GRAHAM: I really think that we need to find at a high level, a 21st Century model of service delivery where government is more of a wholesaler and community is more of a retailer. Government should be setting the priorities and they should be setting the things that they want funded and then they should say, where you live and breathe, you come and tell us how you're going to do it where you are, as opposed to having a RRAP and a SCAP and a PHERP and an Affordable Housing Initiative, a Shelter Enhancement Program and whatever else is going on.

MS. KENT: Okay, I get you now. My last point is, Mr. Chairman, if I have the time, can you tell me more about your idea on the secretariat oversight? Is that what you were referencing when you said arm's-length community board-driven around public housing? Are you referencing that or something else?

MR. GRAHAM: There are a lot of housing knowledgeable people in the community. There has to be a way to make DCS accountable for their strategy and they need to be challenged. You need knowledgeable people to say, have you thought about this, have you thought about that. You need what I would call disinterested people with a lot of knowledge to make sure that the depth and the breadth of what is going on is communicated to the department and that the responses they're coming up with make sense. It's like a housing common sense committee that says to the department, you've lost your mind, don't do that and here's why.

MS. KENT: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Prest. I think you maybe have our last set of questions.

MR. SIDNEY PREST: Yes, I'll put this question to either one of you. You've got a report card for 2011 in numbers. What has the trend been say in the last three, four, or five years?

MS. JAHN: That's an important question because it demonstrates that we are, of course, on a steady incline. From the housing numbers, we had 1,700 individuals in 2009, and then 1,900 in 2011. This is a strong indication that in spite of all these efforts and successes we have seen the numbers are still increasing. The cost for us of doing nothing - we pay already \$31 million, what is the cost of doing nothing? We might get an increase every year that means we are running out of capacity in shelters again. Our goal from the Community Advisory Board and the community plan was no more funding for shelters because this is not a good solution, we want permanent housing, supported housing, but that might not work out because Metro Turning Point is at their capacity.

We still need an out-of-the cold shelter and the pressures on these shelters, if we see this rise again next year, Salvation Army, Metro Turning Point, Adsum House, they cannot provide enough shelter beds, so this is an urgent call for action. There is a real crisis in regard to the shelter system, it is not getting better, if you look at the economy if we have more sharp loss, breakdown in families, lack of treatment programs, these are all indicators that these numbers will go up.

MR. PREST: So prior to 2009, would the trend have been basically the same percentage of increase?

MS. JAHN: Actually we are just able to do this data set thanks to new data through the Homelessness Information System, so before we never had comparable data, so that's why everything starts with us in 2008-09.

MR. PREST: So there probably isn't one indicator to say this is what is pushing this up or along?

MS. JAHN: The reasons, yes, we have the indicators, this comes out of if you take a look at the health report, we asked why are you homeless and then you can see the main reason is, of course, the lack of affordable housing, economical reasons, then there comes family breakup, drug and addiction issues, and release from the prison system. If you look carefully at these different reasons, then you can identify where you can relieve pressure.

For instance, in the prison system we see this in the numbers and we're supported by all our interviews that inmates are being released with no plan where they will be housed. So they enter the halfway house and then on their release date they will be released with their bag of belongings and nobody asks where you will be housed. We would propose to have a housing support worker already in the prison system so this would save you - 300 people would be out of the system. That would be one cornerstone.

It's almost like a puzzle and you take all these different puzzle pieces and break the problem down. These kinds of data sets enable you to do so. Then there are all the ones who would benefit from a drug treatment program so then you can address this issue. The affordable housing issues, of course - renovations, new units, collaboration with the private sector; we have to break it down in order to make these changes.

MR. GRAHAM: One of the things that happens - and this is not peculiar to Nova Scotia; it's all over the world - people are coming to the cities. People come without issues and people come with issues, and that tends to impact the numbers as well.

MR. PREST: You can take in the rural areas, whether it's anywhere in Atlantic Canada, there are some very poor people, but they still have their own home to live in and a roof over their heads. It's warm and tight - nothing fancy.

MS. JAHN: We call this core housing needs. These are the individuals who pay basically more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. The numbers - I didn't bring them today, but I could present this at a later point or circulate it, because this number for Nova Scotia is devastating. These are really the families you refer to who are basically paying their rent, paying their housing, and we heard in our consultation, people don't have enough to heat their homes - seniors. They don't pay insurance or any other basic requirements just to stay in their housing, which is often substandard, as we discussed earlier.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Regan has one additional question.

MS. REGAN: I promise it's just one, uncharacteristically. (Laughter) We were talking earlier about supportive housing workers. They had placed, I think, 240 people in quite a quick turnaround. I'm just wondering if you're hearing any feedback from them about concerns about if they've negotiated a lesser rent for their clients. Is that a temporary fix? Are they concerned about what happens in the future?

MS. JAHN: Of course there are issues. Why? Because this is a partnership. It's private landlords so some are receiving rent subsidies, and we have to see for how long this can go on. At the beginning, probably 100 units were subsidized even before that started by the private sector, and then at a certain number they said, this is it, we cannot support this any longer and how long is this expected to happen?

So this would be really a need for serious talk and strategy with government and private landlords on how to sustain this and how to improve it and extend it because if you see these workers move 240 people, how about strengthening and have 18 or 30 support workers and move more people out and have more relationships so our number would still warrant it.

MS. REGAN: So there's no mechanism right now for those supportive housing workers to talk to DCS to say, these are our concerns; this is what we see coming down the

road. I know you were talking earlier about having senior staff meeting with IPOANS and things like that. Maybe that's a place for it, but is there any way for them to communicate that right now?

MS. JAHN: Actually, there's a very well-directed process in place. The group is meeting on a monthly basis - the shelter and service provider and the senior staff - and they in collaboration developed an evaluation tool and everyone is working really in collaboration how to do this in the future. As I said, this is a really good example of how things should work, it was a great pilot for that and I think it can be an example for other projects in the future.

MS. REGAN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you Ms. Regan. I think that brings us to the end of our question and discussion period. I would like to thank both of you for . . .

MR. KENDALL WORTH: I was hoping there would be an opportunity for us over here that are here as part of the public to ask questions because if there is that opportunity, I have a question for them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's not usually part of this committee's process . . .

MR. GRAHAM: We'll answer it outside.

MR. CHAIRMAN: . . . so there may be an opportunity to ask a question after the meeting is over.

MR. WORTH: I think the answer to that question is something that we should all hear, even you guys . . .

MS. KENT: Maybe you can ask me, and I can ask it for you.

MR. WORTH: The question is, I, myself, happen to be an income assistance client who has a goal to move out of the area of Dartmouth that I live in and to move over here to Halifax. The problem that I'm facing is everything I'm finding, rents are starting at \$200 above and beyond the most that I can afford. For anyone in here who's a regular Street Feat reader, if they followed up on the article I have in the issue prior to this issue, and I continued writing about it in this issue here - how my apartment hunt is going - they would know what I'm talking about.

The thing is I'm wanting to know if anything is being done to address the problem of rents being sky high? Say if I wanted to live in south-end Halifax, \$212 above and beyond the \$535 - \$727 just for a bachelor and that's ridiculous, \$910 a month for a one-bedroom down that way. On the other hand I found two places not in the south end, but in two other areas of Halifax that I'm also interested in wanting to move to because of those being safer neighbourhoods than where I'm at now because my main reason for wanting to

move out of my current neighbourhood is because of the safety of North End Dartmouth, where I currently live.

I've even been having the MLA for my area, Trevor Zinck, he's even been helping me with my apartment hunt and advocating for me, but the problem is when I do find something that I can afford - and so far I have found two places that I actually did apply for because they were within my price range and in two different neighbourhoods where I am interested in wanting to relocate to and both landlords turned me down. One of those two landlords I found discriminating against me because of me wanting to . . .

MS. KENT: Okay, I'm going to have to shorten that. Why don't we give (Interruptions) Okay, thank you.

MR. WORTH: I want to know if they're aware of this problem and what they're doing to address it is what I'm interested in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for that summary.

MS. KENT: I think we've all heard that summary so I guess the gist of it is that just perhaps you could comment on your knowledge of that kind of situation in the work that you do.

MS. JAHN: Kendall, you raised a very important issue, and this comes out in our data sets, that the average rent in the city is, of course, way higher than the current shelter rate which poses a lot of issues for many, many people and makes it impossible to move or to find a place in the first place.

MS. KENT: Thank you very much.

MS. JAHN: You're welcome.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a comment about the process because everybody needs to understand that all of the dialogue in this committee meeting is recorded for the purposes of Hansard and is available on the Web site, but the room is not configured in such a way to allow everybody's voices to be heard, so it does pose some technical difficulties when the discussion expands beyond the committee and the witnesses, just for information purposes.

I was beginning a moment ago to thank both Mr. Graham and Ms. Jahn for their excellent presentation, for bringing their expertise to the table and I think for stimulating what has been a very helpful discussion. Before we stop, you may have some last words that you would like to offer in closing.

MR. GRAHAM: Just to thank you very much for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you. All the things that happen in the world start with conversation, I can't think of anything that has ever happened that really didn't start with conversation, so all

conversation and dialogue is good and we don't always have to agree. The more opportunities we create for this and things like this, we'll all be much better served. Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. The committee will take a brief recess just to allow our witnesses to pack up. We have some other business to take care of in a few moments.

[2:25 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:34 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will call the meeting back to order. On the agenda that is before you, there are a couple of other pieces of business.

First of all, under Committee Business we have a piece of correspondence from Dalhousie Legal Aid, and then we should probably touch base on our next meeting date and next meetings.

The correspondence from Dalhousie Legal Aid is a letter that was received in this office on December 24th. Because I took a little bit of a break, I saw it very early in the new year. I made some inquiries with the department just for information, some inquiries with the Department of Community Services prior to the meeting, which I was able to get some feedback on this morning.

If you'll recall, several months ago we had a request from Dalhousie Legal Aid, as they pointed out, to meet with us. At that point my understanding had been that the Department of Community Services would be meeting with Dal Legal Aid around their concerns about special needs. What I've learned this morning is that that meeting has not yet occurred. The Department of Community Services has apparently been doing quite a bit of analysis of their thinking around special needs. They have a plan in place to meet but the meeting has not yet occurred.

I guess in my role of chairman one of the things I might say is that that frustrates me to some extent. We understood, as we were discussing this, that the issues - where attention had been drawn to the issues - they were important and they need that collaborative process. So that's where things stand now.

It occurred to me as I got that feedback, that maybe one of the things I would like to propose - I know now that Dalhousie Legal Aid has suggested meeting but my view continues to be that DCS needs to meet with Dalhousie Legal Aid, that the input there is important. The possibility of working out a better future maybe comes from that collaborative effort.

I would suggest that what we do is prepare a letter to perhaps the Deputy Minister of Community Services, reminding them that this was an expectation that this committee had set several months ago, that we're disappointed it hasn't happened and that we wish to see it happen. I'm thinking that might be a step before having them meet here.

Yes, Ms. Regan.

MS. REGAN: I think that's a good idea. My concern is that this meeting was supposed to have happened in September. All this time has passed and surely at some point DCS could have met with Dalhousie Legal Aid Service. We have to wonder why this hasn't happened yet, number one.

Also, when I look at our scheduled meeting dates, what I see is that since the summer we've heard from two witnesses. So I would be kind of loath to schedule another meeting with Dalhousie Legal Aid Service and have them pull out at the last second again, that would be my concern. Perhaps we could indicate to them that we would be willing to hear from them but they would have to assure us that they would actually show up.

To me, I see no problem with writing the letter. I think the letter is most appropriate, especially given the time that has lapsed. I really do think that this committee cannot afford to lose another meeting, as we have had happen several times this past Fall. So I guess any response back to Dal Legal Aid would be, we can put you on the list - we'd be happy to add them to the Liberal caucus list, but we want an undertaking that they will actually show up and we don't lose another meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I guess just as a comment on your point, Ms. Regan, it seems like a point well taken that in some ways Dal Legal Aid has been addressing us in this way, using it, in a sense, as a negotiating tactic to actually . . .

MR. ORRELL: What has changed? They said they wanted to meet with Community Services before they came to us and if it hasn't taken place, why do they want to meet with us now?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, they've written us again but we want to be assured that if their real goal is to meet with Community Services, that that's, in fact, what happens. Ms. Kent.

MS. KENT: I think it would be appropriate to - I like the idea of us responding basically to that first issue, which is that there was a will of the Department of Community Services to meet with Dalhousie Legal Aid. There was a will of Dalhousie Legal Aid - again as Mr. Orrell said, what has changed? I don't necessarily think that we have to specifically respond immediately, just instantly, to their request to come.

I think us putting pressure on our department through this committee would be - I would even be open to giving them some sense of a timeline that says we want to hear back

from you on your commitment to meet with these folks because we have pressure from them, we've been asked to consider them for a witness, so we're looking for you to respond to us before next meeting, for instance, or within a time frame so we don't leave that open-ended, so that we're exerting a little bit of firmness to them.

Then when we get feedback, we bring it back to this committee and then do we want to create a response to this? At that point, we may have gotten what we needed, which was their scheduled attempt to meet. Then that second request is null and void, really - it would be unnecessary. Do you know what I'm saying? I wouldn't necessarily want to go at it - I understand and certainly respect what you're saying and we would not want that to happen, but I don't think we need to jump yet to that second part of the letter. Let's investigate and put some pressure on getting the first part done because to me, at the end of the day, that's going to be the most effective tool for the government to do good work.

MS. REGAN: I do think the issue of special needs is important - the third paragraph, the issue of special needs. I just want to make sure this is not left hanging; that if there is not - by the time we get to our next meeting, if there isn't a meeting that has taken place or is scheduled within weeks, then fine, we call these folks before us because this is an issue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think I'm hearing that it would be reasonable to ask the deputy minister to report to us in advance of the next meeting so we have some assurance that a meeting either has occurred or has been scheduled and we can in good conscience understand that it is about to happen at least.

MR. ORRELL: I feel the same way - the importance of special needs is huge. If there is a reason that the Department of Community Services is not meeting with them, at least give us the reason so that we can schedule. I mean, if we need to and we can facilitate that meeting, let's do it, and then after the fact, if there is an important issue that needs to be addressed, then bring it to us and we'll do it then, but it's got to be done in a timely fashion. That's way too long to be dealing with that situation.

MS. REGAN: I might add that they noted that originally they had proposed four speakers, but they intend to provide written submissions. There is nothing stopping them from sending us written submissions. I'd be happy to have a written submission from them at any time in the meantime. If they feel that it is urgent and they have not gotten the response they want from DCS, by all means please either call us or send us a written submission.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other comments? I think then we have a plan of action that we can review at our February meeting.

MS. KENT: Do we need a motion on that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm seeing, in my role as chairman, a level of agreement about how we're going to proceed, so if you're comfortable with that.

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): I just want to make sure that I'm understanding what's happening, which is that we will be writing to DCS to say whatever we're going to say to them about the meeting and so forth. What about Dalhousie Legal Aid? Are we going to advise them of what we're doing? How are we handling them as a response of some sort to them to let them know that we haven't brushed them aside?

MR. ORRELL: Tell them to submit their written submissions as well and then have their meeting with DCS.

MS. KENT: If we're putting a timeline of a month - not even that - to our next meeting, for a response back from DCS, we could go about it with giving a brief response to this, which is we're still supporting the original intention of you meeting so we are writing and asking for clarification and a commitment on your behalf from this committee in support of your efforts for that first paragraph. I don't even think we should go into the next section until we've dealt with that, so if we want to write them, I would write them with a message about that first intended action that hasn't taken place. The alternative to that - and I'm open to this - is just why do we need to respond immediately, I mean, really?

MR. ORRELL: Special needs is pretty important.

MS. KENT: Yes, I get that.

MS. KELLY: Let's be clear - the transcript of this will be on-line. They will know what our decision is, so whether they get a letter or not, it's out there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I guess my thought might be - go ahead, Ms. Kent, I'll let you finish your thought.

MS. KENT: No, that's okay, go ahead.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think the point that all of our discussion is public and will be available to Dalhousie Legal Aid or to anyone else who wants to see that is relevant. It seems to me it might be a courtesy to respond to the letter so that they do understand that we have heard them, that we are interested in seeing a process continue, and to do that directly rather than to leave it as an indirect communication. I would see it as a courtesy.

Are we able to move to next meetings? Our next meeting date is February 5th which would be also at 1:00 p.m. at this location. We are expecting to meet with the Department of Community Services around the funding model for non-profit and commercial daycare centres.

The other thing around future meetings - just so we can maybe put this in abeyance so that you'll think about it - I understand from the PC caucus that for our March meeting there might be some complications with March 5th as our usual meeting date because of some out-of-town meetings. I would like to suggest that we may perhaps wait until our February meeting to look at March, just because maybe everybody's schedule would be a little bit clearer.

The clerk has also brought to my attention that when we look forward to April 2nd, which would also be our April scheduled meeting, that is the day after Easter Monday this year. It's also possible that the House, we have experiences we've had in previous years, the House might be in session at that point which might actually mean an early morning start and there are a range of complications around that, so if we could just perhaps keep that in mind as something we need to talk about perhaps at the next meeting or at the March meeting, we could do it at that point.

Is there any other business that needs to come before the committee? Ms. Langille.

MS. LANGILLE: Can I just make one comment about the April issue and the date issue. I was sort of wondering if perhaps we might just select the 9th as the meeting day and then leave the time up in the air depending on whether the House is in or not? That way our witness at least knows the day and then we can sort of firm up the times, would that be acceptable?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, thank you for reminding me. Okay, April 9th, probably in the morning.

That being all the items before the committee, I declare the meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 2:48 p.m.]