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Thursday, June 13, 2019

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• (1205)

[English]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Chair of the Board of Internal Economy): Order. We are now in the public session of the Board of Internal Economy meeting. We will go to the next item, which is the minutes of the previous meeting. Are they approved?

Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Member of the Board of Internal Economy): Just briefly, I note there is a mention of pairing. We didn't wish to talk about pairing.

I should actually read from the minutes. I'm going by memory here.

I just want to make clear that it was an informal discussion. I certainly did not wish to indicate with my remarks that any changes to the pairing system should be made. I don't know if that's indicated in the minutes.

I want to clarify that I was not asking for this board or PROC, or anyone else, to study the issue of pairing now or in the future. That would be a discussion for the whips, perhaps.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Is there anything else?

With that information—

Mr. Charles Robert (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons): It's a non-change.

Hon. Geoff Regan: With that presentation, then, can we say the minutes are approved?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

The next item is business arising from the previous meeting. Is there anything arising from the previous meeting?

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Now we're at the seventh item on the agenda: the update from the members' working group on the LTVP.

We have quite a group here to present on that. Is it Ms. Sgro who will lead off?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Chair, I will. Thank you very much.

Today I'm joined by my colleague Kelly Block, as well as Peter Julian, who is also a representative on this working group.

For your background information, the working group met on June 4 and June 11 to review the proposed governance structure and initiate engagement on the Centre Block rehabilitation project. The House of Commons administration provided an overview of the long-term vision project, or LTVP, and background on consultations and approvals to date.

The working group discussed the governance structure and agreed on the mandate. The working group was formed as requested by the BOIE with a view to provide engagement with members on requirements and oversight on the Centre Block project and LTVP. The working group will report to the board to provide updates on the rehabilitation project and make recommendations as required. The working group will help guide and inform consultations and engagement with members and stakeholders.

For the development and implementation of the LTVP, guiding principles that we will work under were developed at various milestones. We reviewed those established principles and we propose an updated set of guiding principles that are appropriate for Parliament with regard to the Centre Block rehabilitation. We would seek BOIE's endorsement of the following principles.

Centre Block's primary purpose is to accommodate the two Houses of Parliament. It is first and foremost a workplace for parliamentarians, and the design and operational requirements of the building must take those needs into consideration.

The Centre Block rehabilitation—

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I don't have that in front of me. I trust what Ms. Sgro is saying is correct, but I would like to read it at the same time.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Do we have copies of the presentation available for members?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: What I have here are our speaking notes.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Here comes at least one copy of them.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: My understanding was that you had received a fair amount of information on this project already.

•(1210)

Hon. Geoff Regan: We have something. However, it doesn't include the list that you were starting to read. It sounded as though it would be a good list for us to have.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Do you mean the guiding principles?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes, the guiding principles. We'd better let you carry on.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: The Centre Block rehabilitation project will aim to enhance the operations of Parliament from a functional and technological standpoint to ensure that the infrastructure continues to meet evolving requirements for the proper functioning of Parliament.

The CB rehabilitation project will work to ensure public participation in the work of Parliament, with continued access to chamber proceedings, question period and committee work, as well as to enhance and expand opportunities for public outreach by creating spaces that complement the historic building.

The CB rehabilitation project will explore options for universal accessibility and interconnectivity between buildings on the parliamentary campus via an underground tunnel system and supporting infrastructure.

The CB rehabilitation project will continue to create a balance of accessibility to Parliament and a secure environment.

The CB rehabilitation project will strive to restore the significant heritage fabric of the building as originally designed and built, and to update all engineering and life-saving systems to comply with contemporary expectations of wellness, safety, sustainability and universal accessibility in support of parliamentary functions.

Decisions regarding the future of Centre Block will be guided by the principles of fiscal responsibility and the conscientious use of resources, while taking into account the value placed on restoring historical heritage spaces.

At our working group's initial meeting, we were provided with an overview of the project plan and the roles of the various stakeholders. This complex project is being delivered following a fast-track methodology consisting of many overlapping activities. In this process, early decisions need to be made while requirements are still being developed. This risk is managed through a process of layered decisions that allow flexibility.

Going forward, we will be looking at detailed requirements for key functions in Centre Block and the visitor welcome centre complex to ensure that building functions reflect the operations of Parliament and the members' needs in our workplace.

In terms of immediate activities for Centre Block and the visitor welcome centre, it has been determined that there are two items that require endorsement at this time: the excavation contracting strategy for the visitor welcome centre and the construction hoarding. The working group has reviewed the options and brings forward our suggestions for the BOIE's consideration.

The visitor welcome centre requirement, or VWCC, was established in the 1999 document "Building the Future". The concept was established and approved by the BOIE, COIE and cabinet in 2006 and reconfirmed in 2009 and 2011. Requirements for

the VWCC phase 2 are still under development and will require the working group's validation and further BOIE approval. To ensure that the CB project maintains momentum, an early decision on the excavation contracting strategy is required.

The working group was presented with three options for the excavation strategy for phase 2 of the proposed visitor welcome centre. All options considered the following implications: security, visitor experience, parliamentary functional requirements and cost.

While it was clear to us that excavation is required to accommodate base building requirements, we were of the view that other expressed requirements should be assessed and decided upon after the election.

Accordingly, the working group recommends going forward with the excavation contracting strategy for phase 2 of the visitor welcome centre that includes the baseline of a 22,000-square-metre NET underground expansion of Centre Block, with options that allow for the contract to be scaled down or up depending on decisions with respect to allow actual requirements beyond machinery and equipment.

The second item is the construction hoarding. This site plan indicates roughly the maximum area for the construction site, which includes the Centre Block; the anticipated approximation of where the VWCC will require excavation; and room for construction trailers, material laydown and heavy equipment mobility. The black line indicates the approximate location proposed for the construction hoarding, leaving approximately half the front lawn for public access and for activities to continue throughout the project implementation.

•(1215)

Installation of the construction hoarding is planned to start in the fall of 2019.

The working group was presented with three hoarding options for consideration.

The working group recommendation is a hoarding design that reflects the architecture of Centre Block, displaying images and interpretive text about the project and Parliament for visitors. This would be maintained over the lifespan of the rehabilitation project.

This option provides a cost-effective fencing for the construction site and a visitor experience while the Centre Block is rehabilitated.

The recommendations before you today from our working group are, first, to proceed with the excavation contracting strategy for phase 2 of the visitor welcome centre that includes the baseline of a 22,000-square-metre NET underground expansion of Centre Block, with options that allow for the contract to be scalable down or up, depending on decisions with respect to actual requirements.

The working group also recommends proceeding with hoarding on the front lawn with large monochromatic photos or illustrative drawings on the front face and with ornamental black fencing for the remainder of the perimeter.

Joining me and Ms. Block at the table here today are some of the appropriate people from the various departments working on this project.

Ms. Block, do you have anything you want to add?

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): No, just that if there are any questions, I think we'd be happy to answer them.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: This is going to be a bit of a work in progress as we figure out.... We don't want to duplicate your work. You've obviously been assigned to these tasks to represent all of our interests.

Obviously, decisions were made previously regarding the new visitor welcome centre. I wasn't a part of those boards and I haven't seen those documents. I don't know how close to scale the site plan is and I imagine it's not designed to be that way, so could you perhaps explain something for my benefit?

The current visitor and parliamentary business entrance obviously deals only with the House side at this time. However, it looks as if that is.... What is the current footprint of the temporary, if we want to call it that, visitor welcome centre? What additional functions will it be performing to merit 22,000 square metres, up or down, inside? I should have been paying more attention to the fact that this one downstairs here was a temporary structure, and the new one looks quite a lot larger than what we have now.

Explain it to me very quickly. Is there more under there than just the welcome centre, and that's just what it's being called? Do we really need something that's 10 times bigger than what we have now?

Mr. Rob Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Parliamentary Precinct Branch, Public Services and Procurement Canada): Phase 1—and there are phase 1 and phase 2—is approximately 5,000 square metres, so it is about a quarter of the size of what is recommended to proceed with today. That really services the West Block as a visitor welcome centre. It is a permanent facility, not a temporary facility. Phase 1 will be extended with phase 2, which will serve, in addition to the West Block, the Centre Block and the East Block, creating in essence one integrated parliamentary complex with this visitor welcome centre beneath the great lawn.

Phase 2 of the visitor welcome centre would provide the same services that phase 1 does, including security screening first and foremost, as well as some visitor services and some support functions related to the operations of the House. The visitor welcome centre would provide those services for Centre Block and East Block, as well as some expanded visitor experience for individuals visiting the Hill.

At this point, with part of Centre Block being emptied—the Library of Parliament tracks the statistics—75% of people trying to visit Centre Block were not able to because of volume, essentially management. The visitor welcome centre would provide expanded facilities for Canadians and international visitors visiting the Hill, enabling them to have an experience with our Parliament.

The security functions are a core requirement of this facility. As well, one of the things that I think we've reported to a number of committees now is that modernizing Centre Block will mean displacing about 2,500 square metres of space within the facility. Just as an example, there was a 14-fold increase in the space required for mechanical operation of the building. Putting in new elevator

shafts, for example, and additional washrooms and mechanical shafts will take up space in the facility. As you would know better than I, Centre Block does not have a lot of this modern functionality.

The last piece is that there is also the opportunity for the visitor welcome centre to absorb some of those displaced functions from Centre Block. Some of the core support functions could go to the visitor welcome centre.

With this strategy that's being proposed, those decisions don't need to be taken today. This is an excavation strategy that can be brought down or up depending on the requirements of Parliament as we proceed.

● (1220)

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): If I may, I would add something from the discussion at the working group right now. What Rob has been mentioning thus far has been on the proposed visitor welcome centre as proposed in the past, but the working group asked a very good question in terms of whether we really need all those functions and whether we need to build a visitor welcome centre as it is currently being entertained.

Right now what is before the working group is what I will call a wish list of requirements. These requirements need to be assessed and validated, and that was a discussion for the working group. What has been clear to the working group is the need for machinery and equipment to modernize the Centre Block—which represents, I believe, about 10,000 square metres—and also for connectivity between the buildings in terms of the handling of goods and materials.

The working group said to keep the momentum and to allow the digging for at least those basic requirements needed for the modernization of the Centre Block to proceed and to not lose the momentum over the project. After the election, the working group will turn its attention to the different requirements expressed by the partners and also take into consideration how phase 1 of the visitor welcome centre can be repurposed. That will be left for post-election review.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): Ms. Sgro and Ms. Block, thank you for your statements.

[*English*]

I want to be very clear about what is coming before the BOIE right now. We're not approving the visitor centre—and I don't think there is even consensus about moving to a visitor centre—but the excavation contract is something we're proposing be tendered for now, to begin in January 2020.

A ballpark figure of 22,000 square metres allows the BOIE, after the election, to either scale up if the decision is to add the visitor centre—and I think there will be a time and a place to discuss and debate that—or scale down to the minimum requirements, which Mr. Patrice and Mr. Wright have indicated are part of the essential elements of supplying the mechanical updates to the Centre Block. That would be 12,500 square metres.

The scalability, I think, is very important to all three of us. A decision should not be taken around the visitors' centre now. The excavation contract allows us to scale down to the essentials, or, if a future BOIE decides to go with the visitor centre, to scale up to the ultimate size, which would be about 33,000 square metres.

The excavation contract does not block us in and is not a decision to move ahead with the visitor centre. It is not. I feel pretty strongly about that. It's not a decision we should be making just a few weeks prior to a general election. The BOIE and the committee coming out of the election can then have that debate and discussion, and decide whether that excavation contract is scaled down to the essentials—12,500 square metres—or scaled up to another concept.

I'm comfortable with recommending the excavation contract and moving ahead with it, with the caveat that the BOIE can decide that we just keep to the essentials in the new year.

• (1225)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Before I go to Ms. Block, this is listed on the agenda as an update. To what degree are you looking for a decision from the board?

Ms. Block had her hand up.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your question, and it probably raises for me other questions I have about our role as a working group. I don't think it's for us to determine or suggest the decisions that this board needs to take on this question, but I wanted to concur with what my colleague has presented to you in regard to the things we deliberated on. I would just add that the option we are favouring is the second of three. There was an option to go with a smaller square footage, and also a larger one. We took the middle-of-the-road approach, knowing that there was the scalability that my colleague commented on.

I would also like to put on the record that I personally leaned heavily toward supporting the recommendation coming forward on what had been done by previous boards in regard to establishing this concept of a visitor welcome centre. I did not feel, as a member of a working group that's here to provide suggestions to decision-making bodies, that I would be willing to undo the work that had been done over the previous 20 years.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Julian and then Ms. Bergen.

Wait, it's Monsieur Rodriguez. Let's not be confused about that.

[Translation]

I apologize.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism): Thank you very much.

First of all, it says here that about half of the front lawn will remain in place to allow public access and activities during the project. Obviously, the upcoming Canada Day celebrations will be the last to be held on the Hill for a while - you are all invited to come, by the way - because they take up a lot of space.

It seems that we will still be able to hold activities in the remaining space. How many people, approximately, can this space accommodate? What type of activities will be possible?

Mr. Rob Wright: I will ask my colleague Ms. Garrett to give you more details.

We are working closely with our partner Canadian Heritage to ensure that all activities can continue to be held there. This is a key objective of this work and the basis of our partnership model.

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Garrett (Director General, Parliamentary Precinct Branch, Public Services and Procurement Canada): As some further detail, there has been a significant amount of effort to coordinate across both legislative and executive branches of government to make sure it's as much as possible a very positive visitor experience and business as usual.

To give you a couple of examples, we've been coordinating with the Department of National Defence, and they have confirmed that the Changing of the Guard, for example, will continue on the Hill. We have coordinated with our construction manager to make sure, to the extent we can, that the flag will continue to fly over the Peace Tower, and even with a view of continuing the program of yoga on the Hill.

Every ceremony that we are aware of and all possible activities have been fully coordinated. We have a summary of the current plans with regard to what is going to be happening with those events. I would say in general that nothing has been unduly affected. It's able to operate within the smaller footprint of the front lawn.

• (1230)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I guess we can have that list of the plans...?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: We would be happy to provide that.

[Translation]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: My next question is about the palisade on the site, which looks pretty, from what I see. Have you consulted with the Mayor of Ottawa or Ottawa Tourism about this palisade, which does have a significant visual effect?

[English]

Mr. Rob Wright: We've been working very closely with the National Capital Commission, the City of Ottawa and Ottawa Tourism to ensure the visitor experience remains front and centre, as well as with the parliamentary partners to ensure that the dignity of Parliament is adhered to as we move through that and we remain cost conscious.

We're trying to find the balance of all of those elements and make sure that we have a consensus as we move forward. On this element, I think we've probably achieved that consensus approach to make sure that we have a balance.

There is one critical thing that perhaps bears mentioning. This is different from the West Block, where we had the traditional wrought iron fencing. The construction yard was a bit off to the side, so it was not as visible as this will be, right in the front of the grand lawn. Covering that is probably a little more important, because it's the Centre Block and because it's the great lawn as well.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You are saying that most stakeholders and people who are concerned, like the mayor and others, would be comfortable with one of the concepts. Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Ms. Bergen is next.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Member of the Board of Internal Economy): I apologize. I was a little bit late for this part of the meeting.

I have two things. As I recall, when the notion and the idea came up, I think I brought forward the idea that we would get representatives from each of the parties to reflect ideas and thoughts back to the building committee, or however it would be termed. This was in the context of the West Block renovations. Many MPs felt, for lack of a better example, that a house was built for them that they were going to be living in and using, but nobody had ever asked them what they wanted in the house.

In order to avoid that with the Centre Block renovations, we wanted a mechanism that was not overly bureaucratic and that wasn't going to be dragging or slowing things down, but one whereby our members could speak to that representative in their caucus.

Whether it was that we need to have more women's washrooms or a place where the media can't get to us when we're walking into the chamber or some of the other things that we've heard about, it was a mechanism whereby those thoughts, ideas and wish lists could be conveyed, not in anticipation that they would all be given, but at least that there would be a mechanism for these ideas to be communicated.

What I don't believe it was to be is a place where three colleagues are now being asked to make some pretty major decisions. If that has changed, I think we then need to know how that's going to work. I know that when we approached Ms. Block, for example, we did not convey to her that this was now going to be the requirement. I think we need some clarification on the role of our colleagues who are part of this group.

Second, I would be interested to know how some of the decisions like this are made, because they are very major decisions. On some of the ideas around what might or might not happen on the front lawn, I don't know if we know who is making the decisions and thus who's accountable for those decisions.

Those are the two things I'd like us to solidify: the role of this group—Ms. Sgro, Ms. Block and, I believe, Mr. Julian, who is on that as well—which I do not think should be making major decisions, and then where those decisions are made.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Ms. Bergen, I think you've perceived the role precisely. You've stated accurately and exactly what it was intended to be.

I see Monsieur Patrice, and I don't know if Mr. Wright wants to comment as well to give the perspectives of the administration and of PSPC.

Mr. Michel Patrice: I'll provide my perspective.

Traditionally, the decisions in relation to the requirements—the LTVP and the development of Centre Block and the change and so on—were all approved by BOIE. It's BOIE approval that sets the requirements for the House. My reflection, in terms of past experience, is that these are important decisions. These are complex projects. On reflection, in terms of the time spent in reviewing the

decision and the impact, I think often you did not do it justice in terms of your responsibility.

Obviously—and it was a lesson learned from the West Block project—as you entertained at the beginning, it was to provide a conduit whereby members could, as you explained, receive feedback from the various caucuses to make sure that your voice and your concerns were expressed. As you know, in recent times another committee, for example, has taken a particular interest in certain decisions that had been made, as well as in decisions for the future. Some members have written some of their preoccupations in terms of the need and so on, so for me it also reflected a lack of a sense of engagement by the members.

I believe this group wasn't well placed to receive the detailed information, not to make decisions, but at least to challenge and ask the tough questions of the administration and our partners, Public Works, in terms of whether we really need this, so that it's not administration-driven requirements, to be blunt, but members' requirements. Then the working group could also meet with PROC, for example, if they have an interest and it's a member-to-member discussion in terms of their perception of what the project would be, and also to provide more of a sense of engagement and involvement of members in the project.

I think Mr. Strahl said that it's a new beast and it's going to evolve and adapt based on your instruction, based on the needs of the members and the House, as well as in terms of the observations of the working group, and we're there to assist.

• (1235)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Then are you saying it's a way to ensure that members are involved and are being consulted as the process goes forward and the construction proceeds? Do I read you correctly as suggesting that the board ought to be inserting itself by giving its—I don't know if the word I want is “decision”—own input into certain aspects of this?

Mr. Michel Patrice: Certainly, because at the end of the day, it's the board that approves, and to be blunt, it's the board that could be accountable for the decisions that are made in terms of the requirements stated by the House of Commons.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I see. We're the ones that state the requirements of the House of Commons, right?

Mr. Michel Patrice: That's right.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Can we compare that to what the role of PSPC is, and the executive?

Mr. Rob Wright: From our perspective, in managing these very large projects on behalf of Parliament, one of the most significant risks and most important elements is having clear decisions that are sustainable. That's probably the most important element for us. This type of engagement—ensuring that we are restoring and modernizing these spaces for Parliament and that parliamentarians feel that is the case—is critically important, and it's probably the best way to help ensure that these projects proceed in the best manner possible.

We also, from a PSPC perspective, have to find a way, especially with the Centre Block or the visitor welcome centre, to get to consensus with both the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada. Making sure these projects are able to proceed as well as they can and that they respect timelines and budgets are an additional challenge for us.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm sorry to interject, but with regard to the Senate, we've talked here about the board's expressing what the House's requirements are. Does the Senate's own committee—I forget the name of the committee, but it's comparable to this one—do the same thing? Is there an aspect of the space that we're talking about that relates to the needs of the Senate as opposed to the House, or is it more parliamentary, and both are considered together?

• (1240)

Mr. Rob Wright: Sir, from my perspective, I would say that it's both. There are, obviously, elements that are House-specific and Senate-specific, and then when you get to a facility like the visitor welcome centre, there are elements that you have to make sure are coordinated. In considering the visitor experience, security or some of the back-of-House services, there are definitely synergies and benefits of doing that in a coordinated way. At the end of the day, the visitor welcome centre and the Centre Block are one facility, and we need to think of them as one facility that accommodates different institutions.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Ms. Sgro and Ms. Block wish to intervene. Then I'll go to Ms. Bergen and Mr. Strahl.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: I understand the rationale from departmental officials as to why it's important to move forward with the recommendations that we have before you today: in order not to lose time, and so on and so forth. It leaves us with post-election opportunities to reflect on ups and downs and so on.

Certainly I would like to see clarification on the roles and expectations for the three of us, who are representing different parties. I don't want to receive a complicated document and be asked for a decision in 48 hours and then go to you with a recommendation that we really haven't had time to be fully engaged in.

I love the suggestion. As Ms. Bergen said, these are the kinds of ideas that we thought we may be dealing with. We did not expect, with a limited amount of time, to be coming to you with recommendations to this extent.

I think we all understood why we needed to go forward today in a short period of time, but I certainly would appreciate some clarification of the role of the working group in the future and the board's expectations of us.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Before I go to Ms. Block, I think it is that you're there on behalf of members to convey members' concerns and to make sure that they're consulted. You are the voice of members in that process.

Go ahead, Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

I might go a step further than my colleague in describing some of the angst we probably felt in the last couple of meetings we've had. I do, at the front end, want to say that I have fully appreciated being brought in and being given the level of detail that we were provided.

I think that there's a great group of people here working on this project, so we've relied heavily on, as I said, their expertise, as well as what's been done historically.

I would very respectfully suggest that if there is a standing committee that is made up of members from all parties who believe that perhaps they have a role to play in this process, and then there's a working group with three members representing all parties, it feels a little duplicative to me to have us meeting with these folks to sort of get our initial responses to some of these things and then bring that back to you. I'm questioning whether or not we have a layer here that is perhaps not necessary if we have a standing committee like PROC and then, of course, the BOIE, which ultimately is going to be the one making the decisions and which has great representation from every party on it already.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm not sure that we do make the ultimate decisions, except to say what we think the requirements of the House of Commons are. PSPC has to make construction decisions and so on.

By the way, what we're asked for today, and what the presentation asks for, is approval for a certain size of space to be enclosed by walls and in which the work can be carried out. Of course, that would allow for things of various sizes within that space later, right? That's all you're talking about.

At any rate, I have Ms. Bergen, Mr. Strahl and Mr. Julian.

• (1245)

Hon. Candice Bergen: I have a couple of items.

I think, Mrs. Block, you are entirely right. It was never intended, in any way, to be a duplicate body. However, there was a sense that what PROC was looking at doing would not fulfill that mechanism. It would be more of a casual mechanism for our members to use in communicating some simple things. I think when the PROC report is tabled.... I don't know if it's public yet.

I agree with you. We do not want a body that duplicates what PROC is doing. I think we're in full agreement. Now we just have to fix that.

With respect to what Mr. Patrice was saying—that BOIE has made these decisions—it was before I was here, and I would like to know when that decision was made. I'll use the example of the front lawn of Centre Block, which was going to be excavated, and that whole plan.

Then, as to what you're saying, Mr. Speaker, who is making the decisions around how many committee rooms are to be in place, or what the layout is going to be, or...? We're not making those decisions. Again, who makes those decisions? Then we will know who would be ultimately held accountable for them.

Mr. Michel Patrice: I'll give you eye level, and then maybe more on the specifics in terms of the committee rooms and all of that.

For example, the visitor welcome centre concept was approved by the BOIE in 1999, and again in 2006, 2009 and 2011. In terms of requirements—committee rooms and such—those decisions are made at the BOIE.

There are levels of detail and specificity. I haven't been here, but I can understand that you don't go through every plan, every floor and every room. Sometimes—for committee rooms, as an example—it doesn't go into a level of detail that you would actually have time to look at and assess, and I saw the attempt of the working group to go into what I call the granularity of the project for buildings of this magnitude and a renovation of this size.

Susan may confirm this, but over the last 20 years and all these decisions, in one shape or another it was a question of how much detail the previous board got. That's the question.

Ms. Susan Kulba (Senior Director, A and LTVP Program Management Directorate, House of Commons): Things like the number of committee rooms and all the basic requirements were set out in 1999 in a very concise report that was approved by the board. Those are the base requirements that we have been striving to incorporate through the LTVP.

As Michel mentioned, in 2006 some of the LTVP was evolved into a site plan and concept ideas. Further to that, in 2009-2011, the administration did a full review to make sure the requirements were still accurate. Under the governance at the time, that went to an LTVP steering committee at the senior management level within the administration, and then went on through the BOIE for approval.

Those are the requirements we've been working towards overall. However, as Mr. Patrice says, we've never come to the board with a whole lot of granular detail except on certain occasions, such as the desks in the chamber. That was one of the few times we brought something very detailed to the BOIE. We felt it was very important and we had learned from the experience of the five-seaters that this was something you wanted to be involved in.

On projects of this size, there is a lot of detail. It's a matter of figuring out what detail you want to be involved in and what we can work with you on to get feedback and input so that it becomes a better space and place for your work.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: It's very difficult. I guess I know one of the members who was on the BOIE 20 years ago when this was approved, but of course it was all in camera, so we can't discuss any of it.

I have the benefit of sitting beside Mr. Julian here, and clearly this group has been given the financials and the implications. It was not the intention to have people here who.... In the case of Ms. Block, she is a shadow minister, a key member of our shadow cabinet. She's a respected senior member of our caucus, so we put her in there. We didn't put her in there so that she would be making multi-million-dollar suggestions that would put her under an additional amount of pressure because this was suddenly part of her mandate. I don't think we would have wished that upon her. We would have chosen someone we liked much less than Ms. Block, if that were the case.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Strahl: Therefore, I think on this one, I understand the need to.... I think this probably should have come to the board directly. I think this probably shouldn't have been something that the working group was assigned to. As we're working through this, we're

probably going to find these things, but I don't expect that this is the role of the working group.

The tough part is that there is already scaffolding up on the building, so we're going to have much input at this time. However, those of us who sit on this body are ultimately seen to be accountable, regardless of whether the decisions were made by relatives of ours or not in the past.

At any rate, this is the last meeting we have. Obviously, it isn't something that they will be seized with over the summer, so we can revisit it again. I don't think we have a problem saying that they need to start digging. If that's what the decision was, yes, they do.

• (1250)

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's simply, I think, whether they can put up this wall of this size.

Mr. Julian has a different view. I'll go to him after Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: If it is necessary for the project to dig 10,000 square metres in front of the Centre Block, then since we're not engineers and we're not architects and we're well down the path here, that is not a decision we need to make. That needs to happen. If they need to come to us for a decision in the future on whether it needs to be 27,000 square metres or 10,000 square metres, that's fine. I don't know why we're even talking about this issue.

I guess what I'm saying is that if you need to put the services in there for 10,000 square metres, then I don't know why it's coming back to us. That needs to happen. Go for it in that regard. I don't know why we need to even talk about the other phases at this point.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Before I go to Mr. Julian, I would ask us to keep in mind how spread out the footprint of the precinct is now. Maybe in due course we could have a comment about whether part of this is intended to either limit that footprint in the future or bring it back a bit, which helps in a number of ways with efficiency, security, etc.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a question that I should have asked in the working group. Is the BOIE being consulted, or does the BOIE have responsibility for approval? In other words, if we decide right now that we decline the contract for excavation, what happens? Have we made a decision, or is that just something that's taken into consideration in terms of moving forward?

Mr. Rob Wright: That's a very challenging question.

As we have discussed at this committee, this concept and these projects were previously approved. The government entered into these contracts on the explicit understanding that Parliament wanted a visitor welcome centre. Parliament requested the Government of Canada, specifically Public Services and Procurement Canada, to implement such a project. That's the basis, to this point, upon which the contracts have been entered into.

If the decision is to no longer proceed, yes, there are contract implications. There's no question about that. Under the authority of the Minister of Public Services and Procurement Canada, those contracts were entered into. We would need to have some deep discussions between Parliament and the legislative and executive branches on how best to manage that situation.

•(1255)

Mr. Peter Julian: That decision of BOIE would be determinant. I support the excavating contract, but if we said no, that decision would then be implemented.

Mr. Rob Wright: I'm only speaking from a personal perspective at this point, which can be dangerous, but if Parliament explicitly does not want a visitor welcome centre, I could not see proceeding to build a visitor welcome centre.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: We're not all of Parliament.

Mr. Peter Julian: I understand, but we're being seen as a decision-making body. I think that's important. Ms. Bergen asked a very valid question. I hadn't actually asked it in the working group. I had assumed that we had decision-making authority, and it appears to be the case.

Coming back to the visitor centre, that is something that needs to be decided by a future BOIE. I think all three of us on the working group agreed that this is not a decision that should be taken now.

I do not believe that we're tied by decisions that were taken 20 years ago. The context was different and the mechanical demands were different. I believe that we're proceeding step by step on this project, but after the election the new BOIE will have the responsibility of deciding the ultimate configuration.

For the excavating contract, the scalability is important, because it doesn't tie us in to the decision about whether or not to proceed with the visitor centre. It allows the work to begin, so we're not delaying this project unduly, but ultimately it will still come back, and some hard discussions and hard decisions will need to be taken after the election about what Centre Block and the renewal project will look like. I think it's important for us to take note of that and to build time in for November and December.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I believe that at some point I asked for a briefing on the organization chart. What the decision-making process looks like surely must exist somewhere. If we've just layered a working group on top of that, we should be able to see that as well. Even in the assignment of offices in this building, we saw the difficulty of relying on decisions that were taken 20 years ago, so I agree with Mr. Julian that we're the people here now who are responsible for approving or not approving certain funds. We want to be involved where we need to be and not slow things up unnecessarily.

I believe that at a previous meeting—I don't have the blues in front of me—I did request some indication of how this is supposed to work going forward. Apparently, we had to jump into it to build the fence and to start the excavating contract. That's fine. We're about to rise at the end of next week, so I doubt this group will have to make any other decisions like this. We still have time to get this right, but I would suggest that it starts a few steps back.

I certainly appreciate the work that the working group has done and I apologize for putting you in that stressful position in advance of this meeting, but I think that if we want to get it right, we have to go back to the decision-making flow chart. Then we can look at where we believe a working group or members of Parliament should

insert themselves and where they are not to be inserted. That will give us a much better idea. Rather than coming to and from this group and presenting, we need to know perhaps where to insert ourselves. I would ask for that again.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you. You put it well by saying “where to insert ourselves”.

I have Mrs. Block and Monsieur Patrice—oh, we don't have any time. Sorry; I think I had better suspend. Will you come back, please?

Mrs. Block, you have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Building on the comments that were made, I think one of the things that was an impetus for us was understanding that there is a cost to delaying, if we don't stick with the deadlines that we've agreed to. We understood that this was one of the reasons it was important to come back now.

•(1300)

Hon. Geoff Regan: We will all reflect on those wise words over the next 10 minutes or so, and then we'll come back, I think—or can we? We can't come back today? We have to finish? I have until 1:30, as I understand it.

The meeting is suspended.

•(1300)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1320)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Do we wish to approve the excavation contract strategy and the construction hoarding? Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Monsieur Patrice has indicated that he will provide members of the board, in the next week or so, with a note on the governance of this process.

Mr. Michel Patrice: It will be for discussion purposes, and also a detailed briefing.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I think that from here on, it is important that we decide when we want to insert ourselves—or the board in the future can decide that, whoever they may be.

Colleagues, I thank you very much. I know you have lots to do, so I think we had better...or do we want to go on with the next item? We have another item, I guess. Sorry.

Go ahead, Ms. Bergen.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Before you go, I just want to make sure we're clear now, though, as Mark requested, that we can have a flow chart so that we can understand who is making those granular decisions. Then we know, as we said, where we are going to insert ourselves.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Yes.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Thanks.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Before we adjourn, we have agenda item 8, video broadcasting and webcasting for committees.

Judy, would you go ahead, please?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want you to know that we appreciate the board agreeing to include our recommendation for additional broadcasting resources and options for committees in the next Parliament as part of your agenda today.

I'm joined by Eric Janse, Stéphan Aubé and Ian McDonald from the House administration.

As many of you have known, there have been growing challenges around access to the limited resources broadcast committee proceedings on video. As a result, many committee chairs and members feel that committees do not always get the attention they would like for the important work they do on behalf of Canadians.

In addition, if additional video streams for committee meetings were added, closed captioning would be included, increasing access to committee proceedings for even more Canadians. As there have not been changes to the existing broadcasting resources since 2001, I think it's probably time.

As a result, the liaison committee recently saw a presentation on a web broadcasting option for committee meetings, and the committee fully supported this initiative as a way of increasing access.... Am I going too fast for you, Ian?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Sgro, but I think what we need to come to quickly is the fact that you've made recommendations. They are at the end of the note—

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Yes.

Hon. Geoff Regan: They are:

- 1) That the Speaker write to the House Leaders to recommend they seek the approval of the House to expand the number of committee meetings that may video broadcast/webcast simultaneously.
- 2) Approve additional resources as outlined in the Considerations section under "A. Financial Implications".
- 3) That the temporary funding be absorbed through any surpluses from the global envelope for standing committees available at the end of the fiscal year 2019-2020.

Is the board ready to say yes to that?

Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: This obviously would have no impact in this Parliament.

I think what we are comfortable with, especially at this stage, is to approve the webcasting part of it right away. I think we would look at an additional broadcast capability, perhaps, with the new board. I don't know if that is possible or what the difference is, but that is what we were comfortable with. When we were looking at it, we were comfortable certainly that everything would be broadcast to the web, but we weren't prepared at this time to sign off on the additional television.

• (1325)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Okay. That's an option we could do. Does everyone else agree to that, or are there other comments? I see no other comments, so are we agreed to that proposal from Mr. Strahl?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Very good.

Thank you very much. Sorry to cut you short, but we don't have any time. We're now on to the four reports that are numbered 9, 10, 11 and 12 on the agenda. Are there any issues arising?

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I think we can take all four together.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Good.

Mr. Peter Julian: However, I have a question after reading through the reports. It's on the report on preventing and addressing harassment.

There was a question about the reporting in Table 1, which shows there were four inquiries on sexual harassment but no complaints were lodged. I just wanted a response to that. It seemed to me strange that on something as serious as sexual harassment there were inquiries, yet no complaints were levied. It raises some concerns for me that we may have victims of sexual harassment who are not stepping forward for whatever reason, but it could just be that the sexual harassment inquiry could have come from members themselves, who were just making sure that they understood what their responsibilities were.

Without context, that figure of four inquiries and no complaints seems concerning. I was hoping there were some answers.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Ms. Daigle.

Ms. Robyn Daigle (Director, Members HR Services, House of Commons): Thanks, Mr. Julian.

To give some context, when inquiries come in, they can be inquiries about the policy framework from the members themselves or from employees. It could also be the MP inquiring because they may have a situation between employees. There are a lot of informal mechanisms to help resolve some of these issues without a more formal complaint, so it doesn't mean necessarily that the situation hasn't been dealt with; it just means it may have been resolved otherwise, or it may have just literally been four inquiries on the policy framework if an MP wanted to understand what his obligations are under the policy as well.

Mr. Peter Julian: Do we track that, and do we know what happened to those four inquiries?

Ms. Robyn Daigle: They were resolved. They may have been inquiries on the policy framework. No formal complaint came out of them.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Are the four reports adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I will table the ones mentioned, number 9 and number 12.

Thank you very much, members, for all your hard work on the board. Have a good summer, and good luck.

The meeting is adjourned.

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