

**HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, December 20, 2023**

**COMMITTEE ROOM**

**Committee Business**

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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

[Melissa Sheehy-Richard was replaced by Chris Palmer.]

[Danielle Barkhouse was replaced by Larry Harrison.]

### In Attendance:

Kim Langille  
Committee Clerk

James de Salis  
Administrative Support Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel



**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**9:00 A.M.**

CHAIR  
Hon. Kelly Regan

VICE CHAIR  
Nolan Young

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

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I will note that officials from the Auditor General's Office, Legislative Counsel Office, and Legislative Committees Office are in attendance as well today. We will be dealing with committee business at today's meeting. There will be no witnesses. We have correspondence here - the first piece we can deal with is from the Department of Advanced Education, information requested from the November 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting. MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Can I make a motion?

THE CHAIR: Is it about the correspondence?

NOLAN YOUNG: Well, it's a motion. It could be about whatever. I have the floor here.

THE CHAIR: We're dealing with the correspondence right now, so I'll be happy to put you on the list. I already have two people ahead of you.

We have a letter here from the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education, Ryan Grant. Any discussion on that? We will ensure that is added to the web page.

We will go on to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, information requested from the November 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting. Is there any discussion on that? We will accept that.

Executive Panel on Housing in HRM: investment in affordable housing, November 29<sup>th</sup> response. I'll open the floor for discussion on this particular matter. Anything on that?

I will say that I'm not sure that Item No. 2, "provide our committee with a detailed analysis of the value for money that Nova Scotia is getting on those affordable housing investments," was provided here. We do have a three-paragraph explanation. I'm not sure if that's a detailed analysis, but it's up to the committee whether they feel that what was given there; it's dated November 19, 2023. Do they feel that was detailed enough? All right.

Finally, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing response to a thank-you letter from the committee, as well as additional requested information. Are folks satisfied with the letter they received back?

Now we will move on to the Record of Decision, December 13<sup>th</sup> subcommittee. Members have been provided with a Record of Decision from the December 13<sup>th</sup> subcommittee meeting. I open the floor for discussion, and I've actually had a reach out that someone has a motion. MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I have two motions. My first motion is to move that the first topic be Health Infrastructure Projects with the following witnesses: Department of Public Works, deputy minister; Build Nova Scotia, executive director, Department of Health and Wellness, deputy minister; and Service Nova Scotia, deputy minister and chief procurement officer. Did you want me to read my second motion?

THE CHAIR: I think we'll do one motion at a time.

We'll deal with that motion. Is there any discussion?

NOLAN YOUNG: What was the motion, sorry?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I move that the first topic be the Health Infrastructure Projects, with the following witnesses: Public Works, Build Nova Scotia, Health and Wellness, and Service Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Do you want to actually just read what is written - what we passed out? The status update - just so everybody is clear on what we're talking about.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I move that the first topic be Health Infrastructure Projects, with the following witnesses: Public Works, deputy minister; Build Nova Scotia, health infrastructure executive director; Health and Wellness, deputy minister; and Service Nova Scotia, deputy minister and chief procurement officer.

THE CHAIR: You just read the same thing you did before. I asked you to read the status update. I want to make sure that we get everything in so that we don't have any argument afterward about what was meant or anything like that.

On the chart, it says Health Infrastructure Projects.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Sorry. Okay. "Status update on infrastructure projects progress, spending and timeline including QEII redevelopment, construction of transitional care facilities, CBRM healthcare redevelopment project, etc."

THE CHAIR: Thank you. All right. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just want one clarification and one comment. When we say, "the first topic," is the member's intention that this is just the first topic we're passing today, or does it mean that the next time we schedule, this would be the first one in the line? I want that clarification.

My second thing is we did discuss at some point striking "construction of transitional care facilities" from this topic, because we have an Auditor General's report on that. If we take that out, it might make the health infrastructure projects topic a little more robust so that we can concentrate on transitional care facilities separately.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire, I think that was a question to you.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It will be up to the committee clerk to decide when the witnesses can appear and the order. I just used it as my first motion. Sorry.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Not even 30 seconds before we started this meeting, we talked about when we broke up the topics that potentially would have been one topic with health

infrastructure projects and government procurement practices. We just discussed that Service Nova Scotia was actually there twice in error.

THE CHAIR: It's not an error.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'd like to make an amendment to the motion, please.

THE CHAIR: Certainly. I will just clarify for the member that I don't believe it was there in error. We did discuss this. However, the Deputy Minister of Service Nova Scotia is also the Deputy Minister responsible for Build Nova Scotia. That's why they're here on this topic.

By all means, if you wish to make an amendment, please do.

NOLAN YOUNG: Respectfully, that would be redundant if we were calling the same witness twice. We want the representatives who can best answer this topic. I'd like to make an amendment to MLA Maguire's motion.

I move that the record of decision from December 13<sup>th</sup> outside of the motion passed on October 4<sup>th</sup> and as well strike Service Nova Scotia from the topic we just discussed be accepted by the committee.

THE CHAIR: I will just say that referring to October 4<sup>th</sup>, where we don't have that here, makes it . . .

NOLAN YOUNG: Just what we agreed upon in subcommittee.

THE CHAIR: What we agreed upon in subcommittee was Service Nova Scotia being there. I will just point out respectfully that, in fact, they are two different topics. One is government procurement process and practice and government compliance to legislation policy. It's a large topic. Guidelines for procurement et cetera - that's a large topic. This deals with health infrastructure projects and is a smaller topic. Nonetheless, Service Nova Scotia does have an important role to play in that particular project, the health infrastructure projects.

With respect, I am saying that. I do believe it was there for a reason, upon reflection.

MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Just a little bit of clarification. We're saying the witnesses will be: the Department of Public Works, deputy minister; Build Nova Scotia, health infrastructure executive director; and the Department of Health and Wellness, deputy minister. Is that what we're saying? We're just striking the Department of Service Nova Scotia deputy minister and chief procurement officer from the list, but the witnesses stay

the same aside from the Department of Service Nova Scotia? Is that what the member is stating?

NOLAN YOUNG: My amendment was just what we talked about before the meeting. We have a representative from Build Nova Scotia for health infrastructure, and I know we had the Department of Service Nova Scotia there twice on two topics. Whoever the representative is, I think it's just there in error. My amendment was to accept what came from the Record of Decision but not MLA Maguire's motion on the October 4th, so the record is (interruption).

The witnesses would be for health infrastructure projects, you're saying? Yes, the Department of Public Works, deputy minister; Build Nova Scotia, health infrastructure executive director; and the Department of Health and Wellness, deputy minister.

THE CHAIR: I want to be sure that we all understand what we're voting on because the mention of October 4<sup>th</sup>, which wasn't in anything that was moved (Interruption) I know, but it wasn't in anything that was in the original motion, so I don't know - are you trying to move the entire list?

NOLAN YOUNG: Yes.

THE CHAIR: That's not an amendment, then.

It's a motion.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: You dirty little bugger.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire - language. That's not an amendment. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: No, if you're calling that out of order, then that's fine.

THE CHAIR: All right. We have a motion on the floor - MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'll make an amendment for the Health Infrastructure Projects - Status update on infrastructure project progress, spending, and timeline including QEII redevelopment, construction of transitional care facilities, CBRM health care redevelopment project, et cetera, with the witnesses being: the Department of Public Works, deputy minister; Build Nova Scotia, health infrastructure executive director; and the Department of Health and Wellness, deputy minister. I would remove Service Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Any comment? Any discussion?

We'll now vote on the amendment.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We have removed the Department of Service Nova Scotia from the amendment. Now we are going to vote on the amended motion, which would be that we call Health Infrastructure Projects - Status update on infrastructure project progress, spending, and timeline including QEII redevelopment, construction of transitional care facilities, CBRM healthcare redevelopment project, et cetera. The witnesses would be: the Department of Public Works, deputy minister; Build Nova Scotia, health infrastructure executive director; and the Department of Health and Wellness, deputy minister.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We have a topic. It's a Christmas miracle. MLA Maguire, your motion?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I move the second topic be Government Procurement, and I will read the whole thing, with "Government compliance to legislation, policy, and guidelines for procurement of capital projects, goods and services," and the witnesses being: the Department of Service Nova Scotia, deputy minister and chief procurement officer; the Department of Public Works, deputy minister; and Build Nova Scotia, executive director.

THE CHAIR: If you look on your chart, it's the last one that's on the chart. Any discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Excellent. Yes, MLA Leblanc, I did have you before MLA Young. You were the second person. Go ahead.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'd like to make a motion that we separate - on the third topic, we have Food Insecurity and School Food Initiatives, and I'd like to make a motion that we break those into two. In one case, we would have Food Insecurity - a focus on food insecurity among income assistance recipients, funding of food banks, nutrition, and food access funding; and the witnesses would be the Deputy Minister of the Department of Community Services and the Deputy Minister of the Department of Agriculture.

Then the second topic would be School Food Initiatives - review of school food programs, recent pilot programs, breakfast and lunch programs, food security across



province; and the witnesses would be the Deputy Minister of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Deputy Minister of the Department of Agriculture.

[9:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Any discussion?

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'll just speak to my motion really quickly. While they are connected - Food Insecurity and School Food Initiatives - they are not the same topic. I would say that food insecurity in Nova Scotia is a broad enough topic that we could have more than a two-hour meeting on it. School food initiatives - same thing. We could have a much longer meeting than two hours.

To put them together suggests that they are one and the same, and they are very different. They affect very different populations of the province. That is why I have made a motion to divide those topics so that we can look at them separately.

THE CHAIR: Any further discussion? The motion is to separate what is the third topic on the list that's been distributed into two topics. One would be Food Insecurity - a focus on food insecurity among income assistance recipients, funding of food banks, nutrition, and food access funding; and the witnesses would be the Deputy Minister of the Department of Community Services and the Deputy Minister of the Department of Agriculture.

Then the second topic would be a review of school food programs, recent pilot programs, breakfast and lunch programs, food security across province; and the witnesses would be the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the deputy minister. It says here on our list "DM to consider RCE representation" - the member didn't mention that, so I'm assuming that's not part of the motion - and then the Deputy Minister of the Department of Agriculture.

MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I didn't mention it because, as we have said before, the deputy ministers can bring whoever they want as their support people. If the deputy minister wants to bring people from the regional centres, then that's great.

THE CHAIR: Any further discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is defeated.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I move to accept the rest of the items on the Record of Decision from the subcommittee on December 13<sup>th</sup>. I guess that's that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Chair, I'm sorry. I really feel like this is not in good faith, this type of making an omnibus motion like this, because there are many things that we discussed in subcommittee that didn't make it to this Record of Decision. I would like to have an opportunity to point out the things that I wanted to.

Given that this is now a motion, my comments on the motion are the following: Under the topic of Progress Update on Actions to Improve Emergency Care, I would like to make an amendment that we add a representative from the College of Paramedics.

Under the topic of Review of social support programs (i.e. income assistance, rent supplements, etc.), I would like to add an amendment that we add a witness being a representative from the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers.

In our discussions in the last little while, we have talked about the benefit of having someone from a professional college as an "outside witness." We have heard from the government loud and clear that they don't think that outside witnesses are particularly useful at Public Accounts Committee. As I have said before, this is not something that I need to argue until I die, but I do think it's important in certain cases to have outside witnesses to give their perspective, especially when it comes to dealing with government funding and the spending of government money or the impacts of the spending of government money which is, for instance, why I would think someone from the College of Social Workers would be a very appropriate witnesses for that topic.

I really implore the committee to consider these mild amendments and make sure that when we are meeting as a committee with witnesses, that we are having the most robust and effective meetings as possible.

THE CHAIR: Any further discussion?

All those in favour of the amendment? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The amendment is defeated.

Do we have any further amendments to the main motion? MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I know we just discussed the October 4<sup>th</sup> thing. My motion was excluding that. That's part of the Record of Decision. It was just the topics. Just a point of clarity, that's all.

THE CHAIR: I was going to move onto that one after we were done there, so okay.

All those in favour of MLA Young's motion? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Now we have to deal with other items. MLA Maguire's October 4<sup>th</sup> motion passed, and the motion was that at some point we bring Communications Nova Scotia to this committee to discuss communications around health care, but also communication around government spending. The witnesses would be the deputy minister and anyone else they feel is relevant to the discussion.

That motion passed. October 4<sup>th</sup>, was that in camera?

KIM LANGILLE: That would have been at subcommittee, but this was approved at subcommittee.

THE CHAIR: All right. Do we have a motion regarding - MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: We had some really good, fulsome discussion at subcommittee, and generally when topics come through - when we have new topics - we would put them through subcommittee. While I have the floor here, any topics that are outside of what was submitted, and it just comes through whatever avenue, I would recommend they come back through subcommittee.

With that, I move that we adjourn.

THE CHAIR: The October 4<sup>th</sup> motion . . . (Interruption)

GORDON HEBB: You've got to call the vote on the motion.

THE CHAIR: Okay. So I'll call the vote on the motion by MLA Young to adjourn.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: One second here.

NOLAN YOUNG: It's not debatable.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We have a motion.

NOLAN YOUNG: We moved it.

THE CHAIR: It says here that it passed. He's right - no one moved the motion, and he has now moved to adjourn. We can't debate it because no one moved the motion.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Sorry . . .

NOLAN YOUNG: It's not debatable.

SUSAN LEBLANC: It's not debatable? I didn't even know we did a motion to adjourn in this room.

THE CHAIR: I've never had it happen before, either, I have to say, but there we go. (Interruption) MLA Young has - unparliamentary . . . (Interruptions)

KIM LANGILLE: You have to vote.

THE CHAIR: We have to vote on this. I'm sorry. MLA Lachance.

NOLAN YOUNG: No, it's not debatable.

THE CHAIR: Point of order.

NOLAN YOUNG: Point of order.

THE CHAIR: Point of order over there first. She did a point of order first . . .

LISA LACHANCE: Actually, I think it's a Point of Privilege, so thank you very much. I just really want to call attention to the language that's being used in this meeting. I think it's been off-mic both times, but it's not appropriate. It's a homophobic slur.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: "Bugger"?

LISA LACHANCE: Yes. And you of anybody should know that, because it's most often used in the U.K. in that way. In North America, it's not. I can give you a graphic description of what it means. (Interruption) No, I'm going to finish.

THE CHAIR: Let her finish. She is making a point. Just let her make - let the member, sorry . . .

LISA LACHANCE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: My apologies. Let the member make their decision.

LISA LACHANCE: I recognize that it was off-mic, but it's happened twice. It's unacceptable. This is why we have a requirement to use parliamentary language when we

meet. We shouldn't be using slurs or nicknames or anything of any kind. It's really - the root of a lot of our language traditions are inappropriate.

I suggest that we communicate more professionally when we're sitting in a legislative committee meeting.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, MLA Lachance. Which is why I noted that people are to use parliamentary language when we're in this particular chair. I'm sure that the member in question will take your interjection to heart. Thank you very much.

We have a motion on the floor to adjourn.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

[The committee adjourned at 9:26 a.m.]