

HANSARD

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COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Tuesday, November 17, 2020

Legislative Chamber

Legion Capital Assistance Program

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
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WITNESSES

Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage

Natasha Jackson
Director of Communities Nova Scotia

Bill Greenlaw
Executive Director of Communities, Sport and Recreation



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2020

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

2:00 P.M.

CHAIR
Rafah DiCostanzo

Vice-Chair
Ben Jessome

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and I'm Rafah DiCostanzo, the MLA for Clayton Park West. Today we will hear from the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage regarding the Legion Capital Assistance Program.

Please turn off your phones and make sure they are on vibrate. In case of an emergency, we will exit from the side doors, go down the hill to Hollis Street, and gather in the courtyard of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Please keep your masks on during the meeting unless you are speaking, and please try not to leave your seats during the meeting if possible.

I suggest also that we should take a break after one hour. That will be at three o'clock for 15 minutes, and then we will extend the meeting to 4:15 p.m. Is that okay with everyone? We agree? Thank you.

I will start with introductions, starting with Ms. Roberts.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Before I introduce our witnesses, I just wanted to recognize that last Wednesday was Remembrance Day, and how hard it must have been for all our veterans not to have the usual gatherings and the usual celebration and giving tribute to our veterans. I'm sure you'll be talking about that as well. I thank you for being here, especially in November.

From the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, we have Natasha Jackson, the Director of Communities Nova Scotia, and Bill Greenlaw, Executive Director of Communities, Sport and Recreation. If we could start with your opening remarks, please.

BILL GREENLAW: Good afternoon. My name is Bill Greenlaw, and I am the Executive Director of Communities, Sport and Recreation at the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. I'd like to thank the members of the Veterans Affairs Committee for requesting that the Legion Capital Assistance Program be on the agenda today, because it's an important initiative.

Legion buildings play significant roles in helping to strengthen communities. They are the cornerstone of communities: places where veterans socialize, and where communities mark some of their most important events.

The intent of the Legion Capital Assistance Program is to assist Legion facilities with repairs and capital upgrades. This is a unique program in Canada where funding is exclusively set aside for capital upgrades at Legions. This program was created in partnership with Legion Command and is administered by the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage to honour veterans for all they have given to Nova Scotians and Canadians.

Legion Command is an umbrella organization that has oversight to regulate the general policies and activities of all Legion branches within the province of Nova Scotia and the territory of Nunavut. Legions in Nova Scotia are first and foremost supported by Legion Command. The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage administers the Legion Capital Assistance Program on behalf of Legion Command.

I would also like to comment on the impact of COVID-19. We understand from hearing from communities that it has had many effects on Legions due to loss of revenue and to social distancing requirements, although to date we haven't seen any effect on the Legion Capital Assistance Program, as applications were due just as COVID-19 was beginning. Many of the Legions that receive funding were able to use this opportunity to complete renovations during lockdown.

We've begun discussions with Legion Command to better understand the needs of Legions during these challenging times. Natasha Jackson, the Director of Communities Nova Scotia for our Department, will now walk you through a brief description of the Legion Capital Assistance Program.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Jackson.

NATASHA JACKSON: Good afternoon. Legions play a significant role in Nova Scotian communities. They provide gathering places where people of all ages can connect. They hold many member events and, as was noted, Remembrance Day celebrations, and receptions are first and foremost.

More than that, the 102 Legions in Nova Scotia are also open for important community events such as weddings and birthdays. This is one of the ways that Legions generate revenue - through facility rentals. Numerous not-for-profits use them for hosting fundraising activities and cultural activities. Many Legions are also becoming warming centres when called upon.

Unlike other provinces across Canada, the Government of Nova Scotia has a unique relationship with its Legions. In 2010, the Legion Capital Assistance Program was created through a partnership between the Province and Nova Scotia Nunavut Command which has continued to evolve. The program is one way we demonstrate our gratitude to veterans for all they've given and continue to give to Nova Scotians. The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage takes great pride in being able to administer this capital grant program, created to assist those Legions in maintaining safe and accessible facilities.

The program was previously managed by the former Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Affairs, but in 2016, the program was moved to the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. The annual program budget is \$100,000 and the Legion Capital Assistance Program provides funding of 50 per cent of the total cost of an approved project up to \$10,000.

If the total value of all applications received each year exceeds the total program budget, Legion Command will provide a prioritization of the projects to be funded. Staff at the Department are very committed to working with organizations not unlike the Legions to ensure that they are supported throughout the application process.

Eligible capital assistance projects under this program include necessary structural repairs to meet building code requirements, repairs and replacement of roofs, doors, windows, furnaces and heating systems, onsite sewage systems, wells and water treatment, and other emergency situations deemed eligible by both the Department and Legion Command. Since 2016, the Department has distributed nearly \$620,000 to Legions for about 88 projects - this includes an investment of \$110,000 to 16 Legions this year alone.

As mentioned, the working relationship between Legion Command and the Department continues to evolve. An annual meeting between the Executive Director, Valerie Mitchell-Veinotte, and the elected executive of Legion Command is held to discuss changes needed for the Legions and make adjustments where possible. These meetings have resulted in, over the last four years, changes to allow an allocation of 100 per cent of the grant from a two-payment system; an earlier deadline to receive applications, which provides the Legions with more time to take advantage of the building system; and the opportunity to share with Legion Command other grants that the Department has available that Legions can apply to.

This year, as a result of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, and on the advice of Legion Command, we actually extended the annual deadline to the end of April to allow those Legions adequate time to respond.

In the fiscal year 2018-19, there was an additional investment made into the fund. Due to a high number of applications received that specific year, we were able to access extra funding, which more than doubled our annual support. We were able to provide over \$202,000. As a result of this investment, we are seeing an annual demand for this program that better matches the program budget.

While annual funding for the Legion Capital Assistance Program is limited to \$100,000, the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage also makes additional investments in Legions across the province through our other programs. This is one of the benefits of having the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage administer this grant program.

As the Department makes an effort to help all organizations access programs that they may not themselves be aware of - or be aware that they're eligible for - we're most notably encouraging applicants to make their facilities more accessible. Through the Community ACCESS-Ability Program, we are working towards the province's commitment to make Nova Scotia accessible by 2030. Of course, this includes Legions.

There is a significant amount of work being done to make Legions easier to access for their members and other members of the community. Since 2017, we have invested tens of thousands of dollars to improve accessibility of Legions. This includes improvements to the accessibility of their washrooms as well as paving parking lots and replacing floors.

Last week, through the Community ACCESS-Ability Program, we announced an investment of over \$32,000 to five Legions across the province. As Bill mentioned, this year the Community ACCESS-Ability Program has been available for organizations to apply for accessibility issues related to COVID-19, accommodating physical distancing.

Another example of the program administered by the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage that has supported Legions was, in fact, the Community Food Literacy and Access Fund. This year, the Bear River Branch No. 22 was awarded \$4,500 for a community outreach program to expand their community kitchen.

With this funding, the Legion is delivering food literacy workshops through a live stream. Volunteers along with local dieticians and chefs will offer food preparation, gardening, and preservation demonstrations online. With the help of local churches and the Bear River First Nation, the Legion also has plans to prepare and distribute food to vulnerable residents in the community.

The bulk of provincial investments in Legions, however, remains through the Legion Capital Assistance Program. So far this year, we've seen many excellent projects receive funding, including a heat system replacement in Sydney, roof repairs in Lockport, and a new entrance in Stewiacke.

The Wolfville Legion is in the process of growing. Over the past three years, membership has doubled. Like many other Legions, they were closed in March due to COVID-19. However, they were able to use the closure time to complete the renovations funded in part by the Legion Capital Assistance Program. Also, this year, we provided emergency funding to the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 92 in Freeport, Digby County, which is in the process of receiving \$10,000 for siding replacement after a storm damaged the side of the building.

Over the past five years, we've seen trends in the types of capital improvements made by Legions, including heat pumps, energy-efficient windows, replacement of roofs, structural repairs to foundations, and in particular, areas of electrical work to bring them up to code. These investments and the associated projects will help sustain Legions into the future.

Lastly, last week the federal government provided a Veterans Organizations Emergency Support Fund, which will allow Legions in our area to access \$14 million earmarked for one-time grants to assist with their operations due to the impact of COVID-19. With that said, we are optimistic that Legions will be able to access funding to support their continued operations in the days ahead, or at least through this time.

With those opening remarks, I will close. We are happy to answer your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Jackson and Mr. Greenlaw, for your opening remarks. We will start with our questions and answers. If I could remind everybody to wait until I call your name for Hansard. Also, I'm keeping a list of people who put their name forward for questions and we're starting with Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you kindly, Madam Chair. I appreciate your time here today, folks.

[2:15 p.m.]

Ms. Jackson, you referenced the occasional use of Legions as warming centres. Can you chat a little bit about how the program may impact or positively reinforce the Legion's ability to provide that service?

NATASHA JACKSON: Thank you for the question. I guess to answer the question would be to say that with the capital improvements to the buildings in particular - I think I did mention areas around heat pumps and electrical - it has allowed Legions to be open at times to support those in their community who may be in need.

One area that I can share with you is that a lot of times Legions do have large industrial kitchens as well. That provides an opportunity for members of the community to be served in those times.

BEN JESSOME: You referenced several programs at CCH that were kind of piggyback programs at times that can be coupled with the use of this particular program. Can you expand a little bit on what some of those programs are and how they intertwine with the Legion Capital Assistance Program?

NATASHA JACKSON: When we first inherited the program from Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Affairs in that first year, a great example was a Legion - and excuse me for not knowing the exact name of the Legion - it is in the Tri-County area of the province - the Legion applied to us because they're co-housed with two other community organizations, a daycare and a recreational facility, but the Legion owns the building.

In that case, what we were able to do was provide a grant to deal with the roof through the Legion Capital Assistance Program and the other portion was supported through our recreational facility funding. The building ended up having new windows and roofs within budget. That would be one great example. I think that speaks to how we're able to marry the programs together.

In saying that, the Community Food Access and Literacy Fund is one. Those grants go out to community organizations that are looking to support communities with food security issues. We have had occasion marrying this program with the Festival and Community Event Development Program, which is another program that the Department has. Let's say a community group is using the Legion as a space to host something. We will do the work with our colleagues across the Department to help support through Festival and Community Event Development funding, but the Legion could have been forecasting activity in the course of a year to do that type of activity.

Another program would be - the last one, and most notably - the Community ACCESS-Ability Program. We do tie that program with the Legion Capital Assistance Program on a regular basis. If a Legion comes to us and says that they need to have the floors, the doors, the washroom, they'd like to pave - the Legion Capital Assistance Program doesn't actually pay for paving, but we would contact our colleagues and work to make sure that those projects are looked after.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP. Ms. Roberts?

LISA ROBERTS: Thanks for your time here. I know that in your Department you administer and touch many programs and many relationships with many different organizations, so I appreciate the opportunity to also understand how CCH works a little bit more by a focus on this particular program.

I was curious about the unique relationship - I think you suggested that it was unique across Canada, but then maybe it's also unique in how CCH is working with Legion Command versus how you would work with arts sector organizations or recreation sector organizations. I wonder if you would just expand a little bit on that.

NATASHA JACKSON: In the remarks, we do talk about it being unique. The relationship or the decision to create a program is unique in Canada. Across Canada, there is not an agreement between Legion Command and a province to provide capital assistance to their buildings. That is a unique relationship.

The other part of the relationship that is unique is the arrangement that we have with Legion Command on the applications. I think I mentioned that when the applications come in, it is the requirement of CCH to make sure that the applications are complete and that all the information is there. Then we provide that information to Legion Command for Legion Command to make a decision on prioritizing the list of applications, and then they provide that back to the Province, as we have the responsibility to administer the funds on behalf of the Province. So the Minister approves and sends out those grants, but we have the unique relationship in that Legion Command is part of that process but they clearly defined what areas they wanted to be involved in. They did not want to be involved in the front-end piece.

I wouldn't say that it's unique in terms of how the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage works with communities. I think it's actually in keeping. We oftentimes will work with community organizations or community leads to figure out how we can best work with them and help inform program delivery and decisions.

In the arts world, to go to your question, those decisions and recommendations for funding are made through a leadership council. We do the work with communities and organizations to make sure that we're best serving those communities. That would not be unique overall, but the other pieces are. Hopefully, I've answered your question.

LISA ROBERTS: That's helpful in terms of understanding how CCH works. I am very aware of it being a very important department and one of the departments that is most accessible to community, and also for MLAs who are looking for ways of supporting organizations in the community that are serving different communities. I appreciate hearing that.

You mentioned the role of CCH in terms of ensuring that applications are complete. Do these applications reflect on or capture the operational funding health of the organization as a capital investment is contemplated, or are the considerations around operational funding and capital funding considered completely different?

NATASHA JACKSON: In the case of this program, they are considered separately. Capital assistance is really related to that capital assistance project, and they must demonstrate their ability to contribute to the project, but we don't get into the operations of that organization.

THE CHAIR: We move on to Ms. Miller.

HON. MARGARET MILLER: Thank you very much for being here. I'm very fortunate that I have five Legions in my constituency. I speak to members of the Legion often and go to Legion events often, which is always a pleasure to do, except this year has been an exception to any of that.

I know that the Enfield Legion has been the recipient of grants for doing their kitchen replacement, and I think they're working on something else now, with a dumpster sitting outside. There's something going on there. Elmsdale has had flood mitigation programs. There have been a lot of good programs.

One of the things I've found with these community organizations is that they're only as successful as the person writing the grants. If they don't have strong support for grant writing, they're not as successful. What is there in place for Legions that don't have that ability to have successful grant applications writing? Is there help for them?

NATASHA JACKSON: You're touching on two pieces with that question. One, in terms of how Legions get their support organizationally, that is provided through Legion Command. However, when it comes to them making application to our programs, we do provide assistance. That assistance can be to ensure that, in some cases, you could apply for a grant and if you don't have your signature on it, it's turned back. We're actually going to do the work to make sure that it's turned in and that things are added up properly so that it can be fairly judged. All of the program officers across the Department pretty much provide that kind of support. Legions would be no different.

MARGARET MILLER: I know there's only a set amount of money available, and I believe Legions can only apply every four years for an application for a grant. What happens if the money is gone? Do they have the opportunity to go to the top of the queue for the next year or do they have to reapply? How often does the money actually run out? Do you run out, or is it fully subscribed?

NATASHA JACKSON: First, to answer that, a Legion can apply every two years. Feel free to ask follow-up questions because this is a little bit difficult to manage, so I don't mind more questions about it.

A Legion can apply to this program every two years and they can be eligible for funding. However, if the asks for first-time people in the queue are full, they're not considered. They're eligible if the asks in that year are less than. So, if it's \$100,000, we get \$90,000 worth of asks. Any applicant who applied the year before - two years ago - may be eligible to be considered to make up the last \$10,000.

Then in the following year, you can't. If I get funding this year, I can't get it next year. The second year, I'm eligible if there's not enough money. In the third year, you're absolutely eligible to come back into the queue. Oftentimes, we will have conversations with Legions around their projects and what the most urgent project is that needs to be done.

If they've got a number of pieces that are done and they have their quotes for those projects, we'll say you have \$10,000 here to do this. Sometimes Legions will actually opt for a smaller project than \$10,000 because it is the most urgent one. They're going to hope that maybe in the second year, they can actually compete more for those funds.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Jackson. I wonder if my colleague would allow me to ask one quick question referring to something Ms. Miller has mentioned. She has five Legions and I have zero in Clayton Park West. I'm wondering why? The nearest one is in Fairview. I would love to have a Legion. We have a lot of population in Clayton Park West, but we don't have one Legion. I'm wondering if anybody knows why that would be.

BILL GREENLAW: I actually don't know. I think it's a Legion Command question, but if you'd like, we'll go back and get an answer for you on that. I think it has to be initiated by the veterans, but I'm speculating. We'll go back and get an answer for you on that.

THE CHAIR: I would love to know. Thank you very much. Thank you again for allowing me this question.

We move on to Ms. Masland.

KIM MASLAND: Thank you for being here this afternoon. I have to say out of all the government departments we have, CCH is my favourite. I'm sure it's the favourite of all MLAs here. You guys do incredible work with our community organizations and it's certainly appreciated, especially with our Legions.

You mentioned in your comments about \$14 million being earmarked to help with operations with COVID-19. We had representatives from Nova Scotia Nunavut Command with us in our last meeting, and one of the things that they actually talked about is that we have many Legions struggling just with operation costs. The Winter's coming, heating costs - those types of things.

Can you explain exactly what this \$14 million earmarked will be for, what it will do?

[2:30 p.m.]

NATASHA JACKSON: The announcement was made by the federal government on November 10th as their federal response. Our understanding is that \$14 million is being set aside for the operational costs that Legions are bearing as a result of COVID-19.

In terms of a relationship with Nova Scotia Nunavut Command, we were able to reach out to find out how the money would be distributed. The decisions and the program processes are being worked out by Legion Command with the federal government, and Nova Scotian Legions will be able to access those operational funds through Legion Command.

Legion Command, on behalf of the Province, will be making sure that those eligible operational costs are addressed. Given the relationship we have with Legion Command and how they look after the Legions in the area, I feel very comfortable saying that they would be addressing the most pressing needs that Legions would have related to operational pressures.

KIM MASLAND: So CCH will have no role in the administration of that, and that money will not affect or change what is going to be given out for future capital projects?

NATASHA JACKSON: You're absolutely right. Legion Command will look after this fund, but our Legion Capital Assistance Program as well as any other programs that the department may have to offer that Legions are eligible for - those would continue. It would not impact.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to Mr. Ryan.

MURRAY RYAN: Thank you once again for being here this afternoon. Earlier in your presentation, you spoke about the LCAP being cost-shared - essentially 50-cent

dollars. This year is unlike any other year. Legions have been closed for many months, and had to deal with capacity limits placed upon them when they did open. As a result of this, their ability to fundraise and generate revenue through normal operations has been impacted.

I'm wondering how COVID-19 has impacted the Legion's ability to be able to match any of the approved funding that they received back in the Spring.

BILL GREENLAW: First of all, the Legions would bring that forward to Legion Command. I think that Ms. Mitchell-Veinotte, when she spoke at the committee last month, was very clear that issues of operational pressures, et cetera, would go directly to her at Legion Command. We would certainly entertain a discussion with Legion Command about some problem-solving around that, if that is, in fact, an issue.

As your colleague said, the department is very creative and likes to work with communities and tries to problem-solve. We try to leverage other funding programs, so I don't think that this would be unique in our ability to try to look at that and to find a solution to help these important community assets.

NATASHA JACKSON: If I might, I think you're raising something that we will be able to raise with Legion Command. We do have an annual meeting with Legion Command; it's actually set for December 15th. We can ask that question and we do. We go through and talk about the status of Legions. That would be our opportunity to hear if there were any other issues. If they're feeling that there is an impact to the program, that is their opportunity and they do take that opportunity to share with us how we may make those modifications. I would say: to be determined.

MURRAY RYAN: Thank you very much for the information. It's good to know that CCH has that flexibility in any year, but especially this year. As we can all well imagine, Legions are facing many challenges.

In relation to the overall program with the three-year window to apply, you apply this year and then you have to essentially sit out for two years, unless it's an emergency. This year, with upwards of \$200,000 being made available for Legions, is a bit of an outlier from the normal \$100,000-\$115,000 range. But historically, that equates to about 16 Legions on average being helped per year. If you put it into that three-year formula, it works out that a Legion gets funding about once every six years.

I'm just curious: do you find for Legions - is that sufficient? Is that meeting their needs across the board? Or is that something that needs to be tweaked a bit?

NATASHA JACKSON: Thank you for the question, actually, and I probably should have added it into a previous response. The first piece is that Legion Command and

the Province set up the criteria for the program, so part of the decision about how the grants go out was made in 2010 in conjunction with Legion Command.

Secondly to that, although the program is open to all Legions, not all Legions call upon it as part of their portfolio. They make those decisions and they know that they're competing internally for the funds, and so albeit a Legion may not seemingly be funded for six years. When we look back at who's applied and what the trends are, they've identified when they have a need to be addressed and they apply, and then again we go to Legion Command for them to make those types of decisions.

There are instances where outside of the outlier year, as you've called it, that we may have a year where we have 16 Legions who have applied, and the decision or the recommendation from Legion Command is actually to provide funding to the 16 versus what might seem - it's only those top 10. They can make those decisions based on that. We rely upon Legion Command to help make those decisions with us.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: Thank you so much for being here. I'm pleased that you are. I'm a Legion member. I've never fought in any wars, but I enjoy the Legion. It's a very wonderful place to attend functions. It's one of the largest buildings in my riding of Waverley, in particular, for holding community meetings and so on.

They're going through a lot of problems with COVID, and they're just getting started up. We used to have a weekly luncheon on Friday afternoons. It doesn't exist any more, and I think the reason for that is most of the workers at that - well, the average age was probably in their 80s, and they're just finding it very difficult to get out, especially with COVID. That has been stopped, and I don't know if that will ever begin again.

They do a lot of good work, and they do apply a lot to the Command and through your CCH, and have been very successful in some of the projects that they've been doing.

I guess because of the fact that veterans are disappearing as far as the number of members that we have, I'm wondering if CCH is having many conversations with the Command to talk about possible ways of helping to increase membership and that sort of area. Maybe not, but it is a concern for the Legions themselves.

NATASHA JACKSON: It's a great question, and if you bear with me, I'm actually going to take off my Legion Capital Assistance Program hat and put on the Communities Nova Scotia hat. For us, Legions play a huge part in communities as a piece, but communities are really important and the fabric of communities is really important.

What my response to that would be is you've raised a good point, and it's something that we can take to the meeting on December 15th to reassure Legion Command that the

Communities Nova Scotia piece of the equation - we can actually have a conversation with them to see what we may be able to do to assist in that area.

BILL HORNE: I guess quickly, a follow-up would be to the fact that when they apply for this funding, is it done between the two of you to make a decision - Command as well as CCH?

NATASHA JACKSON: Could I ask for you to repeat that question?

BILL HORNE: You're applying for the once-every-two-years funding - I'll leave it at that. I'm wondering just if you are involved in any of the decision-making, or it's normally up to the Command itself?

NATASHA JACKSON: Okay, sorry. Thank you for clarifying. Staff of CCH ensures that an application has everything for Legion Command to make the decision, and then prioritizing all of those applications. We're not involved in making the decision related to the actual Legion Capital Assistance Program.

THE CHAIR: We move on to Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I just got a quote on a roof and it was more than \$10,000, and I just am wondering if there is a Legion that has a significant capital project that is going to be significantly more than \$10,000 and it's not so easy to necessarily hive it up into multiple projects, how do they handle that? How do you work with them?

Is it possible for a Legion to apply for funding to pay down a mortgage? I don't know if Legions ever take out mortgages, but if you had to do a \$40,000 or \$60,000 project, could you apply every two years for \$10,000 to pay down against the principal? I don't know if that is something in the realm of how the department would work.

BILL GREENLAW: I guess the direct answer is that funding is project-based. As you all know, we're accountable at the end of the day to the Auditor General, so there has to be an investment and a report on a finished product. That would negate the ability to pay down a mortgage in future, because the project would go on forever.

The funding is project-based and it's for that project in that year, so they have to report back that the roof was completed. In some cases, we have to have photographs of the roof to prove that the actual roof was done, et cetera, for our accountability back to the Auditor General.

LISA ROBERTS: That's good to hear, just to have clear in my own mind.

I know that this particular funding stream is one of many that you administer, and not the largest part of your portfolio. If you compare this \$100,000 that is available on an

annual basis and the number of applications that come in, how does it relate to other funding or grant buckets - I want to call them - in terms of how much demand there is to the amount of funding that you're able to provide.

BILL GREENLAW: We talked about the special relationship - having \$100,000 that's set aside specifically for Legions - so the competitive ask is therefore reduced on an annual basis compared to our regional capital assistance program - that's opened up to the province every year, so you could have in theory 1,000 organizations applying for that money. If you divide that up, the pot would perhaps be proportional.

[2:45 p.m.]

That's kind of an academic-y kind of answer, I realize. I think the uniqueness of knowing that there's \$100,000 - if Legions don't have to compete against recreational facilities or other community assets for capital support, I think it covers that basis.

NATASHA JACKSON: The only other piece that I would respectfully add on would be the demand on this particular program is not the same type of demand that we have on other programs, for the reasons that Mr. Greenlaw raised. On average, only one to two Legions per year may not be funded, because most likely they're not eligible, versus the other programs that Mr. Greenlaw would be raising, that would have several that would be waiting. The demand on the program is less than a typical Communities, Culture and Heritage program.

THE CHAIR: We move on to Ms. Masland.

KIM MASLAND: I'm wondering, are there any modifications that you feel could be made to better the program? Increased funding? I think about the cost of building materials right now. Building materials have tripled in cost. My colleague talked about the quote on a roof. I also had my roof done and I know what it cost, and it was well beyond \$10,000.

Just wondering if you feel that there are modifications that could be done to the program to make it better.

NATASHA JACKSON: I think we need to have the conversation with Legion Command, which we do every year, to try to adjust the program. They are strategic in asking what questions and in what areas they would like to have the program changed, and then we're able to try to respond to that in the best way possible.

KIM MASLAND: I'm curious to know, have you ever had a conversation or met with the Minister responsible for Military Relations to talk about these types of programs for the Legions?

NATASHA JACKSON: I have not.

THE CHAIR: We move on now to Mr. Horne again.

BILL HORNE: I'm wondering if you have some understanding of how the Legions are doing in general. Are they all being successful? Are there some thinking that they may have to close up or come under some other local community organization? I'm just wondering if you would have some knowledge of any of that.

NATASHA JACKSON: We are contacted by Legions generally related solely to capital assistance projects, and then they may apply for others of our grant programs for activities they may do, but we haven't heard anything directly from them regarding having to close. That's directly from Legions. However, it is during those annual meetings where we may hear if there are cumulative issues, but we generally don't hear about individual Legions and the state of those individual Legions. That's a relationship between the individual Legion and Legion Command.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Horne for a follow-up.

BILL HORNE: I don't have one.

THE CHAIR: We move on to Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Again, recognizing that you're not Legion Command, but you are provincial bureaucrats in the best sense of the word. Public servants, which is maybe a kinder term than "bureaucrat."

Because we don't always have this opportunity to ask questions, I wonder if either of you would address the expanding scope of the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage in terms of grant programs. You mentioned that this program came from Service Nova Scotia in 2016. Quite recently, we saw funding announced for helping with doctor recruitment under the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. The department is funding and administering grants related to transit and related to community organizations that are trying to address poverty, and particularly food security.

I'm not sure if all of those programs have come out since the Culture Action Plan, but I think certainly many of them have. As an MLA on the Opposition side of things who isn't inside a department, I'm wondering about what challenges it presents or also what it says about how CCH works - that more thematic areas are being added to your plate. I apologize if any of that is totally outside the scope of what you came prepared to talk about, but I would be interested to hear.

BILL GREENLAW: Very interesting question. To your first point, I'm very proud to be both a bureaucrat and a public servant. I am very proud of the work that I and my

colleagues do on behalf of the public and citizens of Nova Scotia, and extremely proud to be involved with CCH. We do great work.

With regard to the question, the Department is rooted in community. I think most of the opening remarks acknowledged how we engage with community in the Department and the programs that you mentioned - the transit program, the ACCESS-Ability program, et cetera - are all rooted in community. I think that those programs, for obvious reasons, were added to the department's mandate for the last couple of years. As we evolve, or if we evolve, that is really a decision of the government. I'll just leave it at that.

I really feel proud about our ability to work with communities, to be innovative, to think about the art of the possible. I think our department brings that lens when we engage with community. I really believe that you've seen first-hand the benefit of that.

LISA ROBERTS: In a lot of ways, I would love to see that approach being used more with our budget, particularly where outside or constituent group members with a vested interest in the success of their sector or the success of their community are actually in a position to do something that is almost akin to participatory budgeting, which is a great way of deepening democracy. I look at it with interest but also with: what else could we do like that?

I don't have the budget in front of me. Can you talk about how much of the Department's budget does engage some external - like the leadership council or some other like the Legion Command - some other folks outside of government in actually assessing applications that are coming in from the community?

BILL GREENLAW: I don't have a percentage for you, so I would just be speculating on that percentage. A lot of the programs engage panels for review and assessment of the applications. I wouldn't know the percentage off the top of my head, but we could get that for you if you'd like.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to Mr. Ryan.

MURRAY RYAN: I was just wondering, from a capital assistance perspective, is there anything in your experience that you've seen that falls through the cracks of this eligibility mortar?

When I look at eligible costs versus ineligible costs, one thing that jumps to my mind - and I get that the program is about the actual physical building, but one of the things I see here is that floor replacement is not included. That could lend itself to being - that's a structural aspect to the building.

I'm just wondering: is there anything that you see or hear about, year in and year out, that's missing or that could be modified to be qualifying?

NATASHA JACKSON: Another great question. The criteria and the eligible projects were determined, and continue to be determined, by Legion Command. They're setting up the criteria based on, obviously, their knowledge of what the structures are looking like.

That having been said, what is great about the program and us being able to manage it side by side with the Community ACCESS-Ability Program is that should a Legion come and talk about how their floor is not eligible through the Legion, we would be looking to work with our colleagues who look after the Community ACCESS-Ability Program, because floors are an accessibility issue.

We approach it looking from a different lens. Albeit it would provide structural - it also provides accessibility for those wanting to enter the building, so we're able to solve the problem in that way, looking at it from a positive asset based approach. That's usually how we manage to mitigate those kinds of issues.

You'll note, as well, that there was a desire not to pave parking lots. That seems like a nominal issue, but it becomes a large issue for people who are going into Legions. What's wonderful about the Community ACCESS-Ability Program is that it allows us to pave the parking lots of Legions.

MURRAY RYAN: Thank you very much for that answer. It's good to see that CCH is accessing funds from multiple pots to help our Legions, which is always so important, especially in times like this.

I'm wondering also - and this would come up from Command, I would assume - this year has been so different. Earlier I asked about the Legions' ability to match the cost-sharing formula of 50-cent dollars. I'm wondering, has there been any communication coming upwards from the Legions related to accessing funding or having operational funding or some sort of provision provided to them to help offset some of their operating costs? Some Legions are in stronger positions than others, but we hear time and time again from the Royal Canadian Legions that there are many that are facing potential closure. I think we all realize that we have another solid 12 months ahead of us before we're out of this pandemic.

NATASHA JACKSON: What I would say is that it is, again, something that I'm sure will be brought up in the December 15th meeting. If it's not, from a community perspective, we may raise that to see if there's anything that we can be involved in.

Further to that, I'm sure that Legion Command is probably making those plans around the federal dollars that are going to be available to support Legions and their operational funds. We haven't had that opportunity and won't until December.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Jackson. I think we can take the break right now. It's almost three o'clock, so 15 minutes. We will be back at 3:14. Thank you, everyone.

[2:59 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:14 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I have two people on the list. If there are no other questions, maybe we can wrap it up a little earlier today - you let me know.

MARGARET MILLER: I just wanted to ask about the Legions in Nova Scotia. Is there a tendency for Legions to own their own buildings or do they rent buildings? If they do rent, how does that process for grants or for improvements apply to that?

NATASHA JACKSON: I don't have a specific number within the portfolio of Legions of how many rent and how many own, but we could find that out for you and provide that.

That having been said, I do know that we have for our grant programs, should an organization rent its space - I do think that most Legions do own, but I'm speculating on that. If they were to rent their space with our grant programs for capital assistance of any type, we would just need to verify from the landlord the extent and the future relationship, so we can feel as comfortable as possible that capital investment is going to the group and not to the building owner.

MARGARET MILLER: You may have already discussed that at some point and I've just missed it, which would not be unlikely. I wanted to ask if Legions wanted to do things to do a greener footprint with the whole trying to reduce their carbon footprint, want to go to heat pumps, want other measures to make themselves more efficient. Would all those be included under the grant program?

NATASHA JACKSON: Yes, and actually encouraged. I do know on occasion that people have talked about what it is that they want to do and they'll put in a heat system, versus being specific to what the system is. Staff would be having a conversation with them to see what's there and if at all possible, encourage them towards a heat pump because of the efficiency with the footprint, but also the cost efficiency. Those are eligible and that conversation is also eligible.

BEN JESSOME: I'd like to focus a little bit on newcomers or transitional planning from the department/Legion's perspective. What type of outreach does the department do by way of introducing yourselves to potentially new Legions or new board members or representatives? Is that transition process incumbent on each specific Legion to do a crash course in the program, or is that something that CCH actively seeks to engage newcomers to the Legion on?

NATASHA JACKSON: I think the best way to answer your question is that annually with the call for applications for this program, it is sent to every individual Legion. The program guidelines and application are also forwarded through caucus offices and then Legion Command follows up with a notice to all of their Legions.

In so doing, what it does allow is anybody who has questions about the program - so if there is a change in their membership or leadership in wanting to apply for grant programs, that's when staff in the office will provide that kind of support.

Earlier, we talked about making sure that applications are complete and applicants are assisted through the process. It would be through that conversation and the grant program that they would - to answer your question - onboard them to understand what would be required in the application.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you for that response and that information. What would you send out? Is it a package that is kind of all-encompassing or is it just kind of like, "We're here, this is the program that is available, reach out if you would like more information about it?"

NATASHA JACKSON: Actually, this is - I wouldn't say unique, but we do make sure that we provide the information and a full understanding of the information to Legions. Given some of the demographics, we make sure that it's mailed out. The package would include a hard copy of the application and the guidelines and on those documents include our phone numbers to be contacted. They're able to make submissions in all manners, and then we understand that Legion Command then emails their members and lets them know. My understanding is - and I can always clarify for you - that they have a link to go to the website, but the Legions do actually get both a mailed hard copy of the application and the guidelines and a notice of "here's the program for this year" and then an electronic notice.

MURRAY RYAN: Just in closing, last week I had the privilege of observing, from a safe distance, one of my local Legions' Remembrance Day services. It was very remarkable and it speaks to Legionnaires and their ability, their creativity, their ingenuity, and their commitment to honouring our service personnel, both current and past.

To that end, I want to thank you for your department's work with Command and with the Legions to provide them with assistance on a yearly basis to help meet their needs.

When I was going through the material for today's session, when I went back and looked for the years 2016-17 and 2017-18 in the press releases, the second page listed the monies paid out by grants to individual Legions. In subsequent press releases in future years, that wasn't included in that. It mentioned one particular Legion per year.

Just out of curiosity, was there a particular reason or decision to change that so that it wasn't included in the actual press release?

NATASHA JACKSON: The best way to answer this question is that it's not intentional. When we do put out a press release, we generally will put in the link and an attachment. If it's not there, we can go back and make sure that that list of Legions that did receive it have it going forward, and we can check to see what's there. Sometimes we are now listing and providing a list of who received for prior years, if that's helpful.

MURRAY RYAN: I'm a CPA, so numbers are my right and my left hands. It's just something - when I go and look at things, that's where I'm naturally drawn, so it was just when I looked, and then it was like, I have to go looking for this elsewhere and what have you. I found a bit of a mixed bag of things. Anyway, thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: I don't see anybody else, so thank you again.

I'm wondering if you have any closing remarks. Mr. Greenlaw.

BILL GREENLAW: Let me just begin by thanking all of you for your efforts during these difficult times and your leadership in being elected officials in Nova Scotia. I know that we appreciate your efforts in dealing with communities in these fluid and often troubling times. As the second wave is coming - it seems to be moving its way across the country, less so in Nova Scotia, thank goodness - I know that your jobs have been made more difficult because of this. I'd like to thank you for that and for representing your communities so well.

I know that you also acknowledged the work and the efforts of CCH, and I appreciate your acknowledgement of the efforts of the department. I would just like to add to that. As you can tell, Ms. Jackson and her team do an excellent job in administering the Legion Capital Assistance Program. We work with communities. Certainly, the art of the possible is there. I really, truly appreciate you recognizing that and the team at CCH, and more specifically Ms. Jackson's team. Thank you for that.

As we discussed today, everyone understands how important Legions are, not only for their members, retired and serving, but to the communities they serve. The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage is proud to administer this infrastructure program because we understand very well how much communities depend on these facilities. Making physical structures safe and accessible to everyone is a very important initiative.

Our staff work very closely with Legions who reach out to us for help in either applying for their grant or in writing their final reports. We also have an excellent relationship with Legion Command, which allows us to ensure any issues or updates to the program are made promptly.

We are also happy to work with Legions to make accessibility upgrades through our community accessibility programs. With that, I'd like to thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you both. I just wanted to make a final remark that last week I also attended the Korean memorial in Clayton Park, and there was a gentleman who spoke - I believe he was in his late 80s - and I almost had tears from the stories he was telling. I was wondering how we can keep those, especially for all these newcomers that have never encountered or learned about this. This time, they held it indoors instead of outdoors, and I asked for the tape so I could put it on my Facebook for the community to hear his stories.

I really appreciate it, and I appreciate your work that you're doing and the information you provided us today. Thank you again. You may leave at your convenience from the side door.

We have some committee business to do. We have a correspondence from Valerie Mitchell-Veinotte, Royal Canadian Legion - Nova Scotia Nunavut Command in response to a request for information made at the meeting of October 20th. All members will receive that email, correct? Also the correspondence on October 29th, and again it was sent to us yesterday. Are we okay with that one? Thank you.

We have two topics left on the agenda, and it was explained to me by Judy - and maybe I will ask her to clarify what is happening with the last two topics and what we could do after.

JUDY KAVANAGH (Legislative Committee Clerk): Well, we have two sets of witnesses left on the agenda. One set have said they prefer not to appear before the Committee at this time, as they have concerns about COVID-19 and they would just rather not appear.

The other ones - it's possible that they might be able to appear next month. This is VETS Canada. I think the Committee had voted to bring them in to talk about the Tour of Duty walk. If they can come in, though, they've said that it's not really appropriate to talk about the Tour of Duty walk right now because that's been suspended because of COVID.

They might be able to come in to give a general overview of their program, talk about some of their other activities, if the Committee is interested in that. Because the Tour of Duty was the voted-on topic, then I think this would require the committee's permission.

BEN JESSOME: I guess in an effort to be nimble and with the Committee's consent - or if required, a motion - and I'm not trying to step beyond the fairly rigid agenda-setting process, but VETS Canada is also affiliated with an initiative that many members in the House have supported over the past couple of years, an initiative called Hockey Helps the Homeless.

It's possible that beyond the scope of their individual setting in Dartmouth and their activity here, they might be able to add an element to their presentation that would involve some information on that initiative that I know many members would be familiar with – specifically, Hockey Helps the Homeless.

We've hosted the event twice in Dartmouth, and if we're talking about adding some elements to the - their organization as a topic - perhaps we could include the Hockey Helps the Homeless initiative as a part of that with the agreement of my fellow Committee members.

[3:30 p.m.]

LISA ROBERTS: I wonder if we might consider making the invitation more general to ask them to address their programs and initiatives rather than try to define the topic too narrowly. That way, they can kind of present their activities as they prioritize best and then we can ask follow-up questions around what catches our interest.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. That is wonderful. Ms. Kavanagh would like to add something.

JUDY KAVANAGH: We don't yet have a commitment from them that they're able to appear on December 15th, but I'll be talking with them between now and then. I'll certainly let you know if they are available.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Kavanagh. If they can't make it, maybe we can have that meeting as an agenda-setting meeting if everybody is in agreement. Ask your staff to submit some topics so that if they can't appear, then at least we have an agenda-setting meeting on the 15th.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Ms. Masland.

KIM MASLAND: Back in our last meeting, I put forward a motion that a letter be written on behalf of the committee to the Minister responsible for Military Relations asking for one-time financial assistance for our Legions. I'm just wondering if there is a commitment to have that letter sent before the Legislature is prorogued.

THE CHAIR: Any discussion? Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I don't recall that motion specifically, but it seems to me that there was reference today to some news on that front. The letter might not be up to date if

there has just been a federal commitment to addressing the operational losses during COVID-19.

KIM MASLAND: I can appreciate what my colleague is saying, but there was a motion and it was unanimously approved that a letter would be sent. Maybe our clerk could provide us some information.

JUDY KAVANAGH: I did send the letter immediately after the meeting. We haven't received a response yet, but the letter didn't ask for a response. It asked for action.

THE CHAIR: Are we okay with that? Ms. Masland.

KIM MASLAND: Is it possible to receive a copy of that letter for the committee members? Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you again. With that, we can be adjourned unless anybody else has anything.

We are adjourned. Thank you, everyone, for being here today.

[The committee adjourned at 3:33 p.m.]