

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Tuesday, January 11, 2022

Via Video Conference

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**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
MANAGEMENT COMMISSION**

Hon. Keith Bain (Chair)
Hon. Angela Simmonds
Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Danielle Barkhouse
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Keith Irving
Claudia Chender
James Charlton, 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

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2022

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

11:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Hon. Keith Bain

THE CHAIR: We'll call the meeting of the House of Assembly Management Commission to order.

Just a few reminders before we begin. First of all, Happy New Year to everyone. I think this is the first time that most of us have seen each other in a while.

Please keep your mic muted until you are called upon to speak, and wait until you're recognized by the Chair. If you want to speak, just raise your hand. I'll be watching for it anyway.

We're going to begin now with introduction of the commission members. We'll start with Deputy Speaker Simmons.

[The committee members introduce themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I just want to acknowledge as well that Gordon Hebb, our Chief Legislative Counsel, and Deborah Lusby, Director of Administration, are part of this meeting. Welcome to you both.

Moving along with the business. The minutes for the last meeting were circulated in advance of this meeting. Are there any corrections required to those minutes? Hearing none, I'll ask for a motion to adopt the minutes of the May 4, 2021 meeting. Do we have a mover?

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I move.

THE CHAIR: Do we have a seconder?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I'll second.

THE CHAIR: The motion is carried.

In business arising from the minutes, there was a resolution at that May 4th meeting that read, "that the House of Assembly Management Commission direct staff to consider the best way to conduct a review of MLA office budget allocations and report back at the next meeting of the Commission."

With that, I'm going to turn it over to the Chief Clerk to speak to the item. James?

JAMES CHARLTON: Thank you, Chair. The Speaker's Administration Office took a look at the issue and came up with four possible options. They're set out in the agenda. I'll just quickly go over them right now. I'll go in the order that they show up on the agenda, although it doesn't reflect any order of suggestion or recommendation.

One option is actually to further defer the discussion in light of the election and the fact that we have many new members, so that they can better understand what the issues are and we can see if this continues to be an issue - the budget allocations.

The next option is to include a review of the budget allocations within the scope of a remuneration panel. To do that would require that legislation be introduced and passed in the House of Assembly to expand the scope of the remuneration panel, which is defined by legislation.

The next option that we came up with is having Deborah Lusby's office provide an analysis of the current MLA office rents for the Management Commission to review and consider. Just to give you an idea, this would be a bit of a number-crunching exercise - present the numbers to you, sort of the relative costs being experienced by rural, urban, and town members - so the Management Commission could look at those and make up its own mind and decide how best to proceed.

The last option being put forward was to hire an external group to conduct a review.

I know we were asked the best way to conduct it. These are four possible options. If we had to suggest one, under the circumstances, we think the most cost effective and fastest option would probably be to have the Speaker's Administration Office conduct the analysis and report back to the Management Commission for consideration.

Also, I know the motion was framed specifically in terms of MLA budget allocations, but I understand that people may be interested in the issue of inside and outside members and just taking a look at how many members are affected. How many are in the sort of - I won't say "gray zone," because it's a pretty clear line, but people who are near the 100-kilometre mark, and just getting a sense of that and whether there's any adjustment that might be needed there.

That's everything from me. I'm happy to entertain any questions if anyone has any.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, James. Is there any discussion from the recommendations that the Clerk has brought forward? Any discussion?

MLA Chender.

[11:15 a.m.]

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I appreciate that. I'll echo the advice of the Clerk. I think it does make sense for the Speaker's Administration office to do that analysis.

For the benefit of new members, I would just say that there's a whole history of how MLA office budgets work, but there's quite a discrepancy in the rents paid by members across the province. Where we actually account for things like staffing and even mileage for outside versus inside members - we actually don't account at all for that discrepancy in office budget.

I probably pay \$1,000 more a month than some other members, just because I'm in the urban core, but it doesn't seem quite right that my constituency is then less able to avail itself of advertising funds or other things from my office because of that.

At the last Management Commission meeting, at least some of us were interested in looking at finding a formula that just makes it equitable - whether those rents get taken out of budget allocations and are dealt with separately, the way our CAs are, or whether there are different allocations for city, town, rural, or whatever it is. I would support the recommendation - just that the Speaker's admin provide an analysis, and then we could determine next steps. I'm fine for that to include the inside-outside member's question, as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. MLA Mombourquette.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Just to echo Ms. Chender - she is absolutely right. I'm the MLA in Sydney, and I can guarantee the discrepancy between the office rents when it comes to the bigger urban core here in Halifax. It is very different.

I just think it's important to have the information. We're not making any ironclad decisions on this. We support the recommendation. I appreciate everybody on the call from the Speaker's Office because we're looking like we may task you with some extra work, but I think it's important that we have the information.

Ultimately, decisions will be made down the road on how to proceed. I think it's a good first step. We may want to bring some more validity to it down the road if we want to look at it from an external standpoint. Right now, I think based on the fact that without being able to go back to the Legislature at this point, let the office go back and come back with some recommendations.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Lusby.

DEBORAH LUSBY: I don't know whether this is an option or not. Would a few folks from HAMC be interested in being part of a little working group where we could collaborate and share information as it comes along - just to kind of keep the process moving, as opposed to waiting for another commission meeting to present the data?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Chender, I see you're in favour of that, and Ms. Simmonds. As it stands, how many would you be looking for - one from each party maybe?

DEBORAH LUSBY: Sure, or we could do two.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Chender, you said that you'd like to be part of the committee. Ms. Simmonds, you did as well. Anybody else?

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Chair, if I can just mention something. I agree with it - I'm just trying to think of the composition for the caucus. If we're going to put more than one on it, I may want to go back and look at somebody from the urban area and then somebody from outside of HRM. I can get you an answer on that fairly quickly. I just want to bring that back to my caucus.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: If we're looking for a member from each party, I would be more than happy to take part in this.

THE CHAIR: MLA Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Chair, just for the sake of simplicity, I like the idea of just one person from each caucus. Then we can feed that information back to our respective caucuses for

discussion if needed, but fewer people tend to make faster work. That's my experience. If we're all represented, maybe that's the simplest way to go forward.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: I agree.

THE CHAIR: I think that is a good idea because again, through Deb's office, you're going to be bringing in recommendations for further discussion anyway. You'll have your chance to do your comparison yourselves as the meetings go on.

If we're in agreement then, we have MLA Chender, MLA Barkhouse, and MLA Simmonds who are going to be on the committee with Ms. Lusby. Is that correct? Okay.

With that, we know the recommendation that's going to be coming forward. I guess we have to make a motion to direct staff to do that. The motion would read: That staff provide an analysis of current MLA office rents, and of the distances of inside and outside members, for the review and consideration of the Management Commission at a future meeting. Do we have a mover for that motion?

We have a mover - Claudia. Do we have a seconder? Derek. That is the committee's directive going forward.

Next on the agenda is the appointment of members to the House of Assembly Management Commission Audit Committee. I'm going to turn it over once again to the Chief Clerk to speak to this item.

JAMES CHARLTON: The Audit Committee is a committee of the Management Commission. It consists of two members of the commission, one of whom must be from the government caucus, and another of whom must be from one of the Opposition caucuses. Those two members - together with two lay appointees who are appointed by the Chief Justice of Nova Scotia - compose the Audit Committee.

The two Management Commission members - technically they've been vacant since the election when the Management Commission was effectively vacated, when everyone ceased to be an MLA upon dissolution. We need a motion to appoint a government representative and an Opposition representative to the Audit Committee of the Management Commission.

THE CHAIR: We do have names to put forward, I believe, in the form of a motion. I'm going to ask for a motion to appoint Danielle Barkhouse and Derek Mombourquette to the Audit Committee, each for a term commencing today, January 11th, and continuing until that member ceases to be a member of the Management Commission or is replaced as a member of the Audit Committee by the Management Commission - whichever first occurs.

Can we have someone make that motion, please? Mr. MacMaster, you're moving the motion?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Do we have a seconder? Mr. Ince, thank you.

The motion is carried.

The next item, and this is something new. Looking at the future, we don't know what the future holds, of course, but I think COVID is going to be around for awhile. Maybe to avoid a lot of confusion going forward, if indeed COVID is still around, we will be meeting virtually. Rather than the Clerk's Office having to contact to get unanimous consent, can we have a motion to authorize the next Management Commission be held virtually? That will cover everything, and then we see where we go from there.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Can I just ask a question?

THE CHAIR: Yes, Ms. Chender, go ahead.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Would this motion cover only the meeting on January 18th?

THE CHAIR: I'm sorry, say that again?

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Would this motion cover only the meeting next week?

THE CHAIR: Yes, the next meeting of the Management Commission. It's only just the next meeting. Mr. MacMaster moved that motion and Mr. Ince seconded it.

ALLAN MACMASTER: That was the previous motion.

TONY INCE: That was the previous motion. Ms. Barkhouse has seconded this one.

THE CHAIR: Say that again.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I raised my hand to second it, Mr. Chair.

THE CHAIR: Sorry for the confusion. That motion was carried.

If there is no further business to come before the meeting, I ask for a motion to adjourn.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I just want to know if Allan painted that picture behind him.

ALLAN MACMASTER: I did that this morning. That's why I was a couple minutes late.
(Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Motion to adjourn.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: So moved.

THE CHAIR: Moved by Ms. Barkhouse, seconded by Mr. MacMaster. Thank you all, folks. Maybe we'll be meeting again soon. It will be a virtual meeting, and we'll see where things go from there. Again, thank you all for your time. Enjoy the rest of your week. Take care. Again, Happy New Year.

[The commission adjourned at 11:25 a.m.]