

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, December 5, 2023

Committee Room

**Update on the Economic and Cultural Impacts of Hosting
the North American Indigenous Games, 2023**

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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[Carman Kerr was replaced by Hon. Ben Jessome.]

In Attendance:

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Tamer Nusseibeh
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

North American Indigenous Games Host Society

Brendon Smithson
CEO

Fiona Kirkpatrick Parsons
Chair and Federal Rep



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

10:03 A.M.

CHAIR

Melissa Sheehy-Richard

VICE CHAIR

John White

THE CHAIR: Order. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services. I'm Melissa Sheehy-Richard. I'm the MLA for Hants West and Chair of this committee. Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional, ancestral land of the Mi'kmaw people.

Today we will hear from presenters regarding an Update on the Economic and Cultural Impacts of Hosting the North American Indigenous Games, 2023. I just want to remind everyone to make sure your phones are on silent, and in case of an emergency, we would like you to use the Granville Street exit and walk up to Grand Parade.

I will now ask the committee members to introduce themselves, beginning with MLA White.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I would also like to note the presence of Chief Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb to my left and Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh to my right.

I would like to at this point welcome the witnesses here today and ask you to introduce yourselves as well, beginning with Mr. Smithson.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: It's wonderful to have you here.

At this point, I would invite you to begin with your opening remarks.

Ms. Kirkpatrick Parsons.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: Brendon and I will be tag-teaming on this. I want to first introduce us by saying that we have some incredible news to share with all of you.

These Games were not just an everyday occurrence, as you know. Those of you who attended would know that there was a special vibrancy in the air. There was something that happened that was unique, that Halifax has never seen before - that Kijipuktuk has never seen before - not in modern memory, anyway. Certainly not since contact.

I'm not overstating that, and I think that when we share with you some of the facts and the observations that were made and the feedback that we received during and after the Games will illustrate that Halifax - Kijipuktuk - truly shone this past Summer.

I'm really honoured to be here with all of you today. I will just share with you a few slides. First of all, I want to pay respects to George "Tex" Marshall. Now, George - or Tex, as he would rather be known - is not able to be with us today, but he was really the originator of the idea of bringing the North American Indigenous Games here to Nova Scotia, and it was his vision that drove us all to do the very best we could to represent this area so well, and also to welcome the approximately 5,000 youth who came from all across Turtle Island to gather here in the very first gathering of its kind in Atlantic Canada's history.

Our organization set out - internally, we have these organizational priorities. We did communicate that this was all about making friends, playing games, sharing culture, and having a legacy that lives. Our mission is to bring together Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island, welcoming them in the spirit of friendship, sport, and culture. These are our values: culture, passion, experience, athletes, unity, and *pjila'si*, which you probably heard a lot when you were walking around town. That is a big welcome. In *Mi'kmaq*, it means - it's more than a big welcome - it's: you come in, sit down, and join us.

At these Games, we saw 16 sports. We had over 3,200 volunteers, and I want to pause for a moment and say that we actually had over 5,000 people apply to volunteer for these games, and 3,208 completed the entire process of the trainings - the cultural-awareness training, the security checks, and all of that. That just tells you how engaged people have been in these Games. They really wanted to be part of it. We had over 4,700 participants in the end, and 52 venues were used across mostly Halifax but also in

Millbrook First Nation and Sipekne'katik First Nation. Over 730 medals were presented, and almost 775,000 livestream views of our Games took place. That's a bit of an overview of what happened.

We wanted to frame this up for you to communicate - if you weren't able to be at the Games, it just gives you a sense of the enormity and the impact of these Games from an economic and cultural perspective, and we'll get to that in a moment.

Brendon, did you want to speak to the human resources piece? This is really your bailiwick.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smithson.

BRENDON SMITHSON: Just wanting to highlight a little bit the staff. Our staff were absolutely phenomenal. We hired passionate people who cared about these Games, and it was reflected in the volunteers, the youth who came. Everybody commented on how hard they worked. We had 47 full-time staff on with the team to be able to do that, all employed and living in Halifax. We did bring people from around Turtle Island to come in because they all wanted to be part of these Games.

One of the big things I wanted to highlight was our structure. We had four different departments: sporting venue, which is a big part of the Games obviously; volunteers and HR, again a huge part of the Games; and marketing and communication. One of the things that we were the first to do was we added a department of culture and engagement, to make sure that culture was a priority in our Games. We had a goal of being 50 per cent sport and 50 per cent culture in all functional areas of the Games. This department was making sure that happened.

Serene Porter was leading this as the director and did a phenomenal job to make sure that Indigenous and Mi'kmaw cultures were highlighted everywhere. We wanted people to have the opportunity to engage with culture how they felt comfortable. Everybody's journey is different, and where they are along that path, so they could do that in the way that they felt comfortable. You could see it throughout the Games in so many ways, which we'll talk a little bit as we continue going forward.

Some of the challenges we had during the Games - I think everyone knows weather. When you plan for the Games, you don't plan for a flood, which happened as part of that. Some amazing work with the people at HRM and the Emergency Management Office and all the departments coming together to make sure that when anything happened, we were ready to react. We reacted in a very positive way - very little impact on the Games in general. We still had games going on and teams being able to participate. We did unfortunately have to miss the closing ceremonies, which you'll see up there as well, but overall, that one stage of weather. We always plan for weather and have a backup to what

happens, except when it happens on the last day and you can't move anything anymore, was one of the pieces to it. We did some really nice celebrations.

The size of the Games was one of the things that was talked about before the Games, and how big these games are. Just to give a scope, the only Games that are bigger than the North American Indigenous Games are the Olympic Games and the Pan American Games. Our budget is nowhere near what the Olympics are, so there's always a challenge within that, but the idea of 5,000 youth - feeding, housing, sport, culture, all those pieces - is just a massive undertaking. Without the staff that I showed earlier, this wouldn't have been possible to be able to put together.

Transfer of knowledge: the Games have had a limited transfer of knowledge from previous Games. We actually were almost starting from scratch again and building things out in terms of how we were putting it together. We made sure that we have a robust transfer of knowledge going forward, but not having that knowledge has its ups and downs. In terms of an upside, we got to make it what we wanted. The downside is there are some pieces of information that would have been great to know when we started, but we found it along the way, and I think produced something great in terms of all the challenges that we had.

In terms of some of the achievements we had, one of the big ones was medical supports. Our volunteer lead was Dr. Brian Seaman, who worked with the Province and Public Health around not just the support of the athletes, but ensuring that the support was there for the number of visitors we had, and that the access of Nova Scotians was not impacted. It was one of the big keys that we talked about. There were going to be a lot of people in Nova Scotia, and making sure that Nova Scotians still had access to their health care was extremely important.

We had a polyclinic for the Games, but we also had pop-up clinics for visitors so they weren't overwhelming the current hospitals that were in place, which worked out extremely well. I think the results that we got back with the Province and Public Health were very positive in terms of how that worked together, and there wasn't a disruption to service in terms of that. It was a really great partnership that was together for about five years and working with everyone.

There aren't many provinces that the CMO of the province gets to be the Chair of your committee, so that was a big help when you get to be able to have such great high-level people around the table.

Our volunteers and staff - there were daily comments about how amazing our staff and volunteers were in this province. A person would ask a question and they would literally spend all day finding the answer to make sure everyone felt comfortable. We really tried to create that environment where this was family coming and making sure that you're

treating them that way. All Nova Scotians stepped up in terms of our volunteers and made sure people felt welcome here.

[10:15 a.m.]

Every morning we had to do a 6:00 a.m. meeting with all the delegations and every morning, every one of them commented how amazing your volunteers are and the work that they're doing along with the staff, and just making sure their kids felt comfortable going above and beyond anything that was requested. You ask someone to open a door and they will go way above and beyond that. We've seen that in Nova Scotia in so many other events and it's shone very broadly in this one.

Sharing of Indigenous culture: In the Games, the requirement is only the fact that you have to have a cultural village which goes on the Halifax Common, which I think most people would have seen. We added two more, on the waterfront and in Dartmouth Crossing. We also used the Mi'kmaw language on our signage so there would be English, French and Mi'kmaq, and made sure there was the opportunity that people could engage with Indigenous culture how they felt comfortable. As I said earlier, everyone is on a different path with their journey and not everyone is visual - some people write. There are different ways to engage with it, and we wanted to make sure that we were able to do that, and the culture team did an amazing job on this.

This is often a part of the Games that gets lost. You've got to feed kids, you've got to transfer kids, you've got to do sport, you've got to house them - there's only a little bit left after that, but we ensured that it was a big part of our Games in terms of that.

The last one was spectators. I've been to two NAIG games before. Spectators aren't bad. There are usually a few parents who are in there. A lot of our venues were asking - all the events are free except for the opening ceremonies, which sold out in 10 minutes. Everything else was free, and we said, Don't worry about it. Usually there are a few people around after the first day. All of our venues said, So you've gone over capacity, we're going to have to talk about limiting who goes in there. Not just parents, but a lot of parents came to see, but also Nova Scotians came out to support everyone.

It wasn't just Nova Scotia games - it was any game that we had, the stands were packed. I remember walking into the Canada Games Centre for volleyball and I couldn't get in. I was like, Wow, this has never happened to me before, and I've been a coach at other games; just to be able to see that. The RBC Centre was where lacrosse was hosted. Traditionally, that rink is actually cold because it's an arena and everybody was very excited to have it in there. The biggest complaint during the Games was that the RBC was too hot because there were too many people there watching and it was just a crazy excitement in terms of that. They were 10 deep on the side in the stands.

Everyone came out to support this: volunteers, staff and even spectators, this was how amazing it was. The number of visitors who came was unbelievable. That is not traditional within the Games, so this was something that was special, that a lot of people wanted to come to Nova Scotia, which echoed, as we saw, the numbers that were from there.

Why don't I turn this over to you, Fiona?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: We had many, many firsts at NAIG and a lot of these firsts are really legacy as well. The first time beach volleyball was featured at the Games - that was a big one for us, a very popular sport. We also had opening ceremonies for the three traditional sports, which were box lacrosse, 3-D archery, and canoe/kayak. I heard you saying it coming into my ear. Those were beautiful. We had traditional ceremonies to honour those particular sports.

We also had sport and culture sharing the same venues, so we really infused culture into the sports. They weren't separate. We also had smudging stations. I don't know if any of you went to any of the venues and noticed there were tented areas where anybody could go and participate in a smudge if you wanted to. I know this was really well received by the participants. They weren't expecting this, and they definitely took advantage of the opportunity to pause and take care of their spirits, take care of their mental health before.

My daughter was a volunteer at a smudging station and she absolutely loved it. She just wanted to keep doing it all week but she only signed up for three shifts and she was like, I wish I could do more. It was such a beautiful experience, and for visitors who have never done it before and were invited to partake, that is part of the cultural legacy. That sharing of culture is not just about sharing culture within the nations that were coming but also with non-Indigenous peoples as well so that they could feel part of these beautiful Games.

Also, as Brenda mentioned, there was Mi'kmaw language on the signage. That was a first. There has not been Indigenous languages on signage before at any of the Games. We had so much wonderful participation in creating this, too, because it's not just a matter of translating a word. A lot of the words that we have in English are not exactly translatable in Mi'kmaq, so we actually had a committee and we had people working on this and great participation from the community from a cultural perspective.

We also had the Youth Cultural Performers Program, and we had an amazing elders-in-residence program. We not only had elders here, but we also had elders from all the other delegations. We gave them opportunities to gather together on a daily basis so that they could meet each other. Elders, of course, are a very important part of our cultures. I say cultures because we are not a monolith. The nations that came here are all very different. The nations from California, for instance, are different from those from the Yukon, and their practices are different as well.

It was really great for them to be able to meet and for us to provide a venue for them to connect and provide the kind of emotional support that many of the youth did need, because let's face it, a lot of them - this was the first time they'd ever been away from home, or on a plane. Some came from a very far distance, and even some who came from New Brunswick were homesick, and they needed some care. That was, as Brandon said, a high priority for us. It was noticed, and this is definitely a legacy. I know that Games going forward are going to adopt this kind of programming as well.

There are more NAIG firsts, in case you thought that was the only slide. We had an awesome transportation loop through Halifax Transit. If you had a participant's badge, you could hop on and hop off at any time. That was fantastic, that there was a loop for going to venues. The HRM transit really collaborated with our team. They offered their buses as safe spaces, so if any youth felt uncomfortable in a situation, if there was some sort of perceived threat or real threat, they could get on a bus. Those were some of the most accessible places they could go, and the bus drivers were all aware that if a youth came to them, they could find refuge. That was a great psychological, if you will, respite.

We also had the indigenous mental health division. This was something that we had to activate very early on in the Games in a couple of instances. These are the things that didn't come out, and I don't want to violate anyone's privacy, but we did have some tragic circumstances that happened outside of the Games with family situations. Our mental health professionals and team were there to support the youth. We had ceremonies for them as well to help support them. Some were in mourning. One youth had recently lost a parent, and we surrounded them with all kinds of support and love in a way that was culturally relevant for them. That's an example of the importance of this.

We also had a Youth Ambassador Program. This was an opportunity for young people, Mi'kmaw youth, to learn about how to host a Games. We made them active participants before and during the Games. They were there to help promote to the youth how to - leadership skills. They organized an event before the Games where they could gather and showcase culture. What other things did the youth ambassadors do, Brendon? Top of mind.

BRENDON SMITHSON: You've covered most of it.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: I've covered most of it. It was a great program. Again, it was a first. I know that other NAIGs to follow will be following this as well.

We hosted great cultural-awareness training. Anyone who volunteered for the Games had to take cultural-awareness training, as well as sport-specific training, or role-specific training. That was so well received. I think it inspired a lot of people to want to learn more. I had so many volunteers tell me they never knew any of this. If you're over

the age of 25, you did not get any of this education in school. I guarantee that if you have children or grandchildren, they're all talking about this now in school, which is wonderful.

We made sure that the volunteers had this training so that our participants had a safe place. They felt seen. They felt understood. I think it went a long way. I even heard volunteers greeting me in Mi'kmaq - non-Indigenous volunteers saying pjila'si and wela'lin. That's a shift. That's an example of the impact of culture on our population. This did not happen before May. Isn't that amazing? It just gives me chills to think about.

We had incredible pins. I'm wearing one right now. I wish I had some for all of you, but they're all gone. But for a price - no, I'm just kidding. Strike that from the record. We had pins from all kinds of sponsors and so on, but we also had pins created for the traditional sports, and those were so well received. They were the hottest ticket in town. The kids went nuts for the pins - not just kids, everybody. It was just a great way for people to meet each other. I had youth coming up to me and talking to me. Do you have this pin and that pin? Can I have that pin? It was wonderful. The traditional sports pins were unique, and that was a NAIG first.

We also had sponsored medical professionals. Brendon, can you speak more to this program for me? I do know about it, but you have a better concept of what this was.

BRENDON SMITHSON: Sponsored medical, this was put in by our medical team, in terms of the fact that these Games are just coming post-COVID-19, and the medical community has done so much for COVID-19, and there's a burnout factor. Asking our medical professionals to volunteer their time for these Games after that is a lot, and we needed a lot of medical volunteers. A lot of them were able to do that, but what we did was we brought in medical professionals from across the country, across Canada, into the Games to be able to support the medical needs.

It also heightened some of the services we were able to offer in terms of that, and also made sure that all venues, all our polyclinics were covered. Again making sure that the Nova Scotia system was able to continue functioning at the level it needs to by bringing in from other provinces for the Games was one of the big pieces. This is done at every Canada Games, and we were the first to do it at NAIG, so it was a great opportunity to be able to do that, as well as bring in Indigenous medical professionals to help support some of the mental health pieces as well. Do you want me to keep going? I'm going to switch it over here.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: It was the first time a Prime Minister of Canada attended a North American Indigenous Games. As hard as that might be to believe, it is true, and we were very honoured to have Prime Minister Trudeau here. He not only attended the opening ceremonies with his young son, but he also participated actively in the traditional opening of the canoe/kayak event at Lake Banook with his son. He did it in a

very humble way. I know that he was well received by the community. He was genuinely engaged. I personally spoke with his young son who was so lovely and delighted to be here.

I think that to me - bringing a young person who's the son of a Prime Minister to meet other youth who are from all across Turtle Island - I think that was just a really beautiful gesture and a sign to us that there was reconciliation in action. I felt that was very important, and I know that was very much well-received.

Do you want to speak to this one, Brendon? Sorry, really quick, if I could also add, you mentioned Canada Games. This was also a first: We had built a relationship with the Canada Games and we did a lot of sharing of knowledge but also of sporting equipment and supplies. Some of the equipment that was at the Canada Games in P.E.I., the Winter Games - we used some of their technology equipment, and that equipment is going on to the 2025 Canada Games in St. John's. I'm actually on the board of those Games as well.

[10:30 a.m.]

We've built a real alliance, if you will, between the Canada Games and NAIG so that we are creating something better. The Canada Games are supposed to be pan-Canadian, and really, they acknowledge that there have been gaps in the participation of Indigenous peoples at the Games. Yes, opening and closing ceremonies, we all know there's lots of that, but real integration. I think Brendon made some amazing connections there with the CEO of the 2025 Canada Games and with the Canada Games Council. At the 2025 Canada Games, they're looking at smudging stations. They loved that we had that, and that is very much part of the culture of the First Nations peoples in St. John's or in Newfoundland and Labrador. They're going to be incorporating that.

That's an example of the ripple effect, that cultural impact. It may be intangible in a way, but I think it does create an atmosphere that has never been done before. Over to you, Brendon.

BRENDON SMITHSON: Do you normally have to go back and forth in these? Instead of going through each one of these individually, I'm just going to give the overall concept and highlight some of them.

A couple things that we wanted to work on are we wanted to acknowledge that the North American Indigenous Games are not just sport and there are other factors. It's not just youth and kids. When you look at the first program around community coaching, this was providing opportunity for youth who have just finished their playing career - some who were eligible in 2020 but not in 2023 - to learn about the coaching stream and what's involved with that, creating that opportunity for them to become active for life and give back to a sport that's been part of them. It was fully subscribed to. We had two from each delegation attending the Games, which was phenomenal in terms of that.

As you look down through some of the other ones, one of the big things that we really focused on was the idea of creating a welcoming environment in venues that we currently have. When you look at the Mi'kmaw flag in the venues - the Scotiabank Centre just raised the Grand Council flag recently - this is about when coming into an environment, you feel welcome, and it's taking those little pieces. We talked about the language earlier - the Mi'kmaq Grand Council flag. Those pieces create that environment that when you walk in, you feel that this is a welcoming place and supportive. We wanted to make sure that not only that happened during the week of the Games, but that continued going forward. It was important for us to make sure a lot of these happened in terms of that.

One of the neat things is the beach volleyball court being renamed. Actually, Volleyball Nova Scotia had nothing to do with us, other than they asked them how they could get the word translated. That just shows the work and what the impact of these Games can be and the partners that we work with going forward.

The last one I do want to highlight, which is the NAIG Council Hall of Honour. This is the first time we've acknowledged that they've started a hall of fame for NAIG, and it was our 2023 team that decided to move forward. That is the picture of the four award winners. Two of them are founders of the Games. On my far right - might be left, depending on how you're looking at it - is Sara-Lynne Knockwood, who was inducted into the NAIG hall of fame and just recently into the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame as the first Mi'kmaw athlete.

It's great to be able to see so much history in one space that people have contributed to these Games over time. For us, it was very important to acknowledge the past as well. This will be a legacy going forward for the Games as part of our work.

Sorry, I actually forgot my glasses (Laughter).

Again, there are a lot of positive social impacts and economics. The economic report is just being finished up now, actually, so we should have that within a week. The positive social impacts we've talked about on the previous slide: environments becoming more welcoming and different pieces that are happening across the province.

We did also have a reduction in environmental impacts. We were the first Games to do water stations. Working with Halifax Water, we had an outside water tap at each of the venues and we provided all volunteers, athletes and mission staff with a water bottle so that we weren't using plastic water bottles throughout the whole Games, and we were having that positive environmental impact. We also housed people by sports. We did that for multiple reasons, but one of the biggest impacts was over 2,000 of the athletes walked to their venue and there were no buses required. It has an environmental impact and some other positives in terms of that. It was really great to be able to do that.

Some big things at the Halifax airport that you'll see there: There's a picture there, some of the art that's been added, and then the traditional canoe remains there. There's also a Welcome to Mi'kma'ki sign that's there now as well. I know Serene and her team did a lot of work to be able to work with the Halifax airport to do these. Most of these things were done on their own. This was not us saying, You need to do this. This was them saying, How do we create the environment that you're asking for? It's really great to be able to see that.

Two facility upgrades: One is for the track and field at Beazley Fields. You'll see there are now stands there that weren't there before. That was by HRM, moving that up in terms of the pieces to that. The community ball field - they had done an amazing upgrade. It was one of the late additions we had to add because we have so many softball teams. They added lights to their field and re-did the field - an absolutely beautiful field. One of the amazing parts of the legacy of that one is that traditionally the field has only been used by community members. Now outside community is using it because the field is the best one in the area, which is just phenomenal to see in terms of that impact.

The next slide is just a video - it's about three minutes long - that was from CBC. This was actually a summary of the Games that I think summarizes it very well. This was supposed to be at the closing ceremonies but unfortunately, there were not closing ceremonies. This is the final slide, but just wanting to share this video with everybody. It really does summarize how it works now. You're going to promise me that this works.

[Video presentation]

THE CHAIR: Thank you so much. That was a great presentation. We're now going to move into the question-and-answer part of the committee. I just want to remind everybody to wait for your light to go red. I'll acknowledge you before speaking. We will begin with 20 minutes per caucus, and we will begin with the Liberal caucus and MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Thank you for the opportunity. How do these Games get funded? It seems kind of a blah question to get started with, but let's get that one out of the way. Just curious where the funding comes from to support these athletes and the Games as a whole.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: That is a great question. There's nothing wrong with asking that at all. We had three key top funders, which were the federal Government of Canada, the provincial Government of Nova Scotia, and the Halifax Regional Municipality. We also had tremendous support from corporate sponsors and exceeded our fundraising goal, actually. That's allowed us to have a bit of a legacy, and that's something we can chat about as well.

I guess I might as well say that right now. We have a legacy fund committee, and we have an obligation through our hosting agreement with the North American Indigenous Games Council to allocate the funds that are - any surplus funds would be 20 per cent to NAIG Council, 10 per cent to the Aboriginal Sport Circle, and then 70 per cent is at the discretion of the NAIG legacy sport council, with the objective being to go to support Mi'kmaw sport in Nova Scotia.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you for that. You expressed some weight and importance behind, I'll say, the sustainability of the Games and some of the challenges that you encountered in planning and an appetite to ensure that there was some continued information or things that are carried on to future Games. Can you speak to that a little bit, please?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: Sure. I think if I understand the question, you're asking if the knowledge we gained - how that's going to be transferred for future Games. Great.

I think Brendon can probably add to this, but I will first say that we actually had this in mind all along, that we wanted to make sure we were able to pay it forward to the next hosts. It's just that there wasn't a mechanism in place. I will say that NAIG Council is a volunteer council. I'm a volunteer. There was nobody sort of full time taking it on to make sure that knowledge has been transferred. I'm not blaming anybody. It's just there are only so many hours in a day, and you can only ask volunteers to do so much. I want to say that first.

We wanted to make sure that we are transferring as much knowledge as we have to the next Games. We started the process ourselves, but we also engaged the services in kind from Deloitte, and Deloitte has provided us with essentially what we're calling a Games in a box, which is essentially an ability to electronically capture everything that we know about hosting a Games and providing that in electronic form, and also physical form. We have physical pieces to transfer to NAIG Council for use by future NAIG hosts.

Did you want to add to that, Brendon?

BRENDON SMITHSON: In terms of 2023 hosts, our staff, and the board, NAIG is a movement, and it was important to us to keep that going forward. There have been some changes along the way. The Games have also been lost. For us, one of the biggest keys was that - I would say, and have heard, that 2023 was the best Games that have ever happened. But we look forward to 2027 being better. We want people to build on the great work that's done; 2017 was the first Games before ours, and we built on what Toronto did, from that perspective.

For us, it's so important that all the information is shared. I've met with the future hosts many times. So has Fiona, actually, as well. In terms of making sure that some of the

lessons learned along the way are shared, all of our documents and other pieces - it's about the youth. That's important to us, to make sure that continues going forward from that kind of a knowledge perspective, in terms of how we're sharing.

BEN JESSOME: You referenced - I think it was 70 per cent that would go into, I'll say, future opportunities. Can you elaborate on some, I'll say, initial planning on how you - it's still probably pretty new but what are the plans for that little pocket of money?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: I can sort of speak to that. The committee hasn't concluded yet, and we are still waiting for all the final financials to come in. We actually have a meeting on Thursday. It might be our second last, but we are getting close to it. I'm reluctant to say too much at this stage, because I don't want to raise people's expectations until we actually have the final numbers in. But I can say that the funds will go to known entities that support Mi'kmaw sport and encourage youth to get into sport, provide them with the right tools and equipment and training that they need to thrive in sport.

[10:45 a.m.]

It's always been, as I understand, a struggle to get enough funding for sports in Mi'kmaw communities. This will definitely be a great legacy of NAIG, and it will be a great piece for many, many years to come. We want to make sure that it's structured such that the benefits will be felt for generations. I hope that answers your question.

BEN JESSOME: Ms. Kirkpatrick Parsons, you referenced your participation in the Canada Games coming up. Is that a board position that is embedded in the Canada Games organizational structure, and in a complementary way, is there a similar type of position that would be embedded in Nova Scotia sports structures, or maybe Sport Nova Scotia as the local representative body?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: The Canada Games Council asked me to be their representative on the board of the 2025 Canada Games. Part of the reason was I have an interest in youth and sport. I was involved as a volunteer with 2011, and of course, with my role on NAIG, they felt it would be a good move for the Canada Games Council to guide the next Canada Games towards more Indigenous inclusion.

To answer your question about Sport Nova Scotia, I'm not aware of a particular position for - if that's a set-aside position for Indigenous representation. Brendon, you know a lot more about provincial sport organizations than I do. Did you want to speak to that?

BRENDON SMITHSON: I couldn't speak to that. That would have to be asked of them, but I will say from the Games and the work that has happened previous to the Games, the integration is coming together and working on different ways to be more inclusive with

Indigenous and beyond in terms of that. I gave an example within the presentation about the beach volleyball court and the naming of it. There are a lot of things that are in the works behind the scenes that people don't even know about in terms of that, but in terms of a specific position, I couldn't speak to that. I know it is a priority within Sport Nova Scotia, for sure, around diversity and equity.

BEN JESSOME: You spoke about the opportunities for smudging throughout the Games in a very accessible way. For people in general, how readily available are opportunities for smudging in day to day - outside of large sporting events or things like this?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: Thank you for asking the question. I guess it depends on where you are and what your culture is. Not all cultures participate or use smudging as a method of spiritual cleansing or spiritual centering. I guess I don't know how accessible it is. I personally do it every day at home, not in a public way. As far as public smudging, I don't know that I've ever really seen it other than in ceremony. This is, I think, what really differentiated our Games. It was very publicly accessible and welcoming for all, and I hope people felt that they could partake. That was the point.

BRENDON SMITHSON: I just wanted to add that part of some of the venue selection is around the accessibility of smudging. Not all spaces - due to fire alarms and other pieces around that - do create some challenges around accessibility to smudging. We've seen that in part of it. I'm sure others have as well, in terms of meetings and other things that have happened, but I think bringing awareness to it is starting to make that shift. Just to speak to some of the accessibility, even within buildings there are barriers to be able to access in terms of that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: Thank you, wela'lin, for your presentation. As you were speaking, and as someone who's been on the board of Discover Halifax in my past, we've always known that Halifax does events well. Given the nature of these Games as a competition, it is a healthy competition across Canada that brings events to major cities that are prepared for it. I would be remiss if I didn't ask you to say hi to Paul Forrest for me, as someone who for 14 years worked with Paul on the Cole Harbour Annual Harvest Festival. I know where his heart is and what he wants to do, so I want to acknowledge that and say hi to him, and to you, Fiona.

I was on council when the North American Indigenous Games were presented to Halifax council and how supportive we were and looking at the brand and the big announcement for the brand. It was all very exciting and very much due time. I think that's what you're seeing. People want to be educated, want to learn, and to make it a legacy. It's something we should have been doing all along.

That's my question in that regard, because I've often heard, and it sounds - I don't have any facts to go by other than opinions. Every time a game - the Canada Games were held and athletes always saying, We're not supported enough financially. I just wondered: In the future, do you see the Canada Games and NAIG being on par? I'm just trying to understand from an events perspective. It's great that everyone is learning the experience. Again, I'm grateful for you having that continuity and transitioning the Games in general.

The other takeaway was: You mentioned Toronto did it well, but then again, the competition, we had to do it that much better. I have to acknowledge the volunteers, because I know that Halifax has long been - I heard it several times, they said, I can't get over it, we just come here. Is there a network of volunteers? I've always suggested that they should have just a known network. Anytime there's an event, you just go and ask them whether they are willing to - I know you're on that list probably, Fiona, but I'm just trying to - I'm excited about the whole thing, but I just wondered, going forward, is this something Canada is going to raise the profile of across the continent, or is it always going to go back and forth as to depending on who the host city is?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: They're always going to be two distinctly different events, because the North American Indigenous Games are really for Indigenous youth. That's always going to be distinct and separate. What we're trying to do with the Canada Games - North American Indigenous Games are North American, if you will, Turtle Island, so it encompasses I think about 25 per cent of participants from the United States. That's the piece that we have to remember, but the Games are mostly held in Canada, and there are a number of reasons for that.

We have infrastructure, we have funding, we have a will, we have a volunteer infrastructure. You asked if there is a volunteer database, if you will. We started one when I was with Events Nova Scotia. I'm not sure where that sits right now. Does it still exist? (Interruption) Yes, it does. I'll acknowledge that. Brendon did say that it does still exist, so there is a database that people can sign up to volunteer.

We did our promotion of volunteers - I think we got people who never volunteered before. I know that for a fact, so we definitely increased the - I hope that part of the legacy is that people now see the benefit of volunteering, of giving back. Yes, this was a unique event, but there is so much that you get from volunteering. If I didn't love it so much, I wouldn't do it. I do it a lot for lots of different things, and I'm not saying that to build myself up. I get more from it than I probably give. I think that people did come away with that feeling.

What we're trying to do as far as working together with Canada Games isn't to merge the two, it's to exchange knowledge, it's to make each other better, and honestly, Canada is at a turning point. You mentioned you should have been doing this before. Yes, perhaps, of course, but we are at a point now where we can really influence change. We're going to keep our foot on the gas, if you will. We're at a point now where we can really

influence change. We're going to keep our foot on the gas, if you will. We're at a point in Canada's history of reconciliation and everywhere we can see opportunities to bring people together and move forward and improve each other, then that's what we should do, in my opinion. That's what we're doing at the Canada Games and the North American Indigenous Games level. Did you want to add to that, Brendon?

BRENDON SMITHSON: In terms of the volunteer database, Volunteer Nova Scotia has that. There is a database where people sign up in, I believe, the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage office is part of that connection in terms of that. I know where that's sitting.

I think Fiona spoke very well about the two Games. They are very distinctly different but there are partnerships that can happen. Going through COVID-19 - all of the games across the country went through it together. We learned from each other and how we developed that, and those partnerships are important to be able to move some things forward. I think it's a great mutual relationship.

In terms of NAIG, Fiona spoke great on that in terms of it's a very different event. They have a different path than the Canada Games to what they're trying to achieve in terms of that and in terms of sharing cultures. It's very different across this country, as we saw all of it coming together in Kijipuktuk. They want to make sure that that's highlighted and it's 50/50 in terms of that. The partnership's important so that there are opportunities for the youth to be able to participate in the Canada Games as well, but they are distinctly different events, and we want to make sure they're structured that way as well.

LORELEI NICOLL: I've always had an interest and a heart for lacrosse, and I've always wanted to see that grow. I'm hoping that there's an opportunity going forward, because we hear a lot about - and I represent Cole Harbour and yes, hockey's kind of king there - but I've always been looking at diversifying other sports as well. Lacrosse is a great sport and I wanted to give that acknowledgement and wondered if there was an opportunity. Also, to go back - so the economic report is going to come out tomorrow, I think you said. It would have been nice to have had it, but in that regard, knowing events, I know that a lot of it comes in kind. You mentioned a lot of - with your transportation, you mentioned the infrastructure, things like that. Will the in kind be acknowledged in the economic impact report that is going to be presented? Everyone wants to be a host, but you have to realize a lot of times that it's the in kind that really makes it successful.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: You're absolutely right. We actually had some surprise in kinds at the end when organizations said yes. (Interruption) I like the word "kind." It's a nice word.

Absolutely, it is recognized. It's recognized also in our budget. We also note it as VIK, value in kind. That is always acknowledged. It's important, because if it takes

something off a line item, that saves us money and that's more money that can go towards Mi'kmaw sports here in Nova Scotia.

You mentioned the economic impact report. Is it tomorrow that it's coming out? It's coming soon. We have no control over that. That's out of our hands. That was a provincial initiative. If you were down at the cultural village, you were probably asked by somebody holding an iPad some questions about your travel habits and how much you were spending and so on. That's going to be reported very shortly. We had some estimates prior to that. It will be very interesting to see how it compares with what's estimated. Our guess is it's going to be much higher than we originally estimated, so absolutely.

Was there anything else that I missed?

When you mentioned lacrosse, I know for a fact that it's very close to Brendon's heart. He's very involved in lacrosse. I have to tell a short side story if I may.

[11:00 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Order. We're turning it over to the NDP caucus - MLA Hansen - but I'm sure MLA Hansen would be happy to . . .

MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I do want to hear the short story, so you can continue on. No worries.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: I'll make it 20 seconds long. Brendon's going to get embarrassed, but I just want to give a shout-out to him. He went so over - this is not a CEO who sat in his office and put his feet up on the desk. He was so involved with everything, but lacrosse is very close to his heart. After a game - it was four in the morning, okay? He had a meeting at six o'clock in the morning - he was sweeping the floor at RBC Centre. He was sweeping the floor. We were like, Brendon, go to bed. I just wanted to say that because that shows you the level of commitment. It's leadership from the top like that which just really inspired everybody to bring their best selves to these games. Sorry to interrupt.

SUZY HANSEN: You didn't interrupt. I think that's the whole point of having you both present today; it's to let us have an idea of - some of us have watched the games. I think most of us here have been a part of it or in some way have watched a number of games. What was seen was just that: an excitement, a vibrancy, young people doing things that they love to do and enjoying it as they're doing it, and, as well, having the support from family, from abroad, and from close to be able to cheer them on throughout the game.

I'm going to go back to funding, but I promise it will be this one time that I ask this question about funding. You mentioned the three key funding streams are the federal, provincial, and HRM. I'm just wondering: Is there stable funding by the provincial government to continue on the legacy?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: Is there stable funding to continue on a legacy? (Interruption) Oh, yes.

SUZY HANSEN: You said there was some funding still that you will allocate in different ways. I'm just curious to know: Has the Province stepped up and said, We will continue stable funding to go toward the athletes and the training and such?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: I don't know. I think what the Province has done has been absolutely adequate, more than adequate for our needs. It met our needs for these Games, and we were able to take that in combination with what was also given us. I must say, we had strong fiscal management that allowed us to get to the point of not only being on time and under budget, but we also had such tremendous support from our corporate sponsors. We have enough money to provide these legacy funds for Mi'kmaw sports. I can't speak to other ongoing funding efforts that the Province is making toward Mi'kmaw sport in Nova Scotia, but I bet you my colleague here can speak to that because he lives this every day.

BRENDON SMITHSON: In terms of Games, there is a bilateral agreement with the federal government and the provinces to support training, travel, and other pieces to the North American Indigenous Games. That's part of the funding going forward, as you mentioned, and in previous ones. Then there are other bilateral agreements around Indigenous sports that work together with the Province in terms of the funding and those kinds of pieces. I'm not privy to the amounts, but there is funding that continues going forward, and those are signed off in the Canadian Sport Policy. The provincial and territorial governments are working together to continue that going forward.

SUZY HANSEN: That's what I wanted to know, because I think when it comes down to the truth and reconciliation, those are a lot of the pieces that we want to make sure are going to be continuing, that are going to be ongoing because it's not just a one-off. We know this when it comes to communities and cultures, and you know this as well, Mr. Smithson. I just wanted to make sure that there was something continuous.

My next question is: You mentioned the health care pop-up clinics and not disrupting the services of the health care that's here at the time of the NAIG games. I'm curious to know - explain to me how this worked. There's a lot we can learn from this, so I'd like to hear how that process worked.

BRENDON SMITHSON: Our medical committee included the host committee, medical side, the Province of Nova Scotia, and also Public Health, working together to

share multiple things including requirements of what athletes would need to bring and other pieces like that.

The focus of our conversations was around how do we make sure that the medical system in Nova Scotia is not overtaxed? It is already at a high point because of COVID-19, and just coming out of that and wanting to make sure it goes together. Within the Games, we have what we call a polyclinic, which, for the simplicity of it, it's a small hospital. Any accredited athlete, coach, or anything, went to the polyclinic. Any part of the Games was not being sent into the main system unless there was a major injury that needed an X-ray - we didn't have an X-ray machine in our polyclinic. The idea was that any of those would come into our polyclinic. Other than an extreme emergency, they would still come to our polyclinic before they were recommended to the hospital, so there wasn't just a deviation over there in terms of that.

Working with Public Health, we were able to set up some pop-up clinics for outside visitors in terms of being able to access that and the idea of not having to go into the straight medical system, which was also used by the community in terms of those. The idea was trying to keep non-Nova Scotians out of the current system in terms of that. When you're here for eight days, it can be overtaxed quite a lot. Our incident reports were extremely high, with the number of things that went through the Games. When sport's going on, that's all part of it. But from the reports that we got back from Public Health and the Province, it worked extremely well. I think there were some higher numbers within the system, but it's also tourism season, and everyone knows everyone's in the city normally. I don't think we went beyond, exceeded, in terms of that.

The partnership between our medical team and the Province and Public Health, just to interact - we met every morning at 6:30 just to make sure we knew where the challenges were and what was coming, and then phone calls throughout the day to make sure everyone was on the same page. Having that partnership at the higher level and then being able to deal with different pieces, including infections. I mean, one of the biggest things was how COVID-19 was going to happen, and we didn't have an outbreak at all in terms of the Games. That was something that was monitored all the way through the Games, in terms of how we worked together.

The idea of having that larger committee come together and talk about what are some of the challenges - this is, again, where the Indigenous mental health side of things came into it. We talked about the anxiety of athletes coming to the Games and some of the challenges around that. We were able to bring that forward. It was just an unbelievable partnership with all three parties at the table to working through all the issues around how we support the athletes as best as possible, and how we make sure Nova Scotians are not impacted.

Both of those were key to the success of the Games, in our minds. That was important to us. That's where we focused and how we built out that structure that, as you mentioned - how we came to that answer.

SUZY HANSEN: You touched on the mental health. That was going to be my next question. When it comes down to mental health, culturally, it can be a bit different. I was just wondering what types of ways and uses that you were able to tackle that particular issue as well.

BRENDON SMITHSON: A little bit tough to answer - mental health is so broad in terms of what's part of it. We worked with the Eskasoni crisis line in terms of having a 24-hour ability to call someone. As we know, situations can arise throughout the evening and day when the polyclinic may not be open. We had counsellors within the polyclinic while it was open at all times, and then the elders-in-residence program was a big part to us. From a cultural point of view, being able to connect with an elder - there were teams that did bring their own elders as well to support them, but you never know when it's going to happen, in creating those spaces.

Part of the reason for the smudging stations in all of the venues was the idea that it created a bit of a calming sense. We wanted the youth to be able to be seen in Halifax, and see the culture. That was also part of the mental health. Overall, it was the wider scope in terms of that, in terms of how we supported it. Using the Eskasoni crisis line was a huge help, to be able to have that 24-hour access, counsellors within the polyclinic, and then the elders as well being available. Obviously a challenge to not overtax the elders, and how we kind of rotated through that and being able to support those was how we came together to support the mental health piece in the Games.

I'm sure there's more we could have done, but we started somewhere, and hopefully the next Games will build on that as well.

SUZY HANSEN: I will say, just based on what was seen, we had no idea that this was something that your organization, your group, had developed. From someone who was just looking in, I thought that it was absolutely phenomenal and amazing and really kind of understood and had an awareness of the different groups that were here, whether culturally from North America, in the U.S., and as well from here in Canada.

I wanted to also mention that I'm glad to hear that there's an alliance with the Canada Games because they're learning things from what you've shown and what you showcase, and as well, infusing the culture in the sport and the cultural legacy.

I think for the most part, when we look at events and we see these things that are happening, we look at them like, This is great, we're just here to do a show and to watch these young people perform or do their sport. At the same time, we're all taking something from what we've watched, what we've seen, what we've experienced, and just seeing that

in play when it comes to the signage, when it comes to the cultural village and not just one spot and two other locations. I think we have a lot to learn. In saying that, I'm glad that there are some things that are being transferred on naturally and some things that are actually, We need to do this work, let's start moving with that.

I also wanted to point out, when you mentioned seeing yourself reflected and creating the environment, that you want to continue going forward. That is exactly what immersing yourself in culture is about. It's making sure that you're able to see that, and young people in particular, because they're the ones who are going to be leading us in future generations, and they're going to be instilling that moving forward and doing that work. I wanted to say that.

Within the Canada Games, with the alliance, do you think that there will be - I think it's maybe early stages to know, but do you think that there will be discussions or movement on maybe having Indigenous language or Indigenous signage similar to what we have seen for these Games?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: I can speak to that because at the last board meeting in St. John's a couple weeks ago, I was informed that they are already moving in that direction. They have some other considerations in Newfoundland and Labrador because they have the Innu and they also have Inuit, as well as Mi'kmaq. They are actually incorporating Indigenous languages into their venues in similar ways to what we did. They really see the value in doing that and they're taking pride. They're fairly early on in their journey there, and I don't think I'm speaking out of turn, and they are now awakening to the value of ensuring that there's more inclusion. It's really a wonderful offshoot of what we were able to bring forward.

They were here to see what we did, and they were like, Let's do that. Why not? Why hadn't we done this sooner? They took lots of ideas from us, and it's been a great relationship. There's been also cost savings between the two events. Why not? Economies of scale and such. There's no reason why we can't collaborate.

SUZY HANSEN: We're going to get back to volunteering. I think the volunteer numbers have gone down, but it was wonderful to see that you had a large number of folks who wanted to volunteer. My thought with that is: The cultural awareness training that you were able to give to folks, has that been asked to be transferred in other ways to other sectors in different parts of departments of government?

BRENDON SMITHSON: In terms of the cultural awareness training, I first want to acknowledge Serene Porter, who actually created the training in her knowledge and worked with the community around doing so from that perspective. We promoted that only the volunteers got the training, but hotel staff, bus staff, university staff all asked for it in terms of that, from that perspective, moving forward in terms of where it expanded beyond that. One of the challenges with - it's not a challenge - the training is sharing it to other

regions. Their culture is completely different than Mi'kmaq. It is a very broad Indigenous piece, but there is a very specific Mi'kmaw piece to it, just knowing where Nova Scotia is in terms of that.

[11:15 a.m.]

I know there has been a lot of work that Serene did with the Games and post-Games about connecting with other organizations that from the Games wanted to learn more about this. Part of the training that was I think the biggest key that the team did so well is, it's not all-encompassing. It's the start of the journey and then asking you to continue how far you want to go with the journey, and giving you resources to do so, which is where we really saw our volunteers step up in terms of looking at other resources to know those kinds of things - opportunities around that.

The training was set up for NAIG in terms of how it works. There would need to be some alterations to what's in there, because it was very focused on our Games. If you're going to a different government department or different business, it might look a little bit different in terms of that would need some reflection in terms of that, but our staff is out there and would probably love to help in terms of that, some connections around that. It was wider than just volunteers who took that training, and just phenomenal, the number of groups. We actually had to start saying no because we couldn't meet the demand anymore. Multiple people came in and said, Can we have the training? We'd love to, but we've got to get our volunteers done.

At some point there had to be a focus, but I'd say the training numbers were closer to 9,000 to 10,000 whom we actually hit by the time we were finished, which is way wider than the volunteering catchment in terms of what they did from that perspective.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm so happy to hear that. I think any way that we can bolster our awareness of the people around us and the environment in which we live and where we are, I think that's absolutely wonderful. I'll keep that in mind in my back pocket.

The only other thing that I wanted to say was that all of these pieces are exactly what we want to see when it comes to, as legislators, the work that we want to do. We may have to adapt some of those things. We may have to make changes to the broader scope of how the process works, but I think it's the awareness, it's the integration, it's the representation, it's all of those things that come when we see these things and how we should be excited to want to make those changes so that all folks, every walk of life can come and sit in a seat that we sit in.

I wanted to say thank you again for you both being here and enlightening us and giving us information from a different side. I've seen it as a spectator, but I think this is wonderful, the work that you both and your team and the volunteers have done has been amazing.

THE CHAIR: We will move over to the PC caucus and begin with MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: First of all, it was absolutely beautiful. I know that they did the - I was taking notes here all over the place. The canoe relay event's kickoff in Gold River, which is in my constituency, was supposed to be at Wildcat, but I was trying to figure out or remember how, but it somehow got changed. I know standing there and taking part in that, people from all over Chester-St. Margaret's and elsewhere watching those students, I know it left a lasting impression. It was a bit of an awakening for people who aren't part of this culture. I'm wondering: What lasting cultural impressions have been shared by participating NAIG 2023 athletes and the volunteers and team staff who took part in the events?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: I'm sure Brendon is jumping out of his seat too, because that's a great question. I may have touched on this before, but one of my personal goals was to see and feel a shift in how non-Indigenous people interact with Indigenous peoples here. It's not that it's been negative, it's just been almost non-existent in some cases. That's fair. That's just the way it's been. I feel that there's been a shift. There's this increase in curiosity, a desire to learn more. I get this every single day. It's partly due to my actual day job, because people do ask me about what I can do to learn more and so on.

I do think, anecdotally at least, that there has been a shift, especially for those who were involved in some way, whether it was just briefly, walking through the cultural village, engaging with the vendors, learning how to make a wigwam, or whether it was to attend one of the canoe relays that were in 13 communities across Nova Scotia. Whatever it was, people wanted a piece of it. I think that spark is igniting curiosity in a generation. Again, the younger people get it. They're getting it in school. They're understanding the reality that we as human beings, as living beings, are all connected. We are not separate. That's, I think, what the Games have done, bring us together to that realization. You're connected to each other, you're connected to the Earth, you're connected to everything around us, and that there's nothing really separating us other than our own hesitations, our own fears, our own lack of knowledge and understanding. I truly believe that these Games have been a turning point for us here in Nova Scotia in terms of our desire to learn more and to connect more. I think it broke down barriers.

Brendon, did you have anything?

BRENDON SMITHSON: First of all, the Wildcat one had a rainstorm, and that was why we were unable to get - the elders weren't able to make it in terms of that.

I wanted to highlight the canoe relay a little bit. One of the reasons for that was our focus was athletes. The reason for the canoe relay was so each community got to highlight their coaches, athletes, and got that moment. When you're going away, you do one big pep

rally. When you're at home, you don't have that big pep rally because everyone's coming to Halifax. We wanted to make sure the communities were involved, and the athletes, and the coaches, and the chaperones all got recognized. We went around Nova Scotia because even though the games were mostly focused in Kijipuktuk, it was the whole of Nova Scotia that came to be part of that. We were able to go to all of the communities and take the canoe.

The first one did get rained out, which was actually the first one which was interesting in terms of that, from that perspective.

From a perspective of youth not, I think Nova Scotia - Fiona spoke very well about the Nova Scotians in terms of that. Outside, one of the big messages we got from the delegations was that Halifax is a welcoming and safe place to come and that they want to come back, and not just to Halifax - most of them stayed for an extra week and toured everywhere in Nova Scotia as part of that. In terms of that, that's where we started. There's still a legacy to do in terms of making sure that continues, but the message going home was very positive that this is a welcoming environment to be in and be supportive and you're seen in that environment.

From kids across Turtle Island, I think every one of them has said every kid wants to come back at some point. They asked if we were hosting 2027 because they wanted to come back. It wasn't just in Halifax. A lot of them did tours all the way to Cape Breton, down to Yarmouth. They wanted to see everywhere. They wanted to see the communities. They wanted to go to every place in Nova Scotia. That was a big piece of that which I think is exciting to see, that the Games really encompassed the whole province. Even though it seems like it was localized, it really wasn't. It was really everything that was part of it.

There were multiple times I heard that they were happy to have a day off because they took a trip to Pictou, or to Chester, or somewhere to go visit. Their parents just took them, and they're out. It was really a welcoming environment that we created and a legacy that I think will impact tourism in the future of people wanting to come here, for sure.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: I wanted to layer on that a little bit. I've been asked this a few times, not just is NAIG coming back, but can we do the cultural village again? Can we have it every Summer? I'm like, If you want to volunteer to lead it, sure. Can you get the funding?

It just tells you that there is something there. There's something there. People do expect when they come to a place like this, they see lots of wonderful Celtic - I'm half Scottish, my dad's Scottish, love the Celtic culture, Acadian cultures, and so on - but we're not seeing a lot of expression of Mi'kmaq culture here during high tourist season. I think there's a lesson here. Something could happen from a culture perspective in Nova Scotia, certainly. Just a suggestion. Let me just drop it there.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: With over 750 Indigenous nations participating, how did NAIG ensure that different cultures were adequately represented?

BRENDON SMITHSON: We focused a lot on Mi'kmaw culture in terms of how we shared culture within the games. Part of the reason for that was during the postponement from 2020, there was an opportunity for the games to go elsewhere, and NAIG council voted unanimously to keep them in Kijipuktuk, in Nova Scotia, because it was the Mi'kmaq's turn to share their culture. We really highlighted that, in terms of making sure that it was 50 per cent sport, 50 per cent culture throughout functional areas. In our training with the volunteers, we wanted our volunteers to allow the youth who were here to share their culture, to be stewards of their own culture.

We didn't have every culture out there in terms of every area. Our highlighting was around the Mi'kmaw culture, which is what the youth really wanted to know about while they were here. They had the opportunity to share. In terms of language, when they learned how to say hello in Mi'kmaq, they would share how they do it. One of the big pieces we did was within the accommodations and within the venue, we always identified a space where kids could gather.

Outside of every venue, including hotels - and I'm sure some of the residents were not happy about this - there were a lot of hand drums, because everyone brings hand drums. What you will see is a youth who could be Cree go out there and start playing their hand drum. Other nations will just join in and learn the song, and then they will share. There's a cultural sharing in terms of that. We tried to create the space where they could come together to share. We created brave spaces in many of our venues as well, where the youth could come together and do that sharing in a safe space.

For us, it was about creating that environment where they felt comfortable to share their culture, and it was respected in terms of that. That's how we brought it together, working with our volunteers to make sure that, if you don't know something, ask. Allow them to be a steward of their own culture. My example to a lot of our volunteers was, the favourite thing that people ask you is, Where is something in Nova Scotia? And you're like, Oh, let me tell you. You're going to go here, you're going to go there, you're going to go that way. We love sharing Nova Scotia and what it looks like, and they'd like to do the same.

That's how we created that environment of being able to do that. We didn't have every culture up to 750. There would have been a lot of signage if we had to try to do that, but overall, that was how we - that was our journey, and what we felt was our way to move forward. Other Games may think differently, but that's how we felt it would work in terms of moving forward.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Kirkpatrick Parsons, did you have something you wanted to add?

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: Sure. I always have something to add.

We really did want to nurture each youth who was coming and encourage them to bring themselves fully. You would have seen that at the opening ceremonies. They would walk in with their particular regalia or symbols of their own culture, which was amazing to see. Seeing the Mi'kmaw people express their culture so proudly gave them that feeling of, Oh, I can do this too. I can bring this home with me. I can be myself at home.

Not all communities are really culturally driven. Some have had that taken away through colonization. I think coming here to experience collectively this sharing of culture - I think it helps rehabilitate, if you will, that sense of self, that sense of one's own culture.

We as Indigenous peoples are reclaiming our cultures. Not all have maximized that yet. Some are still trapped in colonization, and coming here, they left feeling - I think - better than they came. That was our intent, that they would go home, and we talked about being the future leaders. They're leaders now in their communities, but they're going to go home and they are home now, and they're going to change. They're changed forever. They're going to go home and change their own communities.

That's the effect that participating not only in sport but in sharing one's culture does for your own self worth. I just wanted to speak to that.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I'm just going to ask one quick question, and then I'm going to pass it on to my colleague, Mr. Taggart.

On the culture grounds, cultural showcases of the Halifax Common and other areas around the city were visited by a lot of people. A number of Indigenous artists were showcased. Do you have any statistics on the number of visitors, and are you able to share feedback in regard to the visitor experience with these artists and whatnot?

BRENDON SMITHSON: That's just being put together now. Preliminary numbers are over 16,000 visitors not from Nova Scotia, which was - the number up there was 4,700, so you can times that by the number of people who were here in terms of coming to the Games. We will have the final number as the report goes forward in terms of that from that perspective.

Overall feedback - overwhelming positivity from everyone we've spoken to, from the kids who were at the Games. Our summary of how we feel it went is the only complaint we got was, We got sandwiches too many times. If that's the concern, we feel things are moving in a good direction. I just actually met with the delegations last week again for the final wrap-up, and overwhelmingly, their kids feel very positive, loved Nova Scotia, would come back again at any time, really were proud of how we showcased the culture, and other pieces like that.

[11:30 a.m.]

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I know that it was a big worry and lots of preparation for the children. We've heard it here. I'm just glad to hear it again. I'm going to pass it over to my colleague, MLA Tom Taggart.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I've got a lot of notes here, but there are a couple of points that I really want to make. First, I want to really say thanks. I didn't attend, I was in Newfoundland and Labrador on vacation the whole time, but I've got to tell you, as a Nova Scotian and part of government, I'm pretty darn proud of what I'm hearing here today and the work you guys did.

I have a question, but I've got to jump to a comment you made. I wish to comment on it, but I don't want to run out of time. You talked about - I forget how you framed it, about Mi'kmaw culture and how it's not really - I forget how you framed it, but out there that much. I look forward to that changing. I represent Colchester North and I was searching, trying to find the right name, but Tim Bernard and Donald Julien and those guys, it's a really huge project. I think it's called the Mi'kmaq cultural centre. I know I've been to - Mi'kmaewey Debert Cultural Centre, that's what it is. I've met with them and look forward to it going forward, and I expect that to be an absolutely huge opportunity, as well as the opportunity to draw people to our community just for that.

I had to get that out there. I think it's critically important and it's a big deal. Those guys are working hard at it. I think it's moving forward quite quickly.

In the beginning, you spoke about some of the challenges of coordinating such a large-scale event and how you overcome them. What can we do to improve on and to ensure that the Games return to our province in the very near future? What do we need to do? What can we do?

BRENDON SMITHSON: I think in terms of moving forward, one of the big pieces is continuing the legacy of the cultural piece and creating that welcoming environment within all areas of Nova Scotia. I don't know if people always understand what creates a welcoming environment. The idea of having a Mi'kmaw flag when you enter a building; we see the Canadian flag every day. When something is there, it just changes the mindset that this is a welcoming environment. There are some bigger pieces, but there are some smaller pieces that can easily be done to move some things forward.

The two gentlemen that you had mentioned, who were great supports to us as well in terms of that and some partnerships with them, they come up with great ideas in terms of that. The airport, you've seen, has added Indigenous art. The canoe is there, there's a Welcome to Mi'kma'ki. Those pieces bring that comforting environment. The way I often

think about it is if I were in a different country, where do I pick to eat? The one place that has the English language on the door. How do you look at it in terms of that when you're looking at other places? Not just within Halifax. How do we do that across this province?

I can tell you, as I said, they all went across this province. It was not just in Halifax. How we create that environment across the province is something to look at. The words we use within the team was, How do we create the supportive environment for every youth? How are they supported? We kept using those words and working with our partners about how to create a supportive environment where you are. Not asking you to change the whole landscape of a building, but what small thing. A \$20 flag up in a building can change a youth's life. Those are just small pieces. There are lots of others, but that's where you start.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: You also asked about how we can get the Games back. As I understand, there is a process and it's not automatic, but I will say that we were asked several times, When can you guys do this again? (laughs) by people not from here. When is it going to come back? I think it probably wouldn't be a stretch if we really wanted to have them back to put forward a bid at some point.

It's going to be in Calgary next, and then there'll be an opportunity to bid fairly soon on the Games that are to come after that. I think there's a minimum - is it 10 years between - is that the minimum? Yes, West, Central, East. The next would be Central, and then it would be East after that, so we'll be looking at another 10 years, 11 years from now when we'd be eligible to host again. I know it seems like a long way off; I'm going to be really old by then. What's that? It will come very quickly. I mean, heck, I was supposed to be the Chair for the 2020 Games; I came on board in October 2019, and here I am, still the Chair four years later. It goes fast, though. It goes fast.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart, 59 seconds.

TOM TAGGART: Sorry to take up too much time here. I just have to - I have this rural champion, and we've talked about legacy a lot of times. I just would like to (Laughs) - trust me, I'm not being critical because it was a huge success. I think that I would expect having these events in a community, it brings legacy, like you mentioned, to ball fields and stuff like that. I'd just encourage - and maybe that's a role of provincial, too. I don't know, but in the future, if we could try to spread our wings a little bit, use Halifax for the anchor and get out in - Millbrook's a great community. It's very close to home, but there are lots of others. It's an important piece to get outside of - the centre is a draw, but I would get into - I just wanted to get that in.

THE CHAIR: Order. MLA Taggart, you handled that just to the second, actually.

I was thinking we're a little limited on time. Perhaps I welcome some closing remarks as opposed to going a speed round, if that's - maybe we'll let MLA Nicoll ask her quick question and welcome you to give some closing remarks.

LORELEI NICOLL: As you're in your closing remarks, maybe you could address how you're growing NAIG. Like you mentioned, a welcoming environment and safe community, but with regard to growing the sports for women in NAIG. You can maybe nuance that into your closing remarks.

FIONA KIRKPATRICK PARSONS: I didn't prepare closing remarks. I prefer to speak from the heart, so I will start with that.

My term with NAIG is done as soon as we are wrapping up the affairs of the host society. That will conclude my time, I think. (Laughs) I've been asked to consider other things, but right now, I need a break. I know that as the legacy fund committee is contemplating how to disseminate the funds that we have a surplus of, that women in sport - in Mi'kmaw sport - are being strongly considered as recipients of some of that. I'll say no more on that until we have final determination. I know that there's definitely desire around the committee table that we do more to support young women in - women in sport in general in Mi'kmaw communities. There is that.

I want to first say - and if Brendon wants to add to this, obviously I would love it. I want to thank you all for your interest, and your enthusiasm, and your very good questions today. They really help us feel - because it's been a few months and I'm suffering from event withdrawal. You've been able to give us the opportunity to re-enter the wonderful world of the North American Indigenous Games, which personally has been the greatest honour of my life. Yes, it has been. As a little lonely Cree living here in beautiful Mi'kma'ki, in the warm embrace of Mi'kmaw people, I can tell you this is a beautiful people who have a lot to offer, a lot to share, and investing in Mi'kmaw youth is one of the best investments that the Province of Nova Scotia could ever make.

The Indigenous youth across this land are the fastest-growing population of any population. They are the most underserved, from a medical, educational, cultural standpoint, and every other way. They have so many roadblocks in their path to success in life. To be able to offer something like the North American Indigenous Games for them to aspire to gives them hope. When we give youth hope, that's everything. That's all you need sometimes in life. Any of us who have been through hard times, sometimes all you have is hope to hang on to. We give them that bright light of hope. We shine a light on who they are as people with nothing but potential.

Investing in these youth is absolutely a path forward for all of our benefit. This is not charity; this is about investing in a stronger economy, a stronger taxpayer base, if you will. We do pay taxes, by the way. (Laughs) A lot of folks don't know that. We do. I think if we can consider where we can invest in their well-being, sports and culture are certainly two great avenues - we consider it one and the same - but two great avenues to do just that. There's much more and it's very complex, and I realize we have a lot of major problems and major items we need to solve in this province. At the same time, we do need to think about how we are going to invest in and grow this population of incredible young people

who are just waiting for a chance to live up to their own potential and to give back and make our communities stronger here in Mi'kma'ki and beyond.

I don't know what else I can say beyond what you saw in the presentation. I hope that the spirit of NAIG has touched each of you in some way and that you'll carry it forward, that you'll revisit our Facebook page while it's still up and watch the whole video for yourself, because it's on there. Keep the spirit of NAIG in your hearts, because it is not only for the participants; it was for everyone else who attended. It has been an absolute great privilege to work with this man here, as well, who truly led our team. I don't know if you know this, but Brendon was our third CEO. It was a journey. That's a whole other story. We can talk about it off-line, but Brendon really took this on.

He was our director of sport and venue for 2020, and we know what happened there. Then we looked around, and as we were looking for a CEO and went, He's staring us right in the face. He took this role and ran with it, and I could not be prouder to have worked by his side. He is the most dedicated person, as I mentioned. He led by example, and I'd like to give him the last word today. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smithson. No pressure.

BRENDON SMITHSON: I hate to follow that. I was really hoping that was going to be the end right there, in terms of how that went. (Laughter) I do want to thank everybody at this committee for your questions today, and also the Province of Nova Scotia for supporting these Games. A lot of people don't know that there is a bilateral agreement that makes sure the Games happen, but there was additional funding that came forward to ensure the Games stayed here through the postponement. Without the support of the Province of Nova Scotia, we would not be here. The impacts are amazing.

The one comment that I would add on top of what Fiona said is looking within your communities that you're in to how you can create a supportive environment for everyone. Fiona had mentioned communities, but I think it's also - the Games to me were always about Indigenous and non-Indigenous coming together in terms of that, and part of that work is working not just with community but making our mainstream more welcoming and creating that environment, and you'll see a massive change from that.

Hopefully, as we said, our Games were a stepping stone, not the end. We hope that that is the case. I know there's a lot of work to do, but I know with some great people around the table, we'll be able to continue moving things forward in terms of that, and not just in Halifax, but beyond as well, and how we can continue moving forward. Thank you all for your support in making these Games stay here and be such a success. Without the Province, this wouldn't have happened. It really meant a lot to all the youth who came here. I don't know if you know how much they were impacted, but you've changed lives. That's a huge deal. Thank you.

[11:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: It was definitely our pleasure to have you both here today. It makes me very proud - some great leaders, some great leadership, and I did have a chance to talk to some of the ambassadors and some of the kids who were here. Their stories were incredible. It changed me too, as well, and I think you are very correct in saying that it changed our province. I'm just so happy that we were able to hear first-hand from you guys post event. We look forward to the rest that's coming.

You're welcome to leave now. We do have a little tiny piece of committee business. I will call a three-minute recess just so that you can collect your things.

[11:45 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:50 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call the Standing Committee on Community Services back to order.

We have a little bit of committee business. For the topic of Supports for Low-Income Nova Scotians and the Impact of Inflation, Mr. Asif Khan was identified as a witness. However, Asif Khan is no longer employed with Feed Nova Scotia. They have suggested that Ms. Mueni Mutinda come and appear in his place. Just seeing if the committee is in agreement with that. Seeing no questions with that, okay.

The only other thing is just a reminder that our next meeting in the new year is on a different time and date - or, a different date, I should say. It's going to be January 11, 2024, which is a Thursday at 10 a.m. It's in alignment with the Human Resources Committee due to the holidays. The topic there is Supports for Low-Income Nova Scotians and the Impact of Inflation. Our witnesses will be the Department of Community Services and, as I mentioned, Feed Nova Scotia.

If there's no other committee business - MLA Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: Just a quick question with regard to - I like consistency. Community Services equals Tuesday. I just wondered if the following Tuesday - you said Thursday was the 11th?

THE CHAIR: Yes. It was in our last committee where we discussed after the holidays. The committee agreed that we would have it on January 11th, which is a Thursday, at 10:00 a.m.

LORELEI NICOLL: We probably didn't realize it was a Thursday.

SUZY HANSEN: Yes, and I was saying, Is the other committee meeting on the same day?

THE CHAIR: Yes, the Human Resources Committee meeting is on the afternoon of that day so that it aligns with everyone coming back from holidays the way the new year falls.

With no other committee business, we will adjourn the meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:52 a.m.]