

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Wednesday, December 19, 2012

Committee Room 1

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**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)

[Ms. Pam Birdsall was replaced by Mr. Mat Whynott.]

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, DECEMBER 19, 2012

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

8:34 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Hon. Gordon Gosse

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now we'll call the meeting to order - the House of Assembly Management Commission meeting, December 19, 2012. Regular business - first up is the approval of the March 28, 2012 minutes. I will turn it over to Mr. Ferguson.

MR. NEIL FERGUSON: The minutes for March 28, 2012, have been circulated. There's nothing - unless anybody has any errors or omissions that they've noted, then it would be appropriate for someone to move a motion.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The motion is moved by Mr. d'Entremont, seconded by Mr. Corbett.

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

The motion is carried.

The second item on the agenda, the 2011-12 quarter 4 and the 2012-13, I guess, quarterly 1 and 2, financial review. I'll turn that over to Mr. Ferguson.

MR. FERGUSON: As you know, we review these quarterly and it has been a number of months since our last meeting. I'll turn it over to Deborah. I don't think there is anything significant, they have been circulated to the members, but if anyone has any questions about anything in the three sets of quarterlies then Deborah is ready, available and able to answer those questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions?

Item No. 3 on the agenda is franking and travel discussion.

MR. FERGUSON: As the members would know, when the House of Assembly Management Commission regulations were passed, in Regulation No. 42 there is a sub (3), which originally said that within 12 months we're going to look at franking and travel and split them into separate funds, franking and travel. On April 27, 2011, I think Mr. Younger said he thought we should have more time to get better data. It was resolved that within three months after year end 2012, a review would be done. We haven't met since then so this is our first opportunity.

In preparing to talk to the commission about it, I went and looked through the data and I can tell you that I still don't think there's anything like sufficient data to make any kind of rational breakdown. Very briefly, different members approach things quite differently. Some will travel a lot in their riding - perhaps they have a large riding, perhaps it's their personal style; others will do a lot of mail-outs. It's not possible to say at this point things like, what impact is there if a particular member from a riding happens to be a minister? Their ability to do things in their riding, to be in their riding, will be reduced. After another election, the person who is in that riding may not be a minister and may have completely different needs.

One of the fundamental building blocks of independence and the privileges of the members is the ability to do their jobs as they see fit. Given that the data are so shallow, there's not a rational argument that can be made by management for anything approaching a cut-off. You might have some member elected in the next election that has severe mobility problems, if you've said that they can only use so much for travel or maybe you're forcing them to travel.

At this point I think you would need a number of years of data; you would need to see things - how individual ridings or what the spending was in those based on different members, how they do their work; and you would also want the opportunity to analyze whether being a minister has any effect on the take-up of franking and travel.

My recommendation would be that that requirement to split be repealed and that if the commission in the future - years down the line when there are data - wants to revisit it, that would be appropriate. There is just no way that I feel we can comfortably make any kind of rational submission to the commission on which to found such an important breakdown.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Andrew.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: I will actually move that motion to repeal that. I don't know if anybody wants to second it, but I will just make a couple of very quick comments to it. I think the other element to this is there are fundamental differences between ridings that will never be able to be captured by some weird split.

The example I'd give you is - I have an urban riding and some of the other members here do. For us to mail something out is extraordinarily expensive. In many of the rural areas - maybe not all of them - there are alternative delivery methods which can be very inexpensive to deliver to everybody in your constituency.

The other element to that is if you're an urban member, because you don't get the separate allowance for travel back and forth - if myself or Mat or somebody wants to go to a meeting in Pictou and we don't do it as a Critic trip, the only way to claim that mileage is actually through our franking. Whereas a member from Cape Breton can stop in Pictou on the way down to the Legislature and go there.

AN HON. MEMBER: Or if you want to go to Yarmouth.

MR. YOUNGER: If you want to go to Yarmouth, that's right. But because of that variability I just don't think it's practical to split it in any meaningful way.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So the motion put before us is that we appeal Regulation 42(3). It is seconded by Mr. Whynott.

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

The motion is carried.

Item 4 on the agenda is the Auditor General's recommendations for the House of Assembly Financial Statements for years ending March 31, 2011 and March 31, 2012. Mr. Ferguson.

MR. FERGUSON: The draft management letter from the Office of the Auditor General is part of the materials that were circulated. There will be something else coming in January. It is two years since the Auditor General issued his February 2010 report, and as

you know, they do a two-year follow-up to see how departments or people who have been audited have responded. That will be coming out January 23rd.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mark it on your calendar. (Laughter)

MR. FERGUSON: So one of the things that are in here will be similar to what will be in that chapter.

If you've had a chance to read it, you'll see there are a number of recommendations in there. Three of those result in the requirement to make changes to the regulations. One of those I'll start with is the Auditor General's staff met with the Audit Committee and one of the things they thought was unreasonable was the very tight deadline for submission at year end. They felt that 30 days was not enough, not reasonable, given the fact that there's billing cycles and people may get a bill, pay it, and not get the copy back in time to get it.

There was some discussion of whether 60 days was an appropriate time and in the end they said they thought 60 days might, but to be completely fair to the members, they suggested it be extended to 90 days. The Audit Committee accepted this so that's one of the three recommended changes.

Another one is that - and this was something that comes out of the 2010 report - late fees and overdraft interest charges that are incurred by members not having paid a bill in time, they wanted to make it clear in the regulations that those be specifically excluded from reimbursement.

Also, they had audited a number of advertising files and they thought that the regulations should require a copy of the advertisement and placement to be submitted with the claim, which I believe most people are doing anyway. It's being done and it's being asked for when members make their submissions, but they wanted to see it in black and white as a requirement in the regulations. Those are the three things that are coming out of this correspondence.

We have draft resolutions, which Annette can pass around. I can just tell you what they say. The first one is:

“Be it resolved that the *House of Assembly Management Commission Regulations* are amended as follows:

1 Subsection 7(1) is amended by striking out ‘thirty’ in the last line and substituting ‘ninety’”.

That's the extension to 90 days.

“2 Section 8 is amended by adding immediately after subsection (3) the following subsection . . .”

Is this Section 8? I’m not sure of the numbering. (Interruption) It’s not (4A) or anything like that? All right, fine. The new subsection would read:

“(4) A member is personally responsible for and cannot claim for payment or reimbursement for the payment of late fees charged by vendors on overdue accounts or overdraft interest charged by financial institutions.”

The final one:

“3 Section 15 is amended by adding immediately after subsection (4) the following subsection . . .”

This is the one I thought was (4A) - sorry.

“(4A) A member’s claim for payment or reimbursement in respect of an expense for placing an advertisement in a newspaper must include the newspaper tear sheet.”

So those would be the three. (Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, hang on. Moe asked to speak and then I’ll speak. Deborah will be next.

HON. MAURICE SMITH: My concern is about the late payment in the overdraft accounts - the fees at banks for overdraft - because what’s happening is people are paying and running an overdraft and then getting charged (inaudible). If they don’t pay, they get late charges on their bills, their phone bill or whatever. I’ve had a number of people contact me about that because they know that I’m on this committee and on the House of Assembly Management Commission Audit Committee.

One of the things I’m just wondering, and I understand why this is here - is there any way to send the bill, rather than having the member pay it, send it in to Deborah’s office for direct payment? Then that’s not coming into the members’ back account and being paid out - either incurring a late fee for the bill or an overdraft fee for the monies. We do that, I think, with the caucus expenses, don’t we? So we could we not do the same thing for - I’m thinking the larger ticket items. I think we do that now for office rent, don’t we, so some of the advertising, those kinds of things?

MS. DEBORAH LUSBY: So you would sign it off first?

MR. SMITH: Yes. Would that work?

MS. LUSBY: It would impact staffing, but we could make it work.

MR. SMITH: I think that's a way of trying to avoid these fees.

MS. LUSBY: It could make the bill more late, in the sense that if it's coming to you for signing off and then comes to our office for data entry, where if you just paid it . . .

MR. SMITH: But sometimes they're late because you don't have the money in the account. So if the bill comes in they can send it in that day. Actually, I don't think that would happen. You guys can pay it quickly.

MS. LUSBY: I'd have to check with Finance, too, on the ability for them to pay a bill that's not made out to the Nova Scotia Government but made out to the member, so we'd have to work that out. It's definitely worth exploring.

MR. SMITH: But that's the same as our office rent, effectively.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Deborah, you wanted to speak next?

MS. LUSBY: Not on that one. It's just about the advertising. We can talk about that when you get there.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Just going back to the other placement issues - when we do a radio ad. I know this is more specific to newspaper, but radio ads come into the same issue and other advertising that we do that you're not going to get a tear sheet on. Are there considerations for that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think a written copy of the ad, the invoice and the receipt is sufficient.

MR. FERGUSON: So include a copy of the advertisement?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, the written - if it's an ad that you have, whether it's television or radio, what is being said could actually be forwarded to the Speaker's administration office so you'll know where the copy of the ad is.

MR. YOUNGER: If you just have a copy of the ad, that covers that, but also you can put it on a disk . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, just a copy of the ad, I guess, is . . .

MS. BECKY KENT: So we're changing the newspaper tear sheet to include a copy of the advertisement . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: When we do a Christmas ad . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: CTV, you'll get 20 or whatever - you're not going to send in all 20 or so, but a copy of the ad to . . .

MS. LUSBY: MLAs also keep a standard ad on file so if you're doing your normal business card, you just put on your claim "standard ad."

MR. CORBETT: This is one of those ones that I think we're being purer than pure. This time of year a lot of us are probably doing Christmas greetings or season's greeting or whatever, so to get reimbursed now - I'm doing a community radio ad and I'm doing a cable ad. To get reimbursed, I'm going to have to have the content to that ad. I'm going to have to have the script sent in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. CORBETT: So what are we trying to prevent here? I'm just speechless. Am I the only one thinking this way?

MR. YOUNGER: I spend more time doing paperwork to file expenses than almost anything else. (Interruptions)

MR. CORBETT: I don't want to derail this too far.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We can defer it, but that actually comes from the Auditor General.

MR. CORBETT: I'll zip my mouth on that one. (Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have to look at what they're saying too. If you look at what he's saying, it's a non-partisan advertisement. Are you advertising as your constituency MLA - it's a non-partisan advertisement. That should be paid for on your constituency budget.

MR. YOUNGER: Rest assured, we'll ask Frank about it in Question Period if he does a partisan ad.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well I mean, that's his point.

MR. FERGUSON: If the commission would want to go with the other two now and look further at this one, then that's fine.

MR. YOUNGER: We're doing it . . .

MS. KENT: Yes, why overthink it, I think at this stage we're doing it anyway. Just take out "the newspaper tear sheet" and include "a copy of the advertisement".

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's okay.

MR. FERGUSON: I think you'd have to take out "in a newspaper".

MR. GORDON HEBB: To do what you're saying, you have to make more changes than you're suggesting. We shouldn't try to draft it here.

MR. YOUNGER: We're going to be back . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: On the 23rd of January, yes.

MR. YOUNGER: You have to be careful of how that works out. The important thing is all of these things are things that we're doing at the moment, right? They're just not in the regulations. However, what I will say is that the reason why some people are sending in a copy of the ad - because we obviously sent proofs or something - most of us send in the proof because I have waited months to get tear sheets, in some cases.

MS. LUSBY: That's fine.

MR. YOUNGER: No, I know, but at the moment that's why this is - Transcontinental - nobody here from Transcontinental? Okay. The Herald is really good.

MS. KENT: And then we have sports and activity groups that put something in a program, you know, to have them to somehow conform to this is . . .

MR. YOUNGER: And we do try to get them all . . .

MS. KENT: It's PDF, is what we've sent to them.

MS. LUSBY: I think that's part of it. MLAs are not allowed to spend money on sponsorships and donations, so it's important that your ad doesn't say, thank you for sponsoring, or you know, we're happy to sponsor your event because you're not allowed to sponsor. So we're trying to meet those regulations that you're not allowed to sponsor and it saves that already expending . . .

MS. KENT: I think we all got that, though, we got that message.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I mean it's not written anywhere. If we want to look in that Section (4A), "A member's claim for payment or reimbursement in respect of an expense for placing an advertisement in a newspaper must include . . ." a copy of the ad.

MS. KENT: It's as simple as that. But is it a copy of the ad in its final version or is it the copy of what we submit . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: The copy of the ad.

MS. KENT: Yes, the proof.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. So is that okay? I mean that's - I feel very comfortable with that part of it. Michel.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: I have no issue with it but I know when the auditors came in and asked to see specific items from us, they wanted to see the final brochure, not the ad that we submitted. That's where it became a bit of an issue because organizations that we had sent an ad, as part of advertising, when they put it in the brochure, said we'd like to thank our sponsors and there shows our ad in their brochure, which we have no control over, which is why I think at that point the auditors were saying, well hold on now, that's sponsorship, it's not an ad.

We can't control what these organizations do if we buy advertising, we can't, at the end of the day - I know there was talk about putting a disclosure clause. We can try that as well but these are volunteer organizations and they are on shoestring budgets, it's somebody's kid at a computer putting this together, so we have to be a bit realistic there. So I don't mind just sending in the ad, I think that's fine, but if the auditors are going to turn around and say, get me a copy of the final brochure, which was a bit of an issue for us because we had sent in our ad, only to have the auditors say, well we want to see what the Acadian Festival brochure was in 2010. Now that's a job to go find who still has a copy of that brochure from 2010.

I think we have to be careful here that we're not creating nightmares at the end because if we're only expected to send in an ad and the auditors come in and tell us, we want to see the final product from the association from two years ago, that's going to be an issue. It was this time, it's going to be an issue again, so we need to have some understanding there of what the actual expectations are.

MS. LUSBY: Well I sent out a memo - one of the famous ones - about a month or two ago, trying to add some advertising clarity. One of the suggestions was that when people ask you for money for advertising, you include a message about how you are not allowed to be listed as a sponsor; if they want to benefit from your advertising dollars, then that's part of their agreement, not to list you as a sponsor or to use your funds and label you as a sponsor.

I had written a draft text that you could share with the organizations and groups that want to benefit from your advertising and perhaps we use that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Frank.

MR. CORBETT: Look, Deborah, I couldn't agree with you more, but I couldn't agree with Michel more either. The fact is, I read the same issue as Michel on some items as you advertise, and we're not that sophisticated a group and some of the groups that we deal with aren't that sophisticated. You say, here you go, we'll advertise with you, but we cannot be the sponsor and sure as there's it in a cat, it'll show up as "like to thank MLA Frank Corbett for sponsoring our tournament" and I go, Jesus Christ - unparliamentary, I know - but it's that kind of head against the wall here. We are now spending 10 minutes on something that's this big in the world, but this is, I guess, the world we live in.

I don't know what we have to do at the end of the day, but what they want us to do and Deborah, you are absolutely right and my CA (Interruptions) No, no you're right in what you do, you're bang on, but so is Michel. It's like we go and say here's a copy, we actually give people a handout and say here's what you can't do if you're looking for an ad, but invariably somebody who is doing a mock-up decides to put a page in there of "thank you to our sponsors" and we'll put a credit card-sized thing in there, but on the top of it, it says "thank you to our sponsors" which in some ways is a very grey area because one would say by being an advertiser, you're a sponsor. That's the craziness of it.

I worked in television long enough to know that when we would throw something in before we go to a commercial, we'd like to thank our sponsors, and they're advertisers. I know we're splitting hairs here, but that's the frustration that us non-accountants have to deal with and this is a crazy world.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Neil.

MR. FERGUSON: Perhaps I can take this (Interruptions) Well, a possible solution is that we can run this by the Auditor General's staff perhaps and a suggestion that if an MLA sends out their ad to a group and has the message "I am not allowed to be a sponsor" and it comes back and is shown as a sponsor, that we should be able to pay on the basis that it was sent out with an indication that I can't be a sponsor and notwithstanding that they make a mistake thereafter, that should not penalize the member who made it clear to them that they can't be a sponsor.

I'd like to run that by the staff of the Auditor General because it seems to be a very reasonable approach that if the member has done everything right, the member should not be penalized and we should be entitled to reimburse on that basis, so that somebody else's subsequent error does not affect the member. (Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hold on, I have a list. Andrew is next.

MR. YOUNGER: Well that's fine as part of the issue, but the part of the issue I don't want to get missed is the fact that at the moment we only get reimbursed after we send in all of the documentation, which is fine, except at the moment we do an ad and we'll send in the proof because we have that right away. We can be three, four, five months, especially with a community organization before we get a copy and I'm already bankrolling the Province of Nova Scotia on my line of credit waiting to get paid as it is. I'm not going to bankroll them anymore for three, four or five months because now we have to wait for something else.

I don't mind sending that in when it comes, but at the end of the day, at the moment we're sending in the proof that somebody sends to us, with the proof that it has been paid, with a receipt, with everything that says here you go for reimbursement. If I now have to wait, my God, sometimes I'd be over the six months that you're not allowed to be reimbursed before I can send it in, waiting. Transcontinental, we all joke about them, they're bad enough, they can be months as it is, but there are community organizations that can be a year sometimes before oh, yeah, right, we meant to get you this program. So there is that side issue.

I don't mind sending it in and we keep them all, somebody can come over to our office and see every single one of the original ones because when they do send them to us we keep them in a file, but there is that issue of what we send in for proof.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Whynott.

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: I want to echo Andrew. With all due respect, the amount of time that we spend chasing these things in order to get reimbursed is ridiculous so just to put another step in that whole process of whether or not we've asked . . .

MR. FERGUSON: I was only suggesting that it was an evidentiary thing that if you'd done that you would not be in any way penalized. I'm trying to make it easier.

MR. CORBETT: To take Deborah's direction and have the thing here and get Joe Smith from the Rotary Club to sign off and when I come in that they would sign it off, saying that I'm advertising in their brochure and that's what it was - it was an advertisement, not a sponsorship.

MR. FERGUSON: Just to be clear, I wasn't suggesting that it was something that anybody else would have to sign off. If you had sent that notice, then it would mean that if they made a mistake, you would never be penalized. I wasn't trying to add a step to anything. I'm just thinking of accounting evidence, but point taken.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: We are trying to satisfy the Auditor General here. If there are a couple of ways to make it simple, let's just try to make it simple. If not, maybe bring

it back in January and have a little more clarity to it. I don't know what we need to do, but let's just satisfy the Auditor General. I think that would be the safest thing to do here.

MR. SMITH: Just as a suggestion, another way to do it might be not to submit the cheque to the organization until you get a copy of the publication - they're waiting rather than you waiting.

MS. KENT: But sometimes it's not even in physical - it's a banner; it's a slide show; there are events where they have their advertisers flip through a media presentation. It's really complicated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have to satisfy the . . .

MR. CORBETT: Can I just make a suggestion then? With the information here on Sections 1 and 2, put that over to our next meeting; and Section 3 we agree with. (Interruptions)

MR. FERGUSON: You're looking at two different things. One is the agenda that Mr. Corbett is working from and the other is the resolution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, it's the resolution that we're debating right now.

MR. FERGUSON: So you would be saying go with Section 1, but defer Sections 2 and 3 on the resolution?

MR. CORBETT: Yes. (Interruptions) Well, we can find out from Deborah about the ability - the human resource issue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So in the resolution we're going to accept Section 1: "Subsection 7.1 is amended by striking out 'thirty' in the last line and substituting 'ninety'." And we're going to defer Sections 2 and 3 to the January meeting.

MR. SMITH: Could I just ask if we could have the January meeting before the letter goes out. (Interruptions) No, before the Auditor General's letter - if we can correct it in advance, that might be better.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, his report is due on January 23rd at the Public Accounts Committee.

MR. FERGUSON: I believe - and Deborah you can correct me - because they have printing deadlines, we have already said as management that we're going to attempt to comply with those items. They had it listed as the Management Commission will and we said we can't speak for the Management Commission because it's their printing deadline. We said that management will attempt to do that. Part of management's attempt to do that

is what you see before you, but it will still be the same in the report. That won't change now because the printing deadline has passed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there a motion to do that? Frank made the motion. Is there a seconder? Mat Whycott seconded the motion.

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

The motion is carried.

We are moving right along and we're going to go to Item 5, the Financial Statement Approval 2010-11.

MR. FERGUSON: The draft financial statements are in your package. We have never had financial statements before. We've always been a line item, an operating entity within the government hierarchy so it was quite a massive undertaking to generate financial statements. Deborah worked with the Department of Finance and the auditors for months to produce these.

If you look at them, one is for our first audit, ending March 31, 2011, the second is for March 31, 2012. Deborah can correct me if I misstate this but the first set of financial statements is qualified. It's only qualified because accounting rules require auditors to not give an unqualified opinion on a first audit. They state that clearly in the financial statements.

The second ones, ending March 2012, are unqualified. So all in all, these financial statements are very good. Any other comment on that, Deborah? No. So we just have to go through the step of having the commission approve the financial statements as part of the overall audit package. Is that a fair statement?

As I said, they were circulated. They are dry reading but unless anyone has any questions on them . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Michel does.

MR. SAMSON: No, I'm happy to make a motion, Mr. Chairman. Prior to that, I just want to commend Deborah, Neil and all the staff for the work they did in putting this together. As indicated, this was never done before so this was certainly a steep learning curve but I believe the Audit Committee and the auditors expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the work that was done, so I'd be pleased to move the adoption of the financial statements 2010-11 and 2011-12, as presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That was seconded by Chris. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried. Thank you.

Appointment of the Auditor General for 2012 and 2013. Neil?

MR. FERGUSON: We'd like to get this done in a timely way. As you know, we're behind the curve of our first two years. We've now got a very good working relationship with the Office of the Auditor General. We know now what we're doing, they know what we're doing and they're doing.

The Audit Committee has already approved, have recommended the commission appoint the Auditor General to be the auditor of the accounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013. There's a draft resolution to that effect that can be passed around. I'll just read it out to you:

“Be it resolved that upon the recommendation of the Audit Committee of the House of Assembly Management Commission made at their meeting of November 27th, 2012, the Nova Scotia Auditor General be appointed as the auditor of the accounts of the House of Assembly for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013, pursuant to Section 22 of the *House of Assembly Management Commission Act*.”

So if there's a motion . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there a motion? The motion moved by Mr. Whynott, seconded by Mr. Younger.

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

The motion is carried. We now accept that, thank you.

Okay, now we're going to go to the update on the security system for constituency offices. I'd ask Deborah to give us an update on that one, please.

MS. LUSBY: It's on the agenda because it was discussed at the last commission meeting, that we would do some homework on the installation of panic alarms in constituency offices. Over the summer we did do some homework and then consulted with the MLAs, did a little survey, got some feedback and then on November 30th, sent out a memo to the MLAs with some various options and costs. Because of the differences that each office would have, suggested that they contact a security provider in their area.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that agreed?

It is agreed. Thank you, Deborah.

The next item on the agenda is the CPI annual adjustment - Canada CPI April 1, 2012, adjustment. Mr. Ferguson.

MR. FERGUSON: I just want to point out that Regulation 52(1) provides “The fixed amounts set out in the Regulations, except the amount in clause 50(a) . . .” which is mileage “. . . is increased on April 1st of each year by the increase in the Consumer Price Index for Nova Scotia or the core Consumer Price Index for Canada, whichever is lower, for the previous year, rounded to the nearest dollar, and the Regulations are amended accordingly.”

This is to let the commission know that the annual adjustment for April 1, 2012, Canada’s was 2.0 and Nova Scotia’s was 2.6, so to follow the adjustment in the regulations would be to adopt the 2.0. I don’t know if we need a motion. That’s in the regulations, it’s by way of information more than anything.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Mr. d’Entremont.

MR. D’ENTREMONT: I have another item.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Other business?

MR. D’ENTREMONT: Yes, just a quick issue on apartment rents. Rents are going up in the city - maybe have a look at that for the actual living allowances that we do have.

The issue I have, though, is the rollover of living allowances. The instance I have is that you’ve got your rent, you then have to pay your Internet and cable and that stuff, and then you have a power bill. In some cases there’s not enough money left over on your monthly allowance to do it. There’s always money left over because you’re always leaving \$50 to \$100 left over but it might not pay the power bill.

I’m just wondering if there’s an opportunity to have those living allowances roll over every month, so that you do have some space within that total budget. There is total budget there, it’s just the problem you run into is that if you max out in one month because your power bill came in, which is every two months, then you’re maxing out because rents have gone up over the last couple of years.

That’s just the issue I wanted to bring up and maybe something to look at for the January meeting.

MR. YOUNGER: There’s no change in the budget for that.

MR. D’ENTREMONT: No, there’s no change in the budget, it’s just the issue is how do you roll it over, how do you access that money? I don’t have a . . .

MR. CORBETT: Chris, you and I are in the same boat here - Chris and Michel. Yes, it's an issue we seem to be pushed up against every once in a while. It's something I would hope if there was a resolve . . .

MR. D'ENTREMONT: You're saying there must be a regulation change . . .

MS. LUSBY: We just have to annualize, like we did with the advertising amount; instead of \$419 a month limit, we went to \$5,000. So if we annualize the apartment allowance, it would be the same thing. And we annualize the constituency allowance too.

MR. YOUNGER: It's the same issue with part-time staffing. (Interruptions)

MR. CORBETT: We can bring that forward maybe as a motion, if I may, Mr. Chairman, at the next meeting and we could formalize that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that okay? At the next meeting we can look at a motion or a resolution to bring that forward, so we can have that on the agenda for the January meeting. Is that it?

Well, I'd like to say Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year. Those of you who are travelling to Cape Breton, I hope you have your snow tires on.

[The committee adjourned at 9:13 a.m.]