

# **HANSARD**

## **NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

### **HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday, May 22, 2024**

**Committee Room**

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# **HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION**

Vacant (Chair)  
Nolan Young (Vice Chair)  
Hon. Kim Masland  
Hon. Allan MacMaster  
Danielle Barkhouse  
Hon. Derek Mombourquette  
Hon. Keith Irving  
Susan Leblanc  
James Charlton, Chief Clerk of the House of Assembly  
(Non-Voting Member)

[Hon. Kim Masland was replaced by John White.]

[Hon. Allan MacMaster was replaced by Hon. Kent Smith.]

[Hon. Keith Irving was replaced by Fred Tilley.]

## **In Attendance:**

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Matthew Timmons  
Director of Operations and Administration  
Office of the Speaker

David Hastings  
Assistant Clerk of the House of Assembly



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2024**

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION**

**4:00 P.M.**

CHAIR  
Vacant

VICE CHAIR  
Nolan Young

THE CHAIR (Nolan Young): Order. I'm going to call the meeting of the House of Assembly Management Commission to order. We can start with introductions. I'll start with myself.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'll also acknowledge that we're in the presence of staff Gordon Hebb, the chief legislative counsel, and Matthew Timmons, the director of Operations and Administration.

Looking at the agenda here, our first item on the agenda would be the approval of the minutes from the meeting on January 31, 2024. Those minutes would have been circulated in advance. Are there any corrections to the minutes required? Seeing none. I would ask for a motion that the minutes of the January 31, 2024 meeting be adopted. Moved by MLA Barkhouse, seconded by MLA Smith.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We also have the 2023-24 audit report. This would have been circulated in advance of the meeting. I will ask the Chief Clerk to speak to this item. Mr. Charlton.

JAMES CHARLTON: The 2023-24 audit report was presented to the Audit Committee on May 15, 2024. It contains two opinions as follows: An unmodified opinion that the House of Assembly's expenditures complied in all significant respects, with the specified requirements established in Section 22(5)(b) of the House of Assembly Management Commission Act for the year ended March 31, 2024; and an unmodified opinion that the Chief Clerk's assessment of the effectiveness of internal controls of the House of Assembly is, in all material respects, fairly stated, and that the internal controls were operating effectively for the year ended March 31, 2024.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion or questions on this? Seeing none, I ask for a motion that the 2023-24 audit report be accepted as presented. MLA Mombourquette. Seconded by MLA Tilley.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Next item on the agenda would be the annual CPI adjustment. The materials would have been circulated in advance of the meeting. I'm just going to recognize the Director of Operations and Administration to speak on it. Mr. Timmons.

MATTHEW TIMMONS: As you know, we are here pursuant to Subsection 52(1) of the House of Assembly Management Commission Regulations. The fixed amount set out in the regulations, except the amount referred to in Section 50(a), which is for mileage claims and the caucus office entitlements - they are subject to an increase on April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year by the increase in the lower of the CPI for Nova Scotia or the CPI for Canada for the previous year. This increase is subject to the approval of the Management Commission.

As you'll see on the spreadsheet, the CPI adjustment for Nova Scotia was 3.1 per cent, and the CPI for Canada was 2.7 per cent. The 2.7 per cent was the amount used in the calculations. If you look at the table - I won't go through them all - but the overall budget impact of applying a 2.7 per cent CPI increase would be \$129,271. That is the overall budget increase.

We will need a motion to have that approved, so I will turn that back over to the Chair.

THE CHAIR: I think there's some indication from some of the members that it was not something that they were looking at going forward with. Is there any discussion, or should I put a motion in? MLA White.

JOHN WHITE: We'd like to thank the Director of Operations and his staff for preparing the recommendation. However, we do not feel to move forward with it right now.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we'll put a motion on the floor here that the increase on April 1, 2024, the fixed amount set out in the House of Assembly Management Commission Regulations by 2.7 per cent rounded to the nearest dollar, as provided under Subsection 52(1) of the regulations be rejected. Moved by MLA White, seconded by MLA Barkhouse. Any discussion? Seeing none.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Item No. 4 would be our MLA office security continuation from the previous meeting. I think I'll recognize Mr. Charlton to speak on this.

JAMES CHARLTON: The commission passed a motion at its January 31<sup>st</sup> meeting, directing staff to investigate increasing the amount claimable for constituency office start-up costs above the \$2,550 maximum that is currently set out in the Management Commission Regulations to ensure that there's enough money to cover the cost of installing security measures.

Some security measures, such as reception barriers and an alternate rear exit may already be part of an office when the lease is being negotiated, or they may be the sort of thing that MLA would have to negotiate with a landlord to have added to an office. It's really not possible to produce an estimate of those costs. It will be really dependent on the individual office.

However, we did consult with Corporate Security, who advised us that a standard security package of a security alarm with a keypad, two door sensors, and two motion sensors, two panic buttons, a video doorbell, and two cameras and a video recorder capable of storing 30 days of data, all of this from a corporate vendor, would cost approximately \$4,500 plus applicable taxes, so \$5,250 in total. That's what we would be looking at if we were talking about some kind of a start-up amount.

THE CHAIR: Do we have any discussion on this item? MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm just wondering - that's great information, but are we discussing this in order to make a motion that we add that amount to the start-up costs for an office, or are we talking about that being eligible for start-up costs, but you'd only be able to spend \$2,500 or whatever - what are we saying? The other thing that I would just like to say on the record is that I still think we should have a second CA.

THE CHAIR: Before I recognize MLA Mombourquette, my understanding is that the members are able to make motions if they wish on this item or table it, but I recognize MLA Mombourquette.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: This would ultimately be a question, because the \$4,500 is important. Again, budgets vary across the province. Some MLAs would be able to cover the cost of that in their existing budget, but some wouldn't. That's just obvious. You hear a bit about that in certain parts of the province where it's higher. It would be interesting to see if there's a breakdown of how many MLAs could actually cover that under their existing - I personally think that, whether it's into the next election cycle, there are a number of things that we're looking at for start-ups.

Whenever the next election is called, after that election cycle happens, this may be also something that you may want to implement on top of the budget allotment that people have to set up their offices or set up their living accommodations here. The security piece might be something you want to carve out.

For the record, as my colleague from the NDP said, this issue was actually brought forward by the new Minister of Community Services. I wonder how he feels now with his change to the government side, whether we should have a second employee or not. I wanted to get that on the record.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: He's not on this commission, so that's neither here nor there, but I do know that I do have a second CA who works part time. I also know that I just recently installed cameras within my budget. I'd like to ask Mr. Timmons the number of MLAs who actually use their whole constituency budget, because I'm pretty sure it's not that high.

MATTHEW TIMMONS: I can't say off the top of my head. I would say that I can provide the actual numbers, but most MLAs do not spend their full allotment of their budget. That is why we tend to have an overall surplus in our overall budget year to year.

JOHN WHITE: Again, I'd like to thank staff for the research and information. It's certainly a big topic. There are a lot of moving parts in this one. However, at this time, we do not feel like we want to support increasing the budget.

THE CHAIR: Is that a motion?

SUSAN LEBLANC: I think that given the many and serious conversations we've had around staff security in MLA offices - constituency offices - in the last year, since the terrible incident at MLA Maguire's office, I think that clearly adding staff is not on the

table. When that was voted down, I'm pretty sure the idea was that we were to look at how much it would cost to beef up security in offices.

That problem and issue has not changed. We still need as much safety in place for our employees as possible. This seems to be a very reasonable security package. I would like to make a motion saying that we do approve an extra \$5,200 as start-up costs for security only - like, as a little fund for security - for any new MLA, or any MLA starting in a new office. That's all I will say.

THE CHAIR: My understanding for that motion is it would require regulation amendments. That motion may have to be reframed as to direct staff to come back with something for regulation amendments.

Do I have a seconder? MLA Mombourquette.

MLA Tilley, I think you had something? MLA Tilley.

FRED TILLEY: I agree that we need to bolster security in the offices, but like MLA Barkhouse, I did that out of my budget last year, or the first year, at the recommendation - I think the head of security came to our office and suggested what we do.

I think the \$4,500 is probably a high estimate. We did it for less than that. But I think it's a good thing to have, especially where someone is working by themselves.

I do want to address the piece of our CAs. Our CAs are worked very hard. It's hard for them to take vacation. It's hard for them to service the clientele. I know in our office it's very busy, and I know a lot of offices are very busy. I still believe that there should be at least a second CA, at least on a part-time basis during the busy season. It's difficult.

I hear the point of the fact that not all MLAs spend their allotment. I would say, shame on the MLAs who don't. In the community, we can do good things with our budget. It's very limited, but we can be very supportive by advertising in different areas. I think to take away from that to look after security issues would not be a great idea on our part to do that.

I will support that motion. I just wanted to get that on the record.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Just to reiterate, my colleague the member for Northside-Westmount said it right. Some MLAs spend their budgets. Some don't. But if you're looking at a cost for new MLAs to come in, there are a lot of budgets to start out. This is one that you don't have to carve out of your budget you have annually. When you start, you pick an office, government helps negotiate that contract, and as part of it, you

have a start-up cost for necessary security. As MLA Tilley said, it may be less. It's just the ability to carve that out, to put that in place, to not take that from the existing budget.

[4:15 p.m.]

We know MLAs are paying more for rent, they're paying more for utilities, they're paying more for everything to operate their offices. It's an easy way, I believe, to do it as new MLAs come in.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I just want to get this straight. You are going to make a motion to add money to a budget - the Opposition is going to make a motion to add money to a budget that very rarely gets used . . . (interruption). We don't have the exact numbers, no, and I'm sure Mr. Timmons can get it to us. I, like MLA Tilley, just bought mine this year out of my budget - my security system - and I still have had money left over in my budget. I just want to make sure I understand this, because to me, I'm just not going to support the motion. I'll just put it that simply.

JOHN WHITE: I've already spoken, so you already know I wouldn't be supporting the motion, but I do want to reflect on a couple of words that my colleagues have said. Our CAs do spend a lot of time alone, there's no doubt about that. I'll get personal first. One of the first things I did when I got elected was to make sure I had a security system in there for my CAs, and a panic button and everything else. We had a great system here with our security department to help us with that, and we were able to put every bit of it in. I think it was around \$4,000, or something like that.

The reason I want to say that is because I'm in an office that had - I have three office spaces in my office, and not one thing worked. The only thing that I kept were three computer screens, and one of them didn't work when we finally got a computer hooked up to it. We had to buy everything. We had to supply everything in the office, and I was still able to put a security system in. I really am confused as to where the money is not to supply this. When it comes down to it, not a surprise to anybody here, but we are spending taxpayers' dollars, and it is our responsibility to spend appropriately.

I think safety trumps that. I will say that, but if the money is there and we're not spending it, then spend the money you have, and if you have to make choices then you make choices, but realistically, I cannot see where people can't find the money in their budget to do this. That's my own personal experience with it, and that's why I won't support this motion. I just think that the money is there right now - we're just not spending it. It's there. If you buy it in front, first of the year, you will make it last the rest of the year, enough to make it happen. If it's one less newsletter you send out, I don't know, but if it's that important, I think we should have it, and we really should have it.

I won't be supporting this, but I don't want to leave it on the table that safety is at any point being overlooked, because it was the very first thing that I did. I know some of



our MLAs over here have made sure that the camera systems were in place. When I still hear that people are not spending their full budget, I just think, What are we adding money to a budget for when everybody is struggling? Taxes, taxes, taxes. I want to try to keep the budget down and make us do it within the means that we have. I think it's there.

FRED TILLEY: First of all, I'd just like to clarify something that MLA Barkhouse said. We're not looking to add money to the operating budget; it's the start-up budget. Whenever a new office is started up, to MLA White's point, \$2,500 for him to buy all those new things that he needed to start up an office. We're there to serve the public. This is to the start-up of the office. It's a one-time cost . . . (interruption). I don't know what's funny about that because it's true. At the end of the day, it's a one-time cost. The start-up happens in the first few months when you start an office.

I just feel that we should have the ability - many MLAs here in Metro are paying up to \$3,000 a month for rent, where we may not have that in some of the rural areas. In my opinion - if you don't need it, don't use it, that's the point, but there are some MLAs who may need it. I won't need it, but there are some who may need it for the start-up fees. That's just what I wanted to reiterate: that it's adding to the start-up funds, not to the annual operation. So it's not going to happen every year. It's going to happen once, as an MLA is elected.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc, I think you had a comment?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Well, yes, I was just going to say that if people don't want to spend the money, they don't have to spend the money, and if they are under budget, that's great. This is just a motion to make sure that in the case of someone who does spend their money, or use their budget, and who does have high rent or whatever, or whose safety and security system people in their community charge way more, that there's an ability for them to make sure that their employees are safe. It's a health and safety issue, and as employers, we should be doing everything we can to make sure that the people - who are generally from our community - are safe.

My actual question, Chair, is: Do you need me to rephrase the motion to make it a directive to the staff?

THE CHAIR: No, I think we captured that it would be to draft regulations and the changes that would need to take place.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I think MLA Tilley missed the whole point of that, which is that there is a start-up budget. You can use your budget every year, which is why I gave the example that I bought my cameras this year. I just want to get that on record.

I want to call the question. I think we've hashed this over three meetings now.

THE CHAIR: Is everyone good with calling the question?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

That would be a tie, and would leave me to vote, and I vote nay as well.

The motion is defeated.

Moving on, we have Item 5, which would be our financials. They would have been circulated in advance of the meeting.

I'll recognize the director of operations and administration to speak on that. Mr. Timmons.

MATTHEW TIMMONS: I've included in the materials the third-quarter and the fourth-quarter documents. I will just kind of focus on the fourth quarter, as it is the most recent.

As of our preliminary year-end, our overall surplus across Legislative Services was about \$668,000, primarily due to MLAs not spending their constituency budgets and a reduction in travel. I will say that is pretty typical of a non-election year surplus, although a little smaller surplus than in prior years, because we did find, on the whole, that MLAs in the fiscal year that just finished did spend more than in previous years.

As you know, MLAs can expense items up until June 30<sup>th</sup>, so that is why this is just preliminary. Final-final year-end results will be done in July, but we wouldn't expect much of a change from that.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions or discussion for Mr. Timmons?

Seeing none. We've completed the agenda for the House of Assembly Management Commission. I'd like to thank everyone for coming. We now stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 4:23 p.m.]