

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Thursday, November 26, 2020

Legislative Chamber

Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Brendan Maguire (Chair)
Bill Horne
Hon. Margaret Miller
Ben Jessome
Rafah DiCostanzo
Larry Harrison
Brad Johns
Claudia Chender
Kendra Coombes

[Larry Harrison was replaced by Barbara Adams.]
[Brad Johns was replaced by Tim Halman.]

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2020

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Brendan Maguire

VICE-CHAIR

Bill Horne

THE CHAIR: I'm going to call the meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Human Resources. My name is Brendan Maguire. I'm the Chair of the committee.

Just a note about today's scheduled witnesses. There was an email that went around last night and there were some conversations that were had between me, the Clerk, and staff for this meeting. The witnesses asked to be excused due to COVID-19 circumstances.

There was, as everyone is aware, an email that went around. The committee did vote down turning this into a teleconference with future meetings being virtual. To do a little bit of explaining here, the reason why we asked for a teleconference meeting was not only the witnesses but some staff were concerned around potential exposure, especially with members coming in from outside the HRM bubble. Obviously, once again, that was voted down by members of the committee.

The reason why teleconference was put on was because there wasn't enough time for Legislative Television to set up the Zoom or Microsoft Teams. It'll be up to them to decide. That was the reasoning behind it.

We are here today, but there are no scheduled witnesses. I do want to put this out on the floor: I am on other committees. This was decided un-unanimously that because of the circumstances, we would go virtual. I know all three parties at one point were concerned about this and had raised their concerns about not having virtual meetings and democracy moving forward. During the committee meeting that I was in two days ago, that was settled without argument or dispute. I'm hoping that we're able to do that again today through this committee. There should be a motion put on the floor today at some point around turning this committee to virtual going forward, if need be.

I spoke to Gordon Hebb last night about the witnesses. I know there'll probably be some questions about the witnesses. The witnesses are not subpoenaed and by law, they don't legally have to be here, so we can't force them to be here. They, for their own personal reasons, decided not to attend the meeting.

In fairness to the witnesses, they were open to teleconferencing and virtual meetings, again which was voted down by this committee. If we get into that discussion, we need to remember that it wasn't the witnesses who decided not to show up here today. It was the committee that decided not to have those witnesses today.

We'll move forward with that. I don't know which party or who wants to bring forward a motion, but I would strongly encourage - yes?

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Aren't we doing appointments to agencies, boards and commissions first?

THE CHAIR: I will get to ABCs. I just wanted to be clear on what transpired last night.

Again, there were concerns about members outside the HRM bubble that were coming in. There were staff who had their own personal concerns. I hope that every single member of this committee is taking this very seriously - something that all of you have raised in the media. When given the opportunity to vote on this, you voted against it.

I would hope that we can have a discussion today, as other committees have had, and get this through without politicizing COVID-19 and politicizing these concerns by staff and by witnesses.

With that, we'll ask that you turn your phones off or keep them on vibrate. In case of emergency, please exit through the back door, walk down the hill to Hollis Street, and gather in the courtyard of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Please keep your masks on during the meeting unless you're speaking. Do not leave this meeting unless it's absolutely necessary.

We will start with introductions to my left.

[The committee members introduced themselves]

THE CHAIR: Before we jump into the ABCs, the clerk had put forward as per today's witnesses - what was suggested is that we potentially postpone the agenda-setting to January so we can get today's witnesses to appear via Zoom or Microsoft Meetings on December 17th, which would be our next meeting.

Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I have a motion related to that. Is now the time for that, Mr. Chair?

THE CHAIR: No. We'll save the motions for after the . . .

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Then can we save the discussion also for after?

THE CHAIR: There are things that we have to go through first, but the motions will appear after the ABCs.

That is on the floor, as per the Clerk. We'll have some vigorous debate about that, I'm sure. We will now go into committee business with agency, board, and commission appointments.

Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, Arts Nova Scotia Board: I move that Sarah O'Toole be a member appointed by order-in-council.

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

The motion is carried.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: The Department of Labour and Advanced Education, Minimum Wage Review Committee. We have four names: Danny Cavanagh, Collette Robert, Julie Marks, and Wes Surrette. I move all as Member, Employee representatives.

JUDY KAVANAGH (Legislative Committee Clerk): Just to clarify, the first two are Member, Employee representatives; the second two, Julie Marks and Wes Surrette, are Member, Employer representatives.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Sorry about that. I should have been more careful. The second one is for the Mount Saint Vincent University Board of Governors: Judith Sullivan-Corney as a Governor.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

That takes care of the ABCs. Next on the list will be the discussion around virtual meetings. Who wants to kick this off? Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We have a motion to put forward related to this, and I'd like to say to start with, we have always been open to meetings by video conference, but the notion of a meeting on the telephone for two hours with several witnesses didn't seem possible. I want to just question the Chair's version of events a little bit.

None of the concerns were brought forward to the committee when we were polled around staff or health or any of that. I'm disappointed that we haven't been able to meet with the scheduled witnesses around continuing care assistant recruitment. It's a very important issue, and I want to just make clear that after the new rules were put into effect on Tuesday, at four o'clock we received a notice from Communications Nova Scotia that this committee would go forward as planned in this Chamber. That was Tuesday afternoon after we were aware of the changes to the rules and that they would be in effect.

Late yesterday, the committee was polled for permission to move the meeting to the telephone, and our caucus did not agree to that change. The reason we did not agree was that we were not aware that there was any problem from the witnesses with appearing. We had not been given any notice of that. We were not aware that there was any issue with staff appearing.

The rules say that people may come in and out and go to work. Our children are in school. People are going to work. At that point, members - in particular, our member from Cape Breton Centre - had already begun travel after several inquiries around whether or not this meeting would be taking place in the Chamber, given the importance of the topic. We also were given no notice of how we could properly conduct a two-hour telephone meeting with witnesses.

Again, I want to note that teachers, students, health care workers, and essential workers across this province are at school and at work, including many government employees, and many employees in the Department of Health and Wellness in particular.

We are glad that this option is available for video conference. I understand that late yesterday afternoon was not enough time for Legislative Television to set up the video conference, which makes perfect sense. But I would ask in the future that if the committee is polled, that they be polled with enough time that we could agree to a video conference, which I'm certain that our caucus and all colleagues would have agreed to.

I'd like to move the following motion.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'd like to respond.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Could I move my motion, please?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'd like to respond to some of the comments that were made first because those comments were directed at me as the Chair. Then we can go into the motion.

The information changed later on in the day. As soon as we got that information, that information was put forward immediately to the members. While we all are experts in certain fields, we were told by Legislative Television that they were capable of doing teleconferencing. Legislative Television is the expert on these things. They were capable of doing a teleconferencing meeting with witnesses for two hours.

While I appreciate the comparison to everything that's going on, all of us are in our own communities. We're in our bubbles. We have children who are going to school, if you want to use the schools as an example. There is nobody from my children's schools who is coming from Cape Breton. There's nobody from my children's schools coming from - some of the members are coming from Truro.

The concern was that HRM right now has the majority of COVID-19 exposure sites. What we were concerned about - and staff and obviously the Department of Health and Wellness - was bringing outside members in and witnesses in to expose them to Halifax when Dr. Strang and others are encouraging people not to come to Halifax unless it's absolutely necessary.

With that, I just wanted to give you a little history on what happened. I appreciate wanting more time, but there, quite frankly, wasn't more time. This happened, and the second it happened, emails and information were sent out to members.

You're giving me kind of a funny look, but as soon as we . . .

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We didn't receive an email until yesterday at 4:30 p.m.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That's when we received the information. That's when things started to change. The moment things started to change was when you were made aware. I was actually on the phone last night with staff and people on this committee until about 10:00 p.m. at night trying to figure this out. We were doing everything we possibly could to limit exposure to our members and to witnesses.

This isn't about comparing. This isn't about people running off and talking about "this is about schools" or "this is about this" or "this is about that." The truth of the matter is what we wanted to do - what staff was concerned about and what the experts were concerned about was people coming from outside of HRM when they didn't have to, when there were other means, like teleconferencing, which were available.

With that, I just wanted to put all that information out on the table. We'll move forward with your motion, Ms. Chender.

[10:15 a.m.]

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I guess the only thing I would say is that if the rationale was to not have outside members come in, the only truly outside member in this Chamber right now is my colleague Kendra Coombes, who had already gotten here by the time that poll went out, so that wasn't going to serve its purpose for us.

Therefore, I'd like to move the following motion. I move that an additional video conference meeting of the Human Resources Committee be scheduled with today's witnesses as soon as possible to discuss the topic of continuing care assistant recruitment. Not in place of our December 17th meeting, but an additional meeting and then we can continue with agenda-setting on December 17th.

THE CHAIR: Before we move that motion onto the floor, we do have to run that by the Department of Health and Wellness and the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, especially in the middle of a second wave. We'll have to talk to the Clerk and have conversations with the Department of Health and Wellness to see when they're available.

We would love to have them here today or any other day, but I'm sure Dr. Orrell is extremely busy. What I would ask is that we could have the Clerk reach out to the Department of Health and Wellness and figure out when they actually have time available to come in.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Given your comments earlier that we don't have the power of subpoena and that we can't make these witnesses appear, I would request that we vote

on my motion as stated. We all know that if it turns out that the witnesses can't appear, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

What I'm asking is to schedule an additional meeting between now and December 17th with the Department of Health and Wellness.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I would just say logistically, it potentially creates a precedent for this committee and other committees to add additional meetings. I believe that the number of meetings is adequate. We should move forward as per usual. The witnesses can come in for our next scheduled meeting. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Adams.

BARBARA ADAMS: The PC Caucus agrees with the NDP Caucus's motion. The reason for that is we have sat for 13 days in the Legislature this year. We are going to be coming back in on December 18th for one hour where the members are not going to be allowed to speak or ask questions. If we're worried about precedents, that's the precedent I'm worried about.

I don't believe that the number of meetings is adequate, because we cancelled a good six months of them for the most part. We do not want to continue on as usual because the times we are in with the pandemic are not usual. The topic of continuing care assistants is critical because of the number of people who are working in that industry who go into homes and long-term care facilities. They are completely understaffed as is.

I would like to note for the record, as well, that if we have such an extraordinary ability to have teleconferencing, then I would suggest that we could have been having the Legislature meet instead of being one of the only provinces in the country that didn't bother to have a Fall session.

For those reasons, it is important that we not be cancelling meetings. So what the NDP are asking for is to not push this topic - bumping it further down the road and then every other topic further down the road - that we bring in the committee and the witnesses in the way that they feel comfortable moving forward.

Having said that, I would also like to say for the record that whether it's virtual or in person, it's just important that we meet. The PC Caucus supports either in-person or virtual meetings. We will be voting in favour of this motion.

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

We have a tie and because it's a tie, the Chair gets the tiebreaker, and my vote is Nay.

The motion is defeated.

Any other committee business?

Ms. Adams.

BARBARA ADAMS: Again, for the record, since the Legislature's not meeting, one of the only opportunities we have to actually ask questions of government departments is through motions at committee meetings. The PC Caucus is going to be making three motions. We would have made these after the meeting because we would have had witnesses here, but we're going to ask for the information in preparation for the next meeting.

This is Motion No. 1. Yesterday, the applications for full-time bursaries closed for people studying to become CCAs at the Nova Scotia Community College. The government added some additional bursaries this year. It is not sufficient, the number that they offered, but at least there were a few.

With the increased need for CCAs in our province and the chronic shortstaffing, I'm looking to this committee to continue our exploration of this subject to find out exactly how many CCAs we have training in the province by writing the admissions office for updated application information for full-time bursaries this year.

Therefore I move the motion that this committee write to the Nova Scotia Community College admissions office, requesting how many people applied for full-time bursaries for attending the NSCC Continuing Care Assistants Program this year, and how many of those bursaries will be awarded.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Just note that I don't think the preamble insinuating a lack of support for the program was necessary. I'd be in favour of finding out information on that subject, without consideration one way or the other on the efficacy of the program.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Adams.

BARBARA ADAMS: For clarification, I am 100 per cent in favour of this program. I have brought it up in the Legislature over and over again. The long-term care expert panel recommended that it be fully restored. Giving out a couple of hundred positions around the province is, in fact, the issue, not the value of the program. The preamble is important

because last year, all the seats were not taken, and, in fact, my understanding is that one of the courses offered for CCAs was cancelled because of lack of registration.

I think since this is the Human Resources Committee, it is important for us to know how many human resources we have in this industry.

THE CHAIR: The motion is on the floor. Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

BARBARA ADAMS: Thank you very much for that. I appreciate that.

Motion No. 2: in April of this year, Premier McNeil assigned Fred Crooks the job of securing personal protective equipment (PPE) and equipment for pandemic preparedness. As the Legislature has not had a sitting since this appointment, it is incumbent upon us as the committee to make sure that our health care workers across the province are protected by having the tools they need for their own health and safety, and to protect others from the spread of COVID-19.

Therefore, I move that this committee write a letter to Mr. Fred Crooks asking for an update on the pandemic preparedness that has taken place for PPE and other equipment needed by health care workers in the province for the second wave of COVID-19. It is our wish to have this update for the next meeting of this committee.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I just ask for a friendly amendment. Perhaps not to make that overly binding - just as soon as possible, rather than the next meeting, if that works for the committee.

THE CHAIR: There's an amendment to the motion, and that is to change it from next meeting to as soon as possible, which can be sooner or later, depending on what's happening within the Department of Health and Wellness. Is everybody comfortable with that?

Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the amendment please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The amendment is approved.

The amended motion is on the floor. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. Halman.

TIM HALMAN: This is Motion No. 3 from the PC Caucus. As COVID vaccines are being developed and trials of these vaccines are in their final stages, it's important for us to ensure Nova Scotians and health care workers alike that there is a plan for the distribution and inoculation.

With this, I move that this committee write the Minister of Health and Wellness asking for: 1) what efforts the province is making to get in line for procurement; and 2) an update on their planning for distribution of the vaccine and who gets priority.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I just suggest that I expected this to come forward anyway, but I appreciate the member's concern. I think as soon as possible, similar to the last scenario, if that's agreeable to folks.

THE CHAIR: There is a motion on the floor. Also, there is an amendment to that motion, same as the last one: instead of putting a finite date on it, let's put "as soon as possible," so we can get the information quicker, which could be sent to members via email - if it takes a little longer, unfortunately. Are we comfortable with changing the wording to "as soon as possible"?

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

The amendment is carried.

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

The motion is carried.

There seems to be no more motions, but before we close for the day, I do want to stress, once again, that the witnesses did want to meet. They were available to meet. Legislative Television had something set up for them and that, unfortunately, did not pass. We're not getting into who voted yes and who voted no, but that unfortunately did not pass.

We need to make sure that we don't get into this situation again, with all due respect to the members. Ms. Chender did make a valid point where you have a member coming from - Ms. Coombes coming in from Cape Breton, which is, as we know, an extremely long drive. If we are at a point where we go back to some of the issues that we were facing during the first few months of the pandemic and we are essentially told that we have to stay within our communities, then that is a hindrance to Ms. Coombes.

The one thing I will say - there was something mentioned about just one member coming from outside. I was unaware of that. I apologize. Maybe I should have known, but looking at the list, there is more than one member that's coming in from outside of HRM, so that was the concern.

Before we leave today, we need to have this situation fixed so that future meetings, if need be, can go virtual.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: We do have a motion that we need to get in, as well. I move that pursuant to Section 36 of the House of Assembly Act and pursuant to Resolution No. 2, Section (a) (1), passed unanimously on June 16, 2017, that this committee meet after the House is prorogued for the life of the General Assembly, abiding by Public Health protocols and pursuing a virtual option if required.

It's the same motion we passed, but we need to pass it at every meeting.

[10:30 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: The motion on the floor is that we continue to meet even when the House is not in session. Again, I sat on the committee where this motion passed unanimously without disagreement. We need to make sure that we don't go where we were last time. We want to make sure that we do - talking to Legislative Television and our staff - we do have the ability to continue.

One of the concerns that I personally raised during one of the meetings, especially around teleconferencing, is I need to know where we're going with this stuff so that I can leave my home and find a spot, especially for teleconferencing. The idea here is to move forward with virtual meetings if need be.

Some of these things are going to be short notice so people have to be prepared for this. Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I don't believe this motion is actually necessary for this committee because we are legislated to meet anyway. I would support it if it is, but I want to again reiterate that nobody was opposed to a virtual meeting. The opposition was to a telephone meeting.

Our motion - that was defeated earlier - suggested that we need enough notice so that Legislative Television can set up a virtual video conference meeting because we cannot meet for two hours on a telephone unless we are given very clear instructions that we have never received before with witnesses and have a productive meeting. That is my contention.

We're happy to support this motion. We're happy to have virtual meetings. We want those meetings to be by Webex or by Zoom or some other video conference facility. We want to have enough notice so that Legislative Television can set those up.

THE CHAIR: Again, I will repeat that these things were fluid. This wasn't something that was known a day, 24 hours, or a week in advance.

I want to put this on the record again. There were extensive conversations with staff, the clerk, and Legislative Television that they were capable of doing a teleconference meeting with the witnesses and they were comfortable with doing it. Unfortunately, we were in a position where we had to react to the information that was coming in. As the information was coming in, it was being sent out to the members.

I would again say that Legislative Television, who would carry the bulk of this - organizing it and arranging it - if they were comfortable and confident that they could do this via teleconferencing, then that was what I needed as the Chair to proceed forward. If I would have received information from our staff or from Legislative Television that they were not capable of doing this, then that would have been a different story.

There is a motion on the floor. Ms. Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: To be clear: I am not concerned about Legislative Television's capability to get us all on the phone - I can get us all on the phone. My concern is about the ability to conduct a meeting. That's not saying anything about you as chair, Mr. Chair.

In general, I have been a part of more teleconferences in my life than I can possibly count and it's very difficult to run them. To run them in a way that we could properly all ask questions was the concern I had. We don't need to discuss that further. I just wanted to clarify that.

Again, to clarify, we did have a further 24-hour notice. The press conference announcing all of the new rules - which certainly the Department of Health and Wellness knew about before I knew about it - happened on Tuesday. On Tuesday after that teleconference, we were given notice of an in-person meeting today.

I want to be clear on how this unfolded. We did not even have a request for a teleconference meeting until yesterday after 4:00 p.m. We are happy to support this motion, but I want to be sure that the facts, as they occurred, are on the record. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

THE CHAIR: There's a motion on the floor. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

This motion is after prorogation of the Legislature to ensure that we continue to move forward. Obviously, there is some concern and some conflicting information around virtual meetings moving forward: what we are or not, how much time we need, and what we're capable of doing.

What we need to do here is to decide - and we need to have a motion on the floor - about virtual meetings moving forward.

Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: With the consent of the committee, might I suggest we bump that? We have a Thursday meeting, I understand, on the 17th. I guess just put it in advance of the prorogation. (Interruption) Oh excuse me - my apologies, folks. I just didn't have it in my calendar.

THE CHAIR: To be clear, what I am being told by the Clerk and staff is that everything that's happening right now is very fluid. We need to make sure that we continue forward with these meetings. What they are suggesting is right here and right now, we decide to move forward with virtual meetings.

The point of that is so that we don't get put in this position again. We've agreed in this committee to move forward and in the other committee to move forward. I just don't want to be sitting here on December 17th - and I know none of you want to be - going through the exact same situation. I apologize if I'm being short or if I'm being a little animated, but we need to make sure that we have all our bases covered as a committee.

Mr. Jessome. Then we'll go to Ms. Adams and then Ms. Chender.

BEN JESSOME: What is the distinction from having the flexibility to meet online and deciding to go online?

THE CHAIR: The difference is what happened last night. Obviously, I have my own version of events, and that's based on what I was being fed from staff and the Clerk and Legislature TV. If we sit here in this meeting right now and make a decision, it's majority plus one - 50 per cent, sorry. If we do it via email, we need unanimous consent. So as we saw last night, even if one person decides they don't want to do this for one reason or another, then we can't go and have that meeting virtually, and then we're put in the position that we're in right now.

The reason we are stressing this - I'm stressing this as the Chair and they're stressing it - is so that we can actually make a decision on this and not have to have -

because unlike other committees, for some reason it seems to be very difficult at times to get unanimous consent via email.

Does that answer your question, Mr. Jessome?

BEN JESSOME: I appreciate the flexibility to meet in person if we can. I think that Public Health will make the call if we're to meet online. I think that's fair.

THE CHAIR: Duly noted. What I'm hearing is - and then I'll open it up to Ms. Adams - I see she's itching, her hand's gone up a couple times now - what we're saying is that we can continue to try to meet in person until Public Health deems that we can no longer meet in person. I also want to stress that, again, this stuff happens. I know that information is coming out, and Ms. Chender made a valid point: the information that was fed to me - or sent to me - had a different timeline.

Like I said, I'm just feeding you what I'm being fed. In fairness, I was sending it out as soon as I was getting it because I didn't want to catch you off guard, and a big part of it was appreciation from Ms. Coombes and Mr. Harrison having to come in from out of the city.

We can continue to abide by the health guidelines, which is great, but if we need to go virtual, this stuff could be done that night - after 4:00 p.m., unfortunately - and we'll need unanimous consent. If one person says no, we can't do it.

Ms. Adams.

BARBARA ADAMS: I think all that matters really is that we continue to have the meetings - whether it's virtual or in person - but I do appreciate Mr. Jessome's point. There is a bit of a slippery slope in terms of precedents, so if we go all-virtual, at what point do we then revert back to meeting in person? Because that is always the preference, because there's no substitution for having the person right across from you when you're wanting to ask questions.

I guess when the motion is brought forward, there needs to be some mechanism in place that we are able to revert back to in-person meetings. (Interruption) That's exactly his point as well, so I guess just to move things along, I'd like to make a motion that this committee -

THE CHAIR: Before we put the motion on the floor, Ms. Chender actually wanted to talk about - Ms. Chender?

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I just want to say, speaking for our caucus, we have no problem moving to virtual meetings as long as they are video conference meetings. We had said this in March, and again in April and again in May, and we'll say it again now. I

suspect that if that question were put forward for unanimous consent from the committee, you would get unanimous consent from the committee.

It sounds like no one is really prepared with the right form of motion to make this a more structural change, and maybe that will happen at the next meeting. I'm happy to consider that. I suggest that we don't rush into some ad hoc motion that gives the committee new powers, but I will say for our caucus that we will consent to a video conference meeting.

I think for now, at least until the December meeting - and I'm happy to consent to doing that now for the December meeting - someone can move a motion - I can move a motion that we meet via video conference for December, but I want to give my colleague a chance to talk. Again, I would suggest that we could consider giving the Chair discretion or whatever it is at the next meeting, but I would want to see a motion and be able to think about it before we pass it.

THE CHAIR: Before I pass on to Ms. Adams, as Ms. Chender was bringing her points forward, a few questions popped up in my head which I ran by the Clerk. Part of it is I think Ms. Chender is absolutely correct that we don't do an ad hoc motion where there is already a motion that's passed. For the virtual stuff, we need to make sure that if there is a technical difficulty and Legislative Television is having a technical difficulty and we can't do a virtual meeting that day, what are the options? Do we go to teleconferencing? Do we postpone the meeting?

I think if the committee is comfortable - and Ms. Adams raised some really good points that we also need language in there to say that this isn't going to be virtual forever - in the end, what we need to do is we have to have a motion that everybody is comfortable with. What I would suggest - and I think the clerk and our staff would be comfortable with - is having us decide on December 17th, and that as Ms. Chender said, decide on December 17th, and then moving forward between now and the January meeting have a motion that we can vote on via email or at the December 17th meeting that kind of is overarching with all of these issues.

In the end, this isn't about fighting or debating over all the stuff. What it really is about is just making sure that the witnesses that are coming in and the members that are on this committee have the right to full access to those witnesses, and also at the same time respecting that people are travelling from areas that may not have any exposure whatsoever and that are coming into areas that have a larger exposure.

This is all about safety and access. I apologize if anyone has thought that it's about anything else, because that's what we're looking at here. Do you have a comment on what we're speaking about? I'm going to go to Mr. Jessome and then we'll finish with Ms. Adams.

BEN JESSOME: I would just like to add, with all due respect to outside members, all caucuses when required have made arrangements to have substitutes come to committee on behalf of actual members. I believe that this motion and the motion from yesterday's meeting gives us the latitude to meet online or in person - preferably in person whenever possible. I'm not sure why we're continuing to go down this road. I think we have the flexibility to do what we need to do.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: With all due respect to the member, I had talked to the Clerk in the evening prior. That was a Tuesday evening that I spoke to the Clerk. We were having an in-person meeting. At 9:15 p.m., I believe it was, a caucus staffer had also been in conversation with somebody that we were still having an in-person meeting. I held tight until noon. I don't want to get into a fight about it, but I did hold tight until 12:30 or 1:00 p.m. before I had to be on the road before dark. I pulled over in New Glasgow because of an email.

So with all due respect - I don't want to get into a fight about it - but this member did hold tight until the very last minute.

THE CHAIR: I want to thank the member again. Last night, this whole thing - there was, I can tell you - top of mind was some of our members that have partners that are ailing and have illnesses. To be quite honest with you, the MLA for Cape Breton Centre - for me, as committee chair, you were top of mind, and the long road drive that you have to come here, especially with icy roads and things like that. It was yourself and Mr. Harrison, who comes from outside of the city - those were two things that were really top of mind. I think all committee has a deep appreciation that you're coming probably five hours to come here for an hour, two hours. Again, thank you to all our outside members.

Ms. Chender, I saw your hand go up.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Just really quickly, I also want to say in response to my colleague's comment that while we can always make substitutions, my colleague has not yet been able to actually take her seat in the Legislature because it has been so long since we have sat in this building. On Tuesday, Dave Ritcey from the Progressive Conservative caucus entered this Chamber for the very first time as MLA. While we are all members of caucuses, or most of us . . . (Interruption) Can I please speak?

While we are all here as members of caucuses in this room, we are all also representing our constituencies, and that has been extraordinarily difficult to do. While we can make substitutions, all of us as MLAs have the desire to represent our communities and do our jobs. I just want to be clear that if we can find a way to do that - and video conference is an acceptable way to us - that would be preferable.

THE CHAIR: Okay, so I hear the frustration. I hear the concerns. Again, I will say, I want to thank all of the members for being here today. I want to thank you all for your concerns. Ms. Adams, you want to take us home?

BARBARA ADAMS: I would like to make a motion that the committee accept that the next meeting will be by video conferencing, but I would also like to leave open the option that if video conferencing technology breaks down for some reason, that we continue with the meeting in whichever way the Legislature is able to host the meeting that day so that the topic can move forward.

THE CHAIR: Would all those in favour of the amendment please say Aye.
Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Thank you, everybody. Drive safe, have a great day, and that is it for our meeting today. The next meeting will be held December 17th via virtual or any other way we can, and it will be for agenda-setting and approval of appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions.

The meeting is adjourned. Side doors. Have a good one.

[The committee adjourned at 10:48 a.m.]