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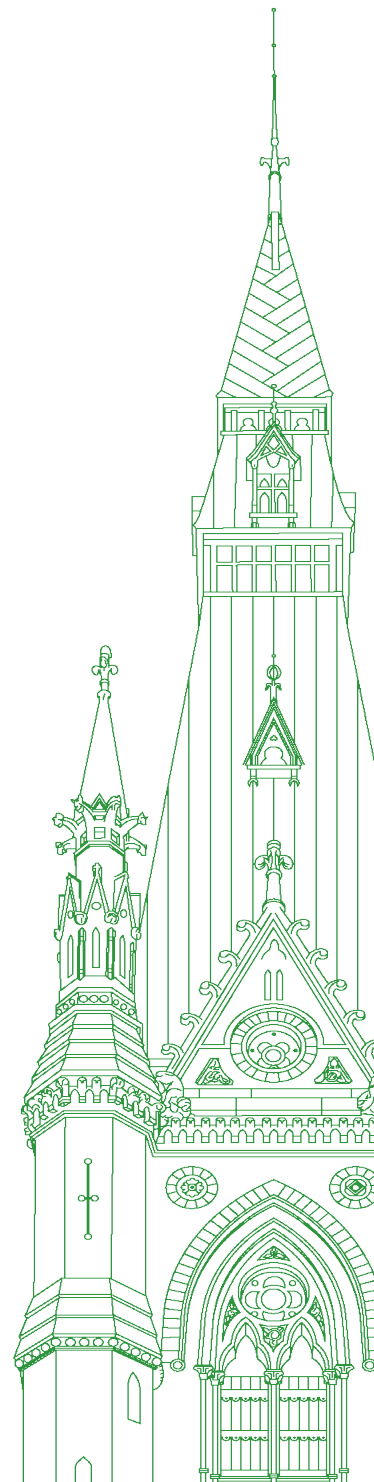
Board of Internal Economy

TRANSCRIPT

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Thursday, March 12, 2020



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• (1120)

[*English*]

Hon. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): Welcome.

It's Thursday, March 12, 2020, and we'll proceed with meeting number three of the Board of Internal Economy.

The first item on the agenda is the minutes of the previous meeting.

Is everything in order? There are no adjustments; everything's fine. Do we have approval? Good.

The next item we'll look at is the parliamentary precinct long-term vision and plan.

Before we go to that, I want to inform everyone that we'll be going in camera should the person from Health Canada come here a bit earlier. Because it is a pressing matter, I want to make sure everyone is here. We may have to interrupt our meeting at some point to proceed with that.

We'll hear from our presenters: Michel Patrice, deputy clerk, administration; Stéphan Aubé, chief information officer; and Susan Kulba, director general, real property.

Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland (Chief Government Whip): Mr. Speaker, there have been very productive discussions among members of the board with respect to this item. I first want to thank my colleagues for those conversations, which have been very fruitful, and provide a recommendation. I thought it would be appropriate for me to start by summarizing as best I can the conversations we've had.

The intention would be to create a subcommittee, a working group, if you will, comprised of members of Parliament from all recognized parties that would be a subcommittee of the Board of Internal Economy, and would report its recommendations to the Board of Internal Economy. We've had some conversations on this to get the composition right. I'm proposing three Liberals, two Conservatives, one Bloc and one NDP for that working group.

From our own perspective, we'll be populating it with members of PROC to harmonize the process and the work PROC has been doing with the work we are doing.

The Senate would then choose its own working group format. It could have a conversation about matters specifically of import to the Senate, the Senate chamber, the Senate meeting rooms and that

sort of thing. However, where there is overlap, those two bodies could meet jointly and try to find a way to get on the same page.

The Board of Internal Economy, though, and we would be seeking to do it at this meeting, would be looking to provide specific direction that the overriding principle be the preservation of heritage.

Candice, I know you had some specific thoughts about some of the pieces, some "thou shalt not touch" provisions: Thou shalt not touch the chamber. Thou shalt not touch the Hall of Honour. Thou shalt not touch the entrance for members. Thou shalt not touch la Francophonie. We would place specific direction to restore these elements of heritage and not contemplate any amendment or potential destruction of these elements of heritage.

I don't think this needs to be part of a motion, but it's important to state that the assistant deputy minister for parliamentary infrastructure of the Department of Public Services and Procurement, or his or her designate, would operate as liaison to the working group to make sure there's that connection between the ministerial side and the work of the parliamentary group. Obviously, it would be led by the parliamentary group, and the minutes of the working group meeting would be recorded and made public 30 days following a meeting.

Mr. Speaker, that builds on the conversations we had at the previous meeting, where we really heard from all members around the importance of—

Hon. Candice Bergen (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Do we have that?

Hon. Mark Holland: Yes, that is my understanding. I'm looking at Charles to see if this has been circulated to members.

[*Translation*]

I think the text is available in both official languages.

[*English*]

Members should have that in front of them. I'm suggesting that as a framework for the motion that we can hopefully proceed with today.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Julian, I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I feel that the text reflects our discussion quite well.

However, I would actually write that the government will have three members, the official opposition two members, and the third and fourth parties one member each. This would ensure that the subcommittee's work can continue if we have an election, whether scheduled or not.

Hon. Anthony Rota: So what are you suggesting, exactly: more members?

• (1125)

Mr. Peter Julian: I am suggesting replacing the reference to the Liberal Party by “government” and the reference to the Conservative Party by “official opposition”, and so on.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Okay, I understand. So we will use the terms “government”, “official opposition”, “third party” and “fourth party”.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: [Inaudible—Editor]

[Translation]

Hon. Anthony Rota: The figures will stay the same.

Do we have consensus to proceed in that manner?

[English]

Is everybody in accordance—

Hon. Candice Bergen: On the numbers.

Hon. Anthony Rota: —on the numbers? Well, I guess we would have to....

Madam Bergen, did you want to say something?

Hon. Candice Bergen: I think the one thing we want to make sure of, and I think we would probably all be in agreement, is that this committee doesn't get too overly bureaucratic where they are calling witnesses and satisfying curiosities. I'd like to make sure that we have some of those parameters. Maybe right now isn't the time to do it. Maybe we want to establish that we will have this subcommittee made up of the composition that you outlined. Or do we want to lay down a few more parameters now?

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland: I'm open. My thinking would be that we would allow that body to make a determination. The parameters are fairly tight. If the committee wanted to hear representation on public use of the front lawn and the implication on the design....

Hon. Candice Bergen: With officials.

Hon. Mark Holland: With officials.

Again, if we want to be so prescriptive as to say that body wouldn't hear from anybody outside of officials and parliamentarians, I'm a little loath to place that restriction on them. I'd rather have them come to that conclusion as part of their process. I'd be interested in hearing you expand upon the....

If I could, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the officials, my understanding is that by placing the “thou shall not touch” provisions and the overall directive of preservation of heritage, it takes away some of the time pressure that was previously discussed. One of the

biggest concerns was the decision on the size of the chamber, as an example, and that impeding the ability to proceed with construction in the summer.

Is that correct?

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): That's correct.

Those kinds of instructions, directives or directions are very helpful in a way in going forward, for example, by taking off the footprint of the chamber. If we don't look at that and we keep the same footprint, then we can focus on other elements, yes.

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, if I could just finish the point, I think we have more time as a result. If this direction is carried out, we have considerably more time than we had previously. The urgency is lifted a little. Therefore, my suggestion would be to leave it to that body to make a determination on how best to comport itself and how best to come to the conclusions for the recommendations they're going to give to this body.

Hon. Anthony Rota: We have Mr. Strahl and then Ms. Bergen.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chief Opposition Whip): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As long as there is something in here, or there is some direction from us.... My worry is that we create a third body as opposed to creating one. Right now we have BOIE and PROC—we're not even talking about the Senate—and now this. As long as we are clear that this body, this group we are creating, is to replace the current work that is being contemplated by this body and by PROC, that we are not making it so that now PROC will hear from officials, we will hear from officials and the working group will hear from officials.... As long as we are making it clear through the motion and clear in public here today that this group is designed to take those functions away from BOIE and PROC and concentrate it here so there are not now three groups discussing this....

I've expressed this privately, but my worry is that when you get into a subcommittee as opposed to a working group, then you become another... Subcommittees have rules and procedures and when as opposed to a working group it becomes a subcommittee, I'm worried that we might lose some of that streamlining that we're attempting to get to here.

If there's a way in the motion, or a way for us to make it clear that what we're trying to achieve here is efficiency and not duplication, we'd be in agreement with that.

• (1130)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Before we go any further, I just want to ask a question of all you who have come together. This is the first I have seen of it, and it seems you've put some thought into it and actually worked together, which is a good thing. My question for you is this. Do you all feel comfortable that this reflects Mr. Strahl's concern about concentrating everything in one committee or do you feel this is going to be split in different areas?

I'll just leave that one. I know we had some people—

Are you saying to leave it as a working group and that should cover the ground?

Mr. Mark Strahl: I'm worried that using certain terminology, although we might understand what it is, would in effect create more problems than it would solve. A working group is what I would like to call it and then we can be more flexible in how it is structured.

That would be my suggestion.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I don't want to complicate things, but do we need an appendix at the end explaining what a working group is? I just want to cover the ground now so that we don't—

Mr. Mark Strahl: Efficiency is what we are looking for here.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Okay, we'll make that note.

We'll go to Ms. Bergen, followed by Madam DeBellefeuille.

[Translation]

We now move to Mr. Holland.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen: The other question I had is this. How are we going to let the working group know, or the officials, or whoever needs to know, the list of “thou shalt not touch” rooms that we want to make sure are preserved?

What's the thought around that?

Hon. Anthony Rota: As a group, have you discussed that?

Hon. Mark Holland: I have a reflection, but I'll wait for my turn.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, the floor is yours. Then it will be Mr. Holland's turn.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): I have looked over the document that was provided to us. I find that it reflects all the discussions we have had. Above all, it clearly defines the parameters that Ms. Bergen, Mr. Strahl or the rest of the committee wanted, in order to give the team led by Mr. Patrice some direction and guidelines.

I understand the confusion we see in the French version—I don't know the situation in English—from the use of the words: “le BRI créera un sous-comité”. So let's take that out and put “le BRI créera un groupe de travail” instead. With that change, I feel that Mr. Strahl will be more comfortable.

After that, in my opinion, the mandate and the description of the objectives in the French version answer all of our concerns and cover all the guidelines that we would like the House of Commons administration to abide by. So I find the document to be quite complete. If we have forgotten anything, Mr. Holland can add it. Personally, I am very comfortable with it.

[English]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland: Thank you. Let me just go through a couple of little points that were raised.

On the first point raised by Mr. Strahl, Mr. Speaker, I think it is certainly the intention of this document and reflective of the conversations that we had that this would create a body, not three, so that it would give very clear responsibility for the adjudication of recommendations to this body, that the body would then be reporting back to BOIE. The intention really of doing this is to ensure that we don't have multiple different channels for the House administration to be dealing with, which is also partly the reason I don't want to be too prescriptive about how that body conducts itself, but ultimately it would be recommendations that would be coming back here.

If there wasn't clarity here, hopefully that clarity will be reflected in the conversations and will therefore be carried in the spirit of what is created. I'm comfortable with adding additional words, but I think that the unanimity of this body probably is sufficient. I wouldn't be uncomfortable with additional words if that made people more comfortable.

What I think would be sufficient to start with, to answer the question posed by Madam Bergen, is that we have some immediate ones that we've already agreed to as a group in our conversations that should not be touched. On the “thou shall not touch” list we have the chamber itself, the entrance at West Block and the Hall of Honour.

Then I would say that the list will certainly be more expansive than that, but I think we can start there and stay those categorically today.

Then, my recommendation would be to ask the House administration to come back to us with a list of heritage features that we can take a look at and potentially add to that list. I can tell you that when the chamber was closed and they had the opportunity to lock hallways, when all the doors were open and nobody was in the building, there were some rooms that I walked into that I didn't even know existed. They were just magnificent, and it would rip my heart out to see them transformed. I may not—or this body may not—even be fully cognizant of all of the heritage features that decisions have to be made on.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to Mr. Patrice, would it be sufficient at this point to give you that specific direction on the pieces of heritage that I have identified, to come back with a more expansive list of heritage features that we could review for our next meeting and then make a decision whether or not to add to that list?

• (1135)

Mr. Michel Patrice: That would be very helpful. It would be our pleasure to prepare such a list and submit it for your consideration, with maybe a little background on each.

Hon. Mark Holland: On that basis, Mr. Speaker, I believe we are simpatico, if I'm reading the room correctly.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

Are we all in favour of this motion? Do we have unanimous consent?

(Motion agreed to)

Perfect, good.

We'll proceed in putting this together, and we'll include a list on there as well. I trust that the parties will be putting forward the people that they want to see on those committees.

Mr. Patrice.

Mr. Michel Patrice: I think we're done.

Hon. Anthony Rota: They did your work for you.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Thank you very much.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, obviously, we are waiting, but I think that some of that conversation would be beneficial even earlier, perhaps. Rather than suspending the meeting, I would make a suggestion that we break for a couple of moments and move in camera.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Yes. We don't have a lot left before we go in camera, so we can go in camera right away.

We are moving in camera, certainly, for the person who is supposed to be here at noon.

Now, I'll ask everyone to leave—well, not everyone—and we'll move in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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