

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Tuesday, June 21, 2016**

**COMMITTEE ROOM**

**Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce & Valley Regional Enterprise Network  
Re: Barriers to Economic Development in the Annapolis Valley**

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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Mr. Joachim Stroink (Chairman)  
Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft  
Mr. Derek Mombourquette  
Mr. David Wilton  
Mr. Chuck Porter  
Hon. Pat Dunn  
Mr. John Lohr  
Hon. Sterling Belliveau  
Hon. Denise Peterson-Rafuse

[Mr. Derek Mombourquette was replaced by Mr. Brendan Maguire]  
[Hon. Pat Dunn was replaced by Mr. Larry Harrison]

### In Attendance:

Ms. Monica Morrison  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESSES**

### **Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce**

Mr. Paul DesBarres - President  
Ms. Judy Rafuse - Executive Director

### **Valley Regional Enterprise Network**

Ms. Kelly Ells - Chief Executive Officer



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JUNE 21, 2016**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**10:00 A.M.**

CHAIRMAN  
Mr. Joachim Stroink

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning, I call the meeting to order. My name is Joachim Stroink, and I'm the Chairman for the Economic Development Committee meeting. Today we will be having a presentation by the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce on barriers to economic development in the Annapolis Valley. Then, subsequent to that, there will be an agenda-setting session.

I ask all members to please turn off your phones. We will start with the introduction of the committee.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for joining us. I'll ask you to introduce yourselves and then you can continue on with your presentations.

MR. PAUL DESBARRES: First of all I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear here on behalf of the Annapolis Valley businesses. My name is Paul DesBarres, President of the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce. To my right is the Executive Director, Judy Rafuse of the Annapolis Valley Chamber, and to my left is Kelly Ells, who is the CEO of the Valley Regional Enterprise Network.

Again, we're here to support the Valley businesses and provide information on their behalf, and we are pleased that you've invited us here.

AVCC represents nearly 400 businesses across the Valley and their employees in a rural region of Nova Scotia, so we have some definite differences that we face in assets, benefits, and challenges that are different from some other chambers, some other regions of the province. Our territory runs from Hantsport to Lawrencetown, and 96 per cent of our members have under 50 employees, 90 per cent have under 25 employees, and 74 per cent have under 10 employees. So we definitely represent small businesses in the Valley in the rural region.

The Annapolis Valley Chamber has four pillars that we focus on - advocacy to all levels of government on issues that are important to businesses and we speak to them regularly, consult with them regularly, and survey them regularly to determine those issues that are important to them. Tourism has also been a major focus in the Valley, especially marketing that tourism. I'll talk a little bit about that later, but we have representatives from all facets of the sector co-operating together to market the Valley as a region. We also have a focus on agriculture. In particular we provide some support in meetings, workshops for the agriculture community, but also sponsor a major innovation award because we think that, in agriculture, innovation is extremely important.

We've created a model now that is supported by the Department of Agriculture, as well as major agriculture providers around the Valley and has provided great benefits to those who come up with the innovations and show the value that it can have. We've given away over \$100,000 in prizes in the last three years.

Professional development is another major focus for us. We do everything from Lunch and Learn, where people can go over their lunch hour, a workshop that may be two to three hours. For the most part, the great majority of what we do are workplace education programs and WIPSI programs that can be 40, 50, 60 hours in length over 10 or 12 weeks and provide really in-depth learning for the businesses, and we get great uptake on those.

I'm going to turn it over to Kelly to give an outline of the Valley, the sectors, some of the numbers, and what are the important assets in the Valley.

MS. KELLY ELLS: The Annapolis Valley, as it is described by Statistics Canada as an economic region, encompasses Annapolis County, Kings County, and Hants County. The Valley REN - the Valley Regional Enterprise Network - together with the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce, covers West Hants through to Lawrencetown, so we do cover a fair piece of the Valley.

Not surprising, the demographics in that particular area are similar to that of the province. We represent approximately 11 per cent of the Nova Scotia population. We have an aging population, and we're also challenged with the youth out-migration. In comparing May 2014 to 2015, the Valley held steady in terms of its population. We had an increase in our labour force, we had an increase in the participation rate, and we had an increase in the employment rate and a decrease in the unemployment rate. So our figures are very similar to those of HRM.

We have 47,000 people in the labour market and represent approximately 5,600 businesses. As Paul would have mentioned, we have a rich agricultural history, but we are diversifying around tourism-related industries and the finance and ICT sectors. From 2004 to 2014, the area saw 72 per cent growth in employment in the information, culture, and recreation sectors; 67 per cent growth in finance, insurance, and real estate; and 22 per cent growth in agriculture. The Annapolis Valley accounts for 35 per cent of Nova Scotia's farmed land, from only 12 per cent of the province's land area. Kings County is the most important county in terms of agricultural output while being sixth in terms of arable lands.

Our economy is based in large part on agriculture, but we also have significant educational assets which include Acadia University and two campuses of the Nova Scotia Community College. The Valley is also home to a Michelin tire company and CFB Greenwood 14 Wing, which is the largest Air Force base in Atlantic Canada.

Tire manufacturing in Nova Scotia accounts for one-fifth of the provincial exports, and expanded in 2015 by 8.6 per cent. It's expected to continue to do well based on strong auto sales in the U.S. The proposed CETA is expected to benefit the province long term through a more than 90 per cent reduction in tariffs on fish, seafood, agricultural products, and more.

Speaking on the long term, the importance of food and agriculture exports is where the Valley plays a very integral role in the economy of Nova Scotia. The top five categories in Nova Scotia for exports include fish products, rubber products, agriculture, wood and pulp products, and paper products. The Valley region is active in all these categories and a significant contributor to the province.

Just to speak very briefly about the Valley Regional Enterprise Network, we are tasked with providing strategic direction for the region for economic development. We recently launched our strategy where we are focusing on strong local businesses in five key sectors including agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, ICT, and alternative energy. These echo very closely those of the chamber, so we do work closely with the chamber.

I'm going to turn it over now to Paul to continue.

MR. DESBARRES: We were invited here to talk about barriers to economic development in the Valley, but before we get to that I first want to talk about some of the assets because we believe strongly that we have the pieces for strong economic development in the Valley. We have the assets; there are just some things that can help us put those together better and leverage them in a better way.

The first thing is that we have, as Kelly mentioned, some very strong employers: Michelin being a great one, and Acadia University. We have strong agricultural partners like Perennia that are very active in the community. We have some great strong employers that see the value of the Valley.

We also have a strong, active chamber - not to blow our own horn, but we are strong, and we are active. We have a lot of members, and we have a lot of volunteers among the members and a very active volunteer board. We have an active regional enterprise network with Kelly at the helm. I think one of the strongest parts of it is that the strong chamber and our active REN work together to have a complementary partnership. There's a lot more we can do together than we can do separately.

I mentioned earlier about agriculture being one of our pillars and it certainly is, especially in the innovative agricultural sector. It is supported by the Department of Agriculture, and Perennia has been a major sponsor. We have had three iterations of our innovation awards. We had a company win one year that developed a computerized management system for the farm-to-table process, so the people could efficiently order their produce and other food items directly from the farm and have it delivered. They developed a system to allow that to happen efficiently.

We had a farmer who grew pumpkins who developed a process to process the seeds from those pumpkins. All those pumpkin seeds you buy in corner stores and gas stations usually come from China. They thought well we've got all these seeds, if we could just process them and sell local seeds in these stores - so they won the award, they got over \$30,000 to buy the equipment that would allow them to do that.

Last year a company won the award - again, around \$30,000 - that developed drone technology to measure soil conditions. That allows them to basically evaluate their fields in a much more efficient way. Again, that's just innovation to do things better, more efficiently, more profitably, and more sustainably. That's an important sector, innovation of our agriculture sector.

I mentioned coordinated and strategic tourism marketing earlier; we've had a couple years now where we've been marketing the Annapolis Valley. You may have seen the ads on CTV and heard them on the radio. They don't say anything about the chamber, it's called "Simply Extraordinary". Those ads were designed, developed by chamber volunteers.

We got funding from the province as well as various municipalities, in fact about \$241,000. All that money was used only for media buys. It didn't have to go to any administration, it didn't have to go to any design fees or anything like that, it was just for media buys. It allowed us, the chamber, to have our Tourism Committee, which represents all facets of tourism in the Valley, from wineries to hotels to restaurants and so on, to put their brain powers together to design a campaign that would bring people to the Valley.

We've seen an uptick in all the measurements that would show growth in tourism, which is mostly through accommodation bookings and so on, so we think that has been very effective. That's an aspect of leverage that we'll talk more about. You get more out of your money by partnering with organizations that have expertise and know the market.

Volunteerism is another key component. We have service groups in the Valley, the same as other regions of the Valley have service groups, but we have a lot of them that do a lot of great work. Rotary - we have several chapters of Rotary throughout the Valley; Lions Clubs and we have a strong AVCC board of volunteers and committees underneath that board of even more people who volunteer their time to plan things, like the agriculture awards, like the professional development sessions - we have a committee for that, like the Tourism Committee - so we have a lot of volunteers.

The REN board is also a volunteer board where they are working hard to help grow the economic activity in the Valley. We have the only volunteer resource centre in Nova Scotia - the Kings Volunteer Resource Centre. They have a part-time staff member but they have a board of volunteers that help plan their strategy and provide support for the services that they provide, which are primarily to help facilitate volunteerism.

A company or a non-profit could come to them and say we really need help planning X, Y, or Z. It could be an event, maybe there's a major event coming to the Valley, they need some volunteers to help coordinate, direct traffic, whatever, or it could be just doing some research for a non-profit. They help match the skills from a database of volunteers that they have, to the needs of the community. They have that database because people know about them and can come to them and talk to them and let them know what their skill set is. So when the volunteer resource centre needs to find a volunteer, they have that database to go to to find somebody appropriate and make those matches.

One of the things we'll talk about is the issue that arises out of that sometimes, that sometimes they spend more time trying to find the funding to keep going than they do trying to provide the service that they provide so well. So a lot of volunteerism in the Valley helps fill the gaps of what isn't otherwise being provided.

Businesses that want to learn and grow; we know this as a chamber because of the professional development we provide and facilitate, a lot of it through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education because we have the contact, we have the database, we know the businesses and what types of professional development they need. The Department of Labour and Advanced Education has the programs and the database of instructors, so we make a good match there in providing those.

The reason I can say they want to learn and grow is because those programs fill up - we send out a notice that we're going to hold a 40-hour program on change management and it fills up; we do one on human resource management and it fills up. In fact, we just recently were going to hold one on resource management and it doubled up, so we held two of them.

There's an eagerness and a desire to want to learn, grow, and do things more efficiently and learn from each other, which these sessions we hold in the provincial government world they call it "clustering." It means that instead of having all tourism people together or all manufacturing people together, the rooms in these sessions are filled

with people from various sectors and they talk about how valuable that is because they can learn from each other. They don't all have the same straight mindset - they can say, well over in that sector they do it this way, well maybe that will work for us. So there's a lot of learning that comes along with that clustering model.

We have a lot of great assets in the Valley. You invited us here to talk about barriers and I think it all boils down to one thing: efficiency. We have the pieces; we have the assets - we need to be able to more efficiently put it together in a long-term and strategic way.

I got thinking about our message here on the way down and it really comes down to - in my day job, my paying job, I do a lot in marketing, marketing research. We always like to boil things down to a few concise words and the four Cs - community, co-operation, collaboration, and coordination - that's what all this boils down to. That represents the barrier, I think, in the Valley. We have a lack of consistency and coordination in the vision, strategy, and planning for the region. We're thinking mostly in terms of the municipal units. The municipal units tend to compete against each other rather than work together.

There is no entity that can plan a strategy, have a vision for the Valley. There are branding exercises that go on in each community, there are quasi-strategies developed for certain communities, but nothing is coordinated across the communities on a regional level. The system is not really set up for that type of collaboration and they haven't really been able to - there have been a couple of attempts, but they haven't really effectively been able to plan any long-term initiatives together.

On the other side of it, the municipal and provincial funding models tend to be short term; they are mostly short term, which means they are unreliable for long-term planning. If you know that you get funding this year and you are going to start an organization, provide a service, a program, but you don't know that next year that funding will be available, then you can't plan in the long term for that. People who might participate in it don't have the confidence in it to invest themselves, their business, their non-profit, their careers or anything in something that doesn't have a long-term sustainable model. What that also does is it misses opportunities to leverage long-term efforts and strategic planning execution.

Just to back up a minute, on the short term, I will acknowledge that there are exceptions to the short-term planning. One is the winery industry. There was recently an announcement for the wineries where they were committed, I believe, \$12 million over four years. That was fantastic, and that's exactly the type of thing we need because they can count on that. It's not, we'll get a little bit of money this year, and hopefully maybe we'll get something next year. They have four years that they at least can count on. The ferry is another good long-term example. But we need more of that.

KVRC, the Kings Volunteer Resource Centre, which I talked about a few minutes ago, is one of those organizations that's always wondering about whether they're going to have funding in the next few months. Tourism marketing that the chamber provides - we

spend as much time trying to find the funding to market the Valley as we do planning it. That's not a good use of the volunteer hours, to always be looking for the money. Those are the missed opportunities for leverage. You have volunteer organizations providing services at a fraction of the cost because they're volunteers, but you're not using those volunteer hours efficiently and effectively because they're always looking for the next funding.

If there was a model in place where you could say okay, this organization is a good partner for providing tourism marketing, let's commit some funding to that. That's not to say that they don't have to report on progress and success because that would have to be part of it, but at least if there is progress and success, the funding will be there. When you have groups that you can partner with in that way, then you can have longer-term strategic execution and planning.

Any economic development - I use tourism as an example because we have a committee that seems to work well that way - needs long-term reliability. Many communities even in the Valley have hired an economic development officer. If they don't see results in a few months or a year, they let them go. Economic development is a long-term process, and it needs to be recognized in that way.

With those barriers in mind, we have a few fairly simple suggestions for solutions. One is to encourage the study of more optimal forms of municipal governance that will better serve and attract business. The terms of reference for something like that need to involve regional co-operation, consistent visions, and coordinated strategies. Secondly, we talked about leveraging partnerships with local organizations that can help plan and deliver the initiatives. Related very closely to that is to make a commitment to these partnerships and provide the resources needed for sustainable programs and planning on a long-term basis. Avoid the models that require organizations to spend their time continually seeking funding to maintain their programs.

I've seen some of the other presentations that have come before you. We could come in here and talk to you about tax rates and put some money here, put some money there, but I think a strategic view of economic development and a model and a structure that lends itself to long-term planning and a thoughtful execution far outweighs what you can do with a few dollars here and there.

I want to thank you very much for your time. That's what we have for you today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I will turn it over to Mr. Porter to start us off.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Thanks for being here. A great presentation, and we do appreciate it. I've got a few questions. Interesting on your solutions - we don't often see anyone come in with solutions; it's nice to see that as well. You guys have been around a

long time, though. What I find very interesting, I would like you to describe for me the Valley.

MR. DESBARRES: Describe it?

MR. PORTER: Geographically.

MR. DESBARRES: Gateway to the Valley, Windsor?

MR. PORTER: No, you didn't say that, you said the Valley. In your presentation, everything's the Valley, the Valley, the Valley. I know where the Valley is; don't get me wrong. I'm from Windsor, I'm from this side of Windsor. West Hants, Windsor, has never been part of the Valley in the minds of those from the Valley. I hear that so much, and I don't get it. I've never gotten it. I would love to have seen a representative from the West Hants Chamber of Commerce, but more importantly, I'd love to see that West Hants Chamber of Commerce part of the Valley Chamber of Commerce from where it begins to all the way through. I see that as a gap in all that we're talking about here today, I really do, and I never understood.

There are good people there, too - I mean I know the RENs involved, always got a great crossover. We had it with the RDA, we had a crossover prior to that, but I always find it interesting how we're not part of the Valley.

MR. DESBARRES: The territory of the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce is Hantsport to Lawrencetown. Our territory doesn't exactly match what some would consider the Valley, and what some people would consider the Valley doesn't match what other people consider to be the Valley.

We are not allowed to solicit expansion of territory actively, but others are allowed to come to us. Some of those talks are currently underway that may result in expansion in your direction sometime in the near future.

MR. PORTER: I don't mean to be critical because I'm not at all. I guess what I'm saying is there's this recognition when we talk about - and you hit on some great points: tourism, agriculture, and all these things. We also are part of that. All of those things that affect the Valley affect us hugely.

We have a great apple grower, Mason's, in our own backyard; we have a brand-new facility by way of a new Birthplace of Hockey facility and it will have a huge impact on the Valley. When we were promoting, presenting, and selling that to our investors, we captured the entire Valley. We don't just talk about wineries down the shore, we talk about the Valley as Minas, Kentville, all the way down through - the ferry and everything else.

This is an attraction throughout the entire region, which includes all of these. I understand the differences between your chambers. I personally would love to see - you mentioned in your solutions and that's where I picked up on it, the regional co-operation partnership. I don't care what you call it, as long as we're working together.

I'm not saying you need to partner or become all one, I'm just saying it's always like that little block there because we are the gateway - and we have been for a long, long time - to the Valley, known as "the gateway." We're kind of left hanging - we're not in the HRM and we're not in the Valley, we're just out there.

You know the economic impact of that, really that I see? I was in downtown Windsor on the street yesterday, there were 11 cars on Gerrish Street, and on one side there were none. Downtown Windsor, for the most part - the old core downtown Windsor - has, I think, nine or 10 vacant places now. We've never seen that. So when we talk about economic development, what are we doing? All these things you're talking about are great, but I'm speaking from my area because I represent it, and we need to be somehow part of that push that you're trying to do because I think we have a lot to offer as well. It's unfortunate we don't see that in this . . .

MR. DESBARRES: When it comes to tourism marketing, our tourism committee actually does reach out beyond our chamber boundaries. We do market Windsor actually, through to Digby, I believe, because of exactly what you are saying. Just because we have chamber boundaries doesn't mean that is the entire region. When we market the Valley from a tourism perspective, we do market Windsor through to Digby.

MR. PORTER: I know that Kelly wanted to have something to add to that, I think. Ms. Ells was looking to comment, I believe.

MS. ELLS: I just wanted to point out that the Valley Regional Enterprise Network is very cognizant of the fact that both West Hants and Windsor are huge contributors to the region, and in coming to our strategy we did take into account very seriously what is happening in Windsor-West Hants.

I think what Mr. DesBarres and what Ms. Rafuse do in the chamber, it reflects a lot of what's happening through the Valley, and even though it may be centred in Kings County, a little bit into Hants County, it still affects and is positive for the whole region, definitely the regional enterprise network. That's why we partner together and work together, the REN is trying to support the efforts of the chamber, not duplicate them, and find areas where there may be gaps, so we can fill those gaps.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Porter, can we come back to you and let Mr. Lohr tackle some questions?

MR. JOHN LOHR: I'm certainly delighted to have you three here representing the Annapolis Valley. I'm very pleased to hear the positives of the Annapolis Valley and I know that I think it's an economic engine in the province that sometimes goes unnoticed. And I'm very pleased that you highlighted agriculture, coming from my background in agriculture. I know that Kings County in particular probably has one of the most diverse agricultural economies of any county in the nation, so just the variety of types of agricultural businesses we have where any other areas that have strong agricultural businesses tend to focus on one sector - they're all grain or they're all potato or whatever.

There's a lot of different things happening in the Valley. I'm very pleased to hear you mention the IT sector growing, too, and all that stuff. I think there's a very positive story about the Annapolis Valley and certainly I know as a resident there that the chamber of commerce has been very front and centre - not only your agricultural innovation but your entrepreneur of the year - your awards program has been very well received. I don't think you even mentioned that particular awards program, but that's always a highlight. All of those things - so hats off, my commendation to the chamber, and I'm very pleased to know how many good things are happening.

I find it interesting if I think back a few years ago, the number-one concerns that I would have heard, I didn't hear today from the chamber. I think back to two concerns: one always was twinning Highway No. 101, and another was shovel-ready industrial land. When I look at your number-one concern right now, it's more the study on municipal governance. I just wonder in particular, in terms of maybe you could just flesh that out - how does that impact the lack of shovel-ready industrial land or is that still an issue? Or does the municipal governance issue sort of impact that shovel-ready industrial land issue? I just wonder if you could flesh that all out for me.

MR. DESBARRES: Well the twinning of Highway No. 101 is still one of our top advocacy issues. We believe that is going to happen so now we're just waiting for it to happen. I think I've heard it's scheduled for 2017.

As far as shovel-ready industrial land, there have been a few steps forward on that. That is still one of our top issues but we believe it is also affected by coordination and collaboration of communities. That's because of having consistency in the planning so that the rules are the same from community to community. If the planning is done in a way that is open for business so that you're ready for a business to move in, build a plant or set up any type of business, then people will recognize that. People don't want to pick your community and then find out it's going to take nine months to get the zoning changed for you. So I think governance consistency of planning is going to affect that readiness of industrial land to a great degree.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Thank you for your presentation. I've made a few notes here of interest. I was looking at your regional strategy, and on the previous page

you talked about fisheries and aquaculture and on the second page the focus was on alternative green energy. I'm looking seaward at the Minas Basin and it is literally off your doorstep, this particular region, and there is an issue there that the local fishermen's groups across all of Nova Scotia are concerned about how that tidal project is going to move forward.

We're on the eve of a court injunction by the local fishermen in that particular area. To me there has to be a path forward and there have to be some questions that need to be addressed. So I'm asking, what is your chamber doing to try to get both sides - the government and these local fishing groups - together to address these concerns?

MR. DESBARRES: Alternative energy was another one of our top advocacy issues. We've done a lot in the alternative energy field, including inviting the participants of the various facets of alternative energy to come and speak to chamber members. We've held forums to educate people on it. We have an advocacy committee that researches the topics. We were heavily involved in trying to at least advance a particular project that was from a company that was going to make an investment of about \$3 million in one of our communities for a tidal project. That company ended up walking away because there was so much opposition to them even getting started.

We weren't saying that this project should absolutely happen; we were saying let it play out a little longer, do the studies, find out what the actual impact would be, and make your decision from there. We support at least getting through the research. We want to educate everybody, and part of that education is the research. So we were very disappointed that that particular investment opportunity walked away before they could even get to the research.

MR. BELLIVEAU: If I could expand on that, did you reach out to the inshore, the fishermen's group? You said one particular energy group. This is not the force that - they're very much the player in that area. I'm just wondering if the chamber reached out to this particular project and tried to get both sides together - is there any ongoing support to bring those sides together?

MR. DESBARRES: No, we have not reached out to them, but I would certainly welcome them to reach out to us. If they want to set something up, we can help facilitate discussions, education of the business community.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Porter.

MR. PORTER: I just want to come back to one point before I move on, and it was the highway twinning. You said yes awfully quickly that it was going to be done in 2017. I just want to make sure we're on the same page there. You've read something that says it'll be done in 2017, or you've been sent something?

MR. DESBARRES: I said I believe I've been told that. I'm going to look at Judy to confirm or deny whether we've been told that.

MS. JUDY RAFUSE: We haven't been told that directly. We know that the salt marshes and so on are starting now, so that's hopefully our indication. Highway No. 101 is first on the list. So, fingers crossed.

MR. PORTER: I just wanted to be clear on that piece. It was like, oh, it's going to be done. I read that piece yesterday as well and I called and said - oh, that's all good. Don't get me wrong. Nobody has lobbied for the twinning of Highway No. 101 more than I have; I can guarantee you that. I guess my message is don't stop lobbying. Keep it going; we want all the support coming from every direction that we can get it. I know that the department and the minister will certainly appreciate that as well.

It was a good bit on the salt marsh stuff; there was a beginning. That's all part of the study.

I think there was some talk about the tolls; they'll go to people and ask. I don't know where that's all going to go. Who knows? We don't know that right now.

MS. RAFUSE: The report on the areas that are looking at tolling is supposed to be coming soon, so we're looking forward to that.

Also, the Granite Drive Interchange is slated for the next couple of years. That's another positive indication that it will be twin-ready. That's a big piece of it as well.

MR. PORTER: That's great. That's a busy area over there, Granite Drive. That'll be a great asset to have, I think, as someone who's in the Valley often, certainly in New Minas. That has become a real busy, busy spot down there. That's a great thing; that's a good thing. We could only dream to have that back at the gateway a little bit.

I don't really have a whole lot more. I just wanted to go back to that piece around that relationship and the solutions; it's nice to see that. It's good to have the REN partner in that mix. They do capture that whole area. We've been supportive of the chamber. I'm not a member of the chamber, but we do have all of those organizations you talked about - the Lions Club, Rotary. I've been in for 10 years, and just got out. It's important that those partners are there as we move forward from one end of it to the other, and all over for that matter, all over the province, to help with economic development.

We're doing very well in the Valley, compared to other areas. It's good to see that, and it's nice to see the information you've brought us. We can only hope to do better and continue on the road that we're on, and we look for great things.

I would just close by saying thanks for all the great work you're doing - a lot of volunteer hours there, as you talked about, and some good people looking after business.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Harrison.

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Again, thank you very much for the presentation. My wife wanted to take a drive down to see the apple blossoms in the Valley and she made the comment on the way home: "You know, I think I could live here." In your presentation I was saying to myself, gee, that sounds like a nice place to go and live. I know you have a lot of things down there, no question about that.

The labour force, of course, suffers in a lot of the areas and of course the decline in the Valley as well in labour force. How do you feel about the immigration aspect of the labour force?

MR. DESBARRES: Immigration is key. Strategic immigration would be even better so that we know what people we need, what skill sets we need. If there is planning and strategy in what kind of communities and markets we want to be, then we can attract the immigration with that skill set.

MR. HARRISON: I was thinking as you were talking a while ago, are all the areas onboard as to what could be done, or do you have certain areas kind of fighting the direction that you would like to go?

MR. DESBARRES: Yes, we have people opposing change. We have communities that believe that if everything is okay now, then just leave it alone. Our belief is that even though we may have fared the economy better than some other regions, we may be better off and we may have great assets, we can do even more with that. Just because things are okay doesn't mean they should be good enough.

MR. HARRISON: What I would like to say is that you folks have so much going for you that if you ever had that co-operation and that coordination, my goodness, the sky would be the limit, wouldn't it?

MR. DESBARRES: Absolutely.

MR. HARRISON: I wish you luck on that - really, I do. I wish the best for you on that one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: I guess I'm dating myself, but I come from the municipal - I do have some municipal background. I remember the old economic development identity and that has been changed by the new Department of Business. To me it was really growing pains of a number of economic development boards across Nova Scotia. I think you are

very familiar with what I'm trying to point out here. I'm interested, now we have a new Department of Business and my question is, how often do you meet?

My concern is as a rural MLA coming to the big city, it's almost like you walk into another universe and try to get your issues presented to that platform, regardless of if you are on a chamber or a respective caucus.

My final question is, has the Department of Business used that same lens for rural Nova Scotia as the previous economic development boards?

MR. DESBARRES: We have not, I don't believe - I have not, at least - met with the Department of Business yet. We would love to sit down and chat with them to see where (Interruption) Yes. There's no field rep in the Valley. We would love to sit down and talk to them to see where they see us moving forward and how they can help, but that discussion hasn't taken place - but it certainly should.

Kelly might want to speak to that.

MS. ELLS: In terms of the Department of Business, they are taking a policy stance so they are in line with Treasury in terms of reporting in the structure, so they don't have the same type of function that ERDT, their predecessor, would have had. The RENs and the REN program was put under the Department of Municipal Affairs because we were seen as working in and with municipalities.

We have had a few conversations with the Department of Business, but more of our conversations are with some of those entities that report to the Department of Business, such as Nova Scotia Business Inc., and partnering with them in terms of investment attraction and finding opportunities in our regions. We also have the strong support of the Department of Municipal Affairs to allow us to be moving forward.

I think what this points out is that at a provincial level, there seems to be a gap in terms of economic development and where that may actually sit right now, without having economic development in the title of a department in the government. It's a new way of doing things, and providing that the government has some patience for us to have a chance to show the impact we can have, I think the regional co-operation is definitely the way to go and the RENs, together with the chambers, may be able to provide that coordination and that collaboration. A big part of our mandate is to ensure that we're not duplicating what's out there but that we are identifying those gaps and helping that move forward, plus taking a strategic vision in terms of what can be the next opportunities.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Do you want to come around, Mr. Belliveau, or do you want a follow-up question?

MR. BELLIVEAU: Well I'll just quickly follow up. I think we're identified as - when you take that rural voice to the big city there is almost a transition to another universe. You identified a gap, I'd like to kind of expand on that because I think we're both possibly talking about the same thing here, so I ask for clarification on that.

MS. ELLS: Perhaps one of the reasons we're with the Department of Municipal Affairs is that they would have that knowledge and it's less like going to the big city, versus something like the Department of Business that is very much city-centric.

I feel we still have a voice but to Paul's point, there are no regional reps because we have a lean, mean Department of Business so they are not reaching out. That's where we depend on our MLAs, that's where we depend on those businesses that do have reach in the rural areas. I think all of you who live outside of HRM will agree that what works in an urban centre will not necessarily work in a rural centre. We have different types of challenges, but at the same time, have many contributions to bring forward.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Rafuse, do you want to follow up?

MS. RAFUSE: Yes, we do have a connection through NSBI but without the field representatives through the former ERDT, there was always an office in Kings County that serviced southwestern Nova Scotia. She was always around, she attended our events and we worked back and forth all the time.

The field rep for NSBI, who was seconded to ERDT and is now back to NSBI, is a frequent visitor in our office so we do have that connection. Some of our Tourism Committee has spoken to Minister Furey on the tourism front.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilton.

MR. DAVID WILTON: Thank you for your presentation today. I have just a couple of questions surrounding the Yarmouth ferry. When it was cancelled back a number of years ago, what impact did that have - negative impact? Now that it is reinstated, what do you see for business in the Annapolis Valley and all down in that region, going forward?

MR. DESBARRES: We have strongly supported the reinstatement of the ferry ever since it stopped and advocated for the reinstatement of the ferry. I think it affects the entire province and beyond our province, it is not just a Yarmouth issue. We have viewed it and made it analogous to a highway. It is a connection to a major market, an important trade partner, an important tourism partner, so we have been in support of it for a long time.

MR. WILTON: I'm just wondering, do you hear from businesses a lot now that it's reinstated, that it's a positive attitude going forward?

MR. DESBARRES: We did see a decline when it stopped, and we did see an uptick when it was reinstated the first time. I think it's too early to say. Since it started last week, we haven't heard that there has been an impact from that, but I would expect that there would be. We actually had members of our chamber on the first voyage across. They went on the first day that it ran, down to an American Chamber of Commerce Convention in Portland, and came back the next day and gave us great reports on it.

MS. RAFUSE: I just wanted to add that we have seen American visitors - we operate the visitor information centre as well in Kentville, in partnership with the Town of Kentville and the County of Kings. We have seen visitors who have come on the ferry just within the last week. Even businesses that we've spoken to from a tourism point of view in Wolfville, when the ferry was cancelled, saw a decline. Last year, they've seen an uptick as well. We're hoping this year with a good gas price, a nice American dollar, and a stable ferry service, we'll see that increase.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: I'm wondering about the tourism piece. I know that the chamber has done a lot of work on tourism. I'm just wondering what impact the changes have in your partner in tourism becoming Tourism Nova Scotia. How are you functioning now working with the new Crown Corporation, and how do you see that relationship with Tourism Nova Scotia and the chamber?

MS. RAFUSE: When we first started we became the de facto tourism marketing agency for the Annapolis Valley three years ago and sought funding from the province and from the municipalities. One of our first stops was to the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency at the time. We got to know Patrick Sullivan really well, and he got to know us really well. We have continued that partnership all the way through, so through all of their changes. You have to work through the growing pains of each organization. We met with Michele McKenzie when she was here, and we have met with the new CEO, who actually was in attendance at our tourism quarterly last month.

We've participated in some of their funding programs. Their programs are 50-cent dollars. So we have to have funding in place to be able to leverage that money. We were successful last year in leveraging some money to actually do some marketing, some actual marketing dollars. They're not offering that program this year. We're in the midst of a search engine marketing strategy with them right now.

Then they're also doing a program that they're calling inspiring stories, which will get video for areas around the province, basically having industry pay 50 per cent to get video for the province, but we'll be able to use it in whatever way we want. Businesses will be able to have it for their website, the REN, and so on and so forth.

It has been a growing pains process in some areas, but I think once TNS gets their feet under them, it will be fine. We also work closely with TIANS, as well.

MR. LOHR: I know Paul mentioned stable funding, so would tourism be one in which you would feel that stable funding would help you offer programs?

MS. RAFUSE: Actually, yes, it would. We have been speaking with the CAOs of municipalities from Windsor to Digby, looking for something from that end as well. We've also looked at implementing a levy, which would be user-pay; however, depending on how that is administered, we don't have the big properties that would give us the amount of money that we need to market - and provincial funding as well. If municipalities could look at us as a line budget for say four or five years, that would make our lives a lot easier going into the next season.

Right now, we want to be marketing our season in mid-May and municipalities often don't have their budgets completed by then so we don't know what we're going to have for funding, which is exactly what happened this year. We try to keep enough money to start at least a small campaign in the early next season because we know that municipal funding takes a while to come through, so we were able to do a downsized version of our television ads, with some radio in HRM. Next week we will start another campaign because we have seen some more funding come through.

MR. LOHR: Could you just talk a minute about the focus of that advertising campaign, like how you're marketing the Valley, what you see as the main focus points? I think I know the answer but I think everybody would be interested in hearing that.

MS. RAFUSE: Our primary target market is HRM and then we go the province next, the entire province. The television campaigns run in the Maritimes: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. TNS - Tourism Nova Scotia - is charged with promoting the province and we are promoting our region; in talks with Tourism Nova Scotia, that has been made very clear. It's very expensive for us, so we just wouldn't have the funding to go outside the market anyway. We want to make sure in our talks with them that they're looking at markets that we think they should and so on.

With continual meetings with them, we try to keep that a coordinated effort. Our advertising, if you haven't seen it, is very pictorial, very few words, and the branding is "The Annapolis Valley - Simply Extraordinary." We have our own website at valleytourism.ca, and that is also in line with novascotia.com, so everything on it has to be licensed accommodations and so on.

MR. DESBARRES: Just to play off what Judy said, there are very few words spoken in the ads. The text comes up "Simply Extraordinary" and it's really about the experience of visiting the Valley. You see a lot of beautiful images, not just scenic views but things you can do, like whale-watching, like lobster at the lobster pound, and all those

kinds of experiences that you can have when you come to the Valley. So we think they're very effective ads.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Following on your opening comments, you suggested that the wine industry has support from this government over the next four years; you acknowledge that. There are a number of other sectors in the agriculture industry - do you believe there is a balance being struck for the other industries? I know the greenhouse industry - pardon my lack of knowledge of this - suffered extensive storm damage over the last number of years regarding wind damage. I know the strawberry industry had some issues and also right now the mink industry is struggling. Do you feel there has been a balance struck between the wine industry, for instance - you recognized that four-year program - and the ones that obviously have had some difficulty in the last couple of years?

MR. DESBARRES: We're very happy with the support and the funding that has been provided to the wine industry. It is a significant sector for the Valley and it's a growing sector and it has huge potential, so I think it is an excellent investment for the province.

But you are right, we do have other important sectors - some sectors that could use assistance to keep going and some that could use assistance to grow. We would also like to see more investment in those sectors as well.

MS. RAFUSE: I just wanted to add that with the inaugural board of Perennia, I think you'll see a more balanced approach of things that you talked about, like the wind damage, the mink disease; it's all reactive - so to get some proactive, sustainable funding that is balanced across the board. And the wine industry is certainly in its infancy in Nova Scotia, I think. We're just lucky enough to have nine of the 11 in the Annapolis Valley.

MR. BELLIVEAU: We don't have a summary of all - for instance, have the greenhouses recouped and have they got their business back in line? To me, recognition that some of them are having some difficult times would be to get that local support. I guess that's why I raised the question.

MS. RAFUSE: We did see a reaction, support, from the government with the strawberry blight and also the replanting of apples - the Honeycrisps, the SweetTangoes, the new varieties. There certainly has been investment through other areas. Are there areas lacking? I'm sure there are, as there are every industry. I'm sorry; I don't know whether the greenhouse industry has regained what they had before.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for coming here today. Forgive me for not knowing exactly, but what major centres and towns does your chamber represent?

MR. DESBARRES: The Municipality of the County of Kings; we also have the Town of Annapolis, Town of Middleton, Town of Berwick, Town of Kentville, Town of Wolfville; the Village of New Minas is along that corridor. We go as far as the former town of Hantsport, now part of West Hants, and Lawrencetown as well, down on the west end of the Valley.

MR. MAGUIRE: That's a sizeable chunk of land. We hear, especially recently, a lot of negative comments around the Nova Scotia ferry. I just want to go back to this. What kind of impact is this having on businesses in places like Kentville, for example, or Lawrencetown? Are you hearing from people on the ground that this is a positive thing?

MR. DESBARRES: I'll let Judy speak to it specifically. She mentioned a few minutes ago that we do staff and run one of the visitor information centres in the Valley, based in Kentville, with support from the Town of Kentville and the County of Kings. She's on the front line with visitors, with tourists, coming into that tourist bureau, so I'll let her speak to that specifically.

MS. RAFUSE: In speaking with businesses and with tourists who are coming, we had a gentleman in yesterday - or maybe it was Monday. He and his wife had come across on the ferry, and they were going back today or tomorrow. But businesses throughout Kentville, New Minas, and Wolfville do see those American visitors as well. They saw the decline when the ferry was cancelled, and they saw the increase when it came back.

MR. MAGUIRE: This is new money to the Nova Scotia economy, right?

MS. RAFUSE: Well, it would be replaced from years before. Before we began tourism marketing in the Annapolis Valley, the statistics, which are calculated by accommodations, were flat for 10 years. The first month that we started our advertising campaign on television, we had a 1 per cent increase. From there, the next month was 6 per cent, and the next month was 5 per cent. We have even seen it in the shoulder seasons; last year, in September and October 2015, we had growth of 9 per cent and 11 per cent. So we know there's great opportunity in the shoulder season, which the ferry doesn't affect obviously, but it's the catchment, what we can offer in the Fall and Spring and even in the winter. Numbers were up in January and February. It wouldn't be such a hardship over last year because last year people didn't get around too well. But we're very buoyed by the increase in numbers, and we sure hope to see that it increases through the Yarmouth ferry.

MR. MAGUIRE: I just want to change topics quickly. We hear a lot of numbers thrown out there, positive and negative. One of the numbers brought up today was the \$12 million investment in the wine industry. For those of us who live in HRM or in other areas where we don't have a wine industry sometimes these things just become a number. What kind of impact does this have on your region - not just numbers, but what's the impact on the ground?

MR. DESBARRES: What that money allows them to do - one facet of it is research into grape growing so they can refine that process and get better grapes for better wine. It allows them to expand the fields so they can have more grapes and, along with the first one, have better grapes and more of them.

It also allows them to market to a greater extent and to a broader area, and outside not only Nova Scotia but the country, to market our local wine around the world. The fact that it is over four years provides that stability, the predictability that they can make a long-term plan, knowing that money will be there to support the plan.

MS. RAFUSE: We have a very vibrant wine industry and we have some really good award-winning wines. Wine and culinary is becoming - the Annapolis Valley is kind of a hot spot for wine and culinary, Wolfville in particular. Many of the wineries are close to Wolfville. We have some very nice restaurants all through the Valley, but Wolfville has a good concentration.

We see it as a great attraction obviously, and to be able to grow more grapes and increase their wineries, you can only go up and it has been fantastic for our area, it really has. We do a winery map in our VIC that shows where the wineries are and which ones they are, and folks will come in and pick those up. The Wolfville Magic Winery Bus - hop on, hop off - they had revenues last year of almost \$1 million. (Interruption) You definitely should.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Harrison.

MR. HARRISON: Just to comment on that, we took that little tour a couple of weeks ago, and I went into one of the wineries and the owner said one of the bottles sold for \$200-some, so we know it's getting there. That's pretty good.

Anyway, that wasn't my question. My question is: the airport at Greenwood, has that ever been considered to be used for passenger or commercial use for the Valley?

MS. RAFUSE: The airport in Greenwood - the municipal airport in Kings County in Cambridge has been closed by the municipality and the civilian airport is now going to reside at 14 Wing. So there are opportunities, I believe, in the future that can come there. It's very early days so I'm not - Kelly may be able to . . .

MS. ELLS: One of the identities of assets that we do have is the fact that now that the regional airport has moved from Waterville to Greenwood, we have assets there that we could not possibly have had economically or feasibly with the regional airport. Now we are just in the infancy stages of trying to figure out what that could be.

There is opportunity, whether it is charter or whether it is cargo, but we believe it can be more than just the hobbyist airport, so we will be looking at potentially setting up studies with that. I have already been in conversation with the group that's kind of leading

the initial part, Paul Easson's group. I think there will be some definite benefit from the airport being in Greenwood. It seems to be a good synergy, and it has been - other areas across the country have similar Canadian Forces Bases and regional airports in one, so I think it could be another one of our great assets that we have.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Again I'm trying to see - I think it was Kelly who made this comment during your opening comments, the out-migration of our youth. To me it's something I'm always interested in when I know that the crops are coming in in the Valley area and there's a bountiful harvest and yet to me there appears to be not enough local people to harvest the crops - that's my observation.

I guess my first question is, what is the chamber doing to attract individuals to harvest this bountiful harvest? To me the second part of that, I know that you guys go out and the industry attracts temporary foreign workers, so I guess what I'm trying to do is get a dollar value of what's being put out to temporary foreign workers and the question is, what are the locals missing here?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Who wants to take that? Mr. DesBarres.

MR. DESBARRES: I don't have a dollar figure, so I'll turn it over to Kelly in a minute. I don't have a dollar figure as to what is spent on temporary foreign workers, but we know that program had been very important to the agriculture community in the Valley. You are right, if they didn't have that program they wouldn't have enough people to do that work, so we have been in support of that program for our local agriculture industry. Do you have any figures, Kelly?

MS. ELLS: We don't actually have the figures on that specifically, but what we do know is that there are jobs available but it's the match between those who are seeking jobs and what they expect for jobs and will do versus those jobs that are available. As Paul mentions, for something like a harvest it's seasonal and it's a short period of time and it is very hard labour, and oftentimes that's when students are either just returning to school so they're not available for that part time.

Some of the issues that the Valley REN will be looking at, and we have even talked with the chamber in terms of this, in terms of the youth out-migration because I think that's another point, I don't think having the youth work on the harvest is going to be the solution to keep the youth here. We're looking at the potential of connector-type programs or mentorship programs which are similar to what's in HRM but maybe not the same, and looking at - there's this big gap if you look at the age of the people and we're drawn to this big V of people leaving and then they come back as they get older. We're trying to steady that out and keep some of these youth. It's to try to find the kinds of employment that will keep them here and keep them engaged. That's where when you start to look at something

like maybe ICT, maybe in the gaming sectors, there are many sectors that are potentially more attractive to the youth.

If you look at the jobs - I think one of the figures that was quoted to me was that 67 per cent of the youth who are entering primary schools today are going to be employed in fields that the jobs don't even exist today. That's how fast our world is changing and I think we have an opportunity, both as the chamber and as the regional enterprise network, to be looking ahead of this and what are those ICT jobs. Who would have thought that the largest taxi company in the world doesn't own any taxis? Who would have thought that the largest retailer doesn't have any retail outlets? You wouldn't have thought of that 20 years ago when the Internet was just coming out, and so it's trying to be proactive.

We have the infrastructure in place. It's good to see that the Department of Business has put a study out on protecting that rural broadband and expanding it where it makes sense to expand it. I think that's the future of the economy.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Just a quick follow-up. To me the technology is expanding, but the crops are going to be delivered the same way - that's my traditional belief.

I guess my question - I'll approach it a different way - the temporary workers' program, is the demand becoming larger for that program? Has it decreased or do you expect it to increase?

MR. DESBARRES: This is just anecdotal, I would say that the demand has been increasing, especially since we have seen some of the employers build bunkhouses and fairly permanent infrastructure to support those temporary workers. Where it used to be not as permanent a solution, it now seems to be treated as more of a permanent solution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Your membership is about 400, I think you said.

MR. DESBARRES: Businesses, yes.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: One of the things I often hear with organizations is, what will I get from my membership? I know that's always an issue. It's pretty well volunteer-run, except for your executive director. Sometimes people feel they're putting more into an organization or a group than they're getting out.

You mentioned workplace education and that you have a great uptake. You just touched on it - could you expand on that? I haven't heard of that before so I'd appreciate hearing more.

MR. DESBARRES: There are many benefits to membership; in fact, there are many different models that chambers use for membership fees, for example. We keep ours very low so it's a low barrier to entry to be a member because then we want to engage those members to participate in other things. Mr. Lohr mentioned our business awards - it's a very well-known event in our area that people have to buy tickets for so, therefore, it's a fundraiser for us. It's a huge part of the business community getting together to recognize those who have had special achievements, anywhere from being a small business to an innovative business to an exporter and so on.

Those events are also great networking opportunities. There are the sectors, like the tourism I've talked a fair bit about, like agriculture, where agricultural sector members can get together at an agriculture committee meeting to talk about things important to their industry. But as far as the professional development, workplace education programs are funded by the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. They don't have the contacts, for example, in our region to be able to go out and offer these programs. We have the contacts, so we become sort of the administrator of the program.

We find out from our members, and I'll clarify - I say our members because that's who we can contact the easiest but you don't have to be a member to participate. Any business can participate. We talk to the business community and find out what do they need to know - what education, what type of training might be useful for them to be able to grow their business? It could be anyone from the owner to a C-level to an employee. Wherever they find they have a need, we find out those needs, and then we go to the Department of Labour and Advanced Education - I think it's the Workplace Initiatives Division of that department - and we say, here's what they're interested in. They have a list of programs they have available that are kind of "in the can" to some extent - they're already developed. But even if it's in the can, every program is customized to the people in the room.

Every program starts with what we call individual needs assessments. Say we've determined there's a need for human resource management, we go and there's a program on human resource management, here are the bullets that it covers. But once we hire the instructor, the instructor will have an interview with each individual participant from that program and find out what their specific needs are. Some of those bullets might get removed because there isn't a need for that particular area, some bullets might get added. It's different than going to a university or a community college where there's a set curriculum. There is an outline that can be added to and subtracted from for each topic, depending on the people in the room.

It's a very interactive experience - 40 hours is the traditional length, essentially over 10 weeks. We've done HR management; we've done change management; we've done computer skills; we've done marketing, level one, level two; we've done business management skills; we've done financial management; Excel - Excel was something that one of the businesses came to us and said, I need some of my employees to learn Excel better. We've now had three different programs on Excel because once we put it out there, everybody else was like, we could really use that too.

We can even go to the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and say, here's a need. If they don't have something in the can, they can help develop it and consult with us on developing it. There's a lot of people interested in social media and learning how to better manage social media and develop social media strategies. That's a component of a marketing program that they already have, but they've now provided a sort of adjusted marketing program that has a focus on social media. It is still marketing, but it's for those who want to dig deeper into social media. Does that answer your question?

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Yes, obviously, membership has its privileges. I have another question on a different topic. It came up because you mentioned Patrick Sullivan's name, and now he's the executive director of the Halifax Chamber. I want to know, is there collaboration amongst the different chambers, not just in the Valley but throughout Nova Scotia?

MR. DESBARRES: I'll let Judy speak to this also, but there are monthly conference calls, for example, among the chambers of our province. As well, the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce is sort of the body that oversees all the chambers in the Atlantic Provinces. So there are connections made through that and events, professional development as well as networking and discussion and policy discussions.

Judy and I actually last year attended the Canadian Chamber of Commerce convention in Ottawa. That was primarily a policy development event so that every chamber in the country had the opportunity to be there and have input into the policies developed for the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which then can trickle down to the different regions. Each chamber has the opportunity to put policies forward to be considered by the Canadian chamber. It's a very elaborate electronic voting system in a room full of some 300 chamber executives. If a chamber can't make it, they can proxy their vote. For example, I don't think Halifax was at that convention, so I had their vote; I could vote for us and vote for them so that they didn't lose their voice completely. There's a lot of collaboration and co-operation among the chambers.

Did you want to add something?

MS. RAFUSE: We are members of the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, and we're also members of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. So we do get to participate in anything that goes on within those two organizations. I also belong to an organization called the Chamber of Commerce Executives of Canada, which is chamber staff. Their conference is held in conjunction with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce conference. That offers some great professional development for staff and also sharing of best practices and best ideas. I've been with the chamber 10.5 years, so I've developed a pretty good contact list of folks across the country. Chambers are very different in larger cities than they are in the Annapolis Valley, but there are a lot of similarities, so it's a great relationship.

The Atlantic Chamber is seen on the national level as a provincial chamber because we don't have provincial chambers in Atlantic Canada. We have provincial policy committees, so each province has a policy committee. We also have an urban chamber caucus, which are the chambers that are above 300 members; I think there's 10 of us in Atlantic Canada. We do a conference call once a month or once every two months. There's a lot of sharing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: I just want to comment on the temporary foreign worker issue. There are two programs; they're federally regulated. One's called the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, and the other is the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. In the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, they come for six months. I think the Temporary Foreign Worker Program allows people to come for two years. There are very few workers in the Valley - there are some; I've met a couple - who are in the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in agriculture. There are some, but the vast majority of the workers - I think they're in excess of 500. I don't know the numbers either, but I mean they make a huge impact, and the farmers would say that they create employment for Canadians, that's what they would say.

It has been a very successful program and I know it's extremely important to the vegetable, the horticultural industries in the Valley. I wonder, if you know, would you comment - either Paul or Judy - on the importance of that worker program to the Valley?

MS. RAFUSE: It's very important. We have a lot of cold crops, a lot of vegetables, a lot of those hands-on, that's the diversity of agriculture in the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia, as far as that goes, and the seasonal workers are extremely important to getting those crops.

They're also not cheap to bring - it's a fair expense to the business, to the agri-business. They also put money back into our economy because they're buying groceries and so on. If you go to New Minas on a Friday night there's a few van loads of them around, so they are spending some money there. It's extremely important to get the crops off the ground.

MR. LOHR: I want to go to a different topic. They don't go home empty-handed either, there are consumer goods that are unavailable in their home countries or are very expensive.

I'd like to switch topics. One of the things we've seen in the last couple of years is the advent of the compressed natural gas trucks coming into the Valley. I believe there are four or five businesses - or Acadia University, which is not a business, but is using compressed natural gas. In some cases some of those businesses or locations in the winter need two or three truckloads a day, it's a fair bit. Does the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce have a policy or a position on a natural gas pipeline coming into the Valley that

would replace this trucking anyway - what would your position be on that or would you see that as advantageous to the Valley?

MR. DESBARRES: We haven't specifically developed the policy on it yet, but it's definitely on our radar that we're looking into it, the research of it, and have been talking to people about it because, to be perfectly honest, we don't know - I think there needs to be a cost-benefit analysis done that we don't have the capability of doing because there are some major users, as you mentioned - Acadia University, Michelin, I believe the hospital, and CKF uses the natural gas as well, so there are a lot and there are a lot of trucks on the road with that.

Intuitively it makes sense that there would be a pipeline to bring that in and then it could have even wider use, as well as taking the trucks off the road. But we'd like to see that cost-benefit analysis done. We haven't put it on our top advocacy list to advocate for or against the position, we are in the research stages of it.

Do you want to comment on it?

MS. RAFUSE: It was within our advocacy of our alternative energy; that was one of the things we discussed quite a bit. We have had, as Paul mentioned earlier, speakers come in on all the different industries of alternative energy - wind, air, solar, tidal, and natural gas.

MR. BELLIVEAU: In your earlier presentation on the challenges you said the municipal units were actually competing against themselves and not working together. So to me, can you give an example of where that exists?

MR. DESBARRES: I don't think that would be wise to give a specific example of something. I don't want to throw any municipalities under the bus, as they say.

MR. PORTER: A couple of things - I wanted to pick up, Ms. Ells, on the comments you made in your opening statement. I don't know if you had it written or it was just off the cuff. You talked about the out-migration and the sentence following that was - and I'd like you to read it again, if you would - it was almost contradictory to that. I kind of caught it when I was listening - could you just read that for me again?

MS. ELLS: What I mentioned is that our population maintains stability, but what we're seeing is more seniors and retiring people coming into the area to offset those younger ones who are leaving, so that's why the contradiction. There is an out-migration of youth; however, in terms of the population over the course of the last year, we've maintained a stable population.

MR. PORTER: Thanks for the clarity. I just wanted to pick up on that, something you said.

The out-migration of youth has always been an interesting one when I listen to this. I was one of those way back in 1980-81 who left this province and went to Alberta to work and came home, like many people that I know, and I'll just speak locally from where I come from. It happens all over but there are a lot of people who went out West and I would say a very small number did not return. Most of us all came back. We went out and we lived our dream and made a few bucks, spent it while we were there, and came home the same as when we left, most of us, I think.

That's not something new, we've seen that for decades. We see it today - a little bit different, though. We see the families where one of those partners are going, they're staying the month, and they're coming home. It's a bit different than it was when I went in those days. Do you count that as out-migration as well in the numbers, or not?

MS. ELLS: The numbers in terms of out-migration are talking about how many people of certain age levels are in here, and it's a figure that we received from Statistics Canada, in terms of the age distribution. So when you see levels of numbers that are going fairly flat and then all of a sudden you get to 22, 23, 24, 25, and the numbers come down and then, just as you are saying, they pick up again later, maybe 40 years old, then you start getting that level again and then start rising in the older ages. So is it out-migration that they leave and they come back? Well it's a net balance in terms of youth. We have more youth who are leaving than we have youth who are coming into the area. So I think by that stance there is out-migration.

I think it can also be measured in terms of young families. When we have schools that are losing a classroom a year or every couple of years, then I think that's another indication that there is less of a younger population here and it is certainly, as you know, a great place to grow up. You've come back yourself, so there are a lot of benefits here, so it's a matter of creating the opportunities.

I hear time and time again that youth would like to stay. Yes, it's good to go out and see other parts of the world, but they really need to feel they have those significant opportunities here. There are opportunities, but I think the conversation is that there isn't opportunity.

MR. PORTER: If I could just add to that, Paul, before you speak, if you look at the census and you keep hearing about the number, the provincial number doesn't change much overall; it really doesn't. So I often wondered, when I heard about all the out-migration, you talk about they're coming back, where are they coming from and it's the other piece around the piece and I'm not sure where Statistics Canada, they would have to answer, I guess, but when they take all this into consideration, how many families are smaller, and we see that in the school example that in certain parts of Nova Scotia there are a lesser number of, even if they are young families, they may be having one or two as

opposed to seven children that were in my family. I've had four; I've done my part. (Laughter) That's uncommon.

There aren't many, though, when you think about it that are my age who have four or five children. They have one or two, maybe, if they've got that. I wonder how much of an impact that has on those numbers you're talking about when it is calculated in. Maybe it has none; I don't know.

Nothing against Statistics Canada, you get these numbers. Nothing is really that well-defined, at least that I ever saw when you start trying to break it down. And I would be looking at that when I say to my own area, you know, what is bringing those families here? You talk about that 40-plus group, us coming back, where are we coming from - are we Nova Scotians or are we from somewhere else - to keep that provincial number level? And we've been fairly stagnant over many years, the numbers.

MR. DESBARRES: You make me feel better; you've taken my part of the quota because I only have one.

Just anecdotally, I'm also one of those. I moved away for 10 years to the U.S. to get my career started. I didn't come back here for business opportunities; I came back here because this is where I grew up and I wanted to live here and raise my family here. I wouldn't have been able to do that without the technology that exists today. This ties back to the ICT industry and developing that sector, marketing that sector, to let people know there are a lot of jobs that you can do from the Valley or from anywhere. You can choose to live where you want to live and still have your career. So 80 per cent of my clients are still in the U.S. Some of them don't know I'm not in the U.S., and that's all because of technology.

MR. PORTER: That's a great thing, and we see a lot more of that in any variety of businesses, which is absolutely fabulous, I agree.

I just want to move quickly. We have Tourism Nova Scotia in my backyard, in Windsor. You talked a bit about that, Judy, as well, and the relationship and the marketing. I think about *Doers & Dreamers*. When it comes out, there's a number of things in it. What percentage of your Valley area is covered in that? More importantly, are we not planning that this year? That goes to print in the Fall or something, and I want to go back to that piece around budgeting, your line items. You talked about your funding. Somewhere that commitment must come along before - I understand the municipal, yes, it's just now that it's coming. That's a bit of a challenge. But wouldn't that request now in this budget year be to the municipal units for next season actually, when we think about that? Or is that even reality? I don't know. I'll leave that with you.

MS. RAFUSE: We begin our fundraising road show in November and try to finish it up by February, and then we wait until sometimes June before we actually hear what the commitments are going to be.

MR. PORTER: That's for the coming season, though, right? Just to be clear?

MS. RAFUSE: Yes, for the coming season. The *Doers & Dreamers* is done by Tourism Nova Scotia, so unless we want to buy an advertisement, that would be our only commitment to that. This year we also commissioned our own Annapolis Valley guide. It was always the Annapolis Valley and Bay of Fundy, which included up to Truro and Parrsboro and it was just too big of an area, so we did an Annapolis Valley guide, which was paid for by advertisements, so there was no money out for us. Yes, we are always looking at - we're starting at the end of this year for our season next year. However, that's for the 2017 budget, and those are not typically voted on and passed through councils until May or June.

MR. PORTER: Understanding that process and that it is this far into the year - our tourism year is already under way - has there ever been any thought that, we know that we're in the current year but what about next year? Are you asking for next year, the year in advance, just because of that reason? To consider the 2016 budget in this year that you're doing, this actually should be a commitment for the 2017 year coming so we're ahead of it every year by a year. They know you're coming back every year. You're not strangers to anyone out there. They know that, and the same all around. I think consistently they're there. They're at the table with something.

MS. RAFUSE: Most of them are, yes. We have talked to bureaucrats and councillors alike and said we need to find a more sustainable funding formula so we can plan year to year. If you know that we're going to come to - I'll use Kings County as an example - for \$20,000 for tourism marketing, can we not be a line item in your budget for a particular amount of time and go in to review? That's a big part of what we do. We go back to the councils and say, we came here, we asked for this, you gave us this, and this is what we did. I think that's appreciated by the councils as well. Yes, we're fighting that fight every day.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You've got a few minutes to wrap up so, Mr. Porter, if you have a really quick question, they can answer, and then we'll wrap up.

MR. PORTER: Just very quickly. I think about that *Doers & Dreamers*; I want to go back to that. You said something about if you want to buy an ad, you can. Great. Do you know what part of the area that you're responsible for in the Valley as a chamber, the REN, et cetera - how much of that is actually something that's covered in the *Doers & Dreamers*? What would I expect to see by way of a percentage of coverage that they're doing for our area?

MS. RAFUSE: Our tourism boundaries go further than our chamber boundaries. For tourism, we represent the area from Windsor, the Avon region, through to Brier Island. That is a large region, and last year, Tourism Nova Scotia created a page on novascotia.com for the Annapolis Valley. You can go to that page which shows accommodations and so on and so forth. The *Doers & Dreamers* guide is much smaller than it used to be and the

focus is really turning to online, so novascotia.com is really being promoted as the place to go.

We're always cognizant that we need to be in touch with Tourism Nova Scotia all the time because we want to make sure that what we're doing is in line with the provincial marketing. They are charged with marketing the province and we want to make sure that we are aligned with them and not look at trying to do something totally different.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. DesBarres, did you want to end with some closing comments?

MR. DESBARRES: Sure. Basically the message we want to drive home today is that changes in the global economy have caused businesses to change their thinking, their strategies, and their structures, to adjust to those changes. It's time, I think, for municipal governments, as well as the province, to rethink how governance is structured to best suit a global market, so we can compete.

People don't think about coming to a specific town in the Valley, they think about going to the Valley. We think there has to be a strategy that oversees the entire Valley, a vision. There can be branding and coordinated visions for each community and I think that would be a great thing, but they have to be coordinated and not in competition with each other.

The second point that we want to drive home is the long-term view, especially when it comes to funding models, tourism being the one we've talked a lot about today, to make a commitment, as Mr. Porter mentioned, a line item so that we have to come back and be accountable, but at least if we're doing a good job, make a commitment to funding that you think is important for economic development, tourism just being an example, but there are many other sectors and areas.

We talked about workplace education as well, the Department of Labour and Advanced Education has been in a lot of upheaval lately, where we don't know from program to program what is going to be available, what is going to be happening. The people we deal with have been fantastic but the structure is in upheaval and there needs to be consistency, coordination, and reliability. I think anything else you do, you can plop money here and there and change tax rates and all these other things, but if you don't look at a region from a strategic point of view, with a long-term plan, I don't think the rest of those things are going to matter that much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll take a short recess so the witnesses can leave. Then we'll come back and do some committee business on picking agenda items.

[11:43 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:47 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. I'd like to call this meeting back to order. This is now the moment for agenda setting. We have all submitted topics. We've agreed that we would take all topics as is. We have five, the PCs have four, and the NDP have one. Right from the get-go, we agree that the NDP's topic will be accepted. The question for the PCs is, you have four; which two would you like? Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: We would select our top two on this list: ferry service and contract - witness, Bay Ferries; and barriers and opportunities for economic development in Cape Breton - witnesses, Business Cape Breton and the Cape Breton REN.

Do you want me to make that a motion?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll make a motion for all of them at the same time.

Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Just on a point of clarification, you said there's only one list; I see two.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry, I apologize. Out of those two, which one would you like?

MR. BELLIVEAU: The first.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, sure thing. We'll happily do that one.

The Liberals will bring in the top three there: aquaculture; the wine industry; and red tape reduction, with the addition of Fred Crooks, who is the deputy minister for red tape reduction.

Would someone like to make a motion to accept all the recommended topics?

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A seconder?

MR. LOHR: I'll second it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Great. Those are the topics for future meetings. I will sit down with Monica, and we'll put a calendar together. (Interruption) Sorry.

Would all those in favour of the agenda topics please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I'll work with Monica to build a calendar, and then we'll reconvene in September, until the House sits, whenever that may be, and then we'll go forward from there.

We also have correspondence from the Department of Business. Are there any questions regarding that correspondence? I hear no questions, so with that, we will adjourn the meeting. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 11:50 a.m.]