

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

**COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Thursday, January 24, 2019

COMMITTEE ROOM

Organizational Meeting

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**NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft (Chairman)
Mr. Hugh MacKay (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Brendan Maguire
Mr. Keith Irving
Ms. Rafah DiCostanzo
Hon. Pat Dunn
Ms. Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin
Ms. Claudia Chender
Ms. Lisa Roberts

In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2019

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good morning, and welcome. This is the first meeting of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development. I welcome all members.

I would like to introduce myself. I am the chairman, Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, and I am the MLA for Lunenburg and Deputy Speaker.

I will ask committee members to make introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would like to remind everyone here, and in the gallery too, to turn off your phones or put them on silent or vibrate. Coffee and tea are in the outer room. If there is an emergency, we'll exit via the Granville Street entrance, and we will meet at Grand Parade. Members, please wait to be recognized so that Hansard is able to pick you up and the mikes can also be turned on for you.

We'll move on to committee business on our agenda. We will talk about the committee mandate. Do all of you have the same sheet as me? Mine is the only one in red. I will read to you the committee mandate:

The Natural Resources and Economic Development Committee is established for the purpose of considering matters relative to natural resources and economic development including agriculture, aquaculture, business, energy, the environment, fisheries, forestry, infrastructure, marketing, mines, public works, science, technology, tourism, trade and transportation.

Committee schedules are ordinarily set at the first meeting of the committee. This being a new committee comprised of two committees that normally met on Thursdays, the only issue would be what Thursdays the committee would like to use, et cetera - Economic Development met on the second Thursday, and Resources met on the third Thursday of the month. I have also heard that sometimes there's a conflict because the Cabinet meets on Thursdays, and the media finds it challenging.

There is an option to meet on a Tuesday afternoon, if that is acceptable. It was the third Tuesday of the month - the fourth Tuesday of the month between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. would be an option. Or we could stick to a Thursday. (Interruption) Human Resources is in the morning, so we could meet in the afternoon.

HON. PAT DUNN: The fourth Tuesday, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., is fine with us.

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: How often - what will the frequency of our meetings be?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Standing committees meet once a month.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: If I could suggest that we have a second agenda-setting meeting in short order so that we're able to actually have a full committee meeting and give the clerk some topics to schedule without delaying overly much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We can consider that.

MR. KEITH IRVING: I agree with you. There's no problem to sneak a meeting in to do agenda setting so that we can get started in February at a regular-scheduled time.

Just for the information of the committee, during budget development, for about three months, I'm unavailable on Tuesday afternoons, as I have obligations at Treasury Board. I think we'll try to work around that with alternates for me, but I'm sure you won't miss me.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I know next week is pretty full for different subcommittees and agenda settings - we're doing one for the Health Committee, we're doing one for the Public Accounts Subcommittee. The following week there may be - I'll ask the clerk. (Interruption)

The clerk does not have her calendar, but would it be acceptable if she throws out a possible date when the committee room is available, and no other committees will conflict? It would be a Tuesday or Thursday most likely to fit it in, because I think we're all busy on Wednesdays with caucuses and other commitments for committees. Is that acceptable - do we have a consensus for that?

MS. ROBERTS: If we could be given both options - two options - because I have quite a few things scheduled for next week. The following week is a little bit more open, but I counted on Thursday as being my open day next week. I'm pretty booked up.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think next week may not be the best week. It may be the following, but we're looking at the fourth Tuesday to have our meeting. I think it gives us a little bit more time than like Public Accounts Committee does.

Let me be clear on this for the clerk. She will send out two dates and we will take whichever one is the most popular. Is that agreed? Thank you.

MR. DUNN: Just a quick question. Do you anticipate us meeting 12 times per year?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Once a month, and standing committees don't normally meet in the summer, except for Human Resources.

MR. DUNN: The reason I'm bringing it up is the fact that we have two very important departments put into one committee, so there is a tremendous number of topics from both sides, so I just thought that perhaps as a result of that, we might meet more than 12 times during the year. I just want to throw it out there.

MR. IRVING: I appreciate what my colleague is saying. We are governed by the usages and precedents of the House. Standing committees are normally monthly and don't sit during the summer. We all have full schedules and I don't see any compelling reason at this point to change from our standard operating procedures for standing committees of the House.

MS. SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I echo what my colleague to my left said. I would disagree with what was just said. I think economic development is probably the most important issue in our province right now. Underlying health care is - poverty is a huge underlying problem, and economic development is one of the aspects that is going to reduce poverty.

I think if anything we should be looking at meeting more frequently. I would be in favour of meeting every two weeks. I certainly don't take the summers off, and I don't think Nova Scotians expect us to take the summer off. I think it was stated that the standing committee wouldn't be meeting in the summer, and I just want to state that I think we should be meeting every month and possibly even twice a month, because economic

development is something that the people of this province expect us to be working diligently on.

MR. DUNN: Just in reference to my colleague's comments - and I agree with what he said - the norm is to meet once a month, excluding those particular areas. I'm not too sure it's the norm in my experience on committees over the years to take two standing committees of such stature and put them together. That's why I brought up that issue in the first place.

MR. HUGH MACKAY: I don't think anybody in the room would disagree that economic development is a vitally important thing and that certainly natural resources is key to economic development and is a pretty hot topic in our province. But I would like to remind the committee that the reason these two were combined was because of all-Party agreement that health is a very important issue, and we created a new Health Committee, which is what triggered the combining of these two committees.

Again, I'm not downplaying the importance of economic development; certainly, I don't think there's anybody in our caucus who feels stronger about that than I do myself. But I do agree with my colleague, Mr. Irving, that the precedent is that standing committees will meet once a month. By breaking precedent we set a new precedent and eventually all committees would be subject to the same considerations possibly, and I don't favour that. I do not support the consideration of meeting biweekly or twice a month.

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: I think this feels a little bit like Groundhog Day. The same conversation happened at the Health Committee where it was proposed that this was very important and that we meet more than once a month. This was roundly rejected by our Liberal colleagues who form the majority of every committee, with the exception of Public Accounts.

I'll certainly voice my support of the idea that I think economic development and resources, particularly those two topics combined, give us a really unique opportunity - particularly in the kind of environmental moment we find ourselves - to have a really robust conversation about what the future of this province looks like and about a number of the very thorny issues facing us at the moment around our energy future.

I would love to meet twice a month. I have no hope that will be accepted by my colleagues, but more importantly I would say that when we get further down the agenda, I think what we all want, at least in the Opposition, is to have a really robust and productive conversation about these issues in public fora so we know that our colleagues are having these conversations. I think they're happening at caucus; they're happening around the Cabinet table. For us as Opposition members, we want to have input into these conversations, and we want to have productive input.

I would support my colleague's suggestion, but knowing that probably won't go very far, I would say that in general there are other things we can do than meet more frequently. We can also have more say in the agenda setting. We can have more freedom to present topics that might be challenging to the government. I guess I just want to flag that I think - I can't speak for my Progressive Conservative colleagues, but for us certainly the reason that we'd like to do things like meet more often is so that we can have productive dialogue and that we can move the ball forward. I think anything we can do that allows us to do that, we'd be in favour of.

MS. ROBERTS: I would second everything that my colleague has said. In addition, my experience of being on standing committees - with the exception of Public Accounts, committees don't meet when the House is sitting - is that it can feel like it's really an interrupted conversation, because in all likelihood we will meet once before the House sits and then we will be in the House for at least six weeks, if not approaching two months, depending on how long the budget session goes. Then we're looking at possibly one, maybe two, meetings before July hits.

It can get hard to feel like the committee is actually a productive space because there simply isn't enough time to have conversations that sort of happen with reasonable proximity where you build knowledge from one committee meeting to another, because we're basically looking at very few conversations with interruptions of several months in between. For that reason, as well, particularly as we are starting the work of this committee, I do think it's an opportunity to set a precedent for this committee. We are the committee members.

MR. DUNN: I'd like to have permission to put forth a motion.

[9:15 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. DUNN: The motion would be as follows: at our agenda-setting meeting, that we would select a few months - not every month of the year, but a few months - where we would meet a second time on a topic, under the umbrella of the two departments here.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: There is a motion that at the agenda-setting meeting to choose a few months that there would be two Natural Resources and Economic Development Committee meetings in a month. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is defeated.

Our next item would be to make sure everyone has their items in. We normally go three, two, and one for topics. That is the standard for standing committees.

MR. DUNN: On that, it is a new committee and I'm just going to throw this out. I would like to see this new committee start off on the right foot by giving every Party two topics as opposed to the traditional three, two, and one.

MS. CHENDER: I would support my colleague Mr. Dunn's suggestion. The argument about precedent is an interesting one. There are a lot of places where precedent is really important and then there are a lot of places where saying there's a precedent is the same thing as saying, let's do things the way we've always done them. We all know that doing things the way we've always done them has sometimes been useful and as many times not been useful.

I think it would be a vote of confidence in our system if we could all have an equal number of topics. I mean, we're all here to represent our constituents. We're all here to find answers to the questions that are going to be put forward before us. From my way of thinking, the only reason not to have an equal share of topics is simply to control the agenda and to control any challenges that may come forward for the government. It's certainly not our intention in putting forward topics to do anything of the sort. As I said before, we want to be productive, we want to work towards answers. We would strongly support the idea of having an equal share of topics in the agenda setting.

MS. RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I just want to bring a point here that there are four of us who want to bring something in. It's just numbers. There are four people here interested in bringing a subject that they want to learn about and you're giving us two for four people. There are four members here who have been elected who will have less say. That's all I'm trying to say.

MS. CHENDER: There are also four on this side, and I'll just remind the member that the reason there are four of you on that side is that the government has determined that this committee will be a majority government committee just like all the other committees, so that you're able to say no every time we put forward a suggestion. With respect, I understand we all have topics that we want to put forward, but that's not a persuasive idea to me.

MR. MACKAY: Colleagues, thank you for your points of view. I respect those. However, I think what we're talking about is each caucus having the opportunity, and the members of those caucuses. I would be hard-pressed to think that the two Parties opposite agree on all things that might be brought forward.

I certainly support Ms. DiCostanzo's argument about providing equal time here to the caucus as opposed to the individual. For example, if we're looking at 20 minutes - because that's how I can do it without my four-function calculator - if we looked at 20 minutes per caucus, that would only give my colleagues and I on the Liberal side here five

minutes each, whereas it would be 10 minutes each for the members of each of the other caucuses. I hardly think that's fair.

We're here representing the democratically elected government and we are here following precedents that every government has followed, including those opposite in recent years.

MS. DICOSTANZO: I just want to go back to that point. Maybe I didn't clarify it well. There are four people on the other side bringing four subjects while there are four people here bringing two subjects. It is not democratic, as far as I can see.

MS. SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I have a solution: let's meet more regularly. If we have more meetings, then there's more opportunity to have more topics.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think we've already voted on that topic.

MS. SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Just a suggestion.

MR. IRVING: I just want to remember that this was a decision by the House, a unanimous decision by the House, to restructure the committees. I think it was under the understanding by all members in the House that we were setting forward standing committees, and standing committees have procedures and practices that have been in use for many years. There has never been a question about those procedures in the five years that I have been coming to committees. I think if the Opposition Parties want to have a discussion about changing procedures in all the committees in terms of frequency, questioning, and structures, then I think that that is a decision for the House Leaders rather than us repeating this discussion at each of the committees. With that, I move that the frequency of meetings . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The content of the meetings, the topics.

MR. IRVING: . . . the content of the meetings, the alignment of three, two, and one of the selection of topics among the three caucuses, and as well the normal procedures of order of questions in which all members are given equal opportunity to ask questions at the table - I move that.

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

The motion is carried.

Decisions of the committee outside of a meeting - all decisions must be unanimous. There will be polling by the clerk. Within a committee meeting, it is a majority. All voting must be done in person.

We have a storm policy. Can I read the short version, or would you like the long version? Short. It's the same for all committees. The House of Assembly, although independent of the government, follows the province's snow closure. There may be circumstances in which the Chief Clerk or I may make the call to send staff home earlier than the province does - these are the words of the Speaker, not of me - or in spite of snow closure, committee's lack of decision to close. In such cases, you would be notified immediately to enable postponement of a committee meeting. If circumstances made it essential that a committee meeting take place in bad weather, I would consider making special arrangements to have employees accommodated near the House to ensure the carrying out of essential business, if it were so advised.

You would get a call or an email as soon as possible, and it is at the call of the chair to cancel those meetings in conjunction with the clerk, and I don't have to poll for that.

We have already dealt with the agenda-setting meetings because it came up.

I would ask, because we are going to meet earlier for an agenda-setting meeting, that you submit your topics to the clerk. Speak to your caucuses and find out what topics they would like to bring forward. When would you like to have them in?

MRS. DARLENE HENRY (Legislative Committee Clerk): As soon as possible, but I will send an email today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You may have to wait until your caucus meeting next Wednesday for agreement, or I don't know, you may communicate another way - as soon as possible for her to set that agenda-setting date.

Is there any other business? Seeing no other business, I ask for someone to make a motion for adjournment. (Interruptions) Oh, no motion? Okay, then we are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:25 a.m.]