

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Thursday, September 19, 2019

Committee Room

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HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Hon. Kevin Murphy (Chair)

Hon. Geoff MacLellan

Hon. Labi Kousoulis

Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

Rafah DiCostanzo

Allan MacMaster

John Lohr

Claudia Chender

Neil Ferguson, Chief Clerk of the House of Assembly
(Non-Voting Member)

In Attendance:

Speaker's Office Adviser

Deborah Lusby
Director of Administration
Office of the Speaker

Annette Boucher
Assistant Clerk
House of Assembly

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2019

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

1:00 P.M.

CHAIR

Hon. Kevin Murphy

THE CHAIR: Order, please. Welcome to the House of Assembly Management Commission meeting for September 19, 2019.

Just before we begin, we'll go around the room starting on my left. Just state your name and your office and if you are substituting for a member, please state who you're substituting for.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: All the materials have been submitted in advance and we'll get right into our agenda with Item No. 1, which is the approval of the minutes from our previous meeting on June 12, 2019. I'll turn that over to Mr. Ferguson.

NEIL FERGUSON: The minutes have been circulated and this is actually going to take us into Item No. 2, as well. Barring anybody else having any questions or issues with the minutes, if you look at Page 2, you will see that we've taken the unusual step of including some of the Hansard transcript for the item dealing with the motion to approve the CPI for the year.

As happens often, we were moving fairly quickly, and you will see that it says: "We'll take that as the motion. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay. The motion is carried."

So there wasn't a seconder, and both the Chief Legislative Counsel and I have discussed this with the Speaker. We don't think that it necessarily renders the carriage of the motion by the commission invalid, but for greater certainty we are suggesting that somebody approve and somebody second a motion simply confirming that motion.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacLellan.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: I'll move it.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacLellan will move it; seconded by Mr. Kousoulis.

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

The motion is carried.

NEIL FERGUSON: Thank you. Barring anything else, a motion to approve those minutes would now be in order.

THE CHAIR: Is there any other business arising from the minutes? Mr. MacLellan.

GEOFF MACLELLAN: I'm just wondering, obviously, upon reflection of the previous meetings and the discussion around MLA Alana Paon's constituency office and the accessibility challenges that we've discussed here and the adherence to some of the rules. There's a much documented conversation that has been had and with the ebb and flow with your office, I'm just curious if we could have an update or is there an update available through the Speaker's Office on that challenge?

THE CHAIR: Certainly. The update is, there is no update. Through numerous emails from both myself as Chair of the commission and as Speaker, and through the Speaker's Office staff, we have reached out to the MLA in question numerous times, with no response. So there is no update as to the progress or lack thereof of the request to come into compliance. We continue to adhere to the rules that are before us to withhold the payment of rent and related accommodation expenses.

NEIL FERGUSON: Barring any other issues arising from the minutes, a motion is still in order.

THE CHAIR: We'll look for a motion to approve the minutes for the previous meeting. So moved by Mr. MacMaster, seconded by Ms. DiCostanzo.

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

The motion is carried.

We'll move on to the financials, Item No. 3, review of the fourth quarter. We'll turn that over to Ms. Lusby.

DEBORAH LUSBY: There are two spreadsheets in your package. The first one is the fourth quarter final report for 2018-19. The reason why this is being reported now is members get 90 days after year end to submit their expenses, which is until June 27th - and we haven't met since then.

The format of these reports has changed just a little bit based on new members on the Audit Committee who have requested a display of some different information. We've added in the first column 2017-18 actuals so they can compare those to 2018-19 actuals. The following columns are comparing the forecast to actuals and then the budget to actuals. The last column shows the final amount spent compared to your budget. If you have any questions, let me know.

The second report in your package is the first quarter as of June 30, 2019, which would traditionally be 25 per cent of the budget as a maximum. Again, the same new columns have been added with the 2018-19 actuals and then the authority, which is the budget displaying the forecast, and then the year-to-date actuals compared to forecast and budget. If you have any questions, let me know.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacLellan.

GEOFF MACLELLAN: This may not be the place for this. I'm just recalling a conversation between Allan, Claudia, the Speaker and myself this week. I'm just curious about the budget line around Legislative TV. There are conversations about enhancing the capabilities for video for certain committees - Claudia may want to jump in here - just expanding some of the work. I know there were some technical aspects, but with those, obviously financials come along. I don't know if this is hypothetical or just in the case that we could see expanded coverage for this legislative session, if that's the case. Would that be reflected in these budget line items, or it would be not until next fiscal?

NEIL FERGUSON: The question of enhancing all of the Legislative Television capacity has been discussed for a couple of years now. We're already doing a lot of things - as you can see from the CART displays here. If we are to expand in the way that we would like to, as we have communicated, we would have at least one additional full-time equivalent needed.

One of the bigger issues is that because of all the different feeds to cover all the different rooms when the Chamber is going, the Red Room and all the committees, there would be a necessary expansion to the already-cramped television studio in the top floor of the House of Assembly. So there will be a capital outlay needed if we are to do properly what we think needs to be done.

The short answer is, no, these amounts do not reflect what is necessary to do what we would like to do, but we hope that moving forward, Treasury Board might see fit to advance the funds. Again, much of that - apart from the FTE ongoing - would be a one-time capital outlay. I would be happy to meet with you and talk about what those future needs might be, but the short answer is, again, no. All of that is not covered by this.

GEOFF MACLELLAN: Neil, are those costs being scoped or estimated at this point, or is it at sort of that standstill until you get some kind of . . .

NEIL FERGUSON: Various different scenarios have been scoped. At one point, we had all the detailed schematics for television-capable committee rooms in the Provincial Building, but other decisions in years gone by were made, and we were not able to move in there and set those things up. Lots of different scenarios have been scoped and we would be happy to go through those with you. There's all sorts of different options, and each one has a different cost, but yes, they have been scoped.

THE CHAIR: Any other questions? Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would happily take up your offer, Mr. Ferguson, to sit with the House Leaders and talk about this a little bit more. Two follow-up questions are, given that the CART service has been added, what is the line item, or is that just being taken in dribs and dabs? The second question is, to the extent that you would begin actually planning and scoping a current scenario for the expansion that you just laid out, what do you need to do that? Do you need an allocation promise from Treasury Board to begin that process? Would you do that ask? What's the appropriate way to move that forward?

NEIL FERGUSON: It would be part of an ask as our regular budget process. We have outlined in the past the various options. As to which specific line item it is, I would defer to the financial wisdom of Ms. Lusby. The answer, generally, is yes, if the decision is made to move forward, then we'll go back and ask for the money, and Treasury Board can yea or nay it.

Again, so that everybody is clear, the House has been advancing actively under this Speaker, the need for accessibility. The Speaker has championed it for a number of years now. We have been working on it.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Just one follow-up. Procedurally, my question is - you reference, if a decision is made. How does that decision get put on the table, what table, and how does it get made?

NEIL FERGUSON: Each year, we submit our budget requests, and we include what are called pressures - things that we would like to do or have to do. Perhaps there has been a statutory change, and that's a pressure that has to be addressed, we hope by an increased amount of money approved by the Treasury Board. We would submit it as a

pressure - I believe that is the correct term. It's up to the Treasury Board to weigh all of our pressures, as they do with every department, and approve or not based on all the considerations that a government has to make in relation to any budget year.

THE CHAIR: Further to your other question about CART and how that came to be, I have been advocating for increased accessibility services for all avenues of House of Assembly operations. CART represents one of the visible bits of progress that are in the low-hanging fruit category, if you will. There was not a great expense associated with it. There was some technical shifting around that had to be done to accommodate it. Now it's in place - I think it has been in place for a number of weeks now - and we'll move on to the next piece of low-hanging fruit here as budgets allow and can absorb those things.

In closing, to wrap it up - and we'll go to Ms. Lusby here - if there's general agreement by all parties involved that broadcasting is a priority, then we'll make it a priority and then ramp up the advocacy to get that done.

Ms. Lusby.

DEBORAH LUSBY: I just want to add that I'll be happy to put together a report of where we are on the various projects and dollars and submit it to the commission as soon as I have it.

THE CHAIR: Thanks. Any other questions or comments on that?

Moving on to Item No. 4 which is the MLA pay schedule for 2020 and I'll throw that over to Ms. Lusby for a detailed explanation.

DEBORAH LUSBY: Next year, based on how the 2020 calendar rolls out, all provincial employees will get 27 bi-weekly pays instead of the usual 26. In January, July, and December, provincial employees will get three pays. Based on the House of Assembly Act, MLAs are compensated with a fixed annual amount for a calendar year, so payroll has asked for confirmation on how to distribute MLA pay in 2020.

There are two options: one is to continue being paid the annual amount in 26 pays with payment dates on the same biweekly pay cycle as provincial employees, but MLAs would have to miss one pay. Choosing this option means getting paid the same biweekly rate as they get paid now but would have to choose to miss a pay period in either January, July, or December.

Number two is to get paid the annual amount in 27 pays with three pays in January, July, and December. This results in a small decrease per biweekly pay of approximately \$78 for MLAs and \$110 for ministers, but overall annual pay is not affected.

THE CHAIR: Any questions on that? Mr. Kousoulis.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Deborah, can you tell us does this same problem apply to the civil service or is it just with MLAs?

DEBORAH LUSBY: Civil service are all getting 27 pays in 2020.

LABI KOUSOULIS: Is it a reduced amount?

DEBORAH LUSBY: Civil service pay is based on a bi-weekly rate as opposed to an annual amount like members are, so they would continue getting paid the same bi-weekly pay but get 27 of them.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Lohr.

JOHN LOHR: Is there any difference for the payroll; does either option create more complications? Is there one option here that's simpler for staff?

DEBORAH LUSBY: Option two.

JOHN LOHR: Option two is much simpler to implement? So just 27 pays. Okay.

THE CHAIR: So we need a motion for this?

NEIL FERGUSON: A motion to adopt option two for the MLAs' pays.

THE CHAIR: There is a motion from Ms. Chender; seconded by Mr. MacLellan.

Would all those in favour of taking option two as presented please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried. Thank you.

That concludes the business of the House of Assembly Management Commission for today. Thank you very much. Meeting adjourned.

[The commission adjourned at 1:18 p.m.]