

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Committee Room 1

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Service

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
MANAGEMENT COMMISSION**

Hon. Gordon Gosse (Chairman)
Hon. Frank Corbett
Ms. Pam Birdsall
Mr. Maurice Smith
Ms. Becky Kent
Hon. Michel Samson
Mr. Andrew Younger
Hon. Christopher d'Entremont
Mr. Neil Ferguson, Chief Clerk of the House of Assembly
(Non-Voting Member)

In Attendance:

Counsel to the Commission:

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Speaker's Office Adviser

Ms. Deborah Lusby
Director of Administration
Speaker's Office

Ms. Annette Boucher
Assistant Clerk
House of Assembly



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2012

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

8:52 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Hon. Gordon Gosse

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. I'll call this meeting to order this morning, Wednesday, March 28th, the House of Assembly Management Commission meeting.

Before we start the regular business, I would like to welcome on the record, officially, the honourable member for Richmond, as newly appointed House Leader for the Official Opposition to the committee. With that being said, we need to have a resolution, which is now being handed out to the committee, stating that the honourable member be appointed to the Audit Committee of the House of Assembly Management Commission, so you now have in your possession a resolution.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Thank you. I guess I'll just read it:

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Richmond, Hon. Michel Samson, be appointed to the Audit Committee of the House of Assembly Management Commission, pursuant to Section 15(2)(a) of the House of Assembly Management Commission Act.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: A recorded vote. (Laughter)

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Well, we might as well get used to it. Mr. Chairman, I second that but just a question on it, do we have to officially remove Mr. MacDonald from the roll?

MR. NEIL FERGUSON: No, I believe he has resigned and I believe there was a press release from the Party. The Party can't have more than the one . . .

MR. CORBETT: No, I know that but just . . .

MR. YOUNGER: We can always add a line that says . . .

MR. CORBETT: Okay, that's fine, the question is answered.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

MR. FERGUSON: Just to be clear, the position on the Audit Committee is not by virtue of office, it's appointed by this commission, under the section that was referred to in the resolution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next up is approval of the January 24th minutes. I will now ask the Chief Clerk.

MR. FERGUSON: The minutes were circulated to all members and I believe there's an additional copy before them so at this point, unless there are any errors or omissions - I'm looking at Mr. Smith because he always catches most of the errors - unless there are any errors or omissions, then it would be in order to have a resolution approving the minutes, as circulated.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Seconded by Mr. Smith.

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

The motion is carried.

The next item on the agenda is the appointment of the auditor for the fiscal year 2011-12. There's a resolution being circulated right now by the Clerk and the Associate Clerk.

MR. FERGUSON: This is something which is required to be done before the end of each fiscal year. It's done upon the recommendation of the Audit Committee. At its last meeting the Audit Committee passed a resolution recommending to the commission that the Auditor General, who is here today with us, be appointed as the auditor of the House of Assembly's financial statements for the upcoming year. Therefore, it's in order, if the commission agrees to have a resolution at this point officially appointing the Auditor General as our auditor. It has been circulated and I will read it:

Therefore be it resolved that upon the recommendation of the Audit Committee of the House of Assembly Management Commission, the Nova Scotia Auditor General be appointed as auditor of the accounts of the House of Assembly for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012, pursuant to Section 22 of the House of Assembly Management Commission Act.

So if somebody would care to move that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is moved by Mr. Smith, seconded by Mr. Corbett.

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

The motion is carried.

I will now ask for an audit update.

MR. FERGUSON: The audit update, just to keep the commission apprised; we have been working on the audit for the period ended March 31, 2011. As the commission knows, we engaged Ernst & Young to provide support for the management certification of the Chief Clerk. We've had co-operation from the Department of Finance.

It has been a very unusual process. One of the things that came up was that this is an audit of the financial statements of the House of Assembly and up until now there has been no such thing. We've been a cost centre of government so we haven't had separate financial statements, for accounting purposes, listing assets and liabilities.

Deborah has done a massive amount of work, with the co-operation of Ted Doane in Internal Audit, and Byron Rafuse and Vicki Dimick - these are people you would probably be familiar with.

We've generated the financial statements, we have had the external auditors Ernst & Young on-site for their work and they are continuing that. We've also had the audit work being done by the Office of the Auditor General and that is all ongoing.

This is very much a learning experience for everyone and it is creating a whole new system and a way of doing things but it is progressing. It's behind schedule, under the

statutory deadlines, but it is being done and it will, we hope, produce a good result but it is taking time. I don't know if Deborah has anything she would like to add. So that's where we are, that's the update.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Security systems for constituency offices. I think everybody received a package this morning. In your file there is a letter quoting proposals for the security system for constituency offices.

MR. FERGUSON: What we had done, as you will recall at the last meeting, the Speaker undertook that we would pursue this further. It has been an ongoing concern. For the purpose of people who don't know the details, what we're discussing is the use of panic-type security systems for constituency offices. We have gone out and sought a quote on what it would cost to install something like that.

One of the options presented is a panic button auto-dialer that could be made available to constituency offices, so the individual members would have the option of getting this. We hope by getting a group rate, as it were, that we can reduce the costs.

One of the aspects - and you'll see there's a breakdown in front of you of the proposed cost - but one of the things that is a bit nebulous is the mileage charge. The idea would be - well, first of all, it might be expensive to have somebody travel, say, to Yarmouth or to Sydney to install one system but if a group of members in, say, Sydney decided to pursue this as something they want to, then the person could drive up there and, over the course of a day or two, install a number of them. That would significantly reduce the overall cost per member.

This is something that would come out of the constituency allowance but it would be available to add, I guess, security for people who may be confronted by irate individuals. We have training at the House; there are people who do get upset about things. I had a fellow get upset with me at Value Village. At the time I didn't have a panic button. So people do get angry and this is an option that is out there. So is there anything further on that one, Deborah?

MS. DEBORAH LUSBY: Well, this would go out to tender as well, so this is just to give you an idea of the type of options, or one option that is out there. What we could do is put this out to tender saying what our needs are and receive bids back from vendors and decide what we want to do. That also guarantees the lowest price.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Corbett.

MR. CORBETT: I guess anything that helps anybody who works for us, helps their security, I'm for it. I'm just wondering, though, does this say okay, that's the only level of security that members can build for? I know some members - and I know I don't have to speak very often on behalf of Mr. Samson - but I happen to know where Mr. Samson's

office is. It's fairly remote, it's close to a 100-Series Highway and I would suspect that his staff person works alone a lot in that area. Am I characterizing it properly, Michel?

Some of us are in a downtown core, I don't know. Would we be able to get higher levels? I guess to be more exact, I would think if a member wanted to get security cameras and so on, is that reimbursable?

MS. LUSBY: In the regulations it does just say security, it doesn't specify what level. So if there were any issues, then that type of concern will come to the commission.

MR. CORBETT: Because as far as security goes, I'd rather err on the high end than the low end. There is other rationale behind this, too, I would suspect, because we are public figures in one way or another, whether we like it or not, and whether it's for our own security, if someone brought a spurious claim against us that said we hit them in the office or something like that. So I would be willing to support, as long as I get - I think it's the understanding here that there is, within reason - a level, like video cameras would be considered security and within reason would be.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: The question I have really is that if I look at this kind of installation, as part of my lease in my remote location there is one in the building, so I don't know what the cost would be to put a panic button on the existing security system because I know that on the main pad there is sort of a button but the unfortunate part is that my CA is down a set of stairs, up a set of stairs, away from that box.

I don't know if this is really the requirement that we need, the security camera seems like another good way. A lot of these buildings that we have are not made for us. Mine is an insurance agent's office, it doesn't really have a secondary or an easy way out for the secretary, so should she be faced with someone, there is no way out for her. I know it has happened on a couple of occasions so I'm just wondering, is there capability there that if we don't go with this program, if there is an opportunity to pay for an upgrade to the security system in the building, because maybe it's cheaper to do it that way. I just throw that out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Younger.

MR. YOUNGER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I understand this correctly, this is really just a question of whether we go out and get a standing offer on this because Section 18 of the Act allows expenditures on security. I'm actually one of the MLAs who has security cameras at the moment. I can monitor them on my BlackBerry and I can monitor them in the caucus office if something happens, and that was approved in advance because of Section 18 of the Act.

I think if we're just talking about, let's go out and get a standing offer if people want to do this, that makes sense because I think the Act actually already provides that security systems and that sort of stuff, obviously - I don't think you want to be Fort Knox necessarily, but within reason it is provided for in the Act specifically.

MS. LUSBY: That's what I was going to say, that this is entirely optional. There are different levels of security already in different MLA offices. Some people are in a secure building where maybe there is a commissionaire there at the front who buzzes people in and out, and others are in remote areas where you walk right in the door and there is your CA. This is just one option that could be open and that it's entirely optional.

MR. CORBETT: I'll make a motion that we agree (Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I would ask now that we go to No. 5 on the agenda, Speaker's Administration Office. Deborah.

MS. LUSBY: I won't take up any time, but I just don't want folks to say they didn't know, so just a reminder that today is March 28th; March 30th is Friday, the fiscal year end. If you have any questions read your e-mails.

MR. FERGUSON: And tell your colleagues too, please.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It has also been brought to my attention that there is another item and I didn't put it under Other Business. It's an item to deal with the projectors and screens purchased by MLAs. It was brought to my attention at 4:11 p.m. last night in an e-mail from the honourable member for Richmond, the House Leader. I would now ask the floor be given to him. Mr. Samson.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe there will be requirement for further discussion on this matter so I would move that this item be delayed until a future meeting where further discussions can take place.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

That is the end of all the items under Regular Business. We will now look for a motion to adjourn the regular business.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Seconded by Ms. Birdsall. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

[The commission adjourned at 9:08 a.m.]