

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Thursday, March 7, 2013

Committee Room 1

**Department of Community Services
Re: Housing Strategy**

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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[Hon. Karen Casey was replaced by Ms. Diana Whalen.]
[Mr. Keith Bain was replaced by Mr. Chuck Porter.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Mr. Robert Wood,
Deputy Minister

Mr. Dan Troke,
Executive Director - Housing Services

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2013

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, everyone. I think we'll begin. We have a sufficient number of members for a quorum and we're a couple of minutes past our hour so I think we should start.

My name is Jim Morton, and I'm the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Community Services. Today we will be looking at issues related to housing. We have two sets of witnesses today: first, from the Department of Community Services; and second, from the Town of Windsor - the Affordable Housing Committee of the Town of Windsor. Because of that, we'll need to divide our time into two sections.

We'll have introductions in a moment but I'm thinking that probably we'll take about 45 minutes for each of the overall presentations and then see how our time falls out. We have a little bit of other committee business that we have to look at at the end of the meeting.

To begin, I think what I will do is start with general introductions. If the committee members would introduce themselves, that would be very helpful.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Just before we begin there are a couple of pieces of housekeeping business I do need to look after. For those people who are visitors in this space, it's important to remember that in the unlikely and hopefully avoidable emergency, it would be important not to use the elevators but to use the stairwells on either side of the elevators, and in as calm a way as you can, go down those steps and congregate in front of City Hall, the Parade Square area. That's for all of our safety so just keep that in mind.

Also, we really do welcome visitors here but the way that this committee is structured and facility for our discussion means that it is not possible to ask questions or to participate unless you're a member of the committee. Visitors are welcome but you are here as observers and that's something to keep in mind.

Certainly if you've got a cellphone - which I did just a moment ago - please turn it to silent or vibrate, just to help the conversation stay focused.

With that, I think what I'm going to do is turn the floor over to the members of the Department of Community Services, beginning with Mr. Wood, perhaps for introductions, and then to make your presentation.

MR. ROBERT WOOD: Thank you very much and good afternoon. Thank you for giving us an opportunity to come and talk about housing. I'm the Deputy Minister of Community Services and my colleague, Dan Troke, is the Executive Director of Housing.

I'll just jump straight into my presentation. As you know, government has been looking at the whole issue of housing for the last number of years and made a commitment in this last year that we would be looking to try to develop a housing strategy for Nova Scotia. Many provinces do have a housing strategy. It's something that Nova Scotia, to date, does not have. We've been going through a fair bit of work around trying to define what that could be and where we could go.

I'll start by giving you some context to this. If you think about our current state, when a lot of public housing had been developed over the last number of decades, so much of it was built in a way where we simply built discrete public housing, which we congregated and segregated into specific areas. In and of itself, it actually can be a major source of poor outcomes. In fact, if you think of it in the reverse, housing and the vitality of a community is probably one of the most important social determinants of health. If you can improve the health and vitality of a community, what you see is all kinds of other determinants within that community and for those citizens go up. Education rates rise, crime rates go down, you see more job opportunities and better health outcomes. A whole range of improvements can be derived from improvements in housing.

Also, we still have in Nova Scotia a significant number of people with disabilities who live in larger congregate housing. Even some of our smaller group homes aren't really integrated into community in the way that we would like. We do have long wait-lists for

public housing and we have a very significant aging population that I'll talk about in just a moment. To go with that is some of the oldest public housing stock in Canada. It is in many instances in the wrong place and it is the wrong type of housing.

When I think about Nova Scotia, if I was to give one slide to describe the situation of what's going on in Nova Scotia, and I only had one slide, I'd use this slide. What it shows is, if you go back to 1991, only 27 per cent of households were single-person or single-parent households; by 2006, 59 per cent. In the last census, 2010, 64 per cent of all households in Nova Scotia were either single individuals or single parents. What you have here is this real seismic change in the demographics of Nova Scotia. We are an aging population; every month 1,000 people turn 65. You have out-migration from communities; you have migration outside of the province. As a province, we go down in population about 16,000 people every year. This demographic shift and change of household composition is a real challenge for us when you think about housing. Housing is typically fixed assets; they don't change quickly.

In some communities it's much easier if you need a three- or four-bedroom house, but if you need a one-bedroom, we don't have that stock. As a consequence, when you think about core housing need in Nova Scotia, 75 per cent of core housing need in Nova Scotia is for single individuals or single parents. That's where our real challenge is. The group that has the highest core housing needs are single males.

We have, again, some real challenges and part of where we need to go is really think about the stock that we have, and as we are planning, are we, in fact, actually converting some of the units that we have? Do we need to think about building different kinds of housing and, along the way here, what's the nature of that housing? How do we want to build it? Do we want to build more just one-bedroom apartments that are specifically for people in public housing or do we want to build more diverse housing?

Along with that, we have communities where real estate prices are rising. We heard from lots of citizens that they were working, they had modest incomes and were spending a very significant portion of their income on rent and that after you have paid for food and electricity and other expenses, there simply weren't savings there for them to be able to get into home ownership. They weren't able to actually get to the place of having some equity to get started. Of course the tragedy of that is that for many of those individuals, the level of rent they pay is actually equivalent to what their mortgage would be, yet they can't actually get into the market and get started. That was a concern.

The other one that we heard from people was that developers weren't developing the kinds of homes that people could, in fact, afford. It's simply if you are building 2,500 or 3,000 square foot homes, the price of that home is really substantial; there weren't enough people who were building more modest-size bungalows and condominium developments that they could move into. So if you think about the peninsula as just one example, the kinds of condominiums that are being developed are \$500,000-plus and people simply

can't afford to get into that market. It doesn't mean that they wouldn't buy, but the stock that is being developed isn't, in fact, at a price that they could afford.

We are seeing increases in rental rates and that continue to be a pressure. While there is some availability in the rental market right now, the cost of rent is pure economics of supply and demand - the more demand you have with less supply, the price goes up and the reverse is also true. So making sure that we have enough available rental space is also important.

We also know, if you think about the ships contract and the kinds of jobs that are going to come to the peninsula as one example, if we simply let market forces be left to bear on the peninsula, you would see a substantial number of people of more modest income be pushed out of the peninsula - the affordability would simply move away. While we want to be able to have more people live on the peninsula and close to work, for a whole bunch of reasons, doing it in a way that does not displace people and allows people to be able to live in the community is really important.

We also have co-ops. We have lots of co-ops, actually, that are quite successful and they do very well but we have other co-ops that have not been as successful. For some co-ops, the number of people who live there who are of modest income has grown. The people who, in fact, had more money have typically left to go and buy their own homes and you haven't had enough revenue coming into those co-ops for them to be successful. At its foundation is this notion of equity - can you, in fact, create a co-op model that allows people collectively to be able to gain equity and make the co-op models actually more successful.

The last point is around the reductions that we are seeing in federal funding. We have something called the social housing agreement and a number of years ago a decision was made that the federal government was going to be getting out of the social housing business. There was a transfer of public housing assets to the province. We are on this declining curve. We probably hit our peak in about 2008, when we had about \$60 million a year coming in and it's on a curve of reduction of about \$2 million a year, so that's a compound reduction - \$2 million in the first, \$4 million in the second, \$6 million in the third and so on. That's money that is directly into the funding of public housing and various grant programs. So it's real dollars that go out the door that ultimately are used to sustain social housing so that's a real concern for us.

As we think through our housing strategy, I mean as everybody knows, we don't have lots and lots of money and we need to be thinking about how are we going to diversify our portfolio, how are we going to be able to grapple with this kind of reality going forward?

When we think about the public consultation, what we went out on in our discussions with citizens - one of the key elements that we got back was this notion that

first off, the province has a responsibility to show leadership, to show that it's going to be making investments in Nova Scotia communities. The people understood and agreed with the notion that we, in fact, needed to be moving to an environment of longer-term sustainability. The notion of affordability was also quite prevalent.

Right now if you think about the sort of rental market in Nova Scotia you really have two options: you either have fully-subsidized public housing or you are paying full market rent. There is very little in between, in terms of rent year to income that is more based on a person's income. One of the things we want to be looking at is, is there opportunity there for us to diversify our rental stock and how we would do that.

We did hear, as I mentioned, from a lot of citizens around this notion of equity and home ownership. People who would like to be able to be in the opportunity of being able to own a home or to be able to start to gain equity yet can't get there without some initial support. So looking at a variety, there's a number of jurisdictions in Canada and certainly internationally where they do have lease-to-own kinds of programs, down payment assistance programs where you can help a person actually get started into the market and they can begin to start to gain equity.

We also heard a lot about the notion of community revitalization, and that really came in two forms. The first was, we heard from a number of communities around their desire to revitalize their downtown cores and what we could be doing in terms of creating and being part of a partnership around how they create more residential opportunities in their downtown cores. How we could be part of broader initiatives that, in fact, actually bring community space, retail space and so on into those downtown cores.

The other notion of community revitalization was in specific neighbourhoods, in neighbourhoods that really had not had a lot of investment in them over a number of years, many of the homes falling into disrepair. Were there opportunities for us to come in again, as a partner, for us to be able to help them do some revitalization?

We also went out and we had lots of consultation around this notion of mixed market development. What we mean by that is really a couple of different things; the first is, can we create developments where people of different incomes actually live in the same community, in the same development. You do that by creating a variety of different tenure types so within the same development people who, in fact, can own their home, people who are renting, people who may be in supported housing or in some other kind of program, maybe on a lease-to-own kind of program.

The other notion of diversity is around family type. So can we have developments where we do have some units that are for single individuals or single parents, others that are for families, some for seniors, some for people who have accessibility needs, and some who have support requirements? Rather than building in these separate bespoke kinds of developments, we simply bring it together. If you think about some of our needs in terms of

supporting seniors and supporting people with disabilities as an example, while the clinical need might be different, the support needs are actually very similar - laundry services, food services, OT services - those kinds of things that really, if you are building and you're building at more scale, there's an economy here where you can start to bring those services together.

As we start to do developments, we're looking at if we're being smarter about it. If you think about some of our other developments - and I'll show you one in a minute here - how do we, through our own development and through the developments that we partner with communities on, really take some of the social housing that we need to do in the supported housing and, in fact, do it in a way that enables us to offset some of those costs and build better programs? That's really at the heart of what we're talking about.

There's one more group here. One of the other areas that we heard very clearly from communities was, how are we going to address issues of homelessness? When I think about homelessness, the area where our greatest need is, it's for people who are chronically homeless: people who have unmanaged mental health issues; people who have unmanaged addictions; people who are chronically coming in and out of shelters, losing their accommodation.

What we're looking to be able to do is actually move forward with an approach that has been used now across North America for almost a decade called Housing First. At its core it starts by asking how you're going to provide a person with a home that is there, that they can start to build a sense of community around; it's their place and they're not going to get kicked out. You start to change both their sense of community but you're also bringing in all of the support services wrapped around them. It's very hard to be assisting a person who has significant challenges when they keep moving and you lose them. If you start to work with them, they lose their housing, they're on the street. How do you, in fact, actually bring people back so you can really start to support them?

The last notion here is this notion of partnership development. Again, there are two notions here. The first is, through the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation, we're the largest developer in Nova Scotia. We're just talking about reorienting some of our development, and along the way and with every development that we do, it is about bringing partners in, and we have always done that.

I think part of our thinking is that we want to expand that and not just have our development partners, but also thinking about community groups and non-profit agencies; how do we start to build in support models and really think through, more in a community way, about our development? So less about just the bricks and mortars, go put the building up and walk away; think of it as, how are we going to build out these communities? How are we going to make sure that the right network of supports is there, and by the time we finish doing the development, we've got the right model in place?

The second notion around partnership is probably the more important one for me and that is that we can be a catalyst of development. We certainly don't profess to have all of the answers - communities are very different. Quite frankly, knowing where the opportunities are, it is something that we can't know everything about. What we do have is the capacity to actually bring resources to bear for communities when they have ideas. Those resources can be human resources. Perhaps they have an idea around a development that a community wants to do but they don't necessarily have the planning resources, architects, engineers, they don't necessarily know how to structure a business case. We can help with some of that.

The other part is in terms of being a financial partner. So through the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation we give loans, we do it all the time, but if we can find private-sector, not-for-profit partners who, in fact, actually have solid business cases but are also willing to actually consider the social benefits that we're looking for - i.e. are you prepared to build some affordable housing in that development, are there supported units or accessible units, and you can meet our objectives - then perhaps there's an opportunity here for us to partner. So those are the kinds of things that we are thinking about.

We are still in the stage right now of formulating our recommendations. This has not yet gone to Executive Council but we are working hard on this, looking to try to move forward.

I recognize there's probably a fair bit there and people will have questions, so I'll stop there and be happy to take people's questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Wood. I know there are questions because I've begun a speakers list and I have some people on it. I would like to welcome Ms. Diana Whalen and Ms. Michele Raymond to the committee, since we had introductions, so welcome. Ms. Regan is the first questioner on my list.

MS. KELLY REGAN: Thank you. I'm going to keep my questions short because I know we don't have a lot of time. How many people are waiting for affordable housing in this province?

MR. WOOD: Do you want to take that?

MR. DAN TROKE: Sure. When we're talking about the list that we would maintain as a province, we have about 3,000 people throughout the province who are looking to access public or social housing.

Now the one thing I'll do in defining that a little bit is that that list contains quite a bit of choice, so you have many individuals who would apply and be actually applying for multiple locations. So if a unit came up and it was offered to them and they said no, I don't want that, I'm waiting for another one, we actually wouldn't bump somebody from the list

for that. We actually have a chronological list and many individuals actually would be waiting for very specific either buildings or locations to come on the list.

In some cases those individuals have been offered and actually in many cases they've been offered a unit, may have turned it down and have been waiting for another.

MS. REGAN: So even with that caveat there, which I was aware of, I don't understand why our deferred federal contribution keeps growing - it's at \$58 million, right? - why we haven't spent this money.

MR. TROKE: The deferred federal contribution is targeted money and the programs - if you think about the co-op program as one, rent supplement as one, public housing as one - there's a set of rules around that. What happens is that pot of money either grows or shrinks, typically based upon the various levels of investment that go into public housing. So the federal partner is one, the province is one, as is the municipality.

In some years there may be a project that's underway that would be a major repair on a building, so that will get drawn down in order to accommodate that repair. Then in the following year, while you're working through a planning stage maybe on another one, there won't be and money can be set aside in that. That pot actually does grow and shrink at different rates.

MS. REGAN: But then we've just come through a whole series of - we had all these announcements about various developments that happened because of the federal money that came in and yet we still have \$58 million, which we have to spend or we lose it. Am I right?

MR. TROKE: The pot that you're talking about has to be expended over the life of the agreement, which is 2034. So that funding, as I said, different pieces of it are attached to different programs so it's not exclusive to - we're going to go build a building or whatever.

The other thing is that during the last decade that money is also working in tandem with the Affordable Housing Program. What I mean by that is we have an agreement with the federal government around constructing rental units in partnership with the private sector and with non-profits. That has been an incredibly successful tool in adding capacity, so each year we have a couple of hundred units that are being created basically in partnership with non-profits and the private sector.

Over and above our social housing stock, there's a large amount of affordable housing that's being created, as well, so what you're doing is you're trying to create the maximum impact, but also - as Rob was talking to - we continually get plans from communities; we continually work with both private-sector and non-profit developers as things are evolving. Some of these - I mean to build a building typically is a multi-year

plan, so as those plans come through, we would be working within those different programs to try to maximize the amount of affordable housing that's created.

MS. REGAN: My concern about partnering with private developers is that those - the social housing that they build is only for a period of time and then it gets reverted back to them, so we lose those. What is it, 15 years?

MR. TROKE: Traditionally it's 15 years forgivable on a \$25,000 contribution.

MS. REGAN: So yes, those are coming on stream, but then we're losing some at the same time so you're talking about several hundred units - at the same time we are losing units, right?

MR. TROKE: Sure.

MS. REGAN: I do have concerns about that. I am concerned about the letter that the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association received because I'm not clear on whether organizations that serve single clients are going to continue to get funding. If I look at the letter, it says that all efforts made by government ". . . should be made to avoid creating building types for a single use." My understanding around mixed-market development was that if one building in a neighbourhood was serving one set of clients - let's say homeless youth - that was okay. I'm a little . . .

MS. BECKY KENT: Mr. Chairman, if I could interrupt. For the benefit of the other committee members, could we see that letter so we know the context of what is being discussed? Thank you.

MS. REGAN: Sure, actually I have copies. The letter continues with ". . . it is important for us to demonstrate that a single bespoke home should not be used for housing one single client group." I have real concerns about what that means for organizations like Metro Non-Profit Housing, which has Morris House, which as we all know has been moved and was getting ready to do some renovations and had federal funding attached to it, as long as there was provincial funding coming along too. I worry about that and what the implications will be for groups like Adsum House or Alice Housing after that.

MR. TROKE: First, if we could see the letter, because I'd like to take a look at it, but actually if I could just speak to a couple of points there. First of all, specifically with regard to your last point around Morris House, the work that they're doing - in order to get federal funding, it is not hinged to provincial money at all. They applied through several different streams of funding from several different levels of government and different organizations and none are hinged on the other. The request that that organization made to us was based upon what they had as a business plan and asked for a specific contribution based on a certain service model, so it was very specific pieces they were looking for.

The funding - particularly the largest funding they were looking at through the federal government and the Homelessness Partnering Initiative - was not tied to any provincial money in any way, shape or form. They're completely different programs with completely different approval processes. They're not attached in any way, shape or form.

MS. REGAN: Okay, but that still doesn't address what I said about . . .

MR. TROKE: I'm just addressing that one point.

MS. REGAN: Okay, thank you.

MR. TROKE: With regard to the proposal in this case, in the letter we're specifically talking to, a request was made of the department to supply funding to support this initiative. There was actually quite a bit of extensive conversations around the support model, around how they were going to operate and in a neighbourhood that as you described is actually going through quite a bit of change. There's an awful lot of development and re-gentrification going on.

In this case here, it was a model that was put forward where they were looking for eight or nine youth to go specifically within a single building. Part of their request was that it didn't actually fit broadly within the full independent living in some of the conversations that we've had with the group. Part of it also was that the model they were proposing, we had some concerns with it. We basically were saying to the organization, we weren't fully supportive of the way that you were pursuing this, that it would move forward. We wanted to have more conversations and we've had that with the group. In this case here - their proposal at this point - we were saying we couldn't support it but if that model was going to change and we were giving them suggestions here around some of the ways that it works within the programs that they were applying for.

MS. REGAN: But again, when I go back to the paragraph where it says, "I believe it is important for us to demonstrate that a single bespoke home should not be used for housing one single client group", are you saying that organizations like Metro Non-Profit Housing or any other group, cannot house people of the same client group in one house? That's what that line says to me.

MR. WOOD: We have lots of organizations where, if you think about HomeBridge, Phoenix, where we, in fact, actually do have single - like a youth home, which we will continue to do, which we will continue to support. This specific request, we did have some concerns on the support model and the level of support for very high-risk youth in a congregate living kind of model. It was different than youth or HomeBridge or Phoenix and those kinds of models, so concern specifically around that.

We will continue to have residential environments where they will be for seniors, as an example. It's more directional in intent. Right now we have no model where we, in

fact, actually do mixed market development, where we, in fact, build units for people with disabilities that are integrated in with other kinds of units.

MS. REGAN: Isn't that what you had planned to do down at the school, Bloomfield?

MR. WOOD: That is where we're intending to go.

MS. REGAN: So you do have a model that you're looking at?

MR. WOOD: That's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can you wrap up? I think we need to move along, we have very little time and other people would like to ask some questions.

MS. REGAN: Absolutely. I should point out, and I would like it on the record, that I think that when we're bringing forward something as major as a housing strategy, that we should have more than half an hour to ask questions because this is clearly going to be, or ought to be, a significant infusion of cash in this province. Here we are, we get half an hour to ask questions on a major thing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I expect this won't be the last time we'll have an opportunity to discuss the Housing Strategy - it hasn't been the first - but if you could wrap up, just so that we can make sure that other people have an opportunity to raise some of their issues.

MS. REGAN: I guess I don't understand why the minister included that line in this letter because it does not make sense to me. If the concern was around the particular model, fine, but what we have here is a line that says a single Bespoke home should not be used for housing one single client group. That, to me, sets off alarm bells. I haven't heard anything yet that would make those alarm bells go away.

MR. WOOD: I'd certainly be happy to also offer other briefings for you around that, if you'd like to discuss it some more. Certainly we have lots of housing that is residential services for youth that we will continue to offer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. This may be revisited in some other way but I'm going to go to Ms. Kent at this point.

MS. BECKY KENT: Thank you, I'll keep it fairly brief; I have a couple of questions. How many co-op housing models - I am familiar with some of the ones that haven't worked well so I was glad to hear you say there are some models that are. How many do we actually have or how many are actually in existence in Nova Scotia right now and where are they, predominantly? Are they predominantly in metro?

MR. TROKE: There are really two types of co-operative housing models. One is linked to a subsidy based on the individual's income; the other is linked to a mortgage and basically trying to pay down the mortgage for the co-operative. Both of them in a genesis are both rental, not equity-based. It's very much more of a rental model than it is any kind of equity or ownership model.

In a predominant number of co-operatives that are here in metro, well over half, and part of that was again actually the way they were built was a large chunk of land would become available to develop a whole lot of units at one time, kind of similar to the model that was done when you think about how most of our public housing was developed as well.

MS. KENT: So do you have a rough idea of how many we have?

MR. TROKE: How many co-ops? I think between the co-ops and the non-profit sector who fall under the same kind of agreements, there are about 3,000 rental units.

MS. KENT: The other is on your partnership development. The obvious partner that I would go to quickly, and you've referenced it, is some form of developer. Are you looking at opportunities for agencies and organizations that are out there serving our vulnerable sector now? There are a lot of agencies out there that really do know that sector that they're addressing and have good ideas. Is this an opportunity for them to be considered at the table as partnering? Could you just elaborate on that idea, share your thoughts?

MR. WOOD: Well, really on two different levels. For some of those organizations, some of them have certainly expressed an interest in starting to get into having their own units that they would own and would be able to start to utilize, so that's part of it. The other is, as we start to build out developments, we will need support partners for many of the units that will be accessible or supported units, that we would naturally want to be partnering with some of these agencies to, in fact, be delivering on those services. So those kinds of opportunities are certainly going to be there.

MS. KENT: Okay, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Burrill.

MR. GARY BURRILL: Thanks. If it's all right, I'd like to ask a political question. I want to go back to what you were saying about this dramatic withdrawal of federal funds from this area. I have been buffaloes by what seems to me to be the relative acquiescence of the provinces in the face of this. If we were to think about something parallel happening, say, in the world of incomes - if the federal government said, oh look, over the next 15 years, there's not going to be any more employment insurance, we're going to scale it back a certain per cent a year and at the end of that period, the provinces are going to cover this

through social assistance - you can imagine, there would be an apocalyptic response. Nothing of this sort has happened about this travesty of housing funding.

I wonder if you agree with my sense that that's true, that there has been kind of a relative acquiescence about the response and if you have any sense of why this might be. Is this a fair question, I guess, is the first thing I should ask you? (Laughter)

MR. WOOD: Every question is a fair question. I guess what I can tell you is that we are a year away from the renewal of other affordable housing agreements with the federal government. This is a concern, I will tell you, right across provincial and territorial regions. I think it's fair to say that all ministers and deputies, regardless of political stripe - provincially and territorially - have a concern about this. This is really significant money for all of us. While we're a small pittance of this, this is \$2 billion nationally - so it's real money.

We are having conversations. I suspect that as we move forward into 2013 and potentially into 2014, this will probably be a conversation that moves to an FPT table where we would have those conversations around this issue. I think what all jurisdictions are grappling with is the reality that they have an aging stock. These are fixed assets, so it's not like you can simply change your model overnight and when you look at the time frame that it would take to start to change models, compared to the reduction in the funding, they just don't line up. That's something that I think we will have some real conversation around.

The other part - and I think the piece that is missing - in some ways it's because there is a lack of information. The provincial government in Quebec just finished a study recently that started to show the impact of investment in housing, in terms of reductions in costs, in justice costs, improvement in education, improvement in health and the actual benefit of why you would want to make these kinds of investments.

I think part of it is, can we be demonstrating as well - because the federal government needs us to be effective as well - can we show that this is, in fact, actually a really good investment if we're able, as one example, to provide more home adaptations to seniors to allow them to stay at home and we reduce the cost of nursing homes and long-term care facilities or provide supports in other ways. Have we in fact actually helped, you know, both federally and provincially the kinds of demographic challenges that we're facing right across the country.

MR. BURRILL: One more, an unrelated question. Could we go back to the mother of all slides that you began with, your main one? You said if you had to select one, the one about the comparison between 1991 and 2006. The categories there, of course, are not exactly comparable. Obviously the point that you're drawing by this is exactly right, this dramatic shift in the composition of households. It would be helpful in making this - you're so right - foundational point about this if there were numbers here that corresponded to

exactly the same categories. Would it be hard to do? For example, we would need either the 2006 one-person household number or the 1991 one- and two-person household numbers, that's all.

MR. WOOD: Yes, I think we can, right, because this comes from the Nova Scotia Community Counts information and Stats Canada data, so we should be able to do some of that. The other thing is simply refreshing it to include the 2010 information. We have the data, we just don't have the slide representation that shows it.

MR. BURRILL: Would it be possible to ask you to forward to the committee, then, if you have it, an updated figure to 2010 about this, with comparisons for both one-person households, two dates, and two-person to those two dates?

MR. WOOD: Sure.

MR. BURRILL: Okay, great, thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Burrill. I'm going to go to Mr. Porter but I think Mr. Porter will be our last questioner. (Interruption) A request, okay. In the interest of time, only. Mr. Porter.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: I have just a couple of very quick things. One would be that I would also point out that it's a shame that we have only a short period of time with witnesses who are before us today and I'm sure we'll probably see them again, based on this being an ongoing issue.

My first question would be, with all those people who are waiting for housing and have gone into housing over the years, how are they prioritized?

MR. TROKE: We have a chronological wait-list, meaning the first person to apply is the first one on the list. However, there is an emergency circumstance, particularly if somebody is escaping domestic violence, that they will be given emergency access on the list. But chronological, based upon when you apply, is how it works.

MR. PORTER: So just on that, where I come from - I've had the honour of representing that area for seven years now as the MLA and I've dealt with a lot of this by way of affordable housing, our need is a great need. I would point out that we have people who are homeless, living under bridges, living in the bushes, sleeping in cardboard boxes. Couch-surfing, I guess, is one of the newer models that we refer to it as, also family members jumping between them here and there, as long as they can stand them, look after them a little bit and then they're on to somebody else.

These are people, just like we are referring to here, who are looking for some sort of affordable housing and cannot find it. You know I've been around here, I guess, long

enough to hear all about how many studies we do and so on and so forth. Not many people out there in everyday life really care about how many studies we're doing. It's more, let's get on with the work.

My next question and I believe it is an important question, would be, when does the province plan on finalizing a document that really is going to attack this issue and take those people who I just referenced off the street and give them somewhere to go?

MR. WOOD: Your points are well taken. We heard that a lot through the consultation. Homelessness was not something that was brought forward just in HRM; it was something we heard across the province, and at risk of homelessness; and that people were struggling to find affordable housing in all communities. This was not just an urban challenge.

In terms of timing, I can't give you answer to that because I don't know what that will be. Government made a commitment that it was going to be moving forward with a housing strategy. As I said, we are formulating recommendations and we've not gone to Executive Council with that yet, but we're obviously working to be able to try to move forward with a strategy as we've been asked to do.

MR. PORTER: How long have you been working on it now?

MR. WOOD: About a year.

MR. PORTER: So a year and there's nothing - at this point it's not a kind of program where you're going to get partway through this with one model that you think is a pretty solid model, introduce that to Executive Council, moving forward. There are many models that are probably reflective, based on what you've shown - there are a number of things that have worked?

MR. WOOD: For sure and I guess we are doing that so in some ways - some of these are incremental changes of things that we are doing. The one that I'd point to - and I'll go to it really very briefly here - is this. This is Bloomfield. We put forward a proposal on Bloomfield because really the community had come forward with a community plan that was exactly in keeping with the kind of model that we were looking to do. So while it was ahead of any kind of strategy, we thought that was the right thing to do. There were good reasons for us to want to go and create that kind of integrative model and we are doing that.

MR. PORTER: That's great for one part of the province, for the HRM.

MR. WOOD: So here's another example of something we did up in Sydney. We took a single home, converted it into a triplex. This is public housing in a residential

neighbourhood. What I like about this is, if you walk down that street, you would have no idea which is the public housing and which is not.

MR. PORTER: And that's all good, I agree with that.

MR. WOOD: It's just getting started. They're examples of where we think we need to go. We've been at public housing now for many decades. It's starting the process of how we are going to start changing the model incrementally over time as we move forward.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Porter, could you wrap up your comments?

MR. PORTER: Thank you, that's fine.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Great, thank you.

I know Ms. Whalen, you have a request to make, so if you will, please.

MS. WHALEN: Are we done? I think there are five minutes, so can I take five minutes?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No.

MS. WHALEN: There hasn't been an adequate amount of time for a subject of this scope.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would like to say that we have other witnesses . . .

MS. WHALEN: We have an hour for those witnesses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: . . . and I will remind members of the committee (Interruption) Excuse me, I'd just like to make this comment. As a committee, we reached some agreement. As we select witnesses, we agreed that we would have this meeting with two sets of witnesses and I think we need to respect both our current witnesses and the ones who are awaiting their opportunity to let us know about their own experience, which I will remind everybody around the table is also about housing and allows us to continue our discussion of housing.

I will also say that this is an important topic. I think everybody has been reflecting that in their questions and we may well wish to invite members from the department to return to talk further.

Ms. Whalen.

MS. WHALEN: What I think we can see from the presentation is there are so many different facets to this. It goes everywhere from homelessness right through to people with disabilities, difficulty finding housing that's suitable, determinants of health and so on. There is an awful lot that needs to be asked and I think it would be a wonderful idea - although I'm not a regular committee member - if you invited them back again right away.

My request then will be that I get information since we can't share it here publicly with questions. I would like if all members of the committee would be given a copy, number one, of the history of that deferred federal contribution. Mr. Troke said that it goes up and down, that it's in flux, that it's used on many programs. I'd like the information to just show how it has been used on those different programs. How much went to rent subsidy? How much went to good programs like this, where you're building housing in normal residential areas and integrating public housing, how much has been used for other programs?

We see \$58 million, a very large number. I realize now that it goes until 2030 or so, but nevertheless, that money has been given to us from the federal government to spend on housing and helping people find safe and adequate housing. If you could give us a history of that fund and where it has been allocated, then that will help us understand the use of it. So that's number one.

I'd like to know specifically how much has been spent on rent subsidies, if you could give me any background, any accounting of rent subsidies. In my area of Clayton Park, there is no public housing but there are rent subsidies in all those new buildings. I share the concern of my colleague that those are federal monies and provincial monies going in there to support developers as they put up new buildings but we don't have a long-term commitment in place for low-income families in those buildings.

MR. WOOD: Recognize that some of those rent supplements are actually income assistance rent supplements, too, that people are receiving.

MS. WHALEN: Well, hopefully they'll continue beyond the 10 years or 15 years, but if you could give me a background on that program in particular and on the \$58 million deferred federal contribution.

MR. WOOD: Sure, can do.

MS. WHALEN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Whalen, and thank you both for being here to present but you may wish to have a final word.

MR. WOOD: I think Ms. Whalen actually did a very good job of it. This is not small. As I said at the very beginning, people having a safe, affordable home and

improving the health and vibrancy of communities is foundational to the social determinants of health; if you can make improvements in there, you, in fact, are actually really helping citizens in a very large, macro way. That, for me, is at the heart of what we are doing and it's why it does cover the breadth. It is something that regardless of whether you're homeless or you're trying to find your first home, it affects all Nova Scotians.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Thank you for being here and I expect that given the interest in our topic today that you'll be hearing from us again at some future point.

I think what we'll do is take a very, very brief recess to allow our first set of witnesses to wrap up, to at least move out of the head table, and our second set of witnesses to get organized.

[1:58 p.m. The committee recessed.]