

**HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, November 22, 2023**

**COMMITTEE ROOM**

**Student Housing Needs**

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## **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

[Tom Taggart was replaced by Dave Ritcey.]  
[John A. MacDonald was replaced by Larry Harrison.]

### **In Attendance:**

Kim Adair  
Auditor General

Kim Langille  
Committee Clerk

James de Salis  
Administrative Support Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Erin Fowler  
Legislative Counsel

### **WITNESSES**

#### **Department of Advanced Education**

Ryan Grant - Deputy Minister  
Lindsay Wadden - Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Partnerships

Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Byron Rafuse - Deputy Minister  
Vicki Elliott-Lopez - Senior Executive Director  
Tatiana Morren Fraser - Executive Director



**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2023**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**

Hon. Kelly Regan

**VICE CHAIR**

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: Order. I'll now call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. My name is Kelly Regan. I'm the MLA for Bedford Basin.

A reminder to all of us to place our phones on silent. I'm going to ask the committee members to introduce themselves, beginning with the member to my left, MLA Young.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I will note that the Auditor General is with us in her special seat, now in the corner of the committee room (interruption). We have Erin Fowler making a guest appearance from the Legislative Counsel Office today, and the Legislative Committees Office is in attendance as well.

On today's agenda we have officials with us from the Department of Advanced Education and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing with respect to Student Housing Needs. I'm going to ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, beginning with the witness on my right, Mr. Grant.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]



THE CHAIR: I will invite Deputy Minister Grant to make opening remarks.

RYAN GRANT: Thank you, Chair. For brevity in my remarks, I'll just skip through the introductory parts.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to speak to you about student housing needs on behalf of the Department of Advanced Education. As a new deputy minister, student housing needs are a priority for me, our minister, and the entire department. I am happy to share with you what I've learned since I joined the department and talk about the team's approach to addressing this complex and global issue.

Although early in my tenure in this role, all discussions I have had with post-secondary education leaders involve student housing. Community, institution, and student needs vary and require a holistic and broad viewpoint when assessing solutions. Our successes in addressing these challenges will continue to require a large community of partners. I would like to take this time to express my appreciation to the public servants who have been working on this file. They care deeply about their work and helping students have a positive experience when they choose to study in Nova Scotia. They understand how important post-secondary education is to Nova Scotians, and that safe and affordable housing is a critical element.

In my first couple of months as deputy minister, I have seen the staff's efforts to address student housing needs. We are working closely with partners and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to understand housing needs of students and all Nova Scotians, listening to post-secondary students directly about how their needs are changing, consulting with post-secondary institutions, and exploring solutions that can help make short-, medium- and long-term improvements.

The department's work to date has informed actions like building new on-campus housing at seven Nova Scotia Community College facilities, renovating and expanding student housing at the Atlantic School of Theology, investing \$5 million to support the development of affordable housing at the Tartan Downs site near Cape Breton University, and launching an online home-sharing tool to help match students with housing near their campuses.

One thing that has been evident during my time as deputy minister is that addressing student housing is complex, with multiple factors that go beyond bricks and mortar, including broader considerations such as affordability. The department has advanced actions to help with affordability, like offering new internship and work-integrated learning opportunities to help students improve their earning potential, updating income thresholds for repayment of student assistance programs, and providing one-time grants to students most impacted by the rising cost of living.

We hope these actions send a message to students that we're taking action to help improve these complex challenges such as housing, and we're listening, just as we'll be listening today. I look forward to hearing from the committee and answering your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Minister Grant. Now, Deputy Minister Rafuse.

BYRON RAFUSE: Good morning, Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting us here to take part in the discussion on student housing.

I won't take much time this morning, but I want to build on some of the things that Deputy Minister Grant has said. We are in a time of generational growth here in Nova Scotia. For the first time in decades, our young people don't have to go west for opportunities. There are plenty of them right here. Whether it be a career in health care or the skilled trades, we are seeing students and young people coming here to study and build their life in Nova Scotia.

We know that students come here, but for them to thrive they need safe and affordable housing. My department, Deputy Minister Grant's department, and many staff across government are working diligently to create the conditions for them to be successful. Housing is a key factor in that success story. We know that in order to truly overcome the housing crisis we need more supply, and we need it at every level. We need to continue to think outside the box to come up with creative solutions.

We've been doing that over the last several years in collaboration with community, all levels of government, and individual Nova Scotian households who have room to share in their homes. Whether a student is occupying a secondary suite in Kentville or a Happipad room in Sydney, students benefit from the unique programs we've developed. We also know that students benefit when we do things like build more long-term care beds for aging seniors, freeing up housing in communities.

Students benefit when we invest in modulars for health care workers or for new public housing units in communities across the province. They benefit from the work of the HRM Task Force, which is working diligently to get 20,000 new units built faster in our province's largest university and college town.

These initiatives are not specific to students, but they open the door for them to access more housing options, freeing up supply. We know that we have a tremendous amount of work to do over the next several years to fully overcome the housing crisis, but I want to assure the committee today that we are fully committed to the hard work and the collaboration needed to support all Nova Scotians, including students, as we continue to grow our province.

THE CHAIR: We will begin our questioning. Each caucus will have 20 minutes, and then we'll divvy up the remainder of the time afterwards, beginning with the Liberal caucus at 9:08 a.m. to 9:28 a.m. MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I have a question for Mr. Rafuse since you brought it up. I wasn't really going to get into it, but Happipad: How many people have logged onto Happipad since its inception, or since it's been brought into Nova Scotia?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Rafuse.

BYRON RAFUSE: I'm going to grab that as I look here. Maybe Tatiana can get it while I'm talking. We announced it this Summer. It's a program that's been used across the country, in B.C. and Ontario. Uptake is getting there. Our numbers are showing some growth. I don't know if we reached our expected numbers yet, but that is an option which we think is going to be successful. As of November 20<sup>th</sup>, we have 200 houses and 558 renters have registered. Twenty rooms have been listed on the site and four rental contracts have been signed.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That's like a millisecond on Kijiji, just so you know. No offence, I just don't understand why we need Happipad when we have Kijiji and we have these other programs. I daresay that if you go around Nova Scotia right now and ask people how they're renting, they're renting from Kijiji and other established applications and websites. This just seems to me like trying to reinvent the wheel or adding a layer of confusion. I don't necessarily think that this is a good use of taxpayers' dollars when we have Kijiji.

In fact, when people come into my office, and I speak to them and they ask about - we started doing this a couple of months ago. I wish I would have brought the numbers, because we've been tracking how people find homes, and it's just like with news. I read an article that said 92 per cent of all news comes from Facebook. It's more than that from my office. My community is a high-rental area; Spryfield is a high-rental area. Not a single person said Happipad. We're talking about hundreds of people who have come into my office.

Listen, I appreciate thinking outside of the box. I've said that to the minister. I know that you guys are trying to do things differently. I will say this respectfully: If we continue to go at the problem the same way, we're going to get the same results. I just don't think that four people getting a rental since - I don't know when he said it was - when were those numbers for?

BYRON RAFUSE: They were as of November 20<sup>th</sup>.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: November - what month are we in?



BYRON RAFUSE: We're in November.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Okay. What I was trying to get at since this application was first announced, how many individuals - and how successful has this been, and what is actually the cost for Happipad? What is the level of success? Where is it where you're like, This thing is not successful?

BYRON RAFUSE: To elaborate on that, the numbers I did provide to you were since inception. That's what we have in place today. There may have been some renters who might have been short term who might have dropped off. I'm not sure about that.

When this was announced, it was announced as a pilot project. There will be an evaluation on this. One of the reasons Happipad was chosen is because of the service it provides that other sites do not. It provides an ability and comfort, particularly for seniors who are going to open up a room in their house - the comfort that somebody else is doing an evaluation of who's coming in, does a background check on them. That allows more people the comfort to expand their houses for this type of initiative.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I have a very short attention span, so I just want to hit your points as you say them. You said background checks. So I will say this: Every single renter does a background check. Every single renter that I know of. People are constantly coming - not only do they do a background check, they do a credit check. They do a criminal background check. This is what we're seeing now. This is the 500 block in Spryfield, that area - and I use that because it's one of the largest spots. Every single person who goes in that building now gets a background check, a credit check, and a criminal background check. That's what they're doing.

I think, respectfully, if a senior is going into a rental place, or if a senior is renting a spot, they're doing all that. Most people are doing all that - it's already happening. That's what we're seeing. If they're not, they're one of the very few. I say that knowing that this isn't just Ron Lovett and his group - they're the ones who oversee that area now. It's also individuals who are renting one place - they have one place. They're calling me up and saying, Hey, we're doing background checks, is that okay? I'm like, it's your property, you can do whatever you want.

Again, four people finding a rental place is not a success. Maybe this thing blows up and it's great and it does all kinds of fabulous stuff, deputy minister, but what has been the cost? What is the total cost of this contract? That's the only thing I need to know right now. What's the total cost that we paid for this contract?

BYRON RAFUSE: I'll give you the total cost, but then I'd like to respond to the rest of your comments. The cost of this was a grant of \$1.35 million. It was shared between the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Department of Advanced Education, and the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care. It provides free access to this program

for renters and hosts for two years. All these services are being provided. It's great that other people are doing background checks, but this agency does it for them. It's great that they're able to do it on their own. Some people are not comfortable with it or don't have the means to do it.

[9:15 a.m.]

This is a tool to allow more supply to come on the market. It allows them to address this in a means that is the easiest way for them to get to the market. Happipad does the match. Happipad provides them with the lease arrangements that the party is to sign, and also provides dispute resolution mechanisms if there happen to be difficulties.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: A couple of things. That's about \$300,000 per rental - per person who's found a rental. (Interruption) I'm just saying - \$1.35 million that we've spent on this, and four people have found a place through Happipad. You say that it's free. All these other services are free. I can go on my phone right now and download about 10 different applications that'll help me find rentals in my community.

You said that it'll help with disputes, but that's what the tenancy board is for. That's what we're told. That's what the ministers have said time and time again: If you have a problem, go to the tenancy board. They don't say, Go to Happipad - they say, Go to the tenancy board. I would dare say that respectfully, you said that they help deal with disputes, but they don't have the legal authority to deal with disputes. Unless we're missing something, they don't have the legal authority to deal with in arrears, they don't have the legal authority to kick people out of apartments. They don't have any of that stuff, so maybe they're just a mediator, and I would say they're probably saying, Go to the tenancy board.

What I would like - and maybe we'll put a motion forward later on about this - is every six months for the department to report back to this committee, because this is the Public Accounts Committee, and this is exactly what this committee is for - it's the public dollars. Again, I'm not blaming you. You're the deputy minister, I know. To see if we're getting our money's worth.

I know in the past, previous governments have been beaten up on it, everything from the Yarmouth ferry to the Film Tax Credit, to all kinds of different things that we got beaten up on and other governments have gotten beaten up on because they said it was "not good money spent." It may seem like nothing, but it is actually something. I appreciate it.

I'm just going to pivot for a moment to the housing strategy. My question to the deputy minister is: The housing strategy is something that's supposed to be very important. It's supposed to be released. It gives a path forward. I am kind of tired of report after report - I'm going to be frank on the record here - I think we report it to death, but it's something that was promised. When can we expect the student housing strategy to come out?

THE CHAIR: Eleven minutes, Deputy Minister Grant.

RYAN GRANT: As the minister identified as recently as yesterday during the announcement related to new student residences with NSCC - and, of course, has formed part of the discussion in the most recent sitting of the Legislature - a housing strategy and action plan is a commitment of government that we will meet when it is finalized and ready.

Every discussion I've had with student leadership in the time since being appointed deputy minister has very much focused on student housing, and that discussion, dialogue, and consultation is very much ongoing. When that process concludes, when that is finalized, of course we will release it. I think it's important to note as well that when actions are ready, they'll also be released and executed to, as evidenced by way of residence being announced at NSCC yesterday.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: A couple of things: I will say that in the past with reports, both the Liberal and NDP government of the past have been criticized for releasing strategies piece by piece, and not releasing it as a whole because there's something to be said for the short-, medium-, long-term vision. This was supposed to be released last Spring. We are a year behind, essentially. Can we expect this to be released within 12 more months?

RYAN GRANT: Again, what I'll say is that for the minister, the Department of Advanced Education, and myself it's very much a top priority, of seeing and advancing ways of enhancing housing. Challenges are complex, and they're institution- and community-specific. Looking at how those can be resolved, how more housing supply can be advanced, whether that is in the traditional form, if you will, of dormitory style or more apartment style, student needs are varying a great deal and changing.

If we reflect on student profiles, international students, and students who have families, what the accommodation requirements are for those different profiles again varies. Across the spectrum of the various forms of housing - on-campus, off-campus - we very much continue to look at with partners of how added supply can be advanced on all those fronts. More student . . .

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire. Sorry, he was signalling.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I am short for time, and in fairness to Deputy Minister Rafuse, I going to actually give you a minute or two to answer. I feel like I just barfed a bunch of questions on you and didn't give you enough time to answer, so I'm going to stop because I think it'd be appropriate. I just have one more question, and then we'll pivot back. Respectfully, I want to leave a little bit of time for Deputy Minister Rafuse.

Where am I? My brain. I have that on record now too.

Tuition is a big problem. I always think of this conversation that I had with a young girl in my community. I knocked on the door. I do that sometimes, just go around and talk to people. It's a weird thing that only politicians are allowed to do, I guess, but I knocked on the door and I had a conversation with her. She was older, she had finished school, and I asked her what she wanted to do. She said: I want to be a nurse. I asked, Why don't you go back to school? She was afraid of the cost of tuition.

I will say from my own personal background, the way I grew up, I was never taught to go to university, any of that stuff. You were told, As soon as you can, get off assistance, get off this stuff and get a job. That's what we were taught and that's what we did. Luckily, I had a few people who took some interest and said, The best investment you'll ever make in your life, dollar for dollar, is post-secondary education. That's absolutely true, but the cost of post-secondary education is astronomical. When I first got out of school, it was \$1,000 a year. Now it's \$5,000, \$6,000, \$7,000, whatever, a year. That's not including the cost.

If you want to go on to be a lawyer, doctor, any of these things, you're looking at, in some cases, \$30,000 a year, which is insane. Where are we - is there any thought from the department to make post-secondary education more affordable for everybody, and not hinder students with \$100,000, \$200,000? I have a sister-in-law who came out owing almost \$200,000. What is the thought? I want to keep it quick because I want to give Deputy Minister Rafuse some time.

RYAN GRANT: I will keep it quick. There are a number of pieces and elements, and it's quite dynamic. If you think about a - yes, tuition policy which currently is set by the current MOU, the relationship between the provincial government and universities and capped at 3 per cent, when we look at affordability in the general sense for students, I think there are a number of factors, including looking at the life of a student going through their education journey. A student assistance program inherently structured, both federal and Nova Scotia program to support those most in need - there's a complex calculus, but a number of factors leading into what supports would be available for a student.

I think when students are making a choice about what their education journey is, their career pathways, certainly we have a responsibility and schools, but finding ways so that students are educated on what that assistance can be as they continue to move through their journey. We're also focused on areas of looking at affordability from the standpoint of programming as well, looking at where there can be targeted accelerated programming as well. The program length can be appropriate for a student and attaching to the workforce, programs like the 2+2 program with NSCC and then connecting into universities are important in that regard.

I think all these elements are important as we continue to reflect on, among other things, what a future MOU would look like with institutions. Perspective and experiences of students continue to be very much top of mind in those discussions.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'll lead with this and then I'll bump it over. It's not a question, it's just a statement. What I will say is that we talk about job shortages and we talk about labour shortages and things like that. I do know that there were some things announced, especially around skilled trades, but what I will say is that quite frankly, there are not enough seats at NSCC. There just aren't. We need to start getting into indenturing people. I think you do three for one or something like that, but for every skilled trade, we need to start doing these things, because a lot of times we hear about electricians and plumbers, but we forget about drywallers and we forget about roofers and we forget about things that are just as important, people who deal with concrete, bricklayers, and things like that, who are just as important when it comes to building.

I think that they get left out. I say this because I have friends who own companies - small businesses - and for drywall, for example, they're like: We're paying big bucks. We can't find anyone. We don't have the time to train people because they're not incentivized. They're like, We have to get in there and do the work.

I think when you look at the picture, especially when it comes to skilled trades, I think you have to treat all of them almost equally. While it's important to have electricians and plumbers and carpenters, there are a lot of other things that are being left behind and are just as important when it comes to building.

Mr. Rafuse, back to Happipad for a second. I'll give you some time this time. What, in your opinion, will make Happipad a success?

BYRON RAFUSE: Before I address it, I want to get back to the issue around the Residential Tenancies Act and just make a clarification on that. Even though there is a dispute regulation mechanism in this Happipad agreement, they are still subject to the Residential Tenancies Act. That is there to try to get parties to agree so you can avoid that process. I would say what would make it successful - we're planning on doing an evaluation on that and, quite frankly, you mentioned maybe the committee could be asked or instructed to provide you an update. We'd be quite willing to provide the committee an update on this on a periodic basis, if that's helpful.

When we look at Happipad - at the department, if you look at the housing strategy and you're looking across the housing spectrum, government's willing to try to intervene in all aspects of that to try to free up supply, and we know from our analysis that there are 130,000 bedrooms in Nova Scotia that are vacant right now. If we can free up some of those for an affordable option for people, then it will be a success, the degree of which I can't define. If we can get at that, it will be successful.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'd say not in my house. I have too many kids and a dog and all that stuff. We used to have an office - anyway, it's just insanity. Tell Happipad to stay away from us. I might actually need an extra room, if you could help me with that.

(Interruption) Yeah, a backyard suite. Again, a great idea. What's the uptake in the backyard suite, the loan for the backyard suite?

BYRON RAFUSE: That was just recently announced. I'm going to ask Vicki to comment on that. She probably has it on the top of her head.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Elliott-Lopez, 20 seconds.

VICKI ELLIOT-LOPEZ: We've had over 50 inquiries to date, and the portal just opened up last week. Very successful so far, we think.

THE CHAIR: You have five seconds, MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I love it, it's a great idea.

THE CHAIR: Okay, time is up for Liberal questioning. Now we go over to MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: I actually received a really timely email from a student in my constituency this week, really expressing her dismay over her experience being a student in Halifax, particularly regarding rentals and her living accommodations. She lives in a building where there are three units ranging from three to six tenants per unit. It's a small family-owned rental agency, and they have about seven to eight properties, mostly in my constituency. About one to two weeks ago, she and everyone else received an email that says: "Unfortunately, due to the rental cap and market conditions, we are not going to be able to renew any leases this year. We would be more than happy to provide you with landlord references. If you want to see other apartments we have, please get in touch with me."

She and her roommates got a hold of them and asked: What else do you have that's nearby? They showed them something that was \$1,000 more a month. She really can't afford that price increase, and she doesn't know what she's going to do when her lease expires. According to the student: "If I had known that I would be moving every year I would have never chosen to study and contribute to the economy here."

I think this links back to the issue around residential tenancy protections. Obviously, everyone affected is on a fixed-term lease. We've consistently pointed out the abuses of the system. I could offer to support them going to the Residential Tenancies Program, but what would the answer be? That lease is in Nova Scotia currently available to the landlord to have signed. What would be your answer to this student and all of these students? If we do the math, there are dozens of people affected by this one action.

THE CHAIR: That's to Deputy Minister Rafuse, was it?

[9:30 a.m.]

LISA LACHANCE: Yes, sorry. I was making eye contact.

BYRON RAFUSE: Certainly we recognize that there is a shortage of affordable housing for students and across a lot of residents. I'm curious, if you could maybe explain to me the situation there again. The person who's renting has decided to take them off the market rather than rent them at an increase? Are they just asking the tenants to leave?

LISA LACHANCE: They are not renewing any of the leases that they currently have. The landlord is not renewing the leases, so that way, they become new leases.

BYRON RAFUSE: I just wanted clarification. I heard that they were taking them off the market. It didn't make any business sense to me. That is an issue, and the housing strategy attempts to get at all those types of things. There are programs that the government offers to allow new developments and affordable living units. We have an affordable living development program. We do allow developers to access that.

The student options will include enhancement of residences for students, or availability of housing for them. It will take some time to address the supply issue, but we recognize or believe that the best solution to address this issue is through supply. We will have a number of options and programs across the spectrum that will allow the supply to increase, and therefore the market conditions will allow for prices to drop or maintain at a level that people can afford.

The five per cent cap is the protection that people have right now. That's what is allowed under the Act. Other than our programs, I'm not sure what you'd like me to say.

LISA LACHANCE: I think what we're seeing, the 5 per cent cap doesn't apply when people used fixed-term leases, and we're seeing the result of this. I heard the word supply a few times there, but this is a clear example of where people are living and would happily continue living. I think that landlords - this particular agency is using what they have available to them to increase their profits and make things more difficult for dozens of people.

I might switch to Deputy Minister Grant and ask the Department of Advanced Education: How are you working with your colleagues at the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing or the folks at Service Nova Scotia to help protect student renters from this type of situation?

RYAN GRANT: What I'll first say is of course we always want the students to have a very positive experience during their journey for education. Secure housing is such an important foundational part of that as well. I have sympathy for students who are experiencing challenging environments.

One thing we referenced earlier in the committee meeting is that the need for housing is considerable across a number of different fronts, so efforts are under way to improve on-campus housing for student choice, student availability - including in moments of need for mobility, whether that's their choice or otherwise. Again, within the last two months, I'm confident of the efforts under way by institutions to look at how they can advance with more campus housing in each of the communities where our institutions reside. That's both on campus and off campus.

We are working with our partners at the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, looking at where their programs can be appropriate, including as it may connect into the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation as well to ensure that we're looking at how we can enhance the supply across all communities. In a lot of ways, the supply challenges - the more that we find solutions, the more that we address those, they'll continue to help with things like affordability with student choice and ensuring that there are appropriate living accommodations based on what the student profile needs are.

LISA LACHANCE: Student profile needs are actually something I wanted to touch on. With all due respect, one of the things I've been really concerned to hear the Minister of Advanced Education talk about a number of times was that folks could choose to stay at home and have a homecooked meal and not pay for accommodation, and that's a way to get a cheaper education in their community.

What I would say is that's not reflective of the profile of students we have in Nova Scotia. I also think it doesn't reflect where we want to go with advanced education in this province. We have a labour shortage. We have a labour-productivity issue. What that means is that people need to have the option to go back and take different types of skills and learning at different points in their lives.

With all due respect, the single-room residences that are being built are not appropriate for lots and lots of students for lots of reasons. I'm wondering, within all of the announced units at NSCC, how many are family units? How many are accessible to the standards that are required under the Accessibility Act?

The other issue with student housing is - certainly we've heard this from students at CBU - no interest in the compulsory, mandatory food plan. What's being done to address that in the new builds? How are these new builds actually going to respond to the students of the future?

RYAN GRANT: There are a couple of pieces there I'll try to sequence and move my way through, but if I miss something, please let me know.

There's no doubt - on, let's say, two fronts here - as we continue to have this extraordinary population growth, as we continue to march toward the goal of a two million population by a few decades from now, the housing needs will continue to be present. We'll



continue to need to look at a number of different styles and approaches in institutions and communities.

Yes, there will be a need for more development for the traditional form of on-campus housing, but certainly a great need for apartment-style living both on campus and off campus. Those efforts will be under way and are crucially important as well.

Regarding student profile and student needs, there are, in a lot of institutions, traditional arrangements with dorm-style and with meal plan arrangements - many, if not all, are mandatory. As you referenced, it's something we've heard through consultations with students over the last year with a number of efforts of looking at where their dietary and culturally appropriate needs just aren't met by the meal plan.

THE CHAIR: MLA Lachance. Sorry, deputy minister. I'm being signalled that the MLA would like to move on. Ten minutes.

LISA LACHANCE: I do appreciate that background. I'm going to go into another question, but I'll leave this question, which was my question: Of all the new units that have been announced, what is the makeup of those units? Not what are we going to evaluate and build in the future, but what are we doing now?

I also wanted to turn and talk toward the other cost for students. Certainly, housing is just one of the issues that creates a lot of cost stress for students. Students in Nova Scotia pay the highest tuition rates in the country. What is the department currently doing to address the other costs of being a student in Nova Scotia?

RYAN GRANT: The first part relating to the existing three residences that have been announced and are under construction at NSCC - I'll have Ms. Wadden provide a bit of background on how that residence mix exists today.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Wadden.

LINDSAY WADDEN: With regard to the three residences that are under way at Ivany, Akerley, and Pictou campuses, as the deputy minister said, we want to be responsive to the needs of students. Part of the work has been engaging directly with students through surveys, through our student round tables, and through open dialogue with student groups. That has been really helpful and helped to inform the decisions and the solutions that we've advanced so far.

In the Akerley, Ivany, and Pictou campuses, we're ensuring that a good majority are one-bedrooms suites to provide more privacy that students are looking for, and then there's the shared living and kitchen accommodations. At Akerley, for example, there will be 39 one-bedroom suites, Ivany 76 one-bedroom suites, and then in Pictou 18 one-

bedroom suites. We also are ensuring that we have a good mix of accessibility and barrier-free units, so 8 per cent of the units will be barrier-free.

Taking all of that wonderful feedback that we're getting from students and trying to incorporate it into the designs, just as we'll do as we continue to learn and engage with stakeholders and students in the next four that we're moving forward with.

LISA LACHANCE: I'll go back to Deputy Minister Grant to answer the other questions around affordability of tuition. I might expand on that too. You mentioned in your opening remarks work-integrated learning and other measures. The changes that have been made for both international students and domestic students who receive student assistance simply increases the amount of time that you're allowed to work. It doesn't necessarily guarantee that there's work-integrated learning.

In mentioning work-integrated learning, how is that going to affect affordability, including housing and tuition, for our students?

RYAN GRANT: Regarding tuition policy as a reference in previous questions, we continue to reflect on a number of factors. Of course, the student experience and affordability are at the forefront of that. We continue to have engagement with institutions about what future policies would look like, and of course have forms for understanding student experience. Yes, two months, but listening has been a very important priority for me over the last number of months and will continue going forward.

A number of factors related to affordability - we talked about student assistance as well. The government over the last three years has looked at where they can provide a one-time grant and support as well. So that's been provided, which has been multiple hundreds of dollars for students who would be most in need, as inherent in the assessment of Nova Scotia student assistance.

Work-integrated learning is a very important component. When we look at things like paid internships through Mitacs or EduNova's Study and Stay program, ways of which we can find pathways for students as they're going through their academic journey - for them to have exposures, which is really important - establish relationships with employers, but ensure that they're both labour market ready and they're also having the experiences to help them decide on what their choice will be for the next phases of life. All of these programs are very important for students.

LISA LACHANCE: Specifically about tuition, have you been discussing a tuition freeze or cap in the negotiations for the next round of the MOU? What about international student fees? As we know, they're completely unregulated and certainly an important part of our post-secondary community - but the issue around predictability, fairness, equity. You spoke of student experience. If you go around in my riding, there are many times when doors open and there are clearly far more than two people living in a two-bedroom

apartment. You can see hallways for rent on Facebook Marketplace - literally, you can have this bed in our hallway. Also, there's a bedroom that can fit up to two people.

[9:45 a.m.]

Basically, I would suggest that this mythical student experience that people once had has really changed. Around tuition, is there a plan to regulate international student tuition? Is there a plan to freeze tuition?

RYAN GRANT: As I've mentioned throughout the committee meeting, there are a lot of considerations. There are a lot of reflections that go into an analysis on what the next iteration would look like. Again, understanding financial dynamics of students and understanding again generally in affordability, what are the ways which we can support students, are all factors.

I won't prejudge how those continued discussions and analyses will evolve, but there's no doubt, again, the experience of students and their ability to pay for post-secondary education, whether that's looking at our student assistance programs, other ways in which we can support affordability - like I mentioned earlier about accelerated programming, but of course tuition policy, as well, is a foundational part of that discussion.

THE CHAIR: MLA Lachance, two minutes.

LISA LACHANCE: I might go back to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Not to belabour the issues around Happipad, but we are very concerned about Happipad as a model. I'm also concerned - I know the assessment was 130,000 rooms available across this province, but there must be some sort of goal for the investment. What is the return on investment? How will we measure success? Right now it's \$325,000 per rental contract. I'm sure that's not the goal.

What is the actual goal in terms of numbers of placements and/or per cost per contract?

BYRON RAFUSE: If you look at the housing needs assessment and our housing strategy, we did attach targets to what we're planning to deliver. On the Happipad contract, our target is to have 500 contracts in place during the assessment period, which is the two-year period.

LISA LACHANCE: It seems to be a bit of a slow start, if we're only at four and we want 500 total in the next 18 months. What is the plan to increase uptake of the platform and reach the goal of 500?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Rafuse, 30 seconds.

BYRON RAFUSE: Included in our arrangement with Happipad are promotional activities for them to undertake to promote the activities - either the accessibility or the access to Happipad. We're hoping with that, and with word of mouth of good experiences associated with this, the uptake will increase to the level that we're anticipating.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for the NDP questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the PC caucus. MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just wanted to get a little bit more clarity. I kind of had a blur of a day yesterday, so I didn't fully hear the details of the announcement, but if my notes are correct, NSCC operates 14 campuses and three community-learning centres across the province.

Can you tell me currently, prior to the builds that started in 2021, how many existed prior to that date?

RYAN GRANT: I very much appreciate the question. I'm going to defer to Ms. Wadden, who's got some background on the counts at campuses across the province.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Wadden.

LINDSAY WADDEN: Prior to 2021, there were three residences that were in existence at NSCC locations across the province. Those included residences at the Truro campus, one at the Strait Area Campus in Port Hawkesbury, and the other at the Centre of Geographic Sciences in Lawrencetown.

In Truro, there are 114 beds. That was actually built decades ago, so it was already in existence when NSCC took over from the Nova Scotia Teachers College in 1988. Then at the Strait Area Campus there are 46 beds, and at COGS in Lawrencetown there are 35. That was a total of 194 beds.

THE CHAIR: Order. I'm sorry, there's a lot of chatter going on here. I'd like to hear Ms. Wadden's answer. Thank you.

Ms. Wadden.

LINDSAY WADDEN: Those were the three that were in place prior to the new builds.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: To be clear, prior to then, in total - in the whole province - there were only three residences that existed?

LINDSAY WADDEN: That's correct - 194 beds in total at those three sites.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Could you tell me of the new ones that are being built? I think you touched on it a little bit, but there were a lot of numbers flying around of the new ones that are being built, the total bed counts. I know I've got a son who is an NSCC graduate, and there was no option for what he wanted to take for any of this housing, and privacy is key to kids. I've got another one who went to Dalhousie University and stayed in residence, and it's the seniority of who gets the single rooms, who gets to share with their friends, and you're randomly placed with people who may or may not share the same kind of lifestyle that you do.

I just wanted to touch a little bit more on the impact of the new builds, and the ones that will come on to market or come on to availability - not really market but come onto availability this Fall. Then, moving forward, I think I heard the date 2025?

LINDSAY WADDEN: As you're aware, there are three new residences under way. Those sites are Akerley - there are 100 beds that will be available in Akerley in Fall 2024 - and then at Pictou, there are 50 beds. Those will also be available Fall 2024. Then Ivany Campus, there are 200 beds. Those will be opening Fall 2025. There's a mix of different accommodation styles within those new builds. Then, of course, the announcements yesterday with an additional four builds at additional sites across the province. That will result in another 270 beds - 40 will be built in Cumberland, 90 at the Kingstec Campus, 40 in Lunenburg, and then another 100 at the Institute of Technology Campus in North End Halifax.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I guess, because I have one son at NSCC, one son in university, and one son in the apprenticeship program, I feel like I have the full meal deal of student experience at my house. I'm looking for - I think maybe this is more directed to the deputy minister - if you can describe the different relationships that are between NSCC and the Province versus the relationships that the universities and the Province have. Also, how that impacts the ability for the Province - for government - to support building campuses on the two. Can you go into detail on that?

RYAN GRANT: I'll try to keep my former technical finance official life jargon to a minimum. NSCC is, as folks know, a community college. It consolidates back with the provincial government reporting entity. There is very much a direct relationship looking at the full spectrum of assessment, project identification, looking at financing options. All of that is a more streamlined, easier pathway because of our direct relationship. Universities are independent, board-governed institutions. They don't consolidate back with the Province, and that is just a different dynamic. It's a different set of circumstances that you continue to wade through about the nature of your relationship and how that results in the role for advancing any number of initiatives, including housing investments. NSCC is publicly owned, so it's very much a connected relationship with government.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I lost my train of thought there. I just have one more follow-up, and then I'll pass it on to my colleague, MLA Young. It gives us the easier

ability, so to speak, to get these residences built faster at NSCC campuses because of that direct relationship. Is that what you're saying in a nutshell? It's much easier to build these residences and work on this relationship with an entity that works directly with the Province versus trying to - it's a totally different scenario to build at an increase capacity at universities. Is that it, in a nutshell?

RYAN GRANT: I think there are elements of that, but what I would say is it's different. In this case when we look at where there are housing needs across communities, where they reside, what those community needs are - of course looking at where we have a relationship through NSCC is looking at one pathway of enhancing on-campus or off-campus housing, including housing supply within the communities at large.

I wouldn't want the comments to be that it's somehow difficult working with universities. It's not a negative. With NSCC there's a direct relationship, so even looking at financing models it's easier in that regard, if you will, because there's a choice related to public assets.

THE CHAIR: Over to MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'll just be direct in my questions. Whose primary responsibility is it to build campus housing at universities?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Grant.

RYAN GRANT: As referenced in the prior answer, what I will say is universities are independent, board-governed institutions - their decisions through their governing bodies related to assets that they'll advance with, including on land that they have. Certainly, at the end of the day in that regard, it is those university institutions that will be making decisions.

NOLAN YOUNG: When was the last time government invested to support a housing project at a university?

RYAN GRANT: I'll refer the question to Ms. Wadden.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Wadden.

LINDSAY WADDEN: The last investment would have been the \$3 million that was announced to repair and expand the beds at the Atlantic School of Theology. That's an existing residence in the south end of Halifax, but it's a really important asset for students because many other students from other schools use those beds. That residence supports students at King's, at Saint Mary's University, at NSCAD. That investment will actually help expand the number of beds there as well, so the bed count will increase by 32 beds.

NOLAN YOUNG: Prior to that announcement, do you remember any prior government investing in student housing?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Wadden. If not, I can answer that.

LINDSAY WADDEN: Thinking back, I think that the investments that would have gone forward before that would have been the investments into the NSCC campuses that I referred to earlier. Also, there was a \$2.7-million forgivable loan that was given to Acadia University back in 2012 to support a renovation of a residence at that time.

THE CHAIR: Over to MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: What about deferred maintenance investments? Can you detail how typical it would be for a government to invest to support universities' deferred maintenance?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Grant.

RYAN GRANT: There certainly have been recent announcements related to deferred maintenance, but I'll defer to Ms. Wadden who has a rundown of them.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Wadden. Nine minutes.

LINDSAY WADDEN: Certainly, deferred maintenance is something that has happened with investments in the past years in particular. In 2018-19, there was \$3.6 million that was invested in the post-secondary sector with universities to support deferred maintenance. In 2019-20, there was another \$20 million that went to universities in the province to support deferred maintenance. In 2021-22, there was \$65 million that was invested to support deferred maintenance.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: In a letter to the Mayor of Halifax, federal Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Minister Sean Fraser suggested that in order to improve the city's application for the Housing Accelerator Fund that they increase density and student rentals within walking distance of the city's first-rate post-secondary institutions. Has either the Halifax Regional Municipality or the federal government had a conversation with your department regarding the potential to partner on student housing projects?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Grant.

RYAN GRANT: In short, I'll say no, including - not sure when that communication would have been provided. Certainly with myself, since being appointed, no direct dialogue and engagement. I only qualify by way of whether there had been previously - again, depending on when that communication had happened.

[10:00 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: And just for the committee, Deputy Minister Grant, when were you appointed deputy minister?

RYAN GRANT: September 14<sup>th</sup>.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Just to be clear, there has been absolutely no communication since you've been appointed, or anybody in your department, from Halifax or the federal government?

RYAN GRANT: Not directly with me. I will just make eye contact with - I don't believe across the department, no.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I am going to send this over to MLA Harrison.

THE CHAIR: MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: Options for housing - how does the department help create options for post-secondary students?

RYAN GRANT: Well, we've looked at a number of opportunities the department has over the last number of years, where they can play a role in catalyzing some investments. If we look at the last number of years, there has been funding that's been provided to institutions like the Atlantic School of Theology to support the repair of some of those units, to extend useful life, and to expand units as well. I think the expansion is 20-plus seats. The Atlantic School of Theology residence supports institutions within HRM broadly, whether that's NSCAD University, Saint Mary's University, University of King's College, we have students from those institutions who utilize that residence.

There has also been funding provided to Tartan Downs, a development located in Cape Breton, which would be down the road, for those who are familiar, from Cape Breton University. Then we have part of the conversation earlier in the committee, where we have a direct relationship with NSCC, government has looked at where they can advance the student housing and residences - the three that were announced and are in construction and set to open both in 2024 and 2025, and the announcement yesterday for new residences on campuses all across the province.

There are a number of different ways in which the department can work with partners, both those that have a more direct relationship with government, and those that have a very strong relationship but different in terms of universities.



LARRY HARRISON: Just for my own curiosity - Atlantic School of Theology, for instance - are there new builds, or are you renovating the old houses that are there?

RYAN GRANT: It's both. There are renovations for the existing units that are there - I think it's 65 currently. That investment, also, is catalyzing an expansion for the number of units. Very much both.

LARRY HARRISON: I was there 50 years ago, staying at AST campus, and I know that it did serve a lot of the other universities - students from King's and so on. I was just wondering if there were going to be new builds, or just the renovations that create that opportunity. I know it's a great piece of property.

RYAN GRANT: A beautiful campus - they all are - but Atlantic School of Theology is beautiful. Part of that investment also does create new units. I think it is 32 more units. At the Atlantic School of Theology in total residences, that'll bring the capacity up to 95.

LARRY HARRISON: There's a five-year plan for housing. What are some of the initiatives for that?

THE CHAIR: MLA Harrison, I just want to make sure I understand. There isn't a five-year student housing plan. Is this going over to Deputy Minister Rafuse, then?

LARRY HARRISON: Yes, the five-year action plan.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Rafuse.

BYRON RAFUSE: Certainly the government has released their five-year action plan for housing. Within that action plan, it outlines three strategic solutions: increasing housing supply; growing sustainable, affordable living; and providing programs that people need. Within those three there are actually 12 actions contained in the plan to help create more options now and into the future.

The plan actually commits more than \$1.7 billion in a multi-year agenda for short-term and long-term transformation. To get into the specifics of all those action plans, I'm going to ask Vicki to outline some of those plans that are now available and what's being contemplated.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Elliott-Lopez, two minutes.

VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: A lot of the initiatives that we have under way, we've got many short-term, medium-term, and longer-term initiatives. We know that we need to increase supply more than anything to achieve affordability. That's our primary goal. More supply means more affordability. We're building on our Land for Housing Program. We've

received over 20 proposals. We have over 300 units contemplated on the land that we've awarded to date, and of course, in exchange for the land, one of the key requirements is that they provide affordable units.

We look for at least 25 per cent of the units to be affordable, which in this case we would look for 80 per cent of average market rent. However, I will say that many of them are contemplating more deeply affordable than that.

Our Secondary and Backyard Suite Incentive Program we think is going to be one of our flagship programs. It allows people to increase density very quickly. It's a lot easier to finish your basement than it is to build a home or an apartment building. As I mentioned, we've had over 50 inquiries to date. We're getting a lot of interest in that program. It's inexpensive for us and it increases density very quickly. It reaches students as well as seniors, and we think that that will be very successful.

We know that we need skilled workers to build homes, so we're looking to our partners at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration to bring in skilled workers. We're talking to developers as well about innovative ways to lower the requirements for skilled workers. How do we . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Time for the PC caucus has elapsed. We're now over to the Liberal caucus. MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: How many minutes?

THE CHAIR: Twelve.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I need some quick, direct answers. I have a lot of questions that I want to get through in the next 12 minutes. One of the things that was brought up was: Has there been any direct dialogue or engagement with the federal or municipal partners? I guess the answer is that since you've been deputy minister, there hasn't been any.

I would like to flip that and ask: Have you actually reached out - you yourself as deputy minister or anyone in your department - directly reached out to the federal government or the municipality to have a conversation with this? Are you leaving it on the municipal and federal partners to make that first engagement?

RYAN GRANT: I will not rely on waiting for individuals to reach out. It is very much a priority for me. It has been my top priority early days in these two months to have direct engagement with university presidents. I've had the opportunity to get around the province to have those discussions and dialogues, but what I would just want to leave with the committee member is engagement is very important to me, and I fully expect on the very short horizon to have further conversations.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Respectfully, that wasn't the question. You said no, that there has been no federal or municipal engagement. My question is: Have you directly, as deputy minister - universities aside - have you made any direct ask to the feds or the municipality for engagement or a process for dialogue on this situation? You're saying they haven't reached out to you, but it works both ways. Have you reached out to them?

RYAN GRANT: As I've said, there has not been engagement so far with the federal government or with municipal leaders across the province. What I will say is again, our colleagues at the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing have constant engagement as well, so of course there's a cross-departmental view of how we can look at solutions for housing.

I just want to reiterate about priorities for the first number of weeks and months, but this is a moment in time, and my priority going forward will continue to be engagement with those relevant leaders.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm going to switch it up, but I just want to say that the reason I asked that question - I don't think it's fair for any of these witnesses to sit here and say that we haven't had any engagement with the federal and municipal partners when you yourselves haven't reached out to them. It works both ways. Deputy Minister Rafuse, I know you have, and I know your department has, but the question was to the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education.

I would say that the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been all over this. Respectfully, I know you've only been in this for two months, but the question was a loaded question coming from government saying, Hey, have you had any engagement - so that they can go out and say that there's been no engagement. The truth is that it works both ways.

I fully expect you to have engagement with the municipality and the federal government at some point - probably some point in the near future - because they are crucial and critical partners. We're seeing this with the public housing being built from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. That would not have happened without all three partners, or two partners, working together.

I understand. Not to do with anything in your response - I just wanted to clear that up.

We're going to stay on you. We are in a high inflation time. Everything is going through the roof - groceries, the cost of living - through the roof. Students are particularly hit hard. We see statistics about how many students are living near or below poverty levels, not eating. I would argue that you probably want to eat if you're going to spend your time studying. You want to have a full belly.

One of the questions I want to ask, and I think it's part of the solution, but I think it's a really easy fix. It's that students who are receiving student assistance can only work 6.7 hours a week at minimum wage. We know that there are all kinds of financial pressures on government. This is an easy thing to do. Are there any plans to remove that cap?

Having said that, I know that it's going to be very difficult for students, but I know there are a lot of students out there who want to work more than six hours a week at minimum wage. I don't know where it came in or why it came in. Everybody's responsible for this, I'm sure. It just seems so ridiculous in a time of inflation and a time where people are struggling to get by.

Can you commit to looking at removing that, so that students can work as much as they want at whatever they're willing to be paid, in a time where people are begging for labour and begging people to work? Will you, as the deputy minister, and the department commit to removing that, and allowing them to work more freely and make more money?

RYAN GRANT: We have in Nova Scotia a very generous and robust student assistance program that seeks to accommodate and provide financial support depending on the circumstances of a student. Is it a Nova Scotia resident studying in Nova Scotia? What are their needs, based on things like income generated and parental contributions? Are they studying here or are they studying elsewhere? Those are all factors related to various programs.

I would say that as we continue to understand the changing dynamic for students and looking at options for affordability, there are a number of levers within the Nova Scotia student assistance program that very much can be evaluated and looked at. What I can commit to is the ongoing analysis and reflection in looking at ways in which we can improve. This is a goal for all of us - a goal for government of having students be able to access post-secondary education, and be able to study, learn, and build careers in the province.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: This one kind of frustrates me. It actually doesn't cost government money to do this. It really doesn't. We have a labour force that is begging for more people. This is an easy thing. This isn't a multimillion-dollar investment. I know that student assistance programs are generous, but they're not increasing with inflation every year. They're not keeping up with the cost of rental increases. They're not keeping up with the cost of food.

It's not like every year there's a little extra to help students get by. In fact, I would argue that every year that goes by and the price of everything goes up, they're living more and more outside their means. In fact, I had the same argument when I was in government about income assistance and allowing people to work on income assistance. It frustrated the hell out of me because we had people who wanted to work, people who could work, and they were capped.

[10:15 a.m.]

It seems like the same punitive program that students are going through. Can you help me understand, without getting into the history of everything, can you actually really help me understand why it's 6.7 hours at minimum wage?

RYAN GRANT: To answer directly the complexity associated with student assistance, I'll be in a better position, I'll have more depth of information a week from now, a month from now, et cetera - my understanding of the complete depth of the program. Two things: One, very much take-away, if there's a specific question related to contents, details, et cetera, we absolutely can come back to you. Over the last number of years as well, reflecting on student needs and student affordability, government has provided a one-time grant for students that is material. It's been hundreds of dollars to support students who are inherently most in need as defined by accessing Nova Scotia student assistance.

We'll continue to look at ways within the program or outside the program through which we can advance priorities with affordability.

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

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I will say respectfully that one-time grants are just that, one-time grants. They don't help long term. Again, I would ask that if you take anything here today, that you go back, you review this policy and allow students to work for more than minimum wage and more than 6.7 hours. Just allow them to work. They want to work, let them work and allow them to keep their house, pay their rent, and keep up with inflation.

I want to pivot to Vicki Elliott-Lopez. Backyard suites - 15. You only have a minute, so I apologize. The vast majority of houses are zoned that they can't have a backyard suite. How do we get around that?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Elliott-Lopez, two minutes.

VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: About 40 of 49 municipalities have allowed backyard and secondary suites now. The remaining nine have indicated some interest in looking at it, so we're hopeful now that the Secondary and Backyard Suite Incentive Program has launched that they will take a second look and change their zoning practices as well.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Let's put the nine on the record. Which are the nine that do not have or do not allow for backyard suites? I think it's a great idea. Let's put the nine on the record. Who are they?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Elliott-Lopez, one minute.

VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: Can I get that list to you?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: For sure, but I will be reading it into the record. Uptake of 15 with the grant that's there, the money that's there, the loan that's there. How many, if it maxes out, how many do we think will be built?

VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: If everybody maxed out at the \$25,000, we expect about 320 under the pilot.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire, 30 seconds.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Quickly, what is the average cost for a backyard suite?

VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: It can be anywhere from \$15,000 to \$25,000 when we looked for basement suites. Backyard secondary suites separate, not attached, it can go up to about \$150,000.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire, 15 seconds.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I guess I'm not building one. I just want to thank you all for being here today. I know sometimes questions are a little tough but I appreciate the professionalism and the answers.

THE CHAIR: Order. We now move on to the questioning from the NDP caucus. Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just want to clarify that this program is also good for renovating basements into suites?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Elliott-Lopez.

VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: Yes, with a building permit.

SUSAN LEBLANC: How much time?

THE CHAIR: You have 12 minutes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: All right, 12 minutes.

I just want to circle back to the first question we asked, which was about the email my colleague received from a constituent. I just want to be really clear about what this situation is.

Many, many landlords, because of the rent cap and because the students are possibly not technically going to be full-year tenants because of the school year, use fixed-term leases. This particular situation is that every tenant of this one landlord is being told

that their fixed-term lease will not be renewed, and the reason is, the landlord says: "Due to the rental cap and market conditions, we are not going to be able to renew any leases this year."

Just to clarify that - what that landlord is referring to is that if they renewed a fixed-term lease, they would be subject to the 5 per cent rent cap, so they wouldn't be able to raise the rent by more than 5 per cent. Instead, that landlord is saying, your lease is over, but you can come and look at a different apartment that I have, but it will be a thousand dollars more a month than what you're paying now.

Does anybody in this room think that is fair or reasonable in the situation that we have right now? If you walk outside right now, we have people with full-time jobs living in their cars and in tents. Now we're going to have full-time students living in tents and cars. A thousand dollars.

My question is for Mr. Rafuse: Will your department commit to working with the Department of Service Nova Scotia and get rid of the fixed-term lease loophole so that students can stay housed?

BYRON RAFUSE: I'm glad you clarified that that actually is a responsibility of the Department of Service Nova Scotia, where the Residential Tenancies Act does lie. There are always ongoing discussions with them about the Residential Tenancies Act and what types of changes or improvements could be made to that. Those dialogues have already occurred.

In the meantime, we will continue to provide our educational programs through them so that people understand their rights and obligations under these types of lease arrangements and help them out. As of right now, when people sign a fixed-term lease, they have to realize that's a potential that could happen.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes, I get that. In fact, I would say probably with the student population, they are more likely to understand that than many other people who are being forced to sign fixed-term leases right now. That is a thing, and I'm sure there are student associations that are going, "Ding, ding, ding - watch out for this."

Nonetheless, it's a bad idea. We are going to discourage students from coming to Nova Scotia. As this person said in their email, had they known before they came to Nova Scotia, they would never have chosen Nova Scotia for a place to study. We all know that our economy relies heavily on the universities in this province and the young people who come here from other places. We count on them to stay here after their degrees and start building their lives here. But why would they if they can't find a place to live?

To me, it is insane that we are sitting around this table talking about these programs, talking about little increments, when in fact we have a serious crisis on our hands.

Speaking of that, Ms. Elliott-Lopez, I just want to go back to the housing that was announced that you were talking about. I forget exactly the investment, but we're talking about there will be some units - I forget the percentage, so you can remind me - whatever the percentage is, they will be affordable units. The definition of "affordable" in this case is 80 per cent of market value.

Again, we all know that in this market, and in the situation that we are in - with low wages, a \$15 minimum wage - no one, or very few people making living wages who are working precarious work - 80 per cent of market value is extremely expensive. In some cases in Dartmouth North, that is a heck of a lot more than what I pay on my mortgage payment. I don't know how anyone could pay \$2,000 or \$2,500 for a rental unit when that is 80 per cent and considered affordable. This definition of "affordable" has got to go.

Again, I'm talking about this as a member of the Public Accounts Committee. Our job is to examine value for money in this province. We are making these massive investments in the name of affordability or affordable housing, and if that's the definition of affordable housing, then we are not getting good value for money on those investments. Lots of people are going to get places to live, but they're not going to be affordable.

I feel like we need to address this straight on. What can you do in the department to look at that definition and figure out a better way to invest in affordable housing than offering grants to developers who are then going to put a small percentage of their units on at 80 per cent below market?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Elliott-Lopez.

VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: We work with our colleagues at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. We adopt many of their definitions because they co-fund many of our programs. We are in ongoing discussions with CMHC on a number of fronts: the household income limits, how they determine average market rent - a number of topics that we're in ongoing discussions.

What I will say is that it's why we have a suite of programs that we offer. Because we offer programs across the continuum, we would partner with Department of Community Services around supportive care environments. We support our public housing, of which we just announced over 200 new units, which is RGI. We support a number of our community housing providers. Our investments have more than tripled in community housing, and they will oftentimes offer very deeply affordable rents in perpetuity. We support our co-op housing sector, and we support developers who are offering 80 per cent of average market rent. We do offer programs across the entire spectrum for various levels of affordability.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc, five minutes.



SUSAN LEBLANC: Not to beat a dying horse, I would suggest, but I'm going to go back and ask a question about Happipad. Even if we get 500 people using this program, it would still cost \$2,600 a deal, which is a lot. That's a lot to broker a deal for someone to find a place to live. I don't know that an actual apartment broker would make that much on one signing of a lease or charge that much. For instance, my parents live in their home, could totally renovate their basement or whatever and offer housing to somebody, except they live very far out of town.

The question for you is: This 500 benchmark, which seems low, are these net new listings? If I had a listing and I was using Kijiji, but then I was like, This is a good idea, it's automatic and there's a background check and it's all of the good things that you said about it, I take my listing off Kijiji, I put it on Happipad. How do we cross-check against that, that these are brand new listings? The whole point of spending this investment is to add housing to the supply, correct? If it's just another way to advertise an apartment or to find an apartment, but there are no new things coming online, then what is the point? Is that your goal for net new listings?

BYRON RAFUSE: Certainly it is a goal to have net new and to get at those 130,000 rooms that are not currently being used. There's no way for us to be able to determine whether someone is taking a property off another platform and bringing it onto this platform, nor would we ask the provider to even try to analyze that. No, we don't know if that occurs. We do know that it will increase supply and access to these types of rooms.

The fee - although it seems large when you do it on that basis - the fee really goes to waiving the fee for the individuals to participate in this. It also goes to the promotional activities to promote the application, as well as for staff of Happipad to be located here in Nova Scotia to provide the service.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc, two minutes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I would again say it's not a gigantic investment we're talking about when we're talking about the public accounts of the Province, but \$1.35 million - then we don't know if it's actually effective in any way - there's no way to track it, as you've just said, Mr. Rafuse. I just think that this is not good value for money. I think that if there was a way to track that and find out - do some kind of analysis - if those are new units coming on into the supply of Nova Scotia. I think that would be important.

I also want to quickly ask about the student housing units that are accessible. Ms. Wadden, you talked about there being a percentage of barrier-free units. What is the price difference between a regular unit, as it were, and a barrier-free unit?

LINDSAY WADDEN: NSCC will be setting the rental levels for each of those. (Interruption) Oh, to build them. I'm sorry. I don't have that in front of me today, but we can certainly get that and provide it to the committee.

[10:30 a.m.]

SUSAN LEBLANC: That would be great because it seems to me that if we can affordably build barrier-free units, why not just build everything to a universal design so that any unit can be used by any person? I'd just love to know what the cost difference is, and if there are ways to bring that down.

When we talk about students in general, we know that the pressures on students are immense. The housing pressures are immense, tuition is immense, and financial aid for students is capped at a level that no longer covers all the expenses. We have generous programs, but they're not doing the trick anymore. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about food security for people who aren't in residences, for students. We know that most universities have food banks that are used a lot.

THE CHAIR: Order, the time for NDP questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the PC caucus, 12 minutes. MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Rafuse, this is a one-off question because if I'm not mistaken, Happipad also vets the landlords, which is different than Kijiji and things of those nature.

BYRON RAFUSE: The vetting goes for both the renter and for the landlord. That provides comfort for both, which you probably wouldn't find on another platform.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Thank you. I just wanted clarification on that because I wasn't too sure if I was right. This is basically just one tool in a toolbox with regard to housing.

Between 2009 and 2013, the number of full-time students enrolled in post-secondary education was around 3,000 students. Can you tell me how many new student housing units were built by the government during that period? (Interruptions)

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse is free to ask the questions she would like to ask. Let me be very clear to the committee members, alright? Let's let MLA Barkhouse ask her questions, and we'll let our witnesses answer the questions. MLA Barkhouse, who would you like that directed to - the deputy minister?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Yes, that would be great. Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Grant.

RYAN GRANT: I just want to clarify - the timeframe is between 2009 and 2013?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: That is correct.

THE CHAIR: That will go to whomever puts their hand up first. Deputy Minister Grant.

RYAN GRANT: Ms. Wadden had identified previously, in 2012 the forgivable loan for Acadia of \$2.7 million to support on-campus housing. Beyond that, not evident that there would be other investments during that period of time.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: That was 2012, you said. So 2013 to 2021, there was also another uptick of around 3,000 students enrolled in post-secondary education. Can you tell me how many new student housing units were built by the Government of Nova Scotia during that period?

RYAN GRANT: The two NSCC builds - we would have at the Strait Area campus with a capacity of 46 builds, and COGS would be a capacity of 35 beds as well during that period of time, so two NSCC locations.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Because I was confronted a little bit about my first question, I missed the answer. Between 2009 and 2021, how many altogether were built?

RYAN GRANT: The two NSCC campuses and the investment at Acadia University - I'm going to pause. We'll get back to you to see what the bed count would have been at the Acadia location. I'm not sure if we have that. If we don't before the end of the meeting, we'll deposit that with the committee.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: What I'm trying to do, for clarification, with the announcements made yesterday and with the four additional Nova Scotia Community College locations - what is the total number of units currently in development since 2021?

RYAN GRANT: We have the three residences that were announced under construction and slated to open in 2024 and 2025. That would be 200 beds at the Ivany Campus, 100 at the Akerley Campus, and 50 at the Stellarton location. That's 350 for that suite.

Yesterday's announcement would be the current estimate 100 beds for the Institute of Technology Campus in Halifax, 90 at the Kentville location, 40 for the Cumberland Campus in Springhill, and 40 in Lunenburg as well. That's 270. Those combined would be 620 beds, as well as the prior discussion on the investment that we referenced for the Atlantic School of Theology, which would be repairs for the existing residences but also an expansion that brings the total resident AST count up to 95.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: That's 95 on top of the 620?

RYAN GRANT: Between the two NSCC campuses, there would be the 620, and then the net new number for the AST residences would be another 32, so that would bring the grand total, the aggregate, to 652.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: That's 652 new units since 2021 in comparison to - I'm just wondering if we found the numbers of 2009-2021.

RYAN GRANT: We'll have to deposit with the clerk of the committee the response on how many units would have been associated with Acadia.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: What I'm trying to do here is get on the record that since government has formed, there has been a substantial growth in units for students. You don't have the numbers. I can't wait to see them, what was done between 2009 and 2021. Can you confirm or deny or take middle road that there has been a substantial amount since the new government was formed?

RYAN GRANT: There is considerable investment across those two waves for NSCC residences, given the historical context, including what has resided at Nova Scotia Community College. Having 620 beds for those residents who live in community, for those who would be attending school and live in communities elsewhere but need accommodations, would prefer accommodations close to campus. The degree to which those campus developments also create displacement opportunities, so if students are able to live on campus where they attend school, it then creates supply opportunities in communities at large.

Considerable investments have been made in announcing, again, the three residences that were announced previously - two of which are slated to open next year, which is exciting - and of course the 2025 opening as well.

THE CHAIR: Two minutes. MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: The department works with scads of organizations, if I'm correct - 36. Can you name some of the organizations that you work with? NSCC, of course - but what other ones do you deal with? Private career college, things like that. Can you name some of those for the record as well? I really feel that you guys work together, and I think that needs to be stated.

THE CHAIR: One minute. Deputy Minister Grant.

RYAN GRANT: With the one-minute limit, I won't itemize and run through. We have a community college. We have a number of degree-granting institutions - universities - and yes, private career colleges, which may be in the 50 or 60 range, so a considerable amount.

We also have forums. We have a partnership committee that's associated with the MOU that ensures the right individuals are continuing to have dialogue about what the needs are for the sector, institutions and student specific. We have a number of student round tables, including one very shortly. That ensures that there is a continual dialogue between the provincial government, institutions, and students, as well. Those are all very important. To your point, of course, very dedicated and frequent working relationships with all of those that have a role to play in the sector.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, MLA Barkhouse - you now have two minutes. I looked at the wrong thing there. Two minutes left. My apologies.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Okay. Maybe then we'll get those numbers, hopefully.

The Department of Advanced Education expenses were a little over, I think, \$165.1 million. That was 24.4 per cent above - or around. Can you let us know what those increased costs are from?

RYAN GRANT: I deeply apologize. I missed the reference to the first part of that question.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: The Advanced Education expenses were \$165.1 million this year, and it was an over of 24.4 per cent. I'm just asking if you can tell us why it was over - what exactly it was or what those costs were from, if you will. I know \$5 million was Cape Breton University to support the Tartan Downs affordable housing project, but what else?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Grant, 45 seconds.

RYAN GRANT: This would be - is it year over year?

I apologize. Is the question year over year, or is it currently within our existing fiscal year or the prior fiscal year? In 2022-23?

THE CHAIR: I think she means year over year, yes.

RYAN GRANT: I don't have an itemization, and I'm cognizant of time. We'll deposit with the clerk. A number of investments would have been made in prior years related to health initiatives and deferred maintenance funding as well.

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

We have time now for our two departments to make some closing remarks if they would wish.

Deputy Minister Grant.

[10:45 a.m.]

RYAN GRANT: I'll be brief. I greatly appreciate the opportunity for the experience to have a dialogue on a very crucial and important topic. It's a matter we take very seriously - I take very seriously, as deputy minister. The need to listen and to continue to understand the evolution of the student experience is a core part of our role in the department, and that will be very important to us as we go forward.

Again, I'm very appreciative of the opportunity this morning. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Rafuse.

BYRON RAFUSE: No closing remarks. I'll see you all next week.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, deputy minister. We look forward to seeing you once again.

With that, the panel is free to go. I think we have some friends in the media waiting for you to chat with you a little bit.

We will continue on. I don't think we need a recess because we don't have a cast of thousands this time. We'll go on to correspondence.

We have correspondence from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. There's a response to the PAC letter re the implementation of Auditor General recommendations. Does anyone have any discussion on the correspondence?

Order. Folks, if you could move out quietly and quickly, that would be appreciated. Thank you.

Any comments here on (interruption). Oh, thank you. Yes, I will just let the record reflect that we have now been joined by our legislative counsel, Mr. Hebb, here at the committee. No comments on that correspondence.

There was a motion left on the floor at the November 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. I believe members have been provided with MLA Leblanc's motion, "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 those programs." I see MLA Young and MLA Maguire.

NOLAN YOUNG: I find this motion for a non-partisan Public Accounts Committee extremely partisan. That would be like me starting a motion with, The NDP currently supports a carbon tax in 2023. I would never do something like that, never would I.

THE CHAIR: Are you sure?

NOLAN YOUNG: No, I wouldn't. I really wouldn't. A motion that's requesting a non-partisan committee that looks at the past expenses of provincial governments to affirm a motion that a federal NDP made on the floor in Ottawa - this is not part of the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee, it's not in the purview of the Public Accounts Committee.

I want to be crystal clear. While we support the idea of this motion, it is a matter of record that the government is opposed to the federal Liberal carbon tax, and we are acutely aware of the negative impact it is having on this province. In fact, on November 10<sup>th</sup> - and I'll table this - the Premier signed a letter with a group of other premiers supporting the removal of the federal carbon tax in all forms of heating, and I'll get that letter to you.

I can't support this motion because it is out of the scope of the committee.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: First off, I will not support this motion in its current form because they're asking to remove the tax on heating for everybody - multimillionaires, and the Braggs of the world, and everybody getting this removed. I don't think it's appropriate to be removing it for the 1 per cent or the wealthy. What I would say is if this motion that was put forward was truly a motion that was supposed to benefit Nova Scotians, it would be targeted and based on incomes and based on people who need it the most instead of a blanket to get it into the media and have a conversation, and all that stuff.

I would say in its current form, I don't support it, and I would think the NDP would be a little bit more particular on this motion. Maybe we can get some clarification if they do think everybody, even the extremely wealthy people in Nova Scotia who can afford these things do and should have this tax break and this credit which we know that a lot of them already have lots of tax breaks and lots of credits coming to them.

Chair, I would like to put an amendment to the motion, if possible, on the floor, and I would hope that it would be supported. The amendment to the NDP motion would be: The removal of tax on home heating be targeted and based on income for those who are struggling during the cost of living crisis and need it the most. That would be my amendment.

I do agree with the member for Shelburne. I think that we need to be able to have a conversation about cost of living and what's causing it. I know everybody wants to blame everything on the carbon tax, and the carbon tax is obviously having an impact on people.

There are all kinds of different things out there that are also - whether it's inflation in other areas that are impacting, and some of those things we heard here today. Housing, the cost of housing, the cost of people being hit with fixed-term leases that are doing extreme damage to people.

We're seeing - I hear it all the time - where people are receiving rent increases outside the rent cap. It's happening all over the place. The response has been to go to the Residential Tenancies Program. The Residential Tenancies Program can take a long time to get through - by that time you're homeless. By that time you're probably kicked out, and then you go through, and maybe you win it, but by that point you're still looking for a place.

There are all kinds of different things that can be had and can be done, whether it's municipal, provincial, or federal jurisdiction. I think when it comes to this, I don't necessarily think that the wealthiest among us should get another tax break, should get another tax credit. That money would be better served in the hands of people who need it the most. In its current form I won't support it, but there is now an amendment on the floor. If they want to support that amendment to add a little more clarification and direct this to the people who need it the most, then we'll consider supporting it.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'd like to speak on the main motion. If anyone wants to speak on the amendment, I'd like to hold my comment.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone want to speak on the amendment? MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: I want to thank MLA Maguire for the suggestion. I think we would be interested in looking at that further, but at this point, what we're really hoping for is a chance for all of us to come together. It's not about media hits and that sort of stuff, but to actually come up with a solution that helps Nova Scotians right now and for this Winter.

THE CHAIR: I have MLA Maguire on the amendment and MLA Young on the amendment.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I would argue that it is about media and it's about getting hits and things like that, because if we wanted to actually come together and make thoughtful suggestions, then we would take the time to actually create thoughtful motions. I'm a little confused why anyone would want to give the top 1 per cent of this province a break. Obviously we have the government - the member for Shelburne has now said that they're not going to support it in its current form. We have stated in its current form we're not going to support it because I don't believe that the wealthiest among us should get another break. They may, but I don't.



Instead of saying, Let's put it on the floor, let's vote this through, we know it's going to get voted down, and then we'll never discuss it again - why not actually have a real conversation about this and make suggestions and put things on the floor that are going to pass with all-party consent? If this is about having the right policy and working together, then we will actually do the right thing. If it's not, then we'll just go out on the floor.

I also would like to put this on the record, that I've been chastised by both the government and the NDP for throwing things like this out on the floor in the past and saying that that's what this is all about. I've changed my ways on these things and decided that we're going to work together and we're going to figure this out. I've been chastised about this over and over. What I would say is you know it's going to fail in its current form. There is an actual amendment on the floor that goes directly to the people who need it the most. This is either about the people who need it the most, or it's about being in the media.

NOLAN YOUNG: I agree with some of what the member for Halifax Atlantic said. I really believe and I firmly believe this is about sound bites. This is so outside of the scope of the Public Accounts Committee. It would be no different to pass a motion that everyone become an astronaut. It's not within the mandate of this committee. While it makes great sound bites for people's social media, respectfully - I respect this committee, I respect its function, I respect its history - and I'm going to stick to what's in the purview, what's within the mandate of the committee. Respectfully, we will not support this because it's outside the scope of the committee.

Again, I know people want great sound bites and social media and say, Look at the big bad - anyhow. That's my comment.

THE CHAIR: Are you speaking to the amendment here, or are you speaking to the first motion?

NOLAN YOUNG: I'm speaking to the amendment and the first motion, and I'm done.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I think my colleague said something about being confused or something over there, but what is confusing to me is that we have a little green book. We all know it, and we read it. In that: "established for the purpose of reviewing the public accounts, the annual report or other report of the Auditor General" - who we have present with us - "and any other financial matters respecting the public funds of the Province."

I don't understand why we have either of these motions on the floor when it doesn't have anything to do with the mandate of this specific committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. MLA Leblanc, you wanted to speak to the amendment.

SUSAN LEBLANC: To the amendment - I can address some of the other comments when I speak to the main motion again, but to the amendment - I thank the honourable member for engaging in this discussion, at least. We wanted to start a discussion. I'll get back to those other points later.

We will not support the amendment. We think that - while I agree that there are haves and have-nots in this province, the only way to make sure that this kind of benefit - i.e. a halt on the tax on home heating oil or home heating fuel - would reach everyone who it actually needs to reach would be universal. We do the same thing already with HST on home heating oil, and the carve out from the federal government on (interruption). Yes, it is true. Sir, it is true. Everyone in this province does not pay HST on home heating oil. With the carve out on the federal carbon tax, everyone in the province who heats their home with oil will not pay that carbon tax. It is a universal . . . (Interruptions)

No to the amendment.

THE CHAIR: You indicated to me that you wanted to speak on the main motion. I have a separate list for the main motion. Do you want to speak on the main motion or do you want to speak on the amendment?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I want to speak on both, but the problem is that as a Chair, you're not making sure that everybody is just speaking on the amendment. I will be more than happy to speak on both right now.

THE CHAIR: I don't always know where people are going with things.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I know, but this has gone very willy-nilly.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse, say your piece.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: While the reality is - I tend to agree with MLA Young. This is not for PAC. The amendment is not for PAC. You guys - and MLA Maguire has stated twice in the last two weeks that he has been - what was the word you used?

THE CHAIR: Chastised.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Chastised for dropping last-minute changes or amendments or anything like this. We've got to stop doing that. The clerk received this 15 minutes before - it was 8:45 a.m. You received this from the NDP caucus. That is unfair. The clerk is setting up - most of us are driving into the city. We had a whole week.

None of that matters, nor does Maguire's amendment. I called the vote last week, and this is just starting to get absolutely ridiculous. We can't have any - we don't do this. It's not part of the PAC.

I call the vote again this week.

THE CHAIR: To be clear, there is no calling the vote. People get to have their say, and then we do the vote. (Interruption)

You can chair committees the way you want to. I want to make sure that everyone has their say, which I have done.

Now, we have the amendment. Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

I see none. Therefore, we will vote on the amendment. (Interruption) A recorded vote on the amendment has been requested.

All those in favour of the amendment, please indicate, and the clerk will call it.

[The clerk calls the roll.]

[10:59 a.m.]

**YEAS**

Hon. Brendan Maguire  
Hon. Kelly Regan

**NAYS**

Danielle Barkhouse  
Susan Leblanc  
Lisa Lachance  
Melissa Sheehy-Richard  
Larry Harrison  
Dave Ritcey  
Nolan Young

KIM LANGILLE: For, 4. Against, 5.

THE CHAIR: The amendment has been defeated.

It's 11 o'clock. We won't be able to deal with the subcommittee issue. For the committee's information, our next meeting is November 29<sup>th</sup>. The topic will be Investments In Affordable Housing Programming. The witnesses will be the Department of Community Services, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Executive Panel on Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and I will just note that Ms. Elliot-Lopez has replaced Mr. Crooks as Chair, so she will be appearing there.

There is no further time, so I now adjourn the meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 11:01 a.m.]