

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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Standing Committee on Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges

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LOCATION: LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS PLAN AND PRIORITIES

COMMITTEE:

Hannah Bell, MLA Charlottetown-Belvedere [Chair]
Sonny Gallant, MLA Evangeline-Miscouche
Lynne Lund, MLA Summerside-Wilmot
Sidney MacEwen, MLA Morell-Donagh
Hon. Matthew MacKay, Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture
Gordon McNeilly, MLA Charlottetown-West Royalty

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

none

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

none

GUESTS:

none

STAFF:

Emily Doiron, Clerk Assistant (Journals, Committees and House Operations)

The Committee met at 10:00 a.m.

Chair (Bell): The Standing Committee for Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges is called to order.

Hello everybody.

Some Hon. Members: Good morning.

Chair: It's nice to see you all. Looks like familiar faces over here.

We have – agenda today for actually considering our work plan, making some decisions on some of the priorities based on the discussions the last time we met. And then from that, sort of an idea of what that work plan is going to look like for what we want to try and achieve before we get into the fall sitting.

So if I could ask for an adoption of the agenda as presented or if there any amendments to the agenda?

Mr. McNeilly: Can I just speak to that?

Chair: Sure, Gordon McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: So with the adoption of the agenda, we'd spoken last time at the last meeting about certain issues around the Speech From the Throne.

I think Mr. Mitchell brought up the Speech From the Throne and the forward lookingness about what was in the Speech From the Throne, and bringing this back to this committee.

I just didn't see it on here, so –

Chair: We would have an update on that. The action arising from that was a letter sent, so we'll have an update on that when we go through our scheduling and work plan because we did take action as committed from the last meeting.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, so that would be in the – so there was a letter sent, should it not be under considerations for the committee work plan?

Chair: Yes, we can add it if you want to see an amendment just to specifically speak about the –

Mr. McNeilly: Yes, please. They were under time sensitivity with that portion of the speech.

Thank you.

Chair: So we'll just add – so just amend the agenda for in the consideration of the committee's work plan, we'll just add an item in there to do the follow-up on the outcome from the letter sent to the Premier regarding the commitments in the Speech From the Throne.

Mr. McNeilly: Yes, thank you.

Chair: So with that amendment to the agenda, can we have approval to the agenda as amended?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: Approved. Great, thank you.

So, Emily had sent out some great materials for us kind of doing a summary of the discussions that we had had in that initial meeting. There's a draft document in there which kind of looked at the priorities that we had identified and then another one regarding consultation and a communications plan.

So with the indulgence of the committee, perhaps if we could – I don't know –

Emily, did you want do a quick summary on your –

Clerk Assistant: Sure, I could do that Chair.

Chair: That would be great if I could ask the clerk to provide us with that overview on the priorities document that she prepared.

Clerk Assistant: Sure.

So at the last meeting, the committee had identified several priorities that they might like to look into moving into the fall and into the winter. So I've tried to assemble them and then kind of give a little bit of a context, and then maybe some of the things

that the committee would like to consider if these end up being the priorities moving forward.

So the first part is an introduction. The rules have been around since our House of Assembly has been around in 1773, and they have evolved since then. Taking into consideration the traditions of our Legislative Assembly and then also the expansion of Parliamentary Privileges and adjusting to other societal and legal realities.

So we've gathered the priorities here, and I've included a preliminary timeline and action plan in the communications and consultation plan. These are both draft documents, and so anything the committee would like to add, change, delete, modify we can do that moving forward.

So under priorities for review during the 66th General Assembly, we have set out four priorities, although the first three are pretty kind of tied together.

The first one being a parliamentary calendar; a parliamentary calendar sets out the schedule of sitting periods throughout the year, in addition to a start date which is already in our current rules.

The calendar establishes sitting periods, as well as weeks that are designated for committee work, and then weeks that are designated for personal or constituency work when the House and committees would not be sitting.

Some of the items that the committee might like to consider on this particular topic would be: how would a calendar enhance the work of the Assembly? Or sorry, how does the current calendar enhance the work of the Assembly and how maybe does it hinder the work?

When should the House meet, and when and how many sitting periods would be established? When would they start, and then when would they end?

So that, as you know from our practice, we have the start dates established. We don't have a set end date for our House periods at this point.

And then some other things if establishing a calendar that might need to be considered, is how do we complete the work of the House if there's an end date already established? So what happens if things are taking longer than anticipated or maybe shorter, and so we're intending to wrap up earlier? How do we do that?

What rules need to be changed to meet in an emergency sitting? Who establishes the calendar?

And then kind of moving into committees, when do the committees meet and what does the weekly sitting schedule look like?

So that kind of brings us then into the hours of the House sitting. Currently our hours of the House are entrenched in the rules of the Assembly, so that includes 16 hours a week when the House is in session, including two evenings.

So how do the current hours enhance the work and how do they hinder the work currently? If evening sittings are eliminated, how are they reallocated during the week?

And then so, if working in conjunction with the parliamentary calendar, how do the changes – sorry what do I have here? What changes should be made to the sitting hours to increase the effectiveness of the Legislative Assembly?

So those two kind of work together, as is the third priority, which was the budget schedule and the process in the Legislative Assembly. Currently the spring sitting is scheduled to start in the first week of April and that's usually when the House considers the provincial budget, the estimates of revenue and expenditure.

If a parliamentary calendar is established, what changes might need to be considered to the budgetary process and who should be consulted if the timeframe for the consideration of the estimates is changed?

So it's kind of a – there's a whole other process involved with the creation of the budget, as I'm sure we're all aware. So that might be – you need to take into account when the committee moves forward with its work.

And then the last one was enhancing engagement and outreach to the public. I was kind of looking for additional clarity from the committee on what areas that they would specifically want to look into on that front.

Items to consider was how can members increase the engagement and outreach to the public? How can the Legislative Assembly and its committees increase engagement with the public? What policy changes may need to happen to ensure public engagement and outreach is enhanced.

So those are the priorities that were discussed at the last meeting with some considerations, but as I mentioned it's a draft document at this point so happy to – can open the floor. I'll let you do that, Chair.

Chair: Great, thank you.

Clerk Assistant: That's my overview.

Chair: No, thanks Emily for that because we had a pretty broad discussion but there was some really clear consensus from the committee on priorities.

And what we're able to do with sort of this framework is get into the details of where to begin to begin given that we've got some people that we would need – experts that we would need to call – but also that we want to sort of be coming forward ideally in the fall with at least some preliminary recommendations.

Perhaps if I can start – initiate a conversation – is looking at these and you talked about how they're all connected, one of the places perhaps that we could begin is with the House sitting hours. Because the House sitting hours, talking around that, allows us to then inform potentially what may need to happen with a calendar.

But certainly would like to hear from the committee members on what you see as where we should begin to begin.

Is there are any thoughts? Silence.

Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Sorry, Chair, did you say you think starting with the House sitting hours, versus starting with the calendar?

Chair: Well one of the things – I'm open obviously to whatever we would like to speak about, but one of the things whenever we're faced with like, kind of the whole where to start is – and I talked to some colleagues about this previously as well is – very much like what the clerk has laid out here is what works for us and what doesn't work for us.

I know hours is one of the things that we've talked about in some ways even more than the calendar itself. It doesn't mean we're not going to talk about the calendar, but basically picking the tough one on the table.

But that's a great way to sort of have a conversation without getting too bogged down in details right away, is what works and what doesn't work.

And we've heard from Minister MacKay last time who spoke about the challenges that evening hours, in particular, can bring. For instance, a suggestion would be: do we want to make sure that we keep Mondays as constituency days or is that up for discussion?

Do we want to talk about keeping 16 hours a week, or do we want to talk about more hours a week, or 16 hours a week and more weeks. So perhaps if there's something you would like to add?

Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

I guess just my personal preference would be to actually discuss the calendar first, and then once we set out that, you know, I have no idea where we'll go but someone comes with a proposal to say: let's have a legislative sitting that we just discuss the budget early in the new year and then there's a spring session to discuss legislation.

Say, for example, it went to three sessions, once you kind of find the positives and negatives of it, maybe making more sessions or more definitive timelines of (Indistinct) – and or all those types of things. Then you can say: okay now that we know that's

going to happen, we can look at increasing from 16 to 20, or maybe adding additional time on a Monday or meeting a full day or reducing it one evening a week.

All those kinds of things, but in my mind it was once you get the calendar down, then you can focus on those 16 hours a week and how to flush them out and what makes it work; just my thought.

Chair: Great, so the quick summary there is just start with the calendar and talk about the potential of roughly three sessions, which is what we've kind of touched on a bit last conversation as well?

Mr. MacEwen: Yes, well not (Indistinct), looking for ideas and how to adjust that calendar. One and three with the budget schedule kind of go hand-in-hand.

I know that's a big one for me and then I think for government in general, I'd like some past history of people that have prepared budgets and the work behind the scenes. What goes into that and how to make that work?

Chair: Gordon McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: Yes, it'd be a good discussion point and I think that with a decision like that when we're talking about budget time changes we really need to – that might be where we start to bring in the experts.

Because the calendar would have a ripple effect for departments to get things ready and we want to – they're under a lot of stress as it is. To make even a week or two week changes would have to be thoroughly discussed, I think, and have to take the department's considerations into context there.

So it'd just be getting in a few experts to talk about and to weigh the – Is it possible, first of all, for them to look at their budgets? I guess that would be the question that I would ask. If they can make any timeframe changes around the budgets, and how that's going to affect things?

Chair: Thank you, Gordon.

And certainly one of the things we had talked about as the resources available, was to do a jurisdictional scan in terms of what other legislatures in the country do and we do know that a number of other legislatures in Canada do exactly this. They have multiple sittings.

They still have large chunks of time for committee work, but it is up to the Legislative Assembly to set that direction, but to do so in consultation exactly with those impacted.

Back to what we talked about in the original thing, the sooner we move on it, the sooner we can have the consultation actually begin to affect change.

So if we're talking about the parliamentary calendar, which as the clerk said, sets out the schedule of sitting periods, including start date and sort of chunks of weeks that could be used for other things, one of the witnesses that we may want to think about calling is specifically, or a set of witnesses, would be around that financial planning side. And so maybe we can think about finding out who in the department of finance are the people that we need to hear from, from that planning perspective.

The other one that I can think of that would be impacted would be the Auditor General because of the annual reporting cycle which requires that liaison with departments. But perhaps the department can best advise us who else we would need to hear from?

Did we want to make that a priority?

Mr. MacEwen: Chair?

Chair: Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: I would probably ask the Auditor if she'd liked to or not, because her books are after the fact.

Chair: Right.

Mr. MacEwen: So her reporting schedule – I guess her concern would be a compressed timeline in a fixed election year when she has to have the books ready a little bit earlier kind of thing.

So as far as like when we approve a budget, she doesn't actually come into play until the year after, right? Because when she does her auditing, so maybe she doesn't feel like it's appropriate to come in. Just ask her first if she wants to come in, yes, but –

Chair: We can certainly send a letter and ask for her feedback on that as an independent officer. That's right.

Mr. MacEwen: Good idea.

Chair: Would we also want to see a Legislative scan of other jurisdictions?

Mr. McNeilly: I think (Indistinct) Maritime jurisdiction, or we wouldn't go across the country, we'd just stick with maybe Nova Scotia, New Brunswick or would you want to –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Chair?

Chair: Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: We're privileged in a way, right, where we discuss the budget line-by-line here in the floor of the Assembly where usually, typically, as we'll find with the jurisdictional scan, is that it usually goes to a committee and then a committee will review the budget kind of thing.

So that's why it's different than other places where we can all – because we don't have that many MLAs we can discuss it here kind of thing. We've seen in the last number of years where the budget's getting better scrutiny, so it takes us a little bit longer, a little bit you know – part of the reason we've seen you – talking about a fixed end date too, is that you don't want to be rushed coming on the end of a session when there's other priorities or legislation that you're trying to get through.

Chair: Sidney, you make a good point too, is that we can look at what everybody else does, but because of the unique size and scale of the PEI Legislature, we also have the opportunity to make something that specifically addresses what we want it to be.

So that's really, really important that we don't lose sight of the fact that this is about

addressing what are the challenges and the opportunities that we've had with the structure here. Because that is an option, we could create that the budget goes to committee, but that's not necessarily off the table.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) that's not something I'd be in favour for.

I think it's (Indistinct) we can all do that, but it's an option that someone might come in and present and say you know: why are you tying up the Legislature? Send it to a separate committee on that.

But then you discuss about how many extra MLAs we have to do all that. It's not like we have 300 to attribute to.

Chair: Lynne Lund.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just curious about the idea of adding a sitting particularly to deal with the budgetary estimates. I like that idea and I also wonder if we were to do that, would that mean there would be no business other than government that was discussed?

Would we only deal with the budget or could other parties still bring things forward? What would a workday look like in that scenario?

Chair: Good question.

Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Great question.

I think that's why we're probably going to be going to the public or be requesting that kind of thing. We need to discuss that.

And when we have these consultations and we get into the details of it is to say: okay if there's perhaps a third session where it's just budget, well, because obviously there's opposition time in the Legislature or private member time –

Chair: Or QP.

Mr. MacEwen: QP, all those things.

I think it's exciting, because really, we can make it tailored to us kind of thing, right? And we shouldn't waste that opportunity if we're discussing the budget stuff. We should be able to have tons of opportunity for the opposition at that time too, maybe, if there's something else we can do.

That should be part of the conversation when we have these debates.

Chair: And that's something that again, we can look at, in terms of sort of what have other jurisdictions found works for them.

The other consideration is still to make sure that there is time for the other roles of MLAs and ministers. So that's about constituency work, it's about your priority file work, and all those other aspects of our jobs.

We are still talking about a calendar which retains time for those functions; so even knowing now that we have relatively limited sitting time. The other thing to consider is the original structure of the calendar was around seasonal industries which are still a factor for our MLAs and for the public.

When you look at other calendars, the summer months tend to be not scheduled sittings and there's usually some space in the spring where there isn't a sitting and so on. So that's something we can all sort of consider, is again, the unique nature of PEI and wanting to ensure that we can protect some of those times.

Would we want to hear from the Clerk of the Legislature, from Joey Jeffrey?

[Phone Ringing]

Mr. MacEwen: Yes, and the former clerk.

Chair: And the former clerk, Charles MacKay.

So we can add that.

Mr. McNeilly: I might add too, that –

Chair: Gord McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: Just getting back to the witnesses and trying to figure out a speedy timeframe, but include all the departments, maybe a letter can be written to the

departments, because we do not want potentially all the departments in to talk to the committee, but we want to include them in their budgetary process.

Can we develop a letter that they can submit submissions about changes and how their departments would be affected – just so that we can include them and get maybe just a minor report back instead of getting everybody to come in and talk to the committee?

I just want to make sure that each department gets included because they're all separate and unique.

Chair: That's a great suggestion; something that's a way of getting submissions, but internal submissions versus external.

Yes, that's a really great suggestion because there may be unique situations in some departments. We know education is one, for instance, that this is near and dear to their hearts about wanting the budgeting to be allocated earlier.

So we could perhaps, clerk, is that something we could –

Clerk Assistant: I think so, yes.

Chair: We can come up with something for that.

Clerk Assistant: Just to clarify on that, the committee would be looking for the written (Indistinct) submission back?

Chair: Yes.

Mr. McNeilly: Yes, so once we – if we get done today thinking about some dates or some movement in the calendar, you know, how that would affect them and their budgetary process. Would they be able to adapt to a change? I think about tourism, education, agriculture – they're all – fisheries.

So I want to make sure that they have no problem with us potentially changing when we decide to talk about their budgets.

Chair: Are there any other factors, committee, that we should consider where

we would need to consult just on the general calendar?

Again, I don't want to presume, but I'm hearing sort of generally pretty open-minded consensus to talking about expanding and planning a calendar, which looks like it has more weeks of sittings than we currently have.

Is there anything else at this point that we should consider? Or, this sounds like we've got some good preliminary consults in place?

Mr. McNeilly: Just to add to that, looking forward into the future, I do believe that committees will be more of a factor.

We should – if we're going to expand the calendar, the committee time to report in the Legislature might be adjusted or enhanced or expanded a little bit because I know there's a lot of activity now. That might be a consideration to put in if we do have more time for sitting days.

Chair: Noted. Thank you, Gordon.

Looking at the list that the clerk had prepared for us, one of the other things that she had identified was the identification of a start date, but also an end date. And one of the considerations was what rule changes – we can absolutely designate that as part of our planning – but what rule changes would need to be in place in case of an emergency sitting or an extension of a sitting?

So for example, would it be government that gets to decide that? Or is it, again, does it come to sort of more of a – would it come to a committee like this, for example?

That's something we maybe don't need to speak about right now, but it's certainly something we should consider when we're thinking about modifying rules.

Clerk Assistant: If I may.

Chair: Yes, clerk.

Clerk Assistant: That could be something I include in the jurisdictional scan, because I know there are different ways of doing it. I think probably every province and territory does something different.

I could include that and bring some options back to the committee if that's something they were interested in hearing about.

Chair: Yes, that would be great.

Thank you.

Mr. McNeilly: One more thing while we're on the topic of calendars.

We have to – I think it's a real priority to bring the Premier in to discuss the citizen's panel.

If that's another – that panel is going to be made up of public and government sitting officials. That might take quite a bit of – we have to know what that is before we add too much more on our work plan. Because that's a unique progressive, very interesting piece of the Speech From the Throne that seemed very important at the time.

So we have to – it's imperative that this committee know what, how long, who that involves and how we get that going, because our timeline is to December 14th to get that going.

Mr. Gallant: Madam Chair, there's also the factor of the mandate of that committee as well, right? We're discussing what we'd like as a work plan, but the Premier will have to indicate what the mandate of that committee will be.

Chair: Exactly.

However the Premier – this committee is still the one that would have to agree to that. So it would be, the Premier would be here to inform us of what he would like to see and then the committee discusses it.

And since we're talking about that, I'll just sort of clarify again that the letter has gone, we have a confirmed date for the Premier to present to the committee and so we can add that in. It will appear in our work plan in time for consideration.

Thank you.

So we have a very clear agreement that looking at the parliamentary calendar and talking now about the impacts on that for

adding in a session regarding budget considerations is a priority.

With the other pieces, in terms of what happens during that session as raised by Lynne Lund, the consideration of making sure that there's time for committee meetings and reporting, and how that may impact the sitting hours during the week would come from those discussions.

So we have a requirement for a jurisdictional scan on parliamentary calendars across the country, as well as the approaches for extension or emergency. And call representatives from the province, from the departments – from the Department of Finance, sorry, to reach out to the Auditor General and the clerks of the Legislature, past and present, for their input.

Does that sound right?

Clerk Assistant: Sorry, just to confirm: a letter to each department?

Chair: Right.

Clerk Assistant: A written submission from them kind of on their perspective if there was a change to the budgetary process.

Chair: Lynne Lund?

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

Just looking at the last question on the items to consider for the first point, it is: What would a weekly sitting calendar look like?

I would just love to propose or ask, I suppose, the question to the committee: do we want Mondays for constituency days? I'd love to get a feel for how others feel.

Chair: Sonny Gallant.

Mr. Gallant: I would like to see Monday stay as they are as constituency day.

Chair: Okay.

Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: I think we need to hear the opinions of others. I think that's what the rules committee needs to do is go out and find out what everybody's thinking.

Yes, we'll all have our own opinion as well, but as the rules committee, we need to find out what the public thinks of that, what the MLA's would think of that.

Have things changed over the past 50 years as an opposition MLA or a government backbencher? Your schedule's certainly different than a minister having dedicated days.

Things that people don't realize about – every district has a –

Mr. MacEwen: – what the public thinks of that, what the MLA's would think of that, have things changed over the past 50 years as an opposition MLA or a government backbencher? Your schedule is certainly different than a minister, having dedicated days.

Things that people don't realize about – every district has a quite varied setup for their own constituency. Whether some people are actually in government office space, some people are doing it out of their kitchen. All those things are quite unique to PEI.

Chair: The local coffee shop.

Mr. MacEwen: The local coffee shop, you're right. Some people use the government members' office or opposition office, their office hours – so all those things. Some people have government Access PEI admin that do things for them. So there's a whole variance of constituency things that have to come into play as well.

But I'd like to know and get the opinion of other people to do that – of course, we'll all have our own opinion as well, but I'm curious to know where that mindset is.

Chair: Something that's a really good point from both is, when we're making large changes we can't assume that any of the things that have been precedent, even if they work for us now. So one of those things is that maybe comes also back to the citizens assembly function too, is about that space where people can provide that feedback, potentially. But we need consultation on that is something I'm hearing from you. What is it the people want to – how do people want to engage?

I've heard something from here and then to Lynn so, Sonny Gallant?

Chair: Thank you, Sidney, for bringing that up, I should have elaborated a little bit more too.

We all know sitting in here Monday is not our only constituency day, but we just kind of picked that as everybody knows we're available that day. But we also deal with our constituents Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday if need be, but I'm glad you mentioned that. We need to explore it and talk to people and see if maybe we should have more constituency days in people's minds or maybe we should have less or be more flexible. Thanks for bringing that up.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) by district, some districts don't realize that there's a Monday day because perhaps that district hasn't had a minister that dedicates that day, right? They just pick up the phone.

Mr. Gallant: (Indistinct) they have a set day so people know for sure if they call, you can see them on Monday for sure, or any other day.

Chair: And it's very interesting because when we do the jurisdictional scan, I don't know if this will be in the context, but in some other provinces, particularly larger provinces, during sitting hours there isn't a fixed constituency day because that's your travel day because it takes so long.

I know in Ontario, Manitoba, B.C., it takes so long to get back that you travel on Fridays, the same as you do with the federal. But one of the backups to that is to actually to have staff and staff supports who can provide that interim. Though it's not in our priority, I'd be very surprised if we don't hear about how people want to engage with MLA's in this process and it may inform some of what we choose to do with our schedule.

Lynne Lund.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate that point and I agree with you that soliciting feedback is going to be wise. I'm wondering how we would propose to do

that. Are we going to ask for submissions? Are we asking people to present? How would we like to garner the opinion of the public?

Mr. MacEwen: An (Indistinct)

Chair: That's a great segway. I'll just do a quick check on where we are with priorities and then that consultation communication plan is absolutely where we're going next on the – I don't think we planned that.

So before we move on to that one though, if we can just go back and just have that last look at priorities. We've sort of covered, I think, both parliamentary calendar and to some extent, sitting hours will, like we said, are going to be in context there anyway. The budget schedule and process has also been kind of incorporated in there, and that enhancing engagement outreach is part of our crossing over onto the communications and consultation.

I have a note here, I'm trying to read my own handwriting, sorry.

At some point, in terms of somebody else who we can speak to is Dawn Wilson from the PEI Coalition for Women in Government who wrote the original report that's been the kind of core for a lot of, I think, for all of our caucuses as a reference point on so many of the things that we've discussed. It may not be relevant immediately, but certainly at some point it would be really good to hear from her on how that research has been updated.

Gordon McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: May I suggest too, just for the record, that we look at the Wednesdays and Fridays. We only sit once on those days. I was looking at Wednesday as a possible split session. You know, going morning and afternoon. Maybe keeping Fridays as is. There might be – that to me is just looking at the calendar, might be a block of time that we kind of propose or look at proposing or have a jumping off point. If we're looking at additional sessions through the week, it could be that Wednesday. I don't know if we want to discuss it here or –

Chair: Sidney.

Mr. MacEwen: Those are all great ideas, but as a committee we have to go out and get that feedback. So, whether it's, the Premier comes in and does his plan and we assess: Do we feel that's good public consultation or not? Do we need additional as a committee? We take all that information, all of that and then we'll have our input too, at that time (Indistinct) but, you know, we almost have to consider ourselves as the gather of information taking all points of view in.

Yes, it's a great idea and no doubt you'll be able to bring that idea up as we go forward. Others will do that too. Then once we come together with a final report, we also have our input in what we gathered in and we say: that's where it is as a starting point, there could be a hundred different starting points to do kind of thing.

That's an excellent option, but I think – it's not like this committee is just going to discuss amongst ourselves here how to change the rules, we're going to take all this input in and then we'll come up with a report and a recommendation from our caucuses, all that kind of thing.

It's a great idea and it makes sense, it's an obvious one, but just so that everybody's aware – I think that's where we're going with this, we gather all the information and then we find the consensus and then go forward, that kind of thing.

Chair: I can expect we'll have a pretty rigorous discussion when we're drafting that report. The more people we can talk to, to get that input – and that's partly the reason of mentioning someone like Dawn – well not Dawn, but the coalition who had made clear recommendations from a particular lens; there's multiple lenses.

Lynne Lund.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Chair.

I'm also wondering, this question is directed to the clerk, if it's possible to get data on viewership for people watching or participating in legislative sittings that happen in the afternoon, versus the evening.

Clerk Assistant: Definitely.

Ms. Lund: It would be interesting to know how our public engagement is on different times of the day.

Clerk Assistant: Just to clarify, do you mean with our streaming and video broadcasting?

Ms. Lund: And also coming in person. Do we collect data on how many people attend sittings?

Clerk Assistant: I'll have to look into that. If it's information that we have I'll certainly bring it back to the committee.

Ms. Lund: Fantastic.

Clerk Assistant: If that's what the committee wants information on.

Chair: I think that would be very helpful.

Ms. Lund: Something we regularly hear is that the value of evening sittings, is it allows people to engage with this, who, otherwise, would not be able to, but I just wonder if that bears out in practice.

Clerk Assistant: I can certainly do that.

Chair: I think we've got quite a list of things to follow-up on at this time, but clarity on that initial discussion, is there anything else anybody wanted to add in terms of priorities at this time? Or can we – should we look at how we schedule – how we begin this conversation.

So we'll move on to that section and perhaps – we had talked about consultation – so, Emily you had had confirmation from the Premier's office and for –

Clerk Assistant: Yes, I'm looking at Friday, September 27th at 10 a.m. I'll look to confirm that, but if committee members could hold that time in the calendar that would be great.

Chair: Super, and that's to follow-up from the requests from the third party regarding the commitments made in the throne speech.

With the other planning, would we be able to get those letters out ASAP?

Clerk Assistant: Sure, we can do that.

Chair: Committee members, subject to availability, are you available to meet at convenience to be able to get these consultations started as soon as possible? Okay.

Clerk Assistant: Great.

Chair: Great. Thank you.

We'll work with schedules to find out as soon as we can, particularly with the departments and that input.

Clerk, I don't know if you're able to give us any kind of idea about what jurisdictional time frames may be. I know you've got quite a heavy workload at the moment.

Clerk Assistant: So for jurisdictional scans, what I will probably end up doing is reaching out to my counterparts across the country. So we'll kind of get a summary of what is done in each jurisdiction. So, I would say, perhaps by the end of the month.

Chair: Great.

Clerk Assistant: I would try to get that information from as many jurisdictions as possible. Of course, it'll depend on their availability for that. But that's probably what I would do and I would say probably a timeline of the end of the month, so end of September.

Chair: Great.

Clerk Assistant: And if that works for the committee, that's kind of the due date I'll put on that information.

Chair: That would be most helpful.

Thank you.

So back to Lynne Lund's question about the – and the question from the clerk about the engagement and outreach – we've got some scheduled (Indistinct) consultation reaching out and doing these letters and having people come in. What else does consultation look like and ongoing communication as well, not to say the same thing?

Clerk Assistant: I'm happy to go over some options.

Chair: Okay great. Some options from the clerk.

Clerk Assistant: So I'm looking at the consultation and communications plan. So this is kind of based off of different things that have been done in the past to reach out to the public with different committee inquiries.

So the first one I have is our traditional letter of invitation. We've crafted a good list of people that we're looking to invite into the committee, and/or receive a written submission from.

So that will be a good place to start, and I'll begin drafting those letters once the meeting is done today.

Next, and just for your information, we always issue media advisories on all the committee meetings that happen here. And so, it's advantageous if we can plan the committee's work and kind of have a group of meetings that we can send out and let everyone know what we're doing and when we're doing it.

I'll coordinate with the chairs to set those meetings. But I'll be in contact with everyone so that we're all aware of when things are happening and we can put it in our schedule and whatnot.

So next, another option is to advertise in print media to solicit public input. So we could request anybody who's interested in this topic to submit written submissions, and so what we would do is highlight what the committee would want input on.

What I'm hearing at this point is on a calendar, what do the hours look like and the budget process kind of all tied into one. And then we would, you know, advertise that we're looking for those written submissions and hopefully get some good content coming back in from the public.

So I would put my contact information, I would then distribute to the committee as it's received to me.

Chair: And when you're speaking of the public, we're talking about the community organizations and interest groups, as well as individuals.

Clerk Assistant: Of course, yes.

Yes, so sometimes when we had done that in the past, looking for input, a group might decide that they'd like to submit something on the group's behalf. So we've received all different kinds of written submissions before when we kind of make that call.

We can also craft a survey that we would have on our website that would have specific questions on these areas of priorities that the committee has set.

And then kind of to follow that up, our social media, so the Legislative Assembly has a Facebook page and a Twitter page. And so any type of media advisory, so when the meetings are happening, if we're looking for input and if we had a survey, if the committee agrees to these different types of outreach – I guess ways to reach out to the public – we can push it on our social media so we can kind of get different groups in that way.

And then also, we can do some promotional work of the committee. I have here that the Chair could reach out to different media outlets to do some promotional work of the committee. Any member of the committee who would like to do that we kind of coordinate together and we can do some work like that.

So it's kind of a starting point, but again a draft. I'll turn it over to the Chair to turn it over to the committee.

Chair: There we go.

So when we met last time, there were a couple things we had talked about in there and one of them was seeking that additional input. So not necessarily having everybody come in as witnesses, but through that route of written submission, it gives us an opportunity to really gather additional input from across the province.

But really, you know, and I think you had heard what those kind of two or three big questions that are in there; but, committee, what else would you like to see us doing in terms of that consultation?

We've already talked about quite a lot of input.

Sidney.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

So, you know, I think – I'm glad that the Premier's coming on the 27th; that's good. I think that's going to be a key part of the input that we take.

I don't know –

Chair: There's (Indistinct) media for that too, right?

Mr. MacEwen: So, like, what's people's comfort zone? I mean, we could start booking all kinds of presentations and coming in, but I'm cognizant I don't want duplicate work, too.

Is the committee comfortable with starting the process of having our clerk ask for those submissions and saying, you know, the four topics there, they are all pretty intertwined; I don't think we need to specify it has to be House hours, it has parliamentary calendar.

We take all that information in. We process that in September. We have the meeting on September 27th to see what the Premier's plan is for that meeting.

As a committee, if we're comfortable with that process and we think it's inclusive, we think it's going in the right direction, we say okay: we let that committee do its work or maybe we have to do additional –

You know, I don't – we have the final say as the rules committee, but I certainly don't want to duplicate work and I want to make sure it's all going together, kind of thing.

Is that a close enough timeline that we wait to see what that plan is before we start inviting like – we can start booking October right now with all kinds of public presentations, but if they have to come back in and do the exact same presentation to somebody else or to another group, I'd like to know the details of that plan is, before we set up our consultation process. So then after the fact, we can maybe fill the gaps.

Am I out? Does that make sense, Chair, or what are you guys thinking?

Mr. Gallant: I'm sitting here thinking that exact thing. Are we going to be two committees doing the same work? We'll know more after the 27th, like the direction.

But that's not to say we need to not meet or not do something, but we just don't want to —

Chair: No, the list of requests we have is already appropriate and substantive to the things we want to discuss depending on availability, and hopefully, particularly representatives from government would be available, with a bit more flexibility.

If we've got a jurisdictional scan coming, we've got some witnesses that can be coming in within this month, plus the Premier's scheduled, and then if we did go with the request for written submissions to the public and public organizations, that probably takes us to the end of the month and then we can see again where we are at that time.

Because that as you — or if we need to go further.

Mr. Gallant: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) additional stuff if we're comfortable with the direction that that's going from the throne speech.

Chair: I'm aware of the fact with some of the committees there's already overlap just because there's a lot discussion going on, and we also need to be aware of sort of not wearing out our welcome with the public either, or the public groups.

However, there's also a lot of things in this that we're going to need to discuss ourselves. So I can certainly see this committee having a number of discussions, which is just the committee — like today — talking within committee, which probably doesn't happen as much as in other ones, but in this one it does.

Gordon McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: Are we — just maybe to clarify with yourself, Chair, and the clerk, we're talking about — the way I see this committee is we're setting up the rules for this committee and our work plan, but we're

also setting the tone for all the other committees around.

Are we — we're not —

Chair: No, no.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, because that's what I was like when we're talking about engagement, we're just talking about engagement within this committee.

Chair: And with the expertise that we need to inform decisions that we will make on rules.

So we go back to the scope of this committee is unique in that recommendations that we make for rules changes from this committee will actually directly and immediately take impact on the rules of the House.

But they don't impact the rule — committees are separate. We could make rule changes here for committees as we have in the past.

Mr. McNeilly: That's what I was thinking about.

Chair: But right now we're not talking about — that may come up, right? But right now we're talking about the priorities that we had set around the overall parliamentary calendar, sitting hours.

I expect we probably will need to think about committee scheduling as part of that calendar, but certainly, we're looking at this stage of coming back in the fall potentially with recommendations that begin to impact those pieces effective on a date this committee recommends.

Mr. McNeilly: Absolutely. So I just wanted to clarify that because that's another topic for another day that I had spoken about before on the last time with that in mind about setting a different tone of engagement to the general public with all the committees, through this committee.

But thanks a lot, a very good clarification.

Chair: And I think it's a fantastic thing that we can maintain on our working list as we get through some of these big pieces. It doesn't come off the table.

So just for clarification, if I can come back to our discussion regarding the written submissions; is that something that we want to put together and get out there this month? Yes?

We have, obviously, we have social media channels. We have our own caucus channels. Is there any other means? Do we need to do advertisement like a more traditional print media for that? What's the comfort level on what we'd like to do to seek those submissions?

Mr. McNeilly: Maybe just as a committee to make sure that we give input to the clerk as she's writing that question to the departments, needs to be clear that, you know, we're changing – we're looking at this.

I'm not sure if we know about the timelines, obviously we need to get submissions about the timelines of that budgetary process. We're thinking more specifically in the start of April, it typically is now. So how much time – are we talking two or three weeks earlier, or a week earlier. I don't know if anybody wants to –

Chair: I'm sorry, to clarify, I was discussing the request to do written submissions to the public.

Mr. McNeilly: To the public, okay. I thought you were talking about the departments.

Chair: That was my mistake sorry.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh okay, my bad.

Chair: Matt MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

The more we can do the better I think with it. That's one thing I've always heard when it comes to public consultation, they didn't know about it, they didn't hear about it, they didn't see it so. Whatever we can do with the social media, the media itself, the paper to get it out there, that way we can say we've done everything possible we could to let the public know.

Chair: Noted. We could get all sorts of interesting things.

Sidney McEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: That's extremely important. I still think it's important to know what the plan is on the 27th after that meeting – so before we – putting weekly advertisements in, all that, we get an idea of the direction from that throne speech and what that potential committee might do, kind of thing, so we're not duplicating those efforts and then we go: would you like to present; would you like to submit and all that.

Chair: Perhaps for clarity, we're talking, potentially, about a couple of different stages. So we've got a stage right now where we've got a jurisdictional scan that we've agreed to and witnesses regarding – about the calendar itself, which is kind of a broader – regardless of what may come from a recommendation or discussions around other committee functions and if we had an initial request for written submissions that would be around input on the parliamentary calendar, sitting hours (Indistinct) and the budgetary process.

We'd heard – as Gordon McNeilly had said, how important it is to get that from departments, we're also going to see that from the public.

We'll likely then, going to need to do another stage after that, pending what comes. I don't see this being a one stage topic. That may be – yeah. I think we've got kind of a part one, which is the foundational information and then another one which is more specifically around the potential proposal coming from the throne speech.

Sidney McEwen?

Mr. MacEwen: That's exactly what I'm thinking too.

Just with regards to a letter to the departments as well, I know we were talking about the time frame of a calendar too, I think some of the wording that should be about the preparation that the departments do for a legislative sitting, I know it's easy for us to say here and say: yeah, three sittings or multiple sittings is great and wonderful because we want to do more work.

I've never been a minister. I know Sonny has been and I know Matthew is now. I suspect the amount of prep work that a department does to prepare for a legislative sitting, is immense, I'm guessing. So, you know, if we go to three sittings and they've got to do all that preparation three times a year instead of two times a year, does that stall our government process, where they're usually doing the work of government – those are really important things too.

It might not necessarily be about adding another session, but rearranging the current – all those things are on the table but I guess I want the feedback of the departments to say: what kind of prep work does it take out of their calendar year, versus doing the normal governing of the province, versus prepping for a Legislature as well kind of thing. So I think that's an important aspect to capture as well.

Chair: That's a really good point. I think that goes to Gordon's comments as well just sort of just making sure we're asking them for their honest feedback on it.

To Lynne's point about – are we adding in a repeat of the whole structure of what we do in other sessions, or is it focused? One of the solutions may be we find the focus is what helps the departments prepare, or not – but them being comfortable to be able to tell us, genuinely what that may look like.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) not just necessarily just on the timing of it, but what's their prep time or work, all that kind of thing that goes into it as well.

Chair: Really good.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

Chair: No, that's good. Does that make – are you okay with that kind of idea; sort of a part one, part two for potential – because obviously that's quite a busy September. I think it sound like for us, which is good. Then, kind of a second phase coming out from that initial round of presentations and consultations; there's a lot of homework again. Sounds like a homework theme here.

Gordon McNeilly.

Mr. McNeilly: I think I'm just conscious about budget. If we look at doing – we're going to have to get the word out there. I just want to make sure that we have enough of a budget and we're conscious of that, if we can, because getting a lot of ads out in the paper, I just want to make sure that we have enough of a budget and we're conscious of that, if we can. Because getting a lot of ads out in the paper, I just want to make sure that our dollars are being spent wisely there. If we can get submissions and social media and various other ways, or choose the least inexpensive route at the beginning and see about enhancing our public engagement.

Chair: Having heard from Matt MacKay and Sidney about the importance of reach, but also the concern about expense, I think there's two things: One is the expenditures for sort of general things like engagement, and so on, are coming from the Legislative Assembly budget, and there is a budget associated.

However, if we draft up something that's appropriate, we could begin with a social media piece, see what the – and a direct email to, for instance, if you have people that you know should be submitting, then that's something the committee membership can take ownership of, is to get that out to their own audiences and see what the uptake is.

But I do recognize the importance of visibly reaching different audiences. So perhaps we can work with the clerk's office to find a happy medium between them, but start with the social media piece. It's very quick, right? And then depending on the uptake – thank you for those inputs.

Okay, so that gives us an idea then of the initial consult and communication plan, at least for the first month; probably a busy October to follow. Are there any other additions or changes to that that anybody wants to add at this time? No?

We had already discussed that the Premier had been confirmed. The clerk and I will obviously follow-up with others as they are confirmed as well, but right now we're holding Friday the 27th, and then we'll advise as soon as another date – I know particularly for you, minister, that your

schedule is a challenge, so we'll try and get those booked for you as soon as we can.

Is there any other business that anybody needs to add to the schedule today? Oh my heavens, you're all so quiet.

So, scheduling: Is there a day that we need to keep free? I know we had a little bit of – we were talking about every other Friday at this point.

Clerk Assistant: Yeah, so I think perhaps once we get the letters of invitation sent out, we can kind of start confirming some meeting dates. So Friday mornings, but we'll kind of wait and see to – you know, how long it will take for maybe to look at their presentations together, and dates that work for them; but kind of working with Friday mornings, and I'll be in touch with the committee as soon as I possibly can.

Chair: Great. That's great.

We appreciate that the committee schedules have suddenly gotten an awful lot more engaging.

Is there any other business from committee members? No?

Motion to adjourn?

Mr. McNeilly: Yes.

Chair: Gordon McNeilly, so moved.

Thank you so much for your input today; much appreciated.

The Committee adjourned