

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Climate Change Adaptation;
EMO Funding and Preparedness for Emergency Disasters in Nova Scotia;
Output-Based Pricing Systems for Industry**

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

Public Accounts Committee

Hon. Kelly Regan (Chair)
Nolan Young (Vice Chair)
Tom Taggart
John A. MacDonald
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Danielle Barkhouse
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Susan Leblanc
Lisa Lachance

In Attendance:

Kim Adair
Auditor General

Kim Langille
Committee Clerk

James de Salis
Administrative Support Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Environment and Climate Change

Lora MacEachern - Deputy Minister

Andrew Murphy - Associate Deputy Minister

Anthony Weatherbee - Director, Climate Change Division

Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Byron Rafuse - Deputy Minister

Department of Public Works

Peter Hackett - Deputy Minister

Mark Peachey - Chief Engineer, Highway Programs

Guy Deveau - Executive Director, Maintenance & Operations

Tonya McLellan - Executive Director, Building Infrastructure

Emergency Management Office

Paul Mason - Executive Director



HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Hon. Kelly Regan

VICE CHAIR

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: Order. I will now call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. My name is Kelly Regan, I'm the MLA for Bedford Basin and the Chair of this committee. A quick reminder to all of us to place our phones on silent. I'll now ask the committee members to introduce themselves, beginning with the Vice Chair.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: On today's agenda we have officials with us from the departments of Environment and Climate Change, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Public Works, and the Emergency Management Office regarding Climate Change Adaptation; EMO Funding and Preparedness for Emergency Disasters in Nova Scotia; Output-Based Pricing Systems for Industry. I'm going to ask witnesses to introduce themselves, and we will begin with the witness on my far right, Mr. Weatherbee.

[The witnesses introduced themselves]

THE CHAIR: Not seated at the table but seated behind is Mr. Peachey, who maybe can just wave, because we have a cast of thousands today. I will invite Deputy Minister MacEachern to make opening remarks.

LORA MACEACHERN: It's my pleasure to join you today with my colleagues from Environment and Climate Change, Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Emergency Management Office, and Public Works. Thank you for inviting us for this important discussion.

Climate change is our most pressing global emergency, and this past year was pivotal, both in the impacts we experienced and in the work being done to change the course of our future as we work towards achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

Our role at Environment and Climate Change is to set high-level climate change policy, build awareness of the impacts we need to prepare for, coordinate adaptation strategies, and lead provincial action to help Nova Scotians adapt. One of the key roles of Public Works is to make provincially owned and operated infrastructure more climate resilient.

Municipal Affairs and Housing, along with EMO, support communities in responding to climate impacts through emergency preparedness, providing direct supports to municipalities, such as flood line maps, updating the building code, and making public housing more energy efficient. This Summer was a heartbreaking reminder of the destruction and loss that climate change can cause right here at home in Nova Scotia.

We also saw the resilience, grit, and resolve that Nova Scotians are known for. The wildfires and flooding represent what we can expect to continue to see more of. Our climate change risk assessment confirms this, so action is critical and is happening, both mitigation and adaptation.

Overall, government has invested approximately \$282 million on climate change initiatives over the past two and a half years. We're making our ambitious targets set out in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act and strong progress on our 68 actions in the climate change plan. The new *Nova Scotia's 2030 Clean Power Plan* will help us even more in achieving this transition.

On the mitigation front, Nova Scotia is showing national leadership in greenhouse gas emission reduction and decarbonization. For example, we created the Output-based Pricing System to hold large industry and Nova Scotia Power accountable for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions, which account for about 50 per cent of our provincial emissions. It is a key part of our path to net zero, along with electrifying how we heat our homes and our transportation systems.

We are also helping Nova Scotians make their homes energy efficient, and the shift to clean, renewable energy is well on its way. Approximately \$223 million has been invested in energy efficiency programming over the past two and a half years.

We are also continuing our work to protect our coast, and the people and homes along it. Government has been clear that they will take action on the best and most effective way to protect people, homes, infrastructure, and natural areas on our coast. To deliver on this critical need, municipalities and the Province will each have key roles.

We are a coastal province and people love our coast. They want to live safely by it and want the natural areas of our coast protected. Nova Scotians can have confidence that we know how important this is, and collectively, we need to get it right.

I think all Nova Scotians are united in having the same goal for our communities: for them to be safe, green, healthy, sustainable, and resilient. Protecting our coast and homes and people on it is a key part of having resilient and strong communities.

While we are hard at work on mitigation, we know we will continue to be impacted by global climate change impacts like storms, warming ocean temperatures, and wildfires as a result of the emissions of the past. That makes adaptation and strengthening the resiliency of our homes, infrastructure, communities, and natural areas more important than ever. The good news is that Nova Scotians are already adapting. They are making themselves aware and informed of the risks and taking action to prevent or lessen the impacts.

Enhancing resiliency is a shared responsibility, with the Province, the federal government, municipalities, the private sector, and Nova Scotians all having a role. So how do we adapt and become more resilient? Some ways are to rethink how and where we build - planning, zoning, and building with climate resiliency in mind, and using nature-based solutions to help protect us from flooding, fires, and storms.

To help create more nature-based solutions, government has committed to protecting 20 per cent of our land and water by 2030, will release a protected-areas strategy by the end of December, and last December provided an additional \$20 million to the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust to assist conservation organizations in protecting more land, wetlands, and water. We also just signed a nature agreement with the federal government that flows \$28.5 million to Nova Scotia to help protect more of these natural areas.

At the Department of Environment and Climate Change we are creating more resources to help communities become resilient and adapt. For example, we now have flood and stormwater experts to support communities in reducing flooding. We have a new funding navigator who can help connect communities with funding programs.

We created the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund to provide municipalities, community groups, Mi'kmaw communities, and post-secondary schools with funding to respond to and prepare for climate change, and government has just doubled the size of that fund.

Government is making progress on the 18 adaptation actions from the climate change plan. We have a climate services specialist in place whose role it is to provide training and information to municipalities, industry associations, community groups, and businesses to help them understand how our climate is changing, determine what it means for them, and how best to adapt. If you would like more information on any of these resources for your communities, please let us know.

In closing, Chair, significant work is under way to address the climate emergency. Make no mistake: it will take all of us working together to achieve this important goal, but we are confident that Nova Scotians can do so.

With that, we look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Minister MacEachern.

For committee members, we usually limit opening remarks to five minutes, but because Deputy Minister MacEachern was speaking on behalf of three departments and an office, I gave her some leeway there. Just so folks know.

We will now begin questioning. Each caucus will have 20 minutes. We will begin with the Liberal caucus.

MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I have a lot of questions, so I'll try to keep my questions short and the answers short too, if possible. I'll start with my colleague from Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. One of the issues they had during the fire was getting out of the community. There's one single road in and one single road out. Obviously, this is an issue. During the last hurricane, West Pennant Road was washed out. People in West Pennant were trapped. There was no way in and no way out. In my community, though it's a loop, you cut off Ketch Harbour Road, you cut off Old Sambro Road, people - that's it.

I'll start with Mr. Mason. What is EMO doing - and are they working in partnership with HRM to deal with these issues? As we saw during the wildfires, this is potentially life-threatening.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Mason.

PAUL MASON: We are definitely working with HRM and all of our municipal partners on this issue. We're certainly aware it's been a point of attention since the wildfires and the floods as well. Ultimately, when it comes to evacuations, those are administered at the municipal level. What we're doing to help support them in that is through our training and exercising regime.

One of the things we're doing specifically with regard to evacuations is we've been working closely with some of our counterparts in the United States and FEMA - the Federal Emergency Management Agency. They have specialized training and exercising regimes specifically targeted at municipal evacuations. Our training exercise division is working to develop the specific program for that, which we anticipate will be ready over the Winter. Then we'll be able to roll that out and conduct that training with municipalities generally.

Ultimately, with regard to the current state where there may be subdivisions or other communities that only have single points of egress, and entry and exit, per se, we'll work with the municipalities to inform their municipal plans. Their plan should take that into account and factor in those evacuation processes. It's challenging, but we'll be working closely with them on it.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I do appreciate that. I appreciate the challenge, and I would also like to say when it came to West Pennant Road, the Department of Public Works was there within an hour. They had filled the road in, and people were able to get in and out, so a big thank you to the department for stepping up immediately.

The truth is that communities like West Pennant, for example, can be a pretty senior community, and people already have transportation issues, so it's pretty scary when these things happen. I think there has to be a plan that's communicated: We're heading into hurricane season, we're heading into snowstorm season, all that stuff. Probably something that should have been done in the past, but here we are. I think that we do have to have better communication so that people know how to get in and out. Thank you for that. That's what I wanted to start with.

I just want to take a moment to talk about the Coastal Protection Act. I don't know who that would be. Deputy Minister - if you could do it quickly - where are we on the Coastal Protection Act?

LORA MACEACHERN: I absolutely appreciate the question. First of all, I just want to acknowledge how important coastal protection is and government's commitment on that topic. It's definitely known that this is important. It's something we need to move forward on, as was reflected in my opening comments.

The engagement that we've been talking about just ended last week. Government spent some extra time contacting and reaching out to coastal property owners. That was an area that hadn't been focused on in previous engagements. That coastal protection focus on coastal property owners has just completed. We're gathering the information and will have more to say on that in the near future.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank you for that. The reason why - it's obviously extremely important and there are some examples that we see. In my community, for example, during the hurricane, people along the Northwest Arm Drive - some of them

much closer than they should be - had severe flooding, had parts of their property washed away. I always think of the example of Lawrencetown. I don't know if anyone here remembers - I think they may have moved the graveyard that was there. Does anyone remember the coffins that were sticking out over the cliff because the cliff had eroded so much? I think of those kinds of things where in the past, individuals built so close to the shore.

[9:15 a.m.]

Right now, am I able to build right up to the shore or is there a moratorium or a wait on it because of consultation happening?

LORA MACEACHERN: There would be a number of factors in determining whether there is an ability to construct up to the shore. That would depend on zoning requirements that relate to the municipality, it would depend on whether that construction intruded into a beach area or onto Crown land under the realm of the Crown Lands Act and the Beaches Act. There would be a number of considerations that would factor into that. It would really be a matter for that individual working with their site professional and finding out what those requirements are.

Certainly we have people at the Department of Environment and Climate Change at the local office who can provide some guidance, as well as at the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Quickly, what you're saying is essentially, if you're building that close, it's a partnership with the municipality and the zoning rules of the municipality that you live in that play a large part on whether you can build that close to the shore or not?

LORA MACEACHERN: Again, it's always very site-specific. It's important for any landowner who's considering building in any location to find out what the parameters are by contacting the municipal office, by reaching out to our Environment and Climate Change regional office, and other relevant government and federal departments to find out what the requirements are. Certainly they can work with their site professionals, they can work with their real estate agent, and others - their surveyor's lawyer as well.

There are a variety of things to take into consideration, and that would be the case building on the coast and building in other places in the province. (Interruption)

THE CHAIR: Right on cue. MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: One of the thoughts that just popped into my head is if I'm going to buy a piece of land - let's say I live in Herring Cove and I'm going to buy a piece of land in Herring Cove close to the shoreline, or part of the shoreline. Is there a

potential that today I can build and then tomorrow I can't, like a changing - because of the Coastal Protection Act? I think that's something that people need to be made aware of.

When you talk about real estate agents and individuals who are building, is there potential in the near future for someone who purchased or invested in a piece of land to have it turn around and say that even though you bought that land and you plan on building there, you can no longer build there?

LORA MACEACHERN: I think that's a really important point. That is the reason why government has taken this extra time to engage with coastal property owners, because there were a variety of questions that were coming into the department and coming in through local MLAs by coastal property owners saying they didn't understand the legislation that was passed and not yet proclaimed. They had questions about it. They didn't know it applied to them. They didn't know how soon it might take effect. There were a lot of questions that were coming forward and there was some uncertainty.

With that, some time has been taken to provide them with more information, to seek their voice. That has happened, and we're in the process of compiling that. I do think that's important, and all the information that we gain will help to inform those next steps. In the meantime, there's still a lot happening on coastal protection and climate change in the province.

We've got a full climate action plan with 68 actions. Coastal protection is one of them, and there are many others. We're moving forward, including with achieving our 20 per cent land protection goal, which includes protection of land, and also water and wetlands in the province. A lot is happening, lots of information is available to people.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: To be clear, I can't afford coastal land in Herring Cove. This one may go to the Department of Public Works - it's an issue that I've discussed with the department many times over the years, around breakwater infrastructure. Some of you may be familiar with these conversations that we've had. I know that this is a federal-slash-potentially provincial partnership. Most people may think that breakwaters are just a rural issue, but it's not just a rural issue.

In my community, and in a lot of communities in HRM, we are on the coast and we do have older breakwater infrastructure. I look at Ketch Harbour, where that infrastructure no longer is appropriate. It doesn't meet the needs. With surging water levels, with stronger and stronger storms, these breakwaters are no longer holding up. It's causing damage - roads to be washed out, bridges to be destroyed. This is having a huge impact on the bottom line not just of your department but of the Province, because you have to go in there and repair these things.

My question is: Has there been any discussion with the department and obviously the federal government - because you're going to need federal partners on this one - on

some kind of program to upgrade the breakwaters across Nova Scotia to make them more suitable for the weather patterns that we are seeing now?

THE CHAIR: Before I go to the department, MLA Maguire, you have nine minutes left. Your time will be up at 9:30 a.m.

Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I can start. Many of the breakwaters that you're talking about would be protection for wharves and coastal structures. They're not necessarily built for protection of the roadway or the bridges. We're a supplement of that, and a beneficiary of that. Some of the ones that you're talking about - the federal government, who looks after them, sometimes through our partners at DNR - they've applied for federal funding and there have been some federal conversations about repairing those breakwater systems, but mostly for the infrastructure that it's basically there for. If it's for a wharf, it's for fishing communities, that sort of thing.

There hasn't been too much discussion that I know of. I'm going to ask my colleague here, Mr. Deveau, that question, but there hasn't been too much discussion on breakwaters with regard to our own infrastructure. If it does affect something, if there's a breakwater that is beneficial to our infrastructure and we see that, we will try to work with the parties who own that breakwater to repair it or upgrade it for our benefit.

I'm just going to ask Guy Deveau.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Before we go to Mr. Deveau, I want to add on to the question. I figured it was going to go to Guy. I think I've picked your brain many times on this stuff.

I do know that in the past, in discussions I've had with the department, the feds were looking to divest themselves from some of these breakwaters, especially the older ones, which leaves these breakwaters in limbo.

Are the feds still moving forward with the divestiture of this vital infrastructure, and is there any conversation to slow that down, to say - I know Deputy Minister Hackett talked about the protection of wharves. I look at the one in Herring Cove, which the pilot boats use. We saw when the breakwater in Herring Cove failed, it did severe damage to that wharf. It also does have an impact on our roads and stuff, like the deputy minister said.

My question to Mr. Deveau: Is anyone in conversation to say to the feds, Hold on, slow down, let's not divest ourselves of these things, like they did the lighthouses, and let's invest in these things, because they are going to be an important piece of infrastructure when it comes to climate change?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Deveau, six minutes.

GUY DEVEAU: As far as I know - I haven't been approached by the federal government or anyone on the breakwater type of reinforcement. As Deputy Minister Hackett pointed out, I believe that's more around small craft harbours. I don't doubt that some of those might have or bring benefit to provincial roads. We will do our share of shoreline protection in certain areas, by placing armour rock and things like that. However, when it comes to the breakwaters, I have no knowledge on that.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I appreciate that. Again, we've had the benefits of the rocks and everything there, and obviously when we get a strong surge, those rocks end up on the other side of the road or they end up doing damage too. It's definitely worth having the conversations. Maybe this is something that we should all be talking to our MPs about, to be frank with you.

Just quickly, I'm wondering if somebody could give us an update on the plan for the Chignecto Isthmus.

PETER HACKETT: I guess it's more of an update you're looking for than an answer to a question. You are probably aware that the Chignecto Isthmus is an important part of land that connects Nova Scotia to New Brunswick. It is a low-lying piece of land between the two provinces. It runs something like \$30 billion worth of economic goods through there a year, not to mention it is also a part of Nova Scotia's service (inaudible) New Brunswick for certain services - things like the IWK and universities, and is reciprocal to other provinces with us.

There is quite a bit of activity through that area. It's a low-lying area. It is something that we're obviously monitoring. It can be susceptible to damage during a storm or a large event.

The dike system there was studied a few years back. We did a report in conjunction with the federal government and New Brunswick, and the report came back. It said the dike system needed to be raised by a certain amount of feet. We're currently working with New Brunswick on a plan to what that would look like to do that work over the next 10 years. We've also filed an application to the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund jointly between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia for federal funding for that project. We're waiting to hear back from the feds on approval of that.

Coincidentally, I'm heading to New Brunswick this afternoon to meet with my counterpart from New Brunswick. There will be a minister of infrastructure there to talk about the Chignecto Isthmus.

THE CHAIR: Three minutes, MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I appreciate that. That got me thinking a little bit. Obviously, the cost to upgrade it is going to be extensive. Is the Department of Public Works working with the Department of Environment and Climate Change around a plan and a costing of upgrading the infrastructure in Nova Scotia - I'll leave that to Deputy Minister MacEachern - to upgrade our infrastructure in Nova Scotia to deal with weather patterns and climate change?

Deputy Minister Hackett talked about low-lying roads and things like that. These are all over Nova Scotia where these are going to be major problems. Has there been any thought or planning on what's going to need to happen and what the price tag is going to be? Obviously, with this kind of stuff we're going to need municipal and federal partners too.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister MacEachern with two minutes.

LORA MACEACHERN: Yes, there absolutely has been consideration of that. If you take a look at the climate change plan, there's a whole section that has actions around moving forward in a strong direction around upgrading infrastructure and working toward making buildings more resilient due to the impacts of climate change. Yes, that is a key part of our work.

I would also mention that we've invested in some additional resources that will help the other government departments and communities. I mentioned in my opening comments about a stormwater engineer that has recently been hired, a new flood adaptation coordinator. These are some key, new resources that have just been employed by the department and will be available to do the kind of support work that's required.

That's what we're all about - the Department of Environment and Climate Change is making sure that everyone is aware of the policy and the impacts, and providing that support that's needed in order to get the work done.

THE CHAIR: Fifty seconds, MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Is there a price tag? Have you looked at the financial cost of doing this work? I'm just looking for a number or roundabout number. This is potentially going to have to be cost-shared, but is there a cost? Has anyone looked at the cost to do these kinds of upgrades and what we need to move this province forward to protect it from climate change?

LORA MACEACHERN: We certainly have a fully funded climate plan, and we'll be rolling that out now and over the next couple of years. In terms of exact details of the various infrastructure in the province and what's required to upgrade that, certainly folks down the table - the Department of Public Works would be better positioned to be able to give that kind of detail.

THE CHAIR: Order. Time for the Liberal questions has elapsed. We'll now move on to the NDP caucus and MLA Lachance.

[9:30 a.m.]

LISA LACHANCE: I think I might start with Deputy Minister MacEachern. In terms of the recent Coastal Protection Act consultations, I'm aware that the number that was floated was 40,000 people. There were 40,000 people to contact. I'm wondering how many responses you got - or how many engagements, however you might count that - and if you have information on how many of those folks had already participated in consultations around the Act.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister MacEachern.

LORA MACEACHERN: Certainly I can appreciate the interest. That information will be become available as soon as we gather it. The consultation just closed last week, and so we're working with a third-party vendor to compile all the information and feedback that was received. That work is happening now and over the next period of time. We'll come before the minister and provide him with that detailed information and we'll look at next steps.

LISA LACHANCE: I want to ask: What is the working definition - without proclaiming the Act, what is the definition of vulnerable coastal areas in Nova Scotia, and where does that authority rest on a provincial level - interest on a provincial level? I understand the difference between municipalities, but provincially, what's the definition? Do we know within that provincial definition how many properties have been developed in the last four or five years in vulnerable or sensitive coastal areas?

LORA MACEACHERN: My first thoughts in terms of responding is the importance of highlighting our climate risk assessment. It is really a key document. We released it around this time last year, and it really does provide that kind of information about what we're going to likely see going forward in Nova Scotia in terms of potential risks on our coast and across our province. That's a key document that we're trying to get out there, trying to help people to understand the risks and take the necessary action, and that really is a guidance for us. It should be a guidance for communities, municipalities, and we're working to get that out there. That's a key piece in terms of answering the question.

The other thing I wanted to mention in terms of information that's available to help guide that understanding about coastal properties, coastal risks, is CLIMAtlantic. We invest in that central information hub. We've got a climate services specialist on staff at the department who works with CLIMAtlantic and is out there providing this kind of data and this information about what's happening on the coastline, what those risks are going forward, and what people and communities can be really careful about. Those are some

key pieces of information that we have available to help inform people and help inform municipalities, and it really is all hands on deck on this topic.

The Province definitely has a role, and we take that really seriously. We're committed to taking action on coastal protection. There are others that have roles as well, key to that being the municipalities. We're calling on everyone to step up, and absolutely the Province will do its part and we are doing that in terms of the information that we have available and the steps that we're taking so far on coastal protection.

LISA LACHANCE: Maybe it's hard to quantify how many properties have been developed in the past number of years in vulnerable coastal areas, but the work that you're - sorry, I forget the name, climate services? Is that the role? - climate services person does. Has the department been aware of any developments or any building along the coastline that has been cause for concern? Has your climate services manager reported any - do they intervene if they're concerned about what decisions are happening by municipalities or private developers?

LORA MACEACHERN: Our goal is to protect Nova Scotians from the impacts of climate change and the impacts that climate change is having on the coast. Our work is really about all of the efforts that are required to move forward the Province in a good way to address the impacts of climate change. We're really focused on the succeed actions in the climate plan. Coastal protection is absolutely one of those important actions. We're focused on that, and we're focused on the 67 others that we know are so important to be able to deal with this.

We want to hear from those coastal property owners. As was mentioned, we had heard through previous engagement that those coastal property owners had things to say, that they had questions, that they had more perspective that they wanted to be able to provide to the government. The kinds of questions that you're asking now, we certainly hope that through this engagement, we'll be able to find out that additional information - more about what's happening on the coast - so that we can all move forward in a really positive and effective way to protect Nova Scotians. We know they care about the coast, and those are the steps that we want to take to protect it.

THE CHAIR: MLA Lachance, just under 14 minutes.

LISA LACHANCE: Since we've probably gotten to the end of this discussion, if there are examples you have of where your climate services person has raised alarms, or others in the department have raised concerns about development that you can provide or provide later, that would be interesting to know about.

Just in terms of the Coastal Protection Act, you're compiling the results of the consultation - I guess my question is around how many people actually participated, and how many were repeat participants. Obviously coastal landowners were not excluded from

previous consultations. I'll be looking for the numbers in terms of the value of reopening that consultation and what value that had.

In terms of timelines, really quickly, what do you expect to happen with the regulations following this consultation? What's the timeline from the close of the consultations last week to regulations being available and the Act being ready to go?

LORA MACEACHERN: We're working on compiling the information now. As I mentioned, we have a third-party vendor that's working with us. We have a small but dedicated team working on that in the department. That work is happening now, and we hope to be in a position to brief the minister on that in December, and following that, some decisions will be made on next steps.

LISA LACHANCE: Actually, just one more question before we move away from the Coastal Protection Act. What do you see as some of the key actions that would be provided for under the Act that might help with issues around flooding? I'm going to turn some of my questions to learning from the flood experiences we had this year. Within the Coastal Protection Act, is there anything that you would like to be able to do that would help protect or mitigate against flooding that you don't have access to yet?

LORA MACEACHERN: Certainly a focus on coastal protection, whether it's in the form of legislation or some other manner. Focusing on coastal protection is important, because it helps people understand about the risks of building too close to the coast, with an awareness and understanding that our climate risk assessment says that flooding and certain other extreme weather events are likely to consistently occur over the next period of time as we move forward to take important action to address climate change.

That's what coastal protection is all about: steps that can be taken through legislation. These steps can also be taken through information and awareness. It can also be taken through all sectors, taking appropriate steps at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. That's what it can do.

There are other matters, as I said, that we're working on as well. We just hired a stormwater engineer. We've just hired additional expertise in flooding. There are flood line mapping efforts that are occurring across the province. There are a variety of actions that are happening, all associated with our climate action plan that will all help with the effects that we're feeling here in Nova Scotia with flooding and coastal impacts.

THE CHAIR: Just under 10 minutes, MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: I think it is really good to hear about the increased capacity in certain areas, and that the department is able to be responsive to that, because there's obviously such a high level of expertise that's needed to act in these areas. I'm actually

going to switch along that line. I'm going switch to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, so on to Deputy Minister Rafuse.

We just completed the legislative session. Bill No. 329 consolidated decision-making power around development in HRM in the hands of the minister. Do you feel the department has sufficient planning staff and capacity to consider development applications and particularly with a view to protecting coastline and climate change adaptation?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Rafuse.

BYRON RAFUSE: One of the things I find about that piece of legislation is that some elements are kind of misunderstood. With the change in authority for the minister, our underlying principles of planning and development approval processes have not changed. Developers must go through that process. The only thing that's really eliminated is the final decision-making process, which can come to the minister if the council is not choosing to do so. In that effect, we don't need to increase our planning capacity at the department. We do have planning resources but our resources are geared more around facilitating the municipality's planning efforts by giving guidance or frameworks or flood line mapping procedures.

The municipality is not going to be devoid of their responsibility to continue out these processes, and developers will have to follow them.

LISA LACHANCE: With that being said, help me envision what would happen. HRM has gone through its development process, whether that's working with communities and environmental assessments and that sort of thing, and then for some reason or another, the issue is taken to the minister. There's something that's disagreed with - some reason or another comes from somewhere. I'm wondering how you anticipate being able to assess within the department any concerns or any files that are brought forward.

You've had all this heavy weight on the municipal side doing the work of assessment and planning. Where does the evidence come from on the provincial side?

BYRON RAFUSE: What would happen previously is the staff of the municipality would be making a recommendation based on those evaluation criteria to the council. Now the ministry will be relying on the recommendation as previously presented to council. There would be requirements to follow - land use by-laws, there would be a consultation required according to the municipal plan. Nothing would change - we would have that information available to the department to facilitate the ministry's decision.

LISA LACHANCE: Actually, I'm going to cede to my colleague.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc, you have six minutes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I guess the question - the elephant in the room - is why change the legislation? Why give the minister those decision-making powers if nothing else is changing? There must be some contemplation of a time when the minister would need to step in and change things or overrule something. Can you talk to us a little bit about that contemplation? Otherwise it doesn't make any sense that we would have just spent however many terrible hours debating that legislation.

[9:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Rafuse.

BYRON RAFUSE: I think the minister did answer that question in the House. There have been instances in the past where staff are recommended, a development agreement has gone to council, and has been rejected or sent back to Community Council requiring that application to go to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board when the developer had to choose to appeal that decision. In those circumstances, at the NSUARB, which held up that process - and if you recall, we are trying to get more houses built in a faster time frame - it would go through that process. It would halt everything, and at that process, the NSUARB, a number of times - no representation from HRM - NSUARB said the decision was appropriate and the development was approved. That just wasted 12 months. That is why that element is there.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm going to ask some questions to the Department of Environment and Climate Change about efficiency. Efficiency and retrofit projects like the HomeWarming project have been funded with proceeds from the cap and trade auctions and the Green Fund. How will the funding for this be impacted by the transition to the Output-Based Pricing System?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister MacEachern.

LORA MACEACHERN: We are very confident in the ability to continue to fund all the programs. We've got an action plan that's fully funded. We're in this transition, as you know, right now where the cap and trade program is winding down, and therefore the Green Fund is winding down, but we're in the process of fully establishing the Output-Based Pricing System, which will generate revenue and we have set up the new Nova Scotia Climate Change Fund, which will replace the Green Fund. It's a fund that is set up to be able to receive revenue from OBPS but from other sources, including general revenue, and has a wide variety of purposes that are set out in the legislation for which it can be used, all associated with climate action.

We're feeling very confident that the Climate Change Fund will be able to fully fund our climate plan. We have that commitment from government.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc, two and a half minutes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: The climate change plan is fully funded. You've mentioned before - or the department has mentioned before - that there are other streams of funding for the Climate Change Fund, including, as you've just said now, general revenue.

Last time we talked at Public Accounts Committee, we didn't have any other details. Are there other streams of revenue besides general revenue and the OBPS that are coming into the Climate Change Fund?

LORA MACEACHERN: The fund isn't fully established. It's established in legislation. We'll see revenue go into that fund later this year as OBPS gets fully up and running and the cap and trade program is full wound down. If you look at the Environment Act, there's a provision there in those recent changes that establishes the fund. There's a provision there that sets out the various sources of funding - available sources of funds that can go into the Climate Change Fund.

The two key ones are the ones that we've just talked about, but it's all set out there as well as the various sources that the fund can be used for.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc, a minute and a half.

SUSAN LEBLANC: A minute and a half. I'm just going to quickly say that the income threshold for heat pump programs in other provinces is higher than we have here - \$75,000 in P.E.I., \$70,000 in New Brunswick. I'm wondering if Nova Scotia is looking at changing the income threshold for our heat pump program.

LORA MACEACHERN: I'll take that information back and speak to EfficiencyOne as well as our partners at the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables.

I will say that Nova Scotia has invested over \$200 million in energy efficiency programming over the last two years - lots of great programming and work happening there to help people transition to heat pumps and other energy efficiencies - lots of programs, including the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund.

We're quite confident of our support and efforts on energy efficiency, but I'll take that piece back.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc, you have 20 seconds.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Well, maybe you can think about this for next time. In the recent Community Services Committee meeting, we heard about the split initiative issue with people who own rental apartments and doing efficiency upgrades.

I'm wondering: is the department looking at other ways to encourage retrofits in rentals and supporting renters who are facing increasing energy costs? Think about that. We'll get back to you.

THE CHAIR: Order. Time for NDP questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the PC caucus. You have until 10:10 a.m.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: First, I'd like to recognize and thank the tremendous efforts during the wildfires this Summer - unprecedented fires, not only across Nova Scotia but across Canada as well. Looking back at it now, my question would be around water bombers. When the Lake John Road fire broke out, I remember the water bombers coming over the constituency office and just pummeling this - hammering and hammering it relentlessly. For that, I'm thankful. I'm grateful for the efforts.

My question would be to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Why does the Province not have their own water bombers? What is being done to address this for the next wildfire?

PAUL MASON: The wildfires were certainly an unprecedented experience here in Nova Scotia. Unfortunately, it's been touched on in the conversation so far today where we're seeing more and more of these here and across Canada.

With regard to the water bombers, when it comes to wildfire fighting, the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables is the lead agency on that and oversees that piece of the response. I know we worked closely with them in this event and generally, so I know they're in the process of conducting an after-action report with regard to the wildfires. I know that water bombers are certainly a part of that report, and a decision will be made on that, I would think, afterward. Ultimately, their department will make that decision, but I know that it's being considered.

NOLAN YOUNG: I look forward to that report. I'll pass it off to my colleague.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I believe that the tragedies this Summer, and the impacts of climate change, affected pretty much all of us around this side of the table at least, and a lot of members on the other. It's a tough one because my floods had loss of life, and a big part of that was the alerting system. There were concerns raised from the incident commanders about how, who can give, and when the alerts can go out. In particular, the family of the little boy, Colton Sisco, has been calling on the government to make some changes there. I know when the Premier came down, it was brought up every time.

I know that it was directed by the Premier to have Nova Scotia EMO look into some improvements in that community engagement. First responder engagement sessions have taken place, and also discussions with the CAOs on improvements at the municipal level.

I guess my question is: When could we expect an update on any changes that are going to be made to the emergency response protocols and the emergency alerting system?

PAUL MASON: As you noted, certainly a very tragic scenario that played out down in your area over the Summer. With regard to public alerting, as you've touched on, we've conducted some work on that. Just to set the context, with regard to the Alert Ready Emergency Alert System, there is a lot of effort that goes into that piece. I'd like to note that we conduct quarterly exercising with all of our partners - municipalities, provincial departments, police, First Nations. Every three months, we have a session where they're all invited. We address any issues, any questions, new staff, that kind of thing. We also have a dedicated program officer who works specifically on that file, so it's certainly a high-priority item within our office.

With regard to the events over the Summer - alerts specifically - what we did after we received direction or reach out and seek feedback basically on potential changes that could be made to the system. We conducted six sessions. Three were kind of by region, per se - so by the three regions which we operate by the Province. For each of those regional sessions, we would have fire personnel, police personnel, elected officials - CAOs, I should say - and First Nations from those areas.

Then we went back and conducted three additional sessions. The additional sessions would have been in mid-September. The initial ones would have been in late August to really seek feedback on how the system's working, any potential challenges that they've identified, any potential areas for improvement, how the process around getting an alert out should work.

We did gather some good feedback through that process around who can authorize an alert, the process itself. That information is being compiled. It will flow up, of course, for evaluation, and I would expect that there should be some additional updates on that within the next couple of months.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I want to continue on that. How is the department taking accountability and recognizing the deficiencies? How can we be sure that these are going to be addressed?

PAUL MASON: With regard to that, the best way that I would frame it is really around continuous improvement. Basically, in that particular instance, when it comes to an alert, that request has to come in through the municipality. They have eyes on the ground. In those types of responses, when you send an alert out, it goes to the entire county. It can't

be targeted to specific areas. The information within it needs to be aligned with the municipal response.

There may be some parts of that county where you want people to evacuate. There may be other parts where you want them to shelter in place. That needs to be factored into the process. What happened specifically in that case is that there were challenges around communication between the municipality and our provincial coordination centre, and those communication challenges impacted the timelines on the alert. Once we got the required information, we had the alert out fairly quickly, within about 30 minutes, but it did take a while to get that information.

I think it's a combination of the event which occurred - there was a very sudden and unexpected event. We were aware that rainfalls were coming, and of course, whenever we get that information, we share that with our partners, but nothing to the scale of what was predicted. I think the particular weather system and the communication challenges that went along with it were key ingredients in that, and those variables will be factored into any changes that are made in the system going forward.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Another big part of the tragedy was there were different areas that were impacted differently. I'm not sure who to address this to - I think the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. How are we ensuring that future developments are going to not be built where there could be potential landslide? I guess it's how it happened there, it took homes off foundations from the impact of debris coming down into certain areas. As we see, this climate change and river courses are totally altered now from where they were and now blocked by all this infill.

How are we going to account for the impacts of the sedimentation runoff and increased risk of flooding from these water damages so that it doesn't impact the nearby communities as we move forward?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Rafuse.

BYRON RAFUSE: As you know, municipalities are required to have municipal plans for development, including requirements to deal with called Statements of Provincial Interest. The Province has a Statement of Provincial Interest associated with flood risk areas. They must deal with that. To help them out with that process, the Province has undertaken an initiative to do what's referred to as flood line mapping. We are working our way through that process first by gathering data to facilitate the mapping.

We're working, I'm going to say, deliberately or methodically throughout the province this year. We're hoping to get about a third of the province completed on the mainland aspect of the province. Next year we'll be moving to the remaining third or half of the province, and then by the year 2025-26, we'll complete mainland Nova Scotia and make our way into Cape Breton and complete that process there.

That flood line mapping program will allow municipalities to be able to identify where there's a high risk of flooding. It will allow them to carry out their responsibilities on planning and by-law usage to avoid those types of areas in the future and tell them where they may need to address issues where there's already currently development in those areas.

[10:00 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard, 10 minutes.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I thought I would just ask two, but I want one more quick question before I pass it on to my colleague from Chester-St. Margaret's. Is there a timeline for the flood line mapping to be presented? Have they received that information today, or is it still being done?

BYRON RAFUSE: I think it actually just began this year. We're hoping that this fiscal year we'll have the data collected for one-third, I'm going to say - we're going methodically across the province - and progressively gather more data, allow the mapping to occur. There are limitations on how fast we can go on that because these are external resources and the availability of these types of experts. By the year 2025-26, the program will be complete, we'll complete the mapping. As they're available to the municipalities, they will be provided to them as we move across the province, and they will have them for their use as soon as they're available.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: As some of you may or may not know, Chester-St. Margaret's was hit hard by the flood, and then the hurricane did a little damage as well. This one is for the Department of Public Works. What is the department doing to ensure that our public infrastructure, roads, bridges, are resilient to the changing, repeated, and extreme weather patterns?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Deveau.

GUY DEVEAU: Actually, we're moving forward looking at the impacts of climate change every time we rebuild something, every time we design something. Our bridges are being designed to 100-year flood standards that have been adjusted to the climate change specifications. We're looking around right now, doing a lot of shoreline protection work with armour rock. We're looking at building up roads. We're looking at locations where we might need to do things such as realigning roads or raising roads, increasing the size of culverts, bridges as required by the design standard.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Excellent. That's excellent to hear. Again, for the Department of Public Works: What is the department doing to better protect and consider

the most vulnerable amongst us from future fire, flooding, storms, for people such as seniors, families, with children, people with disabilities or limited mobility?

GUY DEVEAU: We're doing a number of things on that. There have been a few committees, a few work groups, task forces that have been started. Ironically, one of them actually started before the floods. In May we started a group called the pre-storm prep committee. It includes members of our department, of course, DPW, members of EMO, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, other stakeholders such as Nova Scotia Power. We're really looking at how we address these occurrences when they occur.

Nature is a strong force, so we can plan as much as we can. We're always going to have a negative impact when we do get a very large occurrence. This committee's work is helping us prepare when they do happen. We're working on having an off-the-shelf book that we can pull off in case of emergency that would have such things as templates on codes of practice, deviations, things like that. We've worked on doing jurisdictional scans with other provinces on items such as traffic control, for example. Traffic control can be very restrictive in the aftermath of these events, as it's limited compared to the amount of forces that come into the province to help.

Part of these scans have helped us identify gaps with other provinces in the training that's required for the accreditation to be able to do that safely. We're building a reserve and training programs to be able to have a lot more support when these happen. Part of this committee as well is even seeing the pre-event discussions and meetings with our stakeholders. On some occasions we'll even have Environment and Climate Change Canada join our meetings to see exactly where the greatest impacts are going to occur, how we move staff across the province, maybe in certain locations as required, as well as Nova Scotia Power and other stakeholders. How do they move their forces? How can we support each other?

Really, all this is done to make sure we're prepared - ensuring the stock as far as culverts, bridges, gravels, other things like that. We would need to address these situations just to make sure that we're prepared in the best way when we do get hit by such an event.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I just have one more question before I pass it to MLA Taggart. I read a week or so ago that the feds aren't going to meet their targets. This will be for the Department of Environment and Climate Change. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and getting off fossil fuels is critical to achieving net zero. Can you tell us more about work progress to green our grid and reduce GHGs? It might be to a couple of departments.

LORA MACEACHERN: Happy to start an answer to that one. We're feeling very positive about our trajectory on greenhouse gas emission reductions. Different than many other Provinces, we actually have it now legislated in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. That's really important. We're not only setting the target, we're

making it law by putting it into legislation. That's a really positive thing for Nova Scotia, and we're well on our way of achieving that target that's set out in the legislation. We're a leader in the country on that front. We'll continue to do that.

A couple of areas that I wanted to point out: first of all, our output-based pricing system that I mentioned earlier - the Province is in the process this year of fully establishing that as a provincially created system in line with the federal requirements. That is going to continue to enhance placing large emitters accountable for their emissions and encourage them to decrease their emissions in Nova Scotia. It's a really important piece that's well under way and will be fully operational this year.

Another key part is the new clean power plant. The lead department for that is Natural Resources and Renewables - not here at the table today, but that is a key piece that is showing how Nova Scotia plans to achieve that target, the various areas of renewable energy that will be focused upon. Over at the Department of Environment and Climate Change, we're seeing that.

We're seeing many onshore wind projects come into our environmental assessment process. There have been eight this year. Two green hydrogen projects have come through the environmental assessment process, and there are several others in the process right now, including the intertie between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

There's a lot happening on the renewable energy front. All of that is really critical to achieving our greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, and we're feeling really positive.

THE CHAIR: A minute and a half, MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I'm not sure what to ask here because I'm not sure I can get the question in in a minute and a half. I may end up coming back to it.

Just wondering about the Department of Public Works if I could. If I have to, I'll come back to this next. To the Department of Public Works: How is your department maintaining infrastructure and eliminating dead zones, ensuring cell service needs are reliable during extreme weather events?

PETER HACKETT: As far as during weather events, those things are depending on what happens and where you are. However, the Province has just recently taken initiative to increase cell service across the province, recognizing there are about 21,000 Nova Scotians who don't have access to cell service. As well, there may be a thousand kilometres of major highway that doesn't have good cell service. The Province just recently went with an RFP to the vendors who provide cell, to allow them to take their equipment and go onto either provincial infrastructure or private infrastructure and towers across the

province to help reduce those dead zones around the province. That RFP is on the street right now.

Then we're looking at, going forward, working with our partners at . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for PC questioning has elapsed.

We will now move on to the second round. Each caucus will have eight minutes, beginning with the Liberal caucus. MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Just some quick questions. What is the revenue projection for the Nova Scotia Climate Change Fund from OBPS, and when will the Province receive it?

LORA MACEACHERN: I'm just going to maybe turn it over to my colleague, Anthony, who may have something to add to this point. I would like to emphasize that our process and our OBPS system is still under creation. As you know, it was created in legislation in the last year. We're in that transition period right now where cap and trade is about to be complete. The Green Fund monies are about to be fully extended. We've had our last couple of options, and we will be fully transitioning into the OBPS system and the Climate Change Fund will be in place in the next year.

At this point, we're still creating those final pieces of regulations. The first set of regulations under OBPS were passed and that's to create the process by which the participants come into the system. That's in place, and the next set of regulations are around compliance. To fully answer your question, we need those regulations in place, and they will be in place in the next short period of time.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire has signalled he'd like to ask another question.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Do you have any type of projection on what kind of funding is going to come out of that?

LORA MACEACHERN: I'm going to turn it over to Anthony to provide you with that.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Weatherbee.

ANTHONY WEATHERBEE: In terms of specific revenue coming from the program, it's a bit too early to tell until the performance standards are finalized and fully established. That will tell us what the emission reduction targets are for the facilities, and if they can't meet those targets, they would have to pay. It's hard to say how a facility might respond to a particular performance standard. If they can meet the standard, there

won't be a compliance cost. It is a bit too early to tell - until those regulations are in place, we won't know what the compliance obligation will be.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Hopefully we don't pull any money out of it. Everybody meets compliance, right? That's the best possible outcome. There is potentially money that's going to be generated by this.

I know that in the past they had the Electric Vehicle Rebate program. I have a couple of questions around the EV Rebate program just for myself. Did that program actually incentivize more people to purchase - because \$3,500 toward an electric vehicle is not a lot of money - is there potential and has the department looked at using that funding or finding new funding to top up what I think was an extremely successful program, which was the solar program? We know right now that the money people are getting for the solar program isn't really offset. Over the lifetime of solar, there isn't a great deal of savings. We've talked to the industry; I've talked to individuals. I always use the example of in the beginning, it was almost 50 cents on the dollar and now it's much less than that.

With the OBPS program, is there potential to top up the SolarHomes Program to make it more affordable for Nova Scotians? If not, has the department looked at finding new funding to actually bring it back to 50 cents on the dollar which will incentivize more people to invest in solar?

LORA MACEACHERN: To bring it back to the basics, we're very focused on the climate change plan and those 68 actions. That really is our guiding force and our motivation. A certain amount of funds will be generated through the OBPS system. As Anthony says, as the details get worked out and we identify how those who are responsible act with that system in place, we'll find out how much funding is generated from that. Our focus is on the climate action plan and seeing those 68 actions through to completion. That is the guiding force, and we have a commitment for those actions to be funded.

Amongst those actions, there are some actions around solar, and there is a section of the climate plan that talks about a commitment to review the energy efficiency programs that are now in place to look at any gaps and identify what needs to change. That is one of the actions. That's the work that we'll continue to carry out over now into the future of the climate plan.

When we put it into place, we very much recognize that how to address climate change will change, even within the five years the climate action plan is in place. It's a living and breathing document. We're focused on those 68 actions, and included in that is looking at the energy efficiency programs that are in place and what we should do to change and make them better and invest in other areas.

THE CHAIR: Two minutes, MLA Maguire.

[10:15 a.m.]

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: A really easy suggestion - I know that is rocket science, but it isn't rocket science, if you know what I mean - is allowing and making it affordable for individuals to produce their own power. That is one of the ways that we're going to get people off coal and oil and all these different things. It used to be affordable to purchase solar through the program. It's not as affordable, so fewer people are looking at that.

Especially in our urban cores, I know that I've talked to many individuals when it comes to multi-residential units where these incentives are not on multi-residential units because they don't believe that it gets trickled down to the residents. I think if we really are going to be serious about getting off coal and doing these things, we have to make it more affordable.

Right now - 5 years ago, it was more affordable to purchase solar when you got 50 cents on the dollar on a \$40,000 unit. Now you're getting, I think the last I heard was a \$3,000 to \$5,000 credit. I know that it's spaced out over time how you pay for it, but that's still a large amount of money to put on a homeowner, especially in the time of inflation and everything else going up.

Will there be a focus, do you think, on multi-residential units and residential units when it comes to green affordable energy and making it actually affordable to build these units for residential units?

LORA MACEACHERN: Yes, I think bringing up the importance of solar as a component of all of our efforts is really important. The Department of Natural Resources and Renewables isn't at the table with us today, but I know if they were they would have quite a bit to say on this issue . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Time for Liberal questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the NDP caucus. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Just getting back to my question, which is oddly in line with my colleague's - doesn't happen that often. The Affordable Multifamily Housing Program: the Auditor General did note that there was a low uptake on that particular program because of this thing that we heard about at the Community Services Committee, which is this split incentive issue. Renters, many people who are paying for their own heat, they can't access efficiency programs on their own, and because they're paying for their own heat, the landlords are not incentivized to upgrade the buildings and make them more energy efficient. What's the department doing to look at that? This is specifically about energy poverty, really. Generally, we're talking about old, slightly dilapidated buildings.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister MacEachern.

LORA MACEACHERN: Energy efficiency is very much key. There has been a great focus on that, as was mentioned, over the last number of years, over \$200 million invested. We always should be looking at ways to make sure that those investments are done really effectively. We were really fortunate in Nova Scotia that we have got a stand-alone energy efficiency organization that is focused on this work full time and is making great gains.

In terms of . . .

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister, MLA Leblanc is signalling she'd like to speak. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Because there's not much time, I just want to know specifically about that particular program. Is the department directing EfficiencyOne to look at that program and overhaul it? Are we looking at specific ways to help people in rental units to access efficiency programs so that they will be in less energy poverty?

LORA MACEACHERN: Yes. Thanks very much. We are working on all of those issues. I have some stats in front of me from July that say a total of 1,323 low-income homeowners have benefited from no-cost energy efficiency upgrades from both the HomeWarming program and the Affordable Multifamily Housing Program this past year. Those are totals as of July, so definitely some progress is being made. As I said, we're always looking for ways to increase the effectiveness of our investments, and that is part of our action plan, to be continually reviewing our energy programs and investing in having the most impact for those who need it the most.

THE CHAIR: Five minutes. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I will say that I really hope my colleague is wrong about the solar thing because I just got solar panels, and I thought it seemed like a good financial investment. Maybe I'm wrong. (Laughs)

I want to go back to EMO for a moment. The Premier instructed EMO to meet with fire chiefs, police chiefs, and municipalities to review the emergency alert system. We were just talking about this. Can you, Mr. Mason, confirm that the meetings took place? What was the result, and will there be a review of those meetings that will be made public?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Mason.

PAUL MASON: The meetings did take place. As I touched on, there were six meetings. The first three were regionally based. The other three were sector specific. We met specifically with fire, specifically with police, and then once again with CAOs. Really, the purpose of the meeting was to get their feedback on the system. It's been in place here in Nova Scotia for a number of years. Our initial policy on it was developed back in 2017.

We revised it in 2021. It was really to gather some feedback, whether additional changes that could be made as part of continuous improvement, per se.

There were a few ideas that came forward. Those are currently being evaluated, and a final decision will be made on those at a later point. Those meetings took place, and we're evaluating the outcomes now.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Am I right in thinking that the question of whether the Alert Ready system will be extended to municipalities or other organizations is part of those discussions? We don't know an answer to that?

PAUL MASON: It was part of the discussion. Here in Canada, when it comes to the national alerting system, most provinces have a centralized system similar to what we have here in Nova Scotia, but there are decentralized systems in Alberta, and to a lesser extent, Saskatchewan. That's part of that discussion that we had.

Currently, we've shared direct access to the alert system with the RCMP and HPD here in Nova Scotia. We're open to that discussion with our partners. There are certain accountabilities that come along with it. It's not as easy to use as, say, Facebook or social media. It's somewhat prescriptive in how you interface with it, per se.

At the end of the day, that was part of the discussion, and that will be part of the analysis going forward.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That's great. I'm sorry, I'm jumping all over the place. I want to go back to coastal protection for a moment.

Deputy Minister, can you tell us who the vendor is for the consultation - the third-party vendor for the coastal protection?

LORA MACEACHERN: Yes. The vendor is Group ATN.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I want to ask a question about - not the stormwater whatever they're called, the ones that are in the water - the retaining walls on people's properties. Is that part of the consultation? Is the Act going to contemplate making those illegal? We know that when people have retaining walls, the water hits them and then the surges move down the coastline, and if someone doesn't have one, that's where the damage will happen.

Is the Coastal Protection Act going to look at that part of coastal protection? Has there been any work thus far on encouraging property owners to change out their retaining walls to nature-based solutions for the surges?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister MacEachern, less than one minute.

LORA MACEACHERN: I want to be careful in terms of answering the question around the coastal protection legislation and exactly what it covers off, because I do want to make sure that I give you the correct information on that. My understanding of the legislation is that it's just more broadly worded. It's about creating that coastal protection zone across the province and providing for the need to get authorization to build in certain places if the property in question is within that zone.

I do not believe that there's anything specific in the legislation that addresses that issue. Again, there's broad regulation-making authority, so that may be something that can be looked at as part of it.

THE CHAIR: Order. Time for the NDP questioning has elapsed. We now move back to the PC caucus. MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: Sorry - Deputy Minister Hackett, I got you in the middle of an answer. Is there anything more you'd like to add to that?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Hackett.

PETER HACKETT: I can add a little bit more to the answer. As I mentioned, a request for proposals has gone out to vendors to look at their equipment to be used on towers throughout the province. The government has looked at the fact that cell service is important. It's an essential service in a lot of parts of rural Nova Scotia, as well as in the cities. They're investing about \$47 million into this program which would be to allow the vendors to get into the towers - this is being done through Build Nova Scotia, through the Department of Public Works - and then have a look at the cell gap coverage and what we're missing out of that.

Then we look at a second RFP that would go out that would advance more towers into the system that would allow vendors to come in and participate and put their equipment on these towers. That way we'd hope to get a very broad cell coverage across the province.

Going back to what you originally mentioned about storms and these events that we're having, hopefully over the next little while we'll get this up and running, and hopefully during the storm events these will help those in EHS as well as Nova Scotians in the public.

TOM TAGGART: That's good stuff. I've got to move back to climate change, if you don't mind. It's a bit of a passion of mine. It's certainly a current topic in Colchester North. Under the current climate plan, we have set some of the most ambitious goals in the country. In order to meet those goals, we understand we need to take a dynamic approach to producing green energy. Can you discuss some of the new technologies that are going to get us to 2030 and the role that onshore wind will play in kicking that into gear? That sort of thing is the critical question I'm asking, the role that onshore wind plays initially.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister MacEachern.

[10:30 a.m.]

LORA MACEACHERN: Yes, a very interesting question and I think really important. Nova Scotia's 2030 Clean Power Plan that has just been released really articulates well the kind of resources and what will really be key to the transition in Nova Scotia. The Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, as you know, is the lead for that plan. I don't want to go too deeply into it without that great expertise here at the table, but definitely when we look at the plan, onshore wind is featured there quite prominently in the short term.

It also just talks about the fortunes that we have in Nova Scotia in terms of our positioning on the global stage and the valuable resources that we have here with the abundance of wind and tidal and our proximity to ports. Those are great advantages that we have in Nova Scotia. The power plan really talks about all of that and how we're going to meet the target we are so focused on at the Department of Environment and Climate Change, which is 80 per cent renewables by 2030, net zero by 2050. These are the kinds of things that will get us there.

The other half that we play at Environment and Climate Change is as regulator for these projects that are coming through. I think I mentioned to one of the other questions that we are really seeing a huge difference in terms of what's coming in through the regulatory role.

It had been many, many years, from what I understand, at Environment and Climate Change since a wind project had come through the environmental assessment process, which is that key, big environmental permit that's required for these projects to get off the ground in Nova Scotia; it had been many years.

We've seen eight come through our process within the last year, and two green hydrogen which are entirely new. We need some changes to our regulations in order to, in fact, recognize the existence of green hydrogen and how it fits into a regulatory process. It's just been significant in terms of a regulator, regulating through these kinds of changes in Nova Scotia that haven't been seen in many years.

We've got a couple of other wind projects now registered as part of the process, and we've got the intertie which is another key piece that's part of the environmental assessment process now. Some big changes are happening in Nova Scotia. I'll leave it to Natural Resources and Renewables to really talk about the power plan, but it is key to achieving the commitments in the environmental legislation that government's passed and in our climate plan.

TOM TAGGART: Before I pass it on to my colleague, MLA MacDonald, I've just got to say that because of the role that my constituency is playing initially, I've really become engaged in that. It really is pretty darn exciting, what we've got ahead of us in the next seven or eight years.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald, just under two minutes.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: This is going to be for Mr. Mason, but don't feel bad, it won't be as bad as the last time you were in front of me.

Can you explain the Next-Generation 9-1-1 and the update on it? You've got under two minutes.

PAUL MASON: The Next-Generation 9-1-1 - 911 currently operates on a legacy copper line network. It's very stable, but it's reaching end of useful life. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission is a national regulator and it's made a determination upon the various telecommunication companies that they need to move to the next-generation system by March of 2025. The key difference is it moves from a copper line system to an IP-based system.

We're currently working and evaluating. We've had an RFP out; we're evaluating that now to select a vendor. That process will be done in the next few weeks, and then we'll execute the project by March of 2025. That's really Phase 1. It won't really be noticeable to users at that point, it'll just be more in the background. What's interesting is once we're onto that system in Phase 2, it allows us to enhance interoperability by sharing information, video, pictures, all these different types of things amongst the public safety partners, for lack of a better term. That's really the project in a nutshell.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald, you have 20 seconds.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Will it help the people who are close to the border, grabbing the wrong tower and having the proper 911 quickly?

PAUL MASON: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay, all right. Thank you very much for everyone who appeared before committee today. Do the witnesses have any closing remarks? We do not have any closing remarks - it's a miracle.

I will just say that we're going to take a three-minute break here so folks can move out. I ask people to move out quickly because we do have a lot of committee business, and I ask the committee members not to leave their seats.

[10:34 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:37 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call the meeting back to order. Let's move on to committee business. Members have been provided with the Record of Decision from the October 4th subcommittee meeting. A motion was left on the floor at the October 11th meeting that we table this topic: Capital District Health Infrastructure Projects with witnesses being Department of Public Works, Deputy Minister; Deputy Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; and the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness to a future date, an agenda-setting date for consideration. That was moved by Mr. Young.

I will now open the floor for discussion on that. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just can't remember what the reasoning was.

THE CHAIR: I think it was that MLA Young felt - and I don't want to speak for him - that it was more properly dealt with at a subcommittee meeting where we do agenda-setting. MLA Young, is that correct?

NOLAN YOUNG: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Is there any further discussion on that motion? MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: When is our next agenda-setting meeting?

THE CHAIR: We don't have one scheduled at this time. We do have a number of topics coming up. It's probably in December. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Okay, thanks.

THE CHAIR: I guess we have to vote on that - to table the topic until an agenda-setting meeting.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Maguire, a motion deferred from the September 20th meeting. You have been provided with a copy of that particular motion. The motion is that the Public Accounts Committee request the Auditor General look into the spending and the partisan act of Communications Nova Scotia. This is in relation to the letter to the committee from the Liberal Party leader. MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: The Auditor General is independent. The Auditor General can look at any matters if they wish. We'll not support this motion.

THE CHAIR: I think the Auditor General has indicated previously that the committee can send requests. It can happen. It's not unusual or anything. Is that correct? We have our Auditor General here and she is nodding. To quote Tom Jones, it's not unusual.

We will vote on that meeting now, seeing no other hands for discussion.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is defeated.

There was a motion left on the floor from the October 25th meeting, which was made in camera. Members have been provided with a copy. We cannot discuss the motion publicly unless there is agreement by the committee to do so.

Is there agreement to deal with the motion at today's public meeting?

MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Am I correct that this motion, then, was made in camera?

THE CHAIR: That's correct. That's why I said it was made at an in camera meeting.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Oh, sorry. Somebody asked me a question at the exact same time, and I missed that part. I apologize.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Chair, I'm happy to do whatever I need to do to rescind this motion, or whatever you do to take it off the floor.

THE CHAIR: We have to agree to deal with it first, before we can do any of those things.

It requires unanimous consent for us to deal with this in any way, shape, or form in this meeting now.

GORDON HEBB: Not unanimous consent to deal with it in the open meeting, but unanimous consent to rescind it.

THE CHAIR: There has to be agreement to deal with it publicly. Are we okay with dealing with it publicly? I'm seeing nods all around the table.

Okay. We're going to deal with that publicly. Now, in order to, as per Mr. Hebb's interjection - could you please say what you just said for the microphone, Mr. Hebb?

GORDON HEBB: To withdraw the motion, we require the unanimous consent of the committee.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc, do you want to withdraw the motion?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Do we have unanimous consent for MLA Leblanc to - MLA Maguire, can I see a facial expression of some sort?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Okay, sure.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I would like to make a motion.

THE CHAIR: We still have correspondence.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Oh, sorry.

THE CHAIR: I'm going to deal with the correspondence. I'm happy to take any motion after that. Also, your motion is noted, so even if we don't get to it today, we will deal with it at our next meeting.

We have correspondence from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board: Response to PAC letter re: Implementation of Auditor General recommendations. Any discussion about that?

Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Follow-up information from the May 17th meeting. I think that's the one I had the concerns about. The answer that came back had squishy wording on it, I'll just say. It wasn't clear to me. I went back to the department and asked for clarification, and got clarification on one part, but not the other part of my question. I would just like to write back to ask: Can you just please tell us whether these were overages or underages? With the committee's consent, I will write back just to get that clarified so that we can put this thing to bed.

[10:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: I'll just be writing back to request clarification again because we asked a question and it's not up to them to decide whether it's material or not - just answer the question.

Workers' Compensation Board - Response to PAC letter re Implementation of Auditor General recommendations. Does anyone have any questions about that?

The Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation - Information requested from the October 11th meeting. Is there any discussion on that?

The Annual Report. Members were provided with a draft of the 2023 Annual Report. I think there was one change that we have made. Has that been sent out since the change?

KIM LANGILLE: No, I just noted it.

THE CHAIR: Yes, you did note it. I wasn't sure if it was just for me or if you had sent it to everybody.

KIM LANGILLE: No, everybody.

THE CHAIR: That one meeting was in camera? I'm just trying to remember.

KIM LANGILLE: I had one meeting noted as a pre-hearing briefing when it was actually just an Auditor General briefing. It wasn't on an Auditor General Report.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I move that the Public Accounts Committee approve the Annual Report.

THE CHAIR: Any discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Before we get to PAC Path Forward, I'm going to suggest that we go to MLA Leblanc's motion that she wanted to make today.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Shouldn't we do the PAC Path Forward first because it's on the agenda?

NOLAN YOUNG: Can we just move that forward for now? I mean, we're meeting on the 6th, so we'll have a fulsome discussion.

THE CHAIR: Are we all okay with that? Okay. We will remove that - since we are meeting on December 6th with the Auditor General on that - because I'm seeing nods all around for that.

MLA Leblanc, the motion that you wanted to make.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I would like to make the following motion.

Nova Scotia is experiencing a year of devastating extreme weather that is accelerated by climate change, and urgent action must be taken to reduce our emissions. Thousands of Nova Scotians continue to struggle with dramatic increases to the cost of living. Programs aimed at supporting energy efficient retrofits, such as heat pumps, remain hard to access, especially for low-income Nova Scotians, and effective climate action must address the very real affordability concerns of regular people. Nova Scotians have had relief from paying provincial tax on home heating since the NDP was in government in 2010.

I move that the committee affirm its support for the removal of all tax on home heating, the exemption of all home heating from carbon pricing, and a call on the federal government to improve access to home retrofit programs by doubling investments in these programs.

THE CHAIR: I'm going to take a speakers list: MLAs Leblanc, MLA Maguire, MLA Barkhouse, MLA Taggart. I think an email has gone around from the clerk with that particular motion. (Interruption) I think she just sent it out. MLA Leblanc, would you like to speak to the motion?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes, thank you very much. Basically, it's a motion suggesting that we as the Public Accounts Committee affirm committee support for the removal of tax on home heating. Right now, we know that the carbon tax is coming off of home heating oil in Nova Scotia, but it's not coming off other fossil fuels, other types of home heating - natural gas or propane. This is in support of taking tax off of all forms of home heating fuel, and essentially it is a way to help Nova Scotians with the added carbon price that has been implemented by the federal government, and a way to address some of the energy poverty issues in Nova Scotia. It doesn't cover everything off, obviously, but we've seen the federal government remove the tax from oil, so we'd like to call on the government to do the same for other home heating fuels and to also improve access to home retrofitting programs by doubling investments in those programs.

THE CHAIR: This is all home heating regardless of income, is that correct?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I have a speaker's list. MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I support this in theory, but honestly, I just received the motion 30 seconds ago. I literally just checked my email, and I got it 30 seconds ago. I'd like some time to review it to actually go through the details.

One of the things that we talked about was the PAC Path Forward. I know that my colleagues have been very supportive of a path forward and figuring out the rules and regulations around this committee. One of the things that I've had members get upset with me about - members on both sides - is all of a sudden putting a motion on the floor, and nobody having time to review it because it's topical, and because we just had witnesses, and it was just written on the fly.

Again, while I support the idea and the thought process around this, there have been many times - when we were just in the Legislature and there was a motion put forward around the carbon tax and sending something to the federal government to ask for the elimination of the carbon tax, both the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives voted to send that letter, and the NDP voted against it. Things seem to be changing on the fly quite a bit here.

I would actually say that I've been raked over the coals in this committee, in camera and outside camera, by both the government and the third party for doing exactly what just happened here today. I think we need consistency on how these motions come forward. I don't think that the motion that was just read - I think maybe at the end some new stuff was added to that motion. Again, I'm not fully aware. We have to sit here in this committee and pay attention to what's happening to us, and I don't have time to check my emails and be constantly checking things.

I think what I would like to do is maybe put a motion on the floor that we are able to take a week to review this, then come back and actually have a more fulsome conversation around this, instead of having these things sprung on us and having to vote on the spot without having any type of information on it. Am I able to put a motion on the floor?

THE CHAIR: I think there's already a motion on the floor. (Interruptions) The only thing you can do is make a motion to defer.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Chair, I would like to put a motion on the floor to defer this motion so that we could at least take some time to review it and see what it's actually about. I'll be frank with you. I know the member read the motion. I actually don't know what's in that motion. I have no idea what's in that motion. There was a lot of information just thrown at us. I know that you as Chair just asked questions for clarification, like: Are

we talking about low-income Nova Scotians? Are we talking about working-class Nova Scotians? Are we talking about wealthy Nova Scotians? Are we talking about corporations? Who are we talking about? Is this a tax break for every single person whether they need it or not?

I would say that if we're going to look at something like this, that these things have to be more targeted to the people who need it the most, and that if you're making millions of dollars a year, I would dare say that you can probably afford to pay this stuff, whereas we have people who can't. Again, what I would ask is that we defer the motion, maybe get a little bit more clarification on it, maybe make it more targeted to people who need it the most. Right now, I just don't fully comprehend or understand what's being put on the floor.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, MLA Maguire. I do have a speakers list here. I will just say that Legislative Counsel just leaned over and said: I'm not clear - are we talking about carbon taxes coming off? Are we talking about all taxes? He did raise the issue of some clarity on that particular thing.

MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: So . . . (Interruptions) I'm speaking on your motion.

THE CHAIR: Folks, MLA Barkhouse has the floor.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Thank you. First of all, we only got it 30 seconds ago. Second of all, it's partisan. It's not clear what they want, and it's out of the scope, so I call the question. I think we should just vote. Sorry, MLA Maguire, I don't agree with what you're saying as well, so I just call the question.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart, you had asked to speak?

TOM TAGGART: It's my turn to speak, is that correct? The question's been called but it's my turn to speak.

THE CHAIR: It doesn't matter. You get to speak.

TOM TAGGART: I don't believe this belongs here. I'm not going to support it in any way, shape, or form, or anything that has anything to do with it. I have no idea when PAC starting setting policy. Is that really where we're at here? I'm sorry, but I mean, this is a great clip. It's kind of aspirational to talk about these great things, but this was in the House not less than 10 days ago. I don't know whether it got deferred or whether it got voted or defeated or what happened, but the bottom line is that we're way out of our bounds, and I'm up for calling the question too.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young, you don't want to talk anymore? Is that correct?

MLA Young: No, I'm good.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc, you're on my list. Go ahead.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Just to be clear - and I do think that this does need to be clarified - this motion was sent to the clerk at 8:46 this morning, and the clerk sent it out as I read the motion. So before anyone gets mad at the member for Dartmouth North for just springing something on you, it didn't happen from me. It's a question of process that has to be taken up with the whole committee. It is not the NDP's fault, or the member for Dartmouth North's fault, that you just saw the motion now.

Secondly, to my colleagues' comments, I'm happy to defer this until next week so that we can take it back to our people and we can refine it or whatever, but I do think that there is a place at the Public Accounts Committee - it is not setting policy. Setting policy is not done in this room. Setting policy is done by the government, and this is an all-party committee. It's the Public Accounts Committee affirming a belief in something or affirming something.

That is all we are trying to do. We are not trying to pull the wool over your eyes or do something nefarious that is going to cause the destruction of the province. We know that in Nova Scotia, people are suffering from the high cost of everything. We know we live in a rural province, according to the Premier. We know lots of people heat their homes with fuel - with oil, with natural gas, with propane, and in some cases, with coal. We are trying to move a motion that comes to the aid of people suffering energy poverty and people who won't be able to fill their oil tanks this year. That is all we are doing.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire. Just to clarify, the clerk did not see it, and that's why it wasn't sent out. She doesn't want anyone to think that . . .

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I think we need to bring the temperature down a bit. No one is accusing anyone of anything.

THE CHAIR: I was still speaking.

I just wanted to make that clear. What happened there wasn't MLA Leblanc's - there was no nefarious plot, as she said.

MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I was saying, I think we need to bring the temperature down a little bit. I wasn't being aggressive. What I was saying is that I know in the past, when I brought motions like this forward, both the NDP and the government got angry at me.

THE CHAIR: Order. Would anyone like to extend the meeting? (Interruptions) I didn't even ask because I knew what the answer would be, but I do have to check. Thank you very much to the clerk for keeping me on track there.

Our next meeting is November 22, 2023. Our witnesses will be the Department of Advanced Education and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing re Student Housing Needs.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:00 a.m.]