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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

PH-29

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

PH-29

**Standing Committee
on Procedure
and House Affairs**

Television broadcast system

Committee business

**Comité permanent
de la procédure
et des affaires de la Chambre**

Système de télédiffusion

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1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 6 November 2024

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Mercredi 6 novembre 2024

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Clerk: Christopher Tyrell

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PROCEDURE
AND HOUSE AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT
DE LA PROCÉDURE
ET DES AFFAIRES DE LA CHAMBRE**

Wednesday 6 November 2024

Mercredi 6 novembre 2024

The committee met at 1301 in room 151.

TELEVISION BROADCAST SYSTEM

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will now come to order.

We have with us today Mike Donofrio, the director of the broadcast and recording service. He has been invited to talk to the committee about the Empress Media Asset Management system at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as well as details surrounding exploring and implementing a French-only TV channel for broadcasting House and committee proceedings.

Mr. Donofrio, I understand that you have a presentation for the committee, and then we can open the floor for questions afterward. Please go ahead when you are ready.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Thank you. I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee to discuss and answer any questions you may have about the broadcast and recording service, including the ones brought forward during the committee meeting on October 22 of this year.

I've had the opportunity to watch the committee and would like to start with the question regarding the French-language television station. Our current broadcasting television, ONT.PARL, is both an English- and French-language television channel. If you want to listen to the French-language feed, you go to the SAP or MTS button on your remote—that's secondary audio programming or multi-channel television sound—and choose French. All graphics that appear on the channel are also presented in both English and in French.

The second question was regarding the Legislative Assembly's media asset management tool, eMAM, specifically around when the tool will be available to members and their staff.

In January of this year, we announced a pilot project to give members and their staff access to this system. An email was sent out on January 30 by the Deputy Clerk to staff members of recognized parties, caucuses and independent members. She asked them to identify people who would like to take—

Interruption.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Donofrio, I'm just going to interrupt you for a moment. Ironically—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: There's feedback. Yes, I hear it.

MPP Jamie West: Do you know a guy?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: I know a few people, yes. *Laughter.*

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Thank you. I think that should take care of it, hopefully.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): In that case, please go ahead.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Let me go back: An email was sent out on January 30 by the Deputy Clerk to staff members of recognized parties, caucuses and independent members. She asked them identify people who would like to take part in this testing phase. The pilot project would allow us to gather feedback on how the system can be further be enhanced for a wider range of users. At that time, three people were identified. These people have been trained on the system. In March, the Deputy Clerk followed up to ask for volunteers, but no other potential users were identified at that time.

The broadcast and recording service is eager to have more MPPs and staff take part in this project. eMAM is a powerful system that would allow members and staff to access and view debates going back to BRS's inception in 1986, as well as all current House and committee proceedings and press conferences held in the media studio.

We have two upcoming training sessions scheduled for next week. The first one is Tuesday, November 12, at 1 p.m. in this room. The other is Thursday, November 14, at 10 a.m., also in this room. If you or any of your staff are interested in taking part, please email me and we can book you into one of these training sessions.

I also wanted to clear up any confusion I may have created about what the eMAM system is. During my appearance before this committee in September of 2022, in response to members' questions, I did mention on a couple of occasions the possibility to pull your own clips in the future. I would like to make clear that this ability would come as a separate project that would require additional funds. When we purchased the equipment, the ability to integrate eMAM into the website at a future date was a mandatory requirement. I did not make this clear in my answers.

eMAM is an archive system. It was purchased in order to digitize the over 13,000 tapes stored at the Archives of Ontario and give the assembly the ability to quickly and

easily search and view these videos. It also eliminated the significant fees charged by the Archives of Ontario to store these tapes in a temperature-controlled environment. As mentioned above, it's a powerful tool, and I believe the members and their staff will find it very useful.

Thank you for your time. Any questions that you may have, I'm here to answer.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Thank you very much.

I will maintain a speakers list for members who had invited Mr. Donofrio. I see Madame Collard first, and then MPP Barnes.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my first time participating, and I've been kept informed through my colleague here about the progress.

I'm very interested in the ability for broadcast to provide a floor version of the House proceedings. The French or the English means that there's interpretation speaking over. When you're bilingual and you don't need that interpretation, it's very annoying because you're missing part of the speech because you can't switch back quick enough to be able to capture what the person said in the original language.

That being said, I know you mentioned that Parlance has either the English or the French. Is that what you mentioned?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: It also has the floor sound too. Floor sound is available on the Parlance app, as well as on the website. But—

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay. You'll need to show me how to do that because I haven't been able to figure it out on the Parlance app that I have on my phone. I can only access either French or English. I have no access to the floor version.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: On the Parlance app—I will admit, it is a bit confusing. In order for us to be able to do it with the technology that existed, we put it on the CC channel. So if you hit the closed-caption button, you will get the closed-caption feed, but it will be the floor sound audio that you will hear.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: But you would get the captions in the language that you were logged into?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: The captions are in English.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Only in English?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay.

Regarding the website itself: If you go on the OLA website, I see that now you do have a version accessible without interpretation.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: There is, yes.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: That's fairly new, right?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: That's well over a year or so old.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay. Well, I never go there because I didn't know it was available anyway. I watch it on TV, but on TV, you don't have the floor option.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes. On TV, we are limited by the broadcast technology that's out there, which is an older technology. We only have the ability to send two lan-

guages on television, and that's a limitation of the broadcast technology.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Is there any plan to make a floor-audio version available? That would be a third channel, I understand, so we would have the English, the French and the floor version.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Well, that's where it gets a little difficult, because the CRTC is the one that regulates the television industry. The CRTC has given legislative assemblies a CRTC exemption in order for us to broadcast. They have mandated that the cable companies in Ontario take that channel. They're only mandated to take a channel. If we put a second channel out there, we would be doubling our costs everywhere.

Our satellite time—what it costs us to do our satellite—is one of my biggest line items in the budget. We would need to get a second satellite feed and double that cost. Not only that—satellite time has been harder and harder to find. In the last five years, we've been kicked off our satellite feed twice. Once, they decommissioned the satellite completely, and just recently—we're going through it now—the CRTC has sold off a bunch of space to telecommunications for cellphones. So we're having an even tougher time finding enough satellite time for the one feed.

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If and when we were able to do that, I believe that most, if not all, the cable companies would not take the channel. It wouldn't go, anyway; they wouldn't be mandated to take it. For example, Rogers cable: We've been trying to work with Rogers cable for eight years in order to try to get on their legacy cable boxes, the ones that are analog, our television signal in HD. They will not put it in HD. They put it in HD on their digital platform, but because of the way the analog signals work, they don't have enough bandwidth. So to think that all of the cable companies would take that channel, I don't believe it would happen.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: How many channels is the Legislature using?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: It's one broadcast television channel, which was mandated that all cable companies need to take. For that broadcast channel, the technology allows for us to put on two audio channels. So the main audio channel, when you switch to the channel, is English, and then when you go to your remote, if you hit the SAT button or the MTS button, that's when you get the French feed.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay.

I just have one last question. You mentioned that a memo was sent to recognized parties and the independents to ask volunteers to test the access to digitization of the—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: The eMAM system, yes.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes. I have never seen that memo. Have you?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'd have to ask my staffer.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I don't know where it was sent to. I definitely didn't see it.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: It was sent to, as I mentioned, staff from all parties, as well as all independents. It was

sent to the staff. And as I mentioned, there were people that saw it and were trained on the system, but then, after we saw that there was little uptake, we sent out a second one and, again, there were no volunteers sent to us. I know the Deputy Clerk herself even went up and talked to certain members who she knew were interested in the past directly, and so after a while, we figured there wasn't interest.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay. Is it okay if I reach out to you by email to—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Absolutely. As I mentioned, we're proud of the system. It's a powerful system. Right now, if you were to be in the system, you would be able to see the committee that's going on right now, live, as it happens. You would be able to rewind it. You would be able to see everything we did this morning. You would be able to rewind it and all the press conferences that happened. It's quite a powerful system for you to be able to see all the content.

Also, we've been ingesting the over 13,000 tapes now. I think since 2022, possibly, we've ingested over 11,000 of those tapes. We've almost completed the project, so there's a little less than 2,000 left. There's a massive archive of House sittings going back to 1986, at least.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: So you're saying that we would be able to see what was happening this morning. There's no delay to have to wait until the next day before you have access.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: No. You would be able to see it right away as it's happening. You would be able to rewind it as it's happening. If you heard something and you're like, "What did that person just say?", you would be able to rewind it. You would be able to see everything before that.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay. When is that going to be available?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: It's available now.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay. How—

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I have quite a speakers' list, so we're going to continue to move through it.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Sorry. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): No, that's fine. This is going to be an engaging discussion. Folks had a lot of interest in having you here.

We'll continue on. Ms. Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you for attending. My question is about the training. You say you have one coming up Tuesday, November 12, and Thursday?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes, let me just make sure again. Yes, Tuesday, November 12, at 1 p.m., in this room, and Thursday, November 14, at 10 a.m., also in this room.

Also, we do training on a regular basis. It's usually during constituency weeks, because our staff is quite busy right now with everybody sitting. But if we get some interest where people can't make a constituency week, we can try and figure out another time to do it as well.

Originally, what we were hoping for was three to four people from each party or independents to do a test at first, not to overwhelm, and then slowly make it wider.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: So is there a possibility of doing it online or for it being recorded to be accessed at a later date?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: It's usually better to be in person only because it's really not a consumer product. As I mentioned before, it's an archive. It is made for broadcasters really. Early on, we thought this would be a really nice tool for the entire assembly to use. But just for that initial one, to be able to go through it with a laptop with our trainers, they can walk through everything and answer a bunch of questions, it's easier to do it with people in person and make sure that we understand that they understand how to use it before they leave, and then the experience will be much less frustrating for you when you go back and have to try and use it on your own.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I think you mentioned if we could put together a group of people, you could probably try and see if you could accommodate that training session outside of the ones you do.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Absolutely.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: All right. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. My list is Monsieur Sarrazin, Mr. Rae, Mr. Bailey. Anyone else at this time? Okay.

Monsieur Sarrazin.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: First of all, like the training—I just noticed that it won't be given online, so our staff at the constituency office, like in my case, are the ones really taking care of the video clips and doing the communications. That training—exactly what are we hoping to learn through that training? Like, to go and get some portion of the video clips to be able to edit it or—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: No, it's not. As I mentioned, as the tool sits right now, it's not an editing tool, it's not a clipping tool; it's an archive, right?

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Okay.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: To give a little bit of maybe context is, when I first started in the position about eight years ago, we did not have access to all the content that we had done. The majority of it sat in a room somewhere in Toronto on shelves, on tapes that were deteriorating quickly, and if we didn't digitize them soon, they would be gone forever.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: So more or less, the training is to go and see some—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: It's basically to give you the ability to be able to view any of the proceedings that we've done back to 1986, any time you wanted, any portion of it. And then at that part, if you saw stuff that you liked, you would give us a call and we get you a clip.

We recently moved around an operator position and made a media asset management specialist whose job it is to get members' clips. Our turnaround time now is anywhere between 20 minutes and a half-hour each day.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Another question: The Parlance app—when you were talking about the app earlier, were

you talking about the website, or you were talking actually with the app?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Both. The app itself has all three languages. It has all five of our live feeds—

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Okay, let me stop you there. I downloaded the app, and I guess I selected English when I downloaded it, so I can only access English. I cannot rewind. I cannot do anything—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: You can't rewind. The app right now is limited. We're working with the developers to do a phase 2 portion of the app. When we originally did the app, we did it for a very, very cheap cost as a proof of concept to see what kind of uptake. It has gotten great uptake so we're now working on a phase 2 of that app.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Earlier, when you were talking about rewinding, you were talking about the website.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: No. I was talking about eMAM, that you can rewind back and forth—

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Oh, okay, okay. Sorry. The videos that are accessible online, like the—

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Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes. Currently, for both the website and Parlance, there's no rewinding capabilities. If you go on the app, if you have the latest version, there should be a little wheel, a little cog. If you click on that, it should allow you to pick English or French.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: So I probably need to update the app.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Is the app black or is it green?

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's green.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Okay, that's the old app. If you update the app, it should be a black version. There's a little cog wheel for settings up at the top. If you click that, you can go and choose French, and then, if you wanted floor sound on the video itself, you click the CC button and you would have floor sound.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: All right. Thank you for the answer.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Before we go to Mr. Rae, a quick show of hands—the camera is not on you; I'm just curious—how many members on this table have a version of Parlance on their phones or computers? Okay. So if you don't and you have questions, now is your time.

Mr. Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Michael, for coming back. I know you mentioned you've sent out two emails. I was wondering if you could just send it to literally the members of this committee, because we know it and we will go hound our caucus colleagues, and we have independent members here who can then go—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: That's not a problem. Sure.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I think Mr. Rae and some others have raised the challenge of communications or making sure that folks are aware of some of the services or opportunities, and maybe some of those sticking points. To Mr. Rae's point of using this committee, perhaps there is a conversation to be had about how

this committee can also amplify or communicate with the other members—I'm putting myself on the list—even if it is a matter of "These are the tools that members and their offices have." If it's a one-pager that we can circulate, if it's QR codes to scan and download Parlance—things like that. I have learned that whether it's the Clerk's office or other procedure-and-protocol folks, they seem to have our staff email addresses, as opposed to the individual members' directly, which may also be part of the ongoing challenge.

If you wanted to give some thought to how our committee could be of use in disseminating updates, information or opportunities, I think I've heard that from this committee before: that we want to know and we would like to maybe be part of that.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Absolutely.

The Chair (Mr. Matthew Rae): Mr. Rae, was there anything further? Okay.

Mr. Bailey, I have you next.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for coming here today. I'll accept what everyone else is saying because I don't really get any of this. But anyway, I'm going to have to go home and ask my son or my grandchildren to kind of—

Laughter.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The only question I got—I accept everything else. When I go to watch the House at home, not here, on my TV—I have Rogers, I think, in my apartment, and I'm sure it's Rogers we have at home; I don't know, but anyway—it's always checkerboarded. It's very unusual to watch the House, like question period or anything. It never comes through clearly. Is that something on my end maybe with Rogers or my—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Again, I would assume that what you probably have is the legacy, more analog Rogers box, and if that's the case, what's happening is you're getting our signal in SD and not HD. SD, especially on newer TVs, is going to look much softer, much lower quality than HD signals. Again, the CRTC mandates that they take our channel; it doesn't mandate that they take us in HD.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, I got that. That's what I'm saying. That's what I'm wondering, if the problem is on my end. It's not the feed here that I'm getting; it's something to do with—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Okay, that explains some of it.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Mr. Bailey, anything else there?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, I should go on to add that the technology with me—I'm old enough. A *[inaudible]* was a pipe wrench on the antennas.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Bailey, all of your committee members have been happy to assist you as we've had the opportunity, so that will continue.

Further to his question, though, you said the CRTC has mandated that they take the channel. Are they mandated that they broadcast the channel? You had said it might be SD as opposed to HD, but are they mandated to broadcast it at all or just to take? Or is the language the same?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes, when I say “take,” I mean put it on their basic cable. They need to put it on their skinny, basic cable, which most people can afford.

Interjections.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay, folks.

Sorry. Is there a role that this committee can play? Because I know an awful lot of people subscribe to Rogers, my 103½-year-old grandma included, and she cannot watch Queen’s Park, which makes me sad. Neither can Mr. Bailey, which also makes me sad. Is there an opportunity for this committee to be a voice? Is there a role for this committee to play? I understand that we’re talking about federal, but when the Legislature and its proceedings are not able to be watched by Rogers customers across the province, it seems problematic.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: I guess what I would say to that is that probably any kind of letter coming from the provincial Legislature would never hurt. Obviously, as mentioned, it is a federal mandate. Also, Rogers is trying to move toward their more digital platform, which we are on in HD. The analog platform has limited bandwidth, and to shove all the stations in—it’s why they’ve chosen to do that. Eventually, I believe, they will discontinue that service at some point, but as you are probably all aware, we actually have that service within this building. If you’re turning on your remotes in this building, you’re getting that service; you’re getting the SD channel from Rogers.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Should this committee decide to write a letter or advance this, would you be able to make yourself available for fine-tuning the language and the technical stuff?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay.

I have Mr. West and Mr. Allsopp on my list. Mr. West?

MPP Jamie West: Just for clarification on the online library of video clips: Can we share that with someone outside?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: No. You basically need to be part of the Legislative Assembly, the actual network. Now, it can be accessed by you at home, depending on your connection at home. It’s possibly slower—it might take a whole while—but you end up logging in through our system to get it, so you need to have a valid one of our emails. You need to be part of this domain in order to have access to it.

MPP Jamie West: Okay. I just wanted to clarify that. Thanks.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Allsopp?

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Just a quick question: I just downloaded the Parlance app. It’s working really well. I was also running tech support for Mr. Bailey, as well. We’ve got it almost downloaded there; we just need a password. But I noticed that it’s not quite live. It seems to have a bit of a lag, maybe 30 seconds or so.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: That’s inherent to the way the streaming ends up working. We send our signal to a streaming provider, who then puts it out there. There’s inherently always a delay with streaming and it’s always

going to be there. It’s just the nature of how streaming works.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Am I right to think it’s about 30 seconds or so?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: It probably varies, depending on how long you’ve had the app on. It could get longer. And depending on your connection and things like that, it could vary. But yes.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: No problem. Also, just to be transparent here, the Android version of the new app has a bug that we are addressing, that hopefully will be addressed either at end of this week or early next week, which will have it go to sleep on you right now. The iPhone version doesn’t have that issue. They’re aware of it. They’re fixing it. It should be fixed by the end of next week.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I haven’t downloaded the new version.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Did you just download the new version?

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I have not. I don’t have it. Let me know when the bug is fixed.

1330

Mr. Michael Donofrio: I just remembered that we put that in. They identified the problem and they’re fixing it, but it should be fixed soon, hopefully.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Thank you.

Monsieur Sarrazin.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Talking about the archived video: For now, members—they’re accessible to us. Are there any restrictions on—because I know we can get software that you can actually look at it and record it with your laptop. Are there any restrictions? Are there copyrights? Let’s say I want to pull something from 10 years ago, send it to the ex-MPP in my region—

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Everything that we do, all the proceedings that we do, everything is public domain. There’s no copyright. Anybody is able to use it.

I will say that if you’re using the eMAM system to do something like that, what you are seeing is a proxy version of the original file. It’s a much lower-quality version. When you put it full-screen, it’s not going to be of the same quality that we would be able to send to you.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Madame Collard?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Following up on this archive tool: You say we have access to it now. Do we have access to it without training or do we need to through the training? Can you tell me where it’s located? Where is it?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: No, you need to go through the training first. It’s not incredibly long training. Again, part of the purpose is that right now, we also don’t want everyone to get on the system yet. We’re trying to do a pilot project, so we’re hoping that each of the parties or independents would identify three or four people to take part in this pilot project. We would train them, they can give us feedback on the system, we can see how the load

is and whether that's affecting anything in a negative way, and then start to go full-out and give everyone access.

But right now, to give everyone 100% access to the system right away, we don't know how that will affect the system. We don't know if people are going to say, "Hey, this is great, but what if you did this? What if you did that?" So we're hoping for at least a bit of a pilot project with three or four from each who can test it and give us feedback.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further discussion? Okay.

Mr. Donofrio, we really appreciate you coming for committee today. Is there anything else that you would want us to be aware of that's coming up or to be engaged in any part of the process? Perhaps the pilot, that you're looking for uptake—if you'd like to refer that to the committee so that we can help reach out, please let us know. Is there anything else you would add?

Mr. Michael Donofrio: I think we've covered pretty much most of it. Obviously, our broadcast and recording department is doing lots of work on a regular basis, lots of great work, and we'd love to discuss all the things we're doing at some point, if the committee would like us to at a further date.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Some of us remember before all the committee rooms were online and whatnot. It seems like only yesterday—a lot of changes.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Even in terms of travel committees, for example, last year we did a record number of over seven weeks of travel committees. They were fully broadcast from location, including Zoom within it, so that's a big feat as well. We're very proud of that as well.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Well, thank you very much. At this point, you're free to leave if you wish, as we still have other items of private-bill-related business to discuss. But thank you very much for your presentation today and your time and the work that you're doing. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Donofrio: Thank you.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. First, as a notice to members, the committee received a submission related to Bill Pr55. That's the private bill that members have an article or letter in front of them on, dated November 3. Pr55 is An Act respecting Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries. This submission was announced in the House by the Speaker on Monday. It has been circulated to all members of the committee by our Clerk.

Second to that, relative to the same bill, this morning, the Clerk received a letter from MPP Burch, requesting that Bill Pr55 be referred to this committee, and pursuant to standing order 89(a), the Speaker announced that the order for second reading of the bill was discharged, and the bill was deemed referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I'll pause there.

Are members clear on those two things to this point? A reminder that private bills are not private members' bills;

that with the change to the standing orders, they now go through the House so there's sort of a clock—is that fair to say?—from when they're tabled to when they can pass through the Legislature, unless it is essentially flagged and referred to this committee, either by five members or by one permanent member of this committee.

That has happened, which means that this private bill is set to come before this committee, and that would be up to the committee to schedule that. So would we like to do that at this time? Do members have any thoughts, remembering that when we schedule this bill, there will be presentations and opportunity for, if there are dissenting opinions, interested parties to come and present and then a discussion and a vote at that time for whether or not the proposed piece of legislation will continue? That's the overview of the process.

Mr. Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Just a question of clarification. I also have a piece of paper—applicant email?

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm going to go to that after this.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Okay; sorry.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): This is regarding Bill Pr55. If you look at the letter that was submitted, it seems to be—if members read on the first page, bottom paragraph—that they have raised that there might have been a—I'm going to use the word "misrepresentation," or that there is a challenge in how this has proceeded to this point.

Separate to that, one of our permanent members has brought it before the committee for us to hear about and discuss and whatnot.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Okay, I appreciate the clarification.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): As the Chair, it's my prerogative to schedule, but I serve at the pleasure of the committee.

Mr. Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I would be fine if we schedule something next week—well, not next week because we're not here, but in the next two weeks, the next three weeks. I'm not sure how much notice various groups—I know Mr. Coe, the original sponsor of this bill, obviously, will have a position, one would assume.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. At this time, we don't have a firm date, but if it's in a few weeks, then perhaps the Clerk and I can confer and pick a date that would work for interested parties and those involved. Is that a fair approach? Okay. Thank you.

Finally, as Mr. Rae has already noticed, I want to inform you that we have received a request from a private bill applicant to suspend a standing order with reference to a private bill, which can be made under standing order 85(c). If we check on the screens, momentarily, the Clerk is going to screen the relevant standing order and the request so that members can understand what we're being asked to do.

So if I may summarize—if you want to read this; I don't mean to interrupt, but I will say that private bill guidelines require an applicant to publish a notice once a week for

four weeks in the Ontario Gazette and another newspaper circulated in the locality most affected by the bill. That's in the standing orders. That's the process.

The applicant put their notice in a local newspaper, which is published monthly, but did so for three consecutive months—once a month, it's my understanding, for three consecutive months. The applicant feels that this should satisfy the publishing requirements—again, the requirements being once a week for four weeks in the Ontario Gazette and another newspaper.

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If members have questions, what has been put before us is that this applicant has requested an exemption from the standing orders, or a suspending of the standing order.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): I can speak to that, if you'd like.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Clerk, go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): As the Chair mentioned, the applicant posted a notice in the local newspaper, which runs monthly, once a month for three months. Our office's general interpretation of the guidelines is that, for example, if you were to put in a daily publication, it would be expected to publish once a week in four distinctly different calendar weeks. For a weekly publication, it's once a week for four different weeks. Extrapolating from that, in a monthly publication which is only a published once a month, the expectation would be to publish for four months, specifically for a monthly publication.

The applicant believes that three consecutive months in a monthly publication should satisfy the advertising requirements. To avoid further delays in their application process, they are requesting that the standing order related to publishing notice be suspended, which is standing order 85(e).

As the committee has not set a fee for this, if the request were granted, the applicant would pay a fee of \$50, which was the fee as of the beginning of the 43rd Parliament, per standing order 85(c)(1), which is on the screen in front of you and on the sheets that were handed out to you. The applicant would still need to fulfill all other standard requirements before their application can move forward in the process. This is only the suspending of the one very specific standing order.

With that, I am in the committee's hands as to how you would like to proceed with this, whether to grant the suspension or not. It's up to you.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Ms. Barnes and Mr. West.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: It's published once a month, but it's in circulation for that entire month, I'm assuming, for four weeks in that month?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): If it's published once a month, it's published on a date and it's out there for circulation.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. West.

MPP Jamie West: I was hoping there was more information on this, because I could see making the exception

based on location or if it's the most popular newspaper or something like that. But my concern is that there's a process that was made a certain way and that if you create precedent where you can deviate from it, it opens that precedent for everyone else to deviate from it. If there were more details to understanding why—it doesn't even say, "We didn't understand the intent" or anything; it just says, "We want to change what happened."

In Sudbury, there are three main newspapers, for example: two English, one French. If you chose those one of those and it was only monthly, maybe you could make the argument that most people read this one and it's only monthly. But I feel like with the little information we have here, an applicant—maybe not this applicant specifically, but a future applicant—could potentially choose a newspaper they know isn't well read and has low readership and distribution, so that people in the public aren't aware of what's happening. Or they could choose a newspaper that is less popular.

That's kind of what I'm thinking. I'm not speaking about this applicant specifically, but just how we open the door to people in the future being able to say, "There is a precedent, so we should be able to do it as well."

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I will put myself on the list. I have a question. It was to publish a notice once a week for four weeks in the Ontario Gazette and another newspaper. Have they met the requirements for the four weeks in the Gazette?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): Yes, that is a weekly publication. They have met the requirements for the Gazette.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay.

Mr. Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: My only question on this request is it says, "Republishing the ad would delay the process by at least another month, and I do not think it is necessary...." I'm not understanding really what the urgency is.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): I can't speak to the urgency. That would have to be a question for the applicant. However, the applicant informed me that the publication that they have used, their publishing date is right at the end of the month, and I was contacted about this right at the beginning of November. That's where the extra month comes from, is that they would have to wait until the end of November to publish again in the same newspaper in order to fulfill the requirement. That's the information that I have.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Correct me if I'm wrong, Chris: They have to publish in a newspaper before they come to the committee with this PR bill. So that advertising has to happen before they come? I'm just trying think of why. It's a PR bill.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): For PR bills, it's very much an applicant-driven process. An applicant would approach us and say, "I'm looking to do this PR bill." They would have the bill drafted by legislative counsel. They would need to fulfill all the additional requirements, which are:

—a cheque for the application fee;

—the publishing, again, once a week for four weeks in the Gazette and another newspaper circulated in the locality most affected by the bill;

—they would need to submit a compendium of background information, which is a series of 11 questions they need to answer about their reasons why and their information and that type of thing;

—once the notices are complete, they have to submit a statutory declaration, because I don't necessarily have access to every paper in the province—they would attest in front of a lawyer, a notary, a commissioner for taking oaths or affidavits that publications ran on these dates, and here's the proof of the thing that was published;

—to draft the bill, they need to secure a sponsor, which has to be a private member—so someone who's not the Speaker or a member of cabinet—to agree to sponsor their bill; and

—for the case of a revival bill to revive a corporation, which this is, there needs to be a certificate from the Ministry of Finance indicating that all applicable taxes have been paid up until the point of dissolution.

When they speak with legislative counsel and have their bill drafted, legislative counsel, as part of their work with the applicant, will circulate the bill to the Ministry of Finance and any other relevant ministries so that the ministry has a chance to review and see if they have any objections to the private bill. If they do, they will typically reach out to the applicant in advance and let them know, "This is what we may have a problem with." But one of those ministries being the Ministry of Finance, that's what initiates that certificate being sent directly to my office.

My office collects all the pieces of the application. We help the applicant through the process. Once the application is complete, we will process their application fee cheque, and we will reach out to the sponsor member to have them introduce the bill in the Legislature during introduction of bills. At that point, once it has been introduced, it goes on the order paper, and if we receive a letter from a member of the committee or five not of the committee, it would come to committee for further review.

Mr. Matthew Rae: One last comment, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I would be inclined to deny this request, because if their argument is it's going to delay it by another—we don't know where they are in the rest of that process. It could still be two months, considering the Ministry of Finance, depending on what the bill and—you said it's reviving a corporation—what's involved, or if there's outstanding taxes or whatever.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay.

Ms. Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I just want to—Toronto gazette?

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Ontario Gazette.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Oh, Ontario Gazette. Okay.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Sorry.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: No, I appreciate that.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, I tend to agree with MPP Rae. We would be setting a precedent by doing this, so I would tend to lean towards denying the request as well.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Hsu.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Just a point of information: Do the standing orders define what a newspaper is, or did nobody—I guess, in the past, it was thought not necessary to define it. Now, it's not clear.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): The standing orders do not define what a newspaper is. That may be a question for the committee at a later date. There are fewer and fewer newspapers being circulated in Ontario, so the committee may want to take a look at the guidelines at some point in the future.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay.

Folks have the applicant email in front of them, and it says, "Therefore, I kindly ask for a waiver of the additional publicizing requirement". I feel that various members have said that denying this request would be appropriate. I will turn to the Clerk and say, what would you need from the committee in order to respond to this applicant email?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): A motion either approving or denying the request would be sufficient.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Mr. Rae. 1350

Mr. Matthew Rae: I move to deny the request from the applicant.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Mr. Rae has moved to deny this particular request of the applicant. Is there further discussion?

In that case, are members ready to vote on said motion? All those in favour? All those opposed? Okay.

In that case, this committee will deny the request by the applicant for the waiver of this standing order.

Anything else to finish that? Mr. Hsu.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Just following up on my question and the response from our Clerk: May I suggest that at some future date, we look at this piece of the standing order and make a recommendation on how to change it? It is becoming outdated, and if there is no local newspaper, it's just another piece of red tape that maybe we should get rid of.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I think perhaps as your team receives all of these and the paperwork, you might also have folks who have opinions on this as well, and if you have heard feedback on this, it would be helpful for the committee—if that's something the committee wants to move forward on.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Are we moving forward with this today? Mr. Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I would table it for a future—because I know the government, just off the top of my head—and I know Nick could do more research on some of the changes—has recently changed, I think it was, for [*inaudible*]. At some point, to get some sort of funding, they changed the requirements. Similarly, they had to post in a newspaper. We've changed that definition to an

online, monthly publication. So I think both government and private members have done some sort of work on—it would be good to have a report from legislative research, giving Nick more work.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): This is not an official opinion, but I also understand that various municipalities have requirements and that they have also been trying to navigate that. So it's not a new conversation. Anything further to that?

Mr. Hsu would like the committee to look at this. Mr. Rae is suggesting we table it for now but isn't suggesting we don't look at it.

Mr. Matthew Rae: No, we can look at it. It would be great if legislative research could provide a mini report.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It sounds like we've given homework to our researcher. Is that what just happened?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Sorry, Nick.

Mr. Nick Ruderman: Not at all.

Just to confirm, then—a report on potential ways of advertising or what other jurisdictions have done with respect to requiring advertising in the context of private bills.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Private bills or even—Nika is here, my OLIP intern. I'll give her this homework later. Give a wave, Nika.

I know there was a government bill last session around requirements, whether it was for cultural affairs or something, so not necessarily—even government bills have changed for those municipalities that the Chair mentioned, so they may not even have to do cross-Canada jurisdiction—just in Ontario.

Mr. Nick Ruderman: Excellent. Thank you. And with respect to a deadline—

Mr. Matthew Rae: Yes, we're on a break.

Mr. Nick Ruderman: Okay; thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I also would like to correct my record. If we can just circle back to the letter that we received: I think I understood that it had been submitted by the folks who actually were pursuing the private bill, so I may have said that incorrectly. This is a letter from a different party, highlighting their concern with that private legislation. I think I misunderstood what was before us. When this bill is called to committee, it does seem that there will be other folks who are interested in engaging in that process, so as I have already said, the Clerk and I will discuss how best to ensure that anyone interested is apprised of the schedule.

Anything—

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): I just want to make sure that the committee is on board with the request from MPP Rae for research.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Rae has suggested that we task Nick with figuring out, as we've talked about, other approaches that other jurisdictions have regarding that publishing requirement or how they're navigating the lack of newspapers or whatnot. Are folks interested in going ahead with that request? Okay, good.

One other thing that I will add is that the last committee meeting—oh, wait, that was in camera. Just kidding.

Laughter.

The Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Any letters that we have talked about sharing, those are going forward, so we'll keep members in the loop as we hear back from those who we have reached out to.

Is there anything else to raise today? Any other business? No more discussion. No further business. In that case, this meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1356.

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