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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on
Social Services**

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Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

Chair: Glenn Littlejohn, MHA

Vice-Chair: Tony Cornect, MHA

Members:

Lisa Dempster, MHA

Gerry Rogers, MHA

Glen Little, MHA

Dale Kirby, MHA

Kevin Pollard, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Lorna Proudfoot

Appearing:

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

Hon. Kevin O'Brien, MHA, Minister

Tony Cornect, Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Advanced Education and Skills

Dennis Kendell, Executive Director, Regional Operations

Tom Lawrence, Chief Financial Officer

Lisa Lindahl, Executive Assistant

Kate Moffatt, Executive Director

Len Simms, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

John Tompkins, Director of Communications

Also Present

Eli Cross, MHA

Tina Lamb, Researcher, Official Opposition Office

Susan Williams, Researcher, NDP Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Eli Cross, MHA for Bonavista North, substitutes for Tony Cornect, MHA for Port au Port.

The Committee met at 6:00 p.m. in the Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Littlejohn): Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome, Minister and Mr. Simms, and all of the good folks from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Tonight we will be reviewing the Estimates of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation through the Social Services Committee.

I would like to start first by having the members of the Social Services Committee introduce themselves, starting with Mr. Kirby.

MR. KIRBY: Dale Kirby, MHA for St. John's North.

MS LAMB: Tina Lamb, Researcher.

MR. MURPHY: George Murphy, MHA for St. John's East.

MS WILLIAMS: Susan Williams, Researcher.

CHAIR: Mr. Little.

MR. LITTLE: Glen Little, MHA for Bonavista South.

MR. POLLARD: Kevin Pollard, MHA for the great District of Baie Verte – Springdale.

CHAIR: Across the bay from Mr. Little.

MR. CROSS: Eli Cross, MHA for Bonavista North.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Minister, welcome, and before we get to the formalities and your opening remarks, do you want to introduce the fine people from your group tonight?

Mr. Simms.

MR. SIMMS: Len Simms, CEO of Housing, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

To my left is Dennis Kendell, he is the Executive Director.

CHAIR: They can go ahead and introduce in the same way.

MR. SIMMS: Okay.

Dennis.

MR. KENDELL: Dennis Kendell, Executive Director, Regional Operations.

MR. CORNECT: Tony Cornect, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

CHAIR: John.

MR. TOMPKINS: John Tompkins, Communications.

MS LINDAHL: Lisa Lindahl, Executive Assistant to Minister O'Brien.

MS MOFFATT: Kate Moffatt, Executive Director of Program Delivery and Planning.

MR. LAWRENCE: Tom Lawrence, Chief Financial Officer.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The way we will start, Mr. Minister, we will give you fifteen minutes for any opening remarks. Then we will go to Mr. Kirby for fifteen minutes, and after that we will go ten and ten until we get through the evening.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Nine or ten, hopefully before that, please – two long nights in a row.

As usual, before you speak wait for your red light to come on your mike and we will just go back and forth until we are through.

Minister, if you want to start with your opening remarks.

MR. O'BRIEN: I sure would.

CLERK: I have to call the clause first.

CHAIR: Hang on just one second, Minister.

Clerk, can you call the clause, please.

CLERK: Clause 1.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1.1.01 carry?

Minister.

MR. O'BRIEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is great to be here as the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, and I am certainly pleased to be here with my staff and support from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

I would like to open up my remarks by commenting on the great work they do for the people of the Province, mostly the most vulnerable and the seniors of our Province, because most of the programs we have within Newfoundland and Labrador Housing certainly touches their lives in meaningful ways. We have a series of programs that support that on a go-forward basis. We have about 400 employees spread across the Province in seven regional offices who do work in all areas of the Province, both rural and urban.

We are certainly very proud of the work we have been doing through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to develop affordable housing programs and options to assist persons with disabilities and persons with complex needs, seniors and families with low incomes, as well as to provide supports to help address homelessness through the Province.

Budget 2014 has brought some great news for the corporation that will assist us in continuing to address those goals. Once again, we will partner with the Government of Canada to implement an unprecedented five-year agreement to invest in affordable housing. Under the new agreement we will provide a total investment of \$68 million over the next five years to create approximately 590 more new affordable housing units. Since 2006, through

the investment in affordable housing agreements and with private and non-for-profit partnerships, we have created nearly 1,117 new affordable housing units throughout the Province.

The agreement will also extend the Provincial Home Repair Program, enabling us to annually assist approximately 2,000 households with low incomes to repair their homes. Over the past thirty-six years this program has provided more than \$335 million in loans and grants and enabled approximately 53,000 households to continue living in their own homes.

Budget 2014 provides \$12 million over three years to extend the Residential Energy Efficiency Program to assist up to 1,000 low-income homeowners per year with energy refits that will significantly improve affordability by reducing heating costs. To date, we have been able to assist more than 4,500 homeowners with energy refits.

Another initiative by this government to benefit households with low incomes was another increase to the rental supplement program by \$1 million, bringing the total annual allocation to \$9 million. This has enabled Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to increase affordable housing options by providing an additional 150 rent supplement units. This program supports individuals and families on low incomes and individuals with complex needs by paying the portion of the rent that exceeds 25 per cent of their net household income directly to their landlord. It also helps Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to address its application list.

This government is concerned about homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador. In keeping with the provincial goal to reduce poverty and promote self-reliance, Budget 2014 has allocated an additional \$500,000 through the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation Supportive Living Program for a total annual investment of \$5.3 million to further advance the work of community partners and stakeholders and to address homelessness throughout the Province.

The Home Modification Program will be extended with \$9 million over three years to provide financial assistance to homeowners with

disabilities or seniors with low to moderate incomes that require accessibility changes to their residences.

As the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, I have met and visited with the Nunatsiavut Government and discussed ways to help fix private housing problems in the Inuit communities of Northern Labrador. I am very pleased that Budget 2014 has contributed \$350,000 toward a \$700,000 program in partnership with the Nunatsiavut Government to assist low-income private homeowners in Nunatsiavut to complete major renovations.

For many years Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation has annually supported these eight community centres throughout the Province by providing operational funding which enables them to continue delivering a variety of education, social, employment, and recreational programs. This year, Budget 2014 has enabled us to further support the centres by providing \$100,000 for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Community Centres Summer Employment Program. The program encourages at-risk youth to continue their education and career paths by providing meaningful summer employment opportunities.

As an organization, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation is continually looking forward, planning ahead, and developing housing initiatives in consultation with community stakeholders. It is that approach which has enabled us to create the comprehensive policies and programs that are addressing the complex challenges associated with providing safe and affordable housing to people with low incomes and those most at risk of becoming homeless.

We are seeing results from our approach and we have overwhelming support from advocates and organizations throughout the Province and we will continue to build on the current successes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Kirby.

MR. KIRBY: Thank you.

I was not expecting to be here tonight. I thought Mr. Osborne would be here since he is the critic for this area, but I am happy to participate in this Committee.

I have the distinction of having the most Newfoundland and Labrador Housing of any of the districts in the Province. I just sat down here and listed some of them: Fitzgerald Place, Jensen Camp, Empire, Crosbie, Portia, New Pennywell, Beothuk, Nascopie, Prospero, Wigmore, Austin, Thorburn, Cumberland, Stabb, Copperwaite, Mitchell, Keegan Courts, Hoyles, Graves, Anderson, Algerine and Wishingwell. I think I probably said all of them but I may have missed some.

Of course, I have a bunch of subsidies as well. So I have a lot of people who live in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing residing in my district. I would have to say, that is probably most of the people who call my constituency office looking for assistance. That is probably why Mr. Simms gets an inordinate number of letters and communications from me in comparison to many of my colleagues. I will start by saying that.

I am looking at page 19.3, 1.1.01 under Housing Operations and Assistance. You will have to excuse my ignorance because I have not done this the last couple of years. Under Total Housing Operations and Assistance, it looks like there is a reduction of around \$5 million this year. Can you explain the reduction?

MR. O'BRIEN: The reduction is due to \$2.7 million is not needed in this current year to support the IAH program. That is needed in 2015-2016. That will be there in 2015-2016.

As well, in regard to some of the new initiatives, the Rental Supplement, the Nunatsiavut Investment, and the employment program, we are supporting that with the proceeds from land sales, the \$3.9 million.

MR. KIRBY: What was being supported from land sales?

MR. O'BRIEN: Some of the Rent Supplement; Nunatsiavut Investment of \$350,000; the

employment program, about \$100,000; Community Partnership \$170,000, and that kind of thing.

MR. KIRBY: What would you sell in the run of a year on average, or does it have a huge variance in the lands that are sold by NLHC?

MR. O'BRIEN: Say that again.

MR. KIRBY: In lands and properties that are sold.

MR. O'BRIEN: Land sales; well it depends on any given year in regard to what surplus land that we might have in our inventory across the Province.

There are various inventories and various communities, and we do an evaluation of that land over each and every year to determine if there is – mostly it is in Southlands actually, but there are other lands across the communities that we would evaluate and determine if we would unload those and put them up for sale. It is a revenue generator for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and has been for a long time, actually.

MR. KIRBY: I have a number of constituents in my district who – I guess they raise their families. They have been in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing properties for quite some time and they raise their families in the units. Now their families are grown up and left home. In some cases there is just mom who is left home, and mom is there in a three bedroom unit by herself. I have had people who have talked about problems with snow clearing and trying to negotiate stairs and all these things that become more difficult as we age.

I was just wondering if it might be an idea, or if you have considered some way of almost being more proactive to reach out to those people to try and move them into the manners that you have or to try and free up that space?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, we try to do that. We did a project here in regard to taking some of those units – I cannot remember exactly where they are – and what we did was under our normal maintenance program we modified it and created four one-bedroom apartments out of just one.

So we try to do that in our regular maintenance program.

We have to address the issue. We are quite aware of that issue as well, but we have to seek a balance between your two, three bedrooms and your one bedrooms to make sure we can address the issues that may come forward in the future, because the demographics in regard to the need changes from time to time. We will go through a process of trying to move the single people from those kinds of units into the manors, into more appropriate living quarters. We do that as best we can if they want to move.

MR. KIRBY: I guess to take that a step further, if you did not have space in places like Wigmore Manor or Beothuk Manor, or whatever else there is here in the City of St. John's or in the general proximity, the only alternative then is to turn to subsidies, and there is a limited amount of those. If there is no space in say fifty-plus housing, then that is really the only alternative we have for people who are fifty plus to move them into the private market with assistance.

MR. O'BRIEN: Well, you have the Affordable Housing Program as well which is \$68 million, and which will create another 500 units over the next five years. That addresses that issue as well, because we partner with the profit and non-for-profit in regard to those developments. Some of them, or a lot of them, are just one bedroom or two bedroom type units.

As we partner with the non-for-profit and partners, plus with what we are doing ourselves through that process, we are slowly but surely addressing that issue and trying to get the balance between our inventory in regard to three bedroom, two bedroom houses, whatever we have.

MR. KIRBY: I guess really what it boils right down to, the bottom line from an economic perspective is you have people who live in fairly – it is not cheap, from a number of different angles, including from NLHC's angle, to have somebody residing in a three-bedroom unit when they could have more people housed there.

MR. O'BRIEN: It is, but we have to be really sensitive to the person's needs as well. As you referenced in your opening remarks, they have

lived there most of their lives. They have raised their family there. There are a lot of memories there, so we do not force them to move. We would contact them and if they wanted to, we would assist them in that process as best we can through the different programs that I just outlined, but if they do not, we do not force the issue.

MR. KIRBY: I see that, yes. That makes sense.

MR. O'BRIEN: We just will not do it.

MR. KIRBY: Okay.

One of the things we hear a lot about is waiting lists. We do not really receive regular updates on this, so maybe this is an opportunity to chat a bit about where things are with wait-lists. For example, how many people do you currently have on the wait-list in the Province?

MR. O'BRIEN: Currently the actual wait-list is about 763.

MR. KIRBY: About 763.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, 763 and that is a reduction since 2010 of about 300 or so. The wait-list back in 2010 was somewhere around 1,214 and now it is 763, but units are being prepared for selection as well. That is a moving target as well. People who are on the list, to be honest with you, we have offered housing in 2012-2013 to over 200 people but they refused it and they are still on the list. They will make a new application next year just to keep their name in the cue.

MR. KIRBY: I assume since most of the housing is concentrated here in the capital region most of those wait listed are here in the city –

MR. O'BRIEN: The higher percentage would be here in St. John's and the bigger urban areas.

MR. KIRBY: How much do you think we would be saying?

MR. O'BRIEN: St. John's has dropped by half, but what is the wait-list in St. John's?

OFFICIAL: It was 463; it is now 250.

MR. O'BRIEN: That is 400 –

MR. KIRBY: That is four hundred and fiftyish.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

OFFICIAL: It is 250 now.

MR. O'BRIEN: It is 250 now.

MR. KIRBY: It is 250 now? Oh, sorry.

MR. O'BRIEN: Sorry, I did not have that number right in front of me, but it is down by over 200. It pretty well dropped by half in the City of St. John's as well.

MR. KIRBY: Since when?

MR. O'BRIEN: Since 2010.

MR. KIRBY: Since 2010.

Do you think that you find or are there any way of telling whether people come from the wait-list every year because their application lapses and they fail to renew?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, we contact and most people do renew their applications. One time a part of that wait-list or a certain percentage of that wait-list would be dormant, the person has moved on, they have moved, whatever it may be, so it is a good way to have a good snapshot in regard to the actual wait-list. That is one of the reasons why we did it, but the people know the process and they are contacted in regard to renewing their applications too. The wait-list is more accurate today than it was in previous years.

MR. KIRBY: Okay, I think my time is up there, Mr. Littlejohn?

CHAIR: You have four minutes, Mr. Kirby.

MR. KIRBY: Oh, do I? Okay, sorry.

What sort of follow-up is done at the end of the year or after a period of time a person's application sort of needs to be renewed? What sort of follow-up is it that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing does?

MR. O'BRIEN: What was that again?

MR. KIRBY: What sort of follow-up is done with people who drop off the wait-list? There have to be some –

MR. O'BRIEN: If they drop off the wait-list that means that they have moved on.

MR. KIRBY: So are they phoned, mailed, or e-mailed?

MR. O'BRIEN: No.

I believe, if I am right –

OFFICIAL: No, that correct.

MR. O'BRIEN: That is right, when they first put in an application, we would not follow up with them.

MR. KIRBY: There is no reminder sent to them to remind them that they need to renew?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, there is not.

MR. KIRBY: Do you have any sense of how many of your units are currently vacant and do not have anyone residing in them?

MR. O'BRIEN: I have it somewhere. There is not a whole lot. There is some that are being refurbished into –

MR. KIRBY: Where?

MR. O'BRIEN: They are all over the Province.

MR. KIRBY: You can provide a total number. I am interested in the total number and then sort of St. John's versus not St. John's.

MR. O'BRIEN: I can give you a number. That is not an issue for me, but the thing that you have to be aware of with regard to that number is that some places there are no demand. There might be no demand in certain areas in a given urban area. The person just does not want to move to a certain part of town, so that constitutes a vacancy.

Then there are units that are currently under the regular maintenance program being refurbished

as well, so it has to go through that process. They would be listed as being vacant as well. That is actually a moving number. I could give you a number today –

MR. KIRBY: Do you have them separated between sort of what is vacant and ready for occupancy versus what is under renovation?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, I can give you a breakdown in regard to what is being refurbished. Over in Corner Brook I think there was something like – if I remember now, let me think about it. There are twenty-three units. There are ten that are being refurbished right now. There is another ten that is just going to tender, and there are thirteen that are going to be refurbished through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing staff.

That is kind of the nuance that we have. That is the reason why we are making such progress in regard to bringing our units up to standard.

MR. KIRBY: Have there been any new units – and I guess this really applies to units that have been produced as a result of separating existing ones into two. Have there been any –

MR. O'BRIEN: We have increased our stock, yes. Not by a whole lot, but we have renovated, like I said, apartments – twenty-six new units have been produced.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible).

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, that is what I am trying to get to. We have produced about twelve through the reconfiguration. I am just trying to remember how many units that have split, but then we have built twenty-six new units over the last half a dozen years or so.

CHAIR: Dale, can I hold your thought there and go to Mr. Murphy –

MR. KIRBY: Sure.

CHAIR: – or do you have a clue-up question on that?

MR. KIRBY: No, that is fine. I can come back to here.

CHAIR: Okay.

Mr. Murphy.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening to all the staff from Housing, Mr. Cornect, Mr. Minister, and Mr. Simms. I want to come back to the budget question again, the total amount of revenue right off the top, or 1.1.01, Housing Operations and Assistance.

Mr. Kirby asked the question about the present budget being down about \$5 million, but when I went back through past budgets, I notice that this amount is down considerably. For example, when I went back as far as 2011-2012 it is a little bit disconcerting actually when I see it – and unless, Mr. Simms, you might have an explanation for it; you have been there for a while now.

In 2011-2012, we were dealing with \$52 million. In 2012-2013, the actual amount on the books was \$56,123,600 and the revised amount was the same, but now we are down to about \$41 million here. The budgeted last year was \$46 million, so there is a bit of a decline here. I am just wondering: Can you give us an overall snapshot of what has been happening here for the last couple of years? I know that this year, while significant, is not as significant as what has been happening in the past years here. Are you dealing with a smaller budget here overall?

CHAIR: Mr. Simms.

MR. SIMMS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, I think it is fair to say a couple of years ago the budget number – you have to recall our budget; this is not our budget number.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

MR. SIMMS: This is the Province's grant.

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. SIMMS: Our budget is \$120 million.

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. SIMMS: The Province's grant was reduced a couple of years back because some of the federal-provincial programs had expired, so our share was carried in the years previous to that. When the programs expired, then our share dropped off. Last year you will recall, I am sure, there was a reduction in our overall budget, like all other departments, and that was explained last year several times.

This year, that is not the situation. As the minister has said, this year what happened is that we have a new five-year federal-provincial agreement with the feds on the investment in affordable housing. It is a \$2.7 million contribution by the Province each year for five years. We do not need the first year's \$2.7 million because that first year is taken up with the proposal call, then the evaluations and the allocations and approvals for the projects, but the actual cash or money will not get spent until the following fiscal year. We were able to take that \$2.7 million out of this year's budget. Next year we will get double that in the Province's budget. We were able to also, from the sale of lands, be able to provide \$3.9 million in to what we need this year in our budget.

For this year only, this is only one year, out of that we still get the extension to our Home Modification Program or REEP program. We still get all these other items that have been allocated in the budget, announced in the budget, the rent supplement funding and all that sort of thing. So it all works out. It is just that it is our funding for the first year that we are using.

MR. MURPHY: A question then as regard to the federal contribution. How is that gauged? Does it have to be a measure, say, for example, of how much money the Province spends and then they would get federal matching funds on that? What would be the federal contribution on that?

MR. SIMMS: It is the same thing, the same contribution of \$2.7 million.

MR. MURPHY: So it would be \$2.7 million on top of the \$2.7 million.

MR. SIMMS: That is only for the affordable housing component because the \$68 million also

includes the \$4 million for the Home Repair Program.

MR. MURPHY: For the Home Repair Program.

MR. SIMMS: For federal and provincial.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

I was just wondering then, out of this number, \$41,494,000, can we get a more detailed budget breakdown sent to us as regard to what the monies are going to be spent on say for the next year?

CHAIR: Minister.

MR. O'BRIEN: The money is spent in all the different programs that we offer, which I just outlined in my opening remarks in regard to the Rental Housing Program, Rent Supplement Program. You have your Provincial Home Repair Program, Home Modification Program, Residential Energy Efficiency Program, supportive living program, Investment in Affordable Housing, Provincial Homelessness Fund, and the Partner-Managed Housing Program.

These are all programs within Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation that are given out either in grants or loans to low-income individuals and homeowners in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is the way that program works. The grant system is broken down in all those different areas and programs within the corporation itself. That makes up that \$41 million.

MR. MURPHY: Okay. I am just wondering if we can get a breakdown. For example, if I picked one here, the Provincial Homelessness Fund, how much is in that particular fund or do you project –?

MR. O'BRIEN: It is \$1 million.

MR. MURPHY: Just \$1 million in that.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

As regard to any positions, did we lose any job positions in the budget because of the drop in revenues here?

MR. O'BRIEN: No.

MR. MURPHY: No. No job losses?

The total budget for 2014 would be \$41,494,000, of that –

MR. O'BRIEN: That is not the total budget.

MR. MURPHY: No. You have the provincial component here, yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: That is the provincial component only.

MR. MURPHY: Yes. Of that component then, I guess, the public rental housing operations, social housing, what is the total budget for social housing, for example, for this year?

MR. O'BRIEN: It is \$55,857,000.

MR. MURPHY: Is there funding available to build any new social housing units on top of that? Are there any new social housing units going up?

MR. O'BRIEN: No.

MR. MURPHY: No.

You mentioned 763 people were on the waiting list for housing. Does Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, for example, keep statistics on the age demographic of the people who are there?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, we do.

MR. MURPHY: I guess that would not be available to us, would it?

MR. O'BRIEN: I can provide it.

MR. MURPHY: Can you get that?

MR. O'BRIEN: I can provide it, yes, sure.

MR. MURPHY: As regard to units out there that are needing repair – I do not have a lot of

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units in my area, and I guess to some extent I do not have a lot of grants either. I do have some more grants obviously, more than housing units, but I have noticed that housing units are shut down for a long time for one reason or another. They could be damaged or whatever. It seems like it takes a long time for those housing units to be made available. Again, I am just wondering if you have any idea of about how many units might be shut down at this present time that are not available or under repair in inventory?

MR. O'BRIEN: I would have to look at the full stock, the full inventory right across the Province, but in regard to the amount of time it takes to go through the regular maintenance and also the renovation process bringing units up to more acceptable standards, we are dealing with a robust economy. We go out to tender on various times with regard to various units.

We have to wait for that tendering process to go through, and like I just said, there is a lot of work out there in various areas of the Province. A lot of construction companies are busy. As well, we have our staff who actually completes the renovations on others. We do it as quickly as we possibly can.

Also, in regard to the 763 people on the wait-list, I also want to impress that in 2013 – we had approximately the same number of people on the wait-list in 2013 – 200 people refused when they were offered. I want that on the record, because people are not ready. That wait-list, I want to impress on people here, is not carved in stone because there are fair number of nuances to it that would determine exactly what that number is. So if you looked at the number who refused, that wait-list is really at 563 right across the Province.

MR. MURPHY: As regard to the ones who have dropped off the waiting list though, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing has not done an assessment as regard to the ones who have moved on or have not renewed. I am wondering, have you considered that to see exactly what happened, if these people moved on to –?

MR. O'BRIEN: In regard to that, they were on the wait-list and certainly made the wait-list look

like it was in regard to that particular number, but I would think that if a person needed the support of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing they would be coming forward looking for a unit. I would assume they have moved on to more productive lives and meaningful lives. That is the way I would look at it because for the simple reason is that they just do not go and not have any place to live. They will come to us. That is the process.

MR. MURPHY: In some ways I would agree, but I am just wondering if Newfoundland and Labrador Housing would consider doing a survey of those people who have dropped off the list, just to get more pertinent information as regard to – like maybe they were on there for too long of a time and got fed up with waiting on the list or something. It would be a good source of data for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, let alone –

MR. O'BRIEN: It is pretty difficult to do really, because a fair number of them have moved, different phone numbers and all that kind of good stuff. It is a good suggestion but I do not know how accurate it would be in regard to doing such a study.

MR. MURPHY: All right.

CHAIR: George, hold your thought there because your time has expired.

Mr. Kirby.

MR. KIRBY: Thanks.

Of the number of units that we have right now, how many of those would you say are accessible units?

MR. O'BRIEN: We have about 223 fully accessible. Under the investment in the Affordable Housing Program, we have about eighty-one fully accessible units in our stock itself. As well, we have a number of them that are partially accessible in that they have – I think 310 have ramps because that is all they require. We have another 220 that are visitable units. What that means is there is no step in regard to entering the premises, they are all have wider doors, and certainly an accessible washroom on the first level so people can visit those particular

units who have disability issues. Then I mentioned the 310 ramps over the years to various other units right across the Province.

MR. KIRBY: How many of those units would you say conform to universal design in the fullest sense?

MR. O'BRIEN: Full accessibility?

MR. KIRBY: In terms of what is called universal design.

MR. O'BRIEN: We brought in the universal design, and it would not apply to our units because they are fully accessible, the eighty-one in our own stock.

MR. KIRBY: The eighty-one.

MR. O'BRIEN: All the ones under the affordable housing would be too.

MR. KIRBY: That is the 223?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: In the Budget for 2014, there is \$68 million over five years to create approximately 590 new affordable housing units. The agreement also extends to the Provincial Home Repair Program. How much money is in that program for this year, the Provincial Home Repair Program? There is \$68 million over five –

MR. O'BRIEN: It is \$40 million for home repair over five years and –

MR. KIRBY: Over five?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: How many of that –

MR. O'BRIEN: There is \$28 million for the affordable housing units.

MR. KIRBY: How much of the \$40 million over five years is in the current year, the current fiscal year we are moving into now?

MR. O'BRIEN: It is \$8 million.

MR. KIRBY: It is \$8 million. Thanks.

Do you have a sense of how many applications are presently in for that program?

MR. O'BRIEN: We have no wait-list – in regard to what program, though?

MR. KIRBY: The Provincial Home Repair Program.

MR. O'BRIEN: We have no wait-list whatsoever.

MR. KIRBY: There is no waitlist?

MR. O'BRIEN: None – we eliminated it.

MR. KIRBY: So no wait-list?

MR. O'BRIEN: No wait-list.

MR. KIRBY: Okay. So how much was provided through that program last year then in 2013?

MR. O'BRIEN: It was \$8 million.

MR. KIRBY: There was \$8 million provided last year.

MR. O'BRIEN: The wait-list was over 4,000 back in 2006 – totally eliminated.

MR. KIRBY: You seem pretty happy about that.

MR. O'BRIEN: You are damn right – I should not say that.

MR. KIRBY: Over 8,000?

MR. O'BRIEN: Over 4,000.

MR. KIRBY: Over 4,000.

MR. O'BRIEN: That wait-list is eliminated.

MR. KIRBY: That is quite good.

In Budget 2014 there is \$9 million over three years to extend the Home Modification Program. How much of that \$9 million is in the current year?

MR. O'BRIEN: Three.

MR. KIRBY: Okay, so it is three, three, and three?

MR. O'BRIEN: That is a three-year program.

MR. KIRBY: So three in each of the following three years?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: How much was provided through that program last year?

MR. O'BRIEN: Three.

You must think I was the minister last year too.

MR. KIRBY: Is there a wait-list for applicants for that program?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, there is not.

MR. KIRBY: No wait-list?

MR. O'BRIEN: No.

MR. KIRBY: Do you have any idea how many homes are able to use \$3 million in the run of year?

MR. O'BRIEN: About 1,000 –

OFFICIAL: No.

MR. O'BRIEN: No?

OFFICIAL: For home modification the costs are higher and the grants are higher (inaudible) –

MR. O'BRIEN: About 300 – I am sorry, about 350.

MR. KIRBY: About 300 to 350.

Just tell me whenever I am out of time because I will go on.

The Residential Energy Efficiency Program, which we have talked a lot about, \$12 million over three years for up to 1,000 per year. How much of that funding of the \$12 million is for this year? Is it four?

MR. O'BRIEN: Four.

MR. KIRBY: It is four, four and four?

MR. O'BRIEN: That is correct.

MR. KIRBY: I guess my recollection is that when that was up to 1,000 before and the application process began in January the amount of funds was exhausted sometime in July. Is that accurate?

MR. O'BRIEN: Last year you are talking about?

MR. KIRBY: Well, not last year because last year was cut by 500 so let's say in the previous year when it was 1,000, would it have been around July when it was exhausted of funds?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, the funds would not be all gone, but all the applications had been approved at that time that we received.

MR. KIRBY: Okay, because that was what was received by the deadline, is that what you are saying?

MR. O'BRIEN: That is correct.

MR. KIRBY: So those funds would have gone where then, back into consolidated revenue?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, it would have been used going forward. Because with regard to the program itself, it takes time for the people to get the work done so you cash flow it when the work is done.

MR. KIRBY: So did those funds go back to NLHC or back to government?

MR. O'BRIEN: The funds do not go anywhere; the funds go out to the people.

MR. KIRBY: Okay.

Maybe I will just rephrase that because I am not asking it the right way. Let's say there was \$4 million in the pot for this year and you received a certain number of applications by the deadline and that number of applications was not sufficient to spend the entire \$4 million, what would happen to any remaining funds?

MR. O'BRIEN: I do not anticipate that happening, I will be quite honest with you.

MR. KIRBY: So are you saying everybody who applies would be able to get funding?

MR. O'BRIEN: Absolutely – until the 1,000 is up.

MR. KIRBY: Until the 1,000.

MR. O'BRIEN: We would extend it and if we did not have enough applications, say, by June if that was the deadline – it never happened before but if it did, we will keep going because that is money that we have in this current budget.

MR. KIRBY: You would do that, but you do not have that problem because there is sufficient need to use the 1,000.

MR. O'BRIEN: Absolutely.

MR. KIRBY: Okay. What would happen if you had 1,001 applications?

MR. O'BRIEN: What do you mean 1001 applications?

MR. KIRBY: Well if you had enough funding for up to 1,000, what if 1001 people applied?

MR. O'BRIEN: Well it depends on the amount of work that has to happen as well. If people are doing less than 1,000 then you would have more money in the pot. You would have to do an evaluation on a go-forward basis.

MR. KIRBY: So it is up to 1,000. It might only be 990.

MR. O'BRIEN: The 1,000 is the number of people. I think you are confused, but the grant is up to \$4,000 but if we had less than \$4,000 for somebody who wants to do \$3,500 well then we would consider other applications.

MR. KIRBY: Okay.

MR. O'BRIEN: We do not, just because we saved money, send it back to the Treasury – absolutely not, it is there to support the people.

MR. KIRBY: Okay.

How would you characterize the demand for that program?

MR. O'BRIEN: It is good, absolutely it is. Definitely, without a doubt, it has good uptake. It is a beneficial program. Nobody has ever denied that. I have never denied that in the House. It is an excellent program.

MR. KIRBY: What was the motivation for moving it back up to 1,000 from up to 100 last year?

MR. O'BRIEN: Two reasons: number one, we are into a hard Budget process and you have to make hard decisions as a government. That is an area that had already served about 4,500 people up to date. That was one of the areas that we could, when we looked at it, just to give us some room there and flexibility when it comes down to other department's challenges and needs. Then as well, we wanted to make sure and evaluate the program. You have to make sure that it is having the desired impact.

On evaluation we know it is saving people on average about 32 per cent. That, in some cases, is very significant to the householder. Then when I became the minister, and when in my budget process I thought it was time to have a discussion in regard to that program, the results are that we have brought it up to the \$4 million per year for three years.

MR. KIRBY: You made a better argument this year than you did last year?

MR. O'BRIEN: Well, no, I was not the minister.

MR. KIRBY: Sorry, I will not go there.

CHAIR: Dale, hold your thought there, I can see where –

Mr. Murphy.

MR. MURPHY: How are you?

CHAIR: Good, how are you?

MR. MURPHY: Good.

Mr. Minister, just on that fact when it comes to evaluation tools you use for evaluating, I am wondering about what evaluation tools you have used for the REEP?

MR. O'BRIEN: For the REEP?

MR. MURPHY: To evaluate the success of the program. Maybe your communications person might be able to answer that?

CHAIR: Mr. Simms.

MR. SIMMS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The process that we require is to approve the application for the individual. They go get the work done, but we go and do a blower door test before they get the work done to have some idea of where they are losing their energy. Generally, 90 per cent or 85 per cent of the time it is insulation; ceilings, floors, and that sort of thing. The staff this year, because we are doing it ourselves – we did it by an outside consultant before that, by the way – they then go and say, okay, go get the work done.

When they get the work done, our inspectors go back again and we do an inspection again with a blower door to see where you have made the savings. You use software that the federal government used to use for their energy efficiency program. It is as simple as that, really. It is a software package.

It shows, and has showed every year since we have had the program, a savings of about \$775 per household, which is significant. The average household that uses this program is earning maybe less than \$20,000 a year. It saves 32 per cent from emissions.

MR. MURPHY: Do you revisit REEP recipients, homeowners, for the success of the program?

MR. SIMMS: Oh, yes.

MR. MURPHY: How about people who all of a sudden get bumped from the list? I did receive a call last week when we were making –

MR. SIMMS: Get what?

MR. MURPHY: People who get bumped. They do not get accepted for the REEP.

MR. SIMMS: Did he say? There is only one reason.

MR. MURPHY: The problem was, basically, the order of priority, the affordability on the part of the people who had to carry on extra work, for example. Some of the work was not affordable, so they would choose the cheaper work to be done first, but they were actually being told to do more expensive work and that sort of thing.

Do you prioritize the work?

MR. SIMMS: Are you talking about REEP?

MR. MURPHY: For the REEP, yes.

MR. SIMMS: Like I said, 90 per cent of the work that is done by all of the applicants is insulation. There is no extra work or expensive work. I am not quite sure.

MR. MURPHY: I have run into one or two people now. The latest call that I have had was last week on that, where people actually got bumped from the REEP and did not have a good word to say about it, actually.

MR. SIMMS: I think the only reason people would get bumped is if they are not eligible for the program which is \$32,500. If you are below that you would not get bumped.

MR. MURPHY: I will have to send it to you in the form of a letter for some follow up. My next question is in regard to the \$32,500, the eligibility line that you have here. That has been in place now for some time. It has been there for a long time now, the last three or four years that I can remember.

CHAIR: Minister.

MR. O'BRIEN: No, the threshold.

MR. MURPHY: The cutoff threshold, yes, is what we are talking about. I am just wondering: It has been there for a while; is it time to change that threshold?

MR. O'BRIEN: I am not sure if it would be, George. The simple reason is that threshold is based on Canada Mortgage and Housing standards. That threshold is actually higher than most provincial thresholds in the provincial government.

It certainly meets the needs, but at some given time, on an evaluation we may want to have a look at it. Right now, there is great uptake in regard to the program. Until we service those people, the most vulnerable people of our Province, I would not really want to raise that threshold at this particular time creating a want list really.

We are having a real significant impact on those people. Really, again, they are the most vulnerable people of our Province.

MR. MURPHY: I am just wondering with the cost of everything gone up, particularly energy and food prices – I am just wondering even with the possibility of the department even gearing to the rate of inflation because the \$32,500 has stayed the way it is for some time.

MR. O'BRIEN: I understand what you are saying. In the meantime, once you increase the threshold then that increases the budgetary requirement because the uptake is good. It is complete uptake right now. It is certainly servicing the most vulnerable people of our Province.

Right now, the focus is on the most vulnerable. I understand that cost has gone up for each and every one of us in regard to home renovations or the operational costs of a home, whatever it may be.

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: You can only do so much in regard to a budget. My focus and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation's focus is on the most vulnerable. The most vulnerable are under that \$32,500 threshold at this particular time.

MR. MURPHY: Okay. Do you know when Canada Mortgage and Housing may be revisiting that number?

MR. O'BRIEN: Our number is actually above theirs in some places. Our thresholds are above theirs.

MR. MURPHY: I am just wondering about uniformity when it comes to CHMC. Is there any plan by CHMC to revisit that or anything? Are we going to depend on the number for the next little while? I am really concerned because the price of construction materials and insulation, pardon the expression, is gone through the roof.

MR. O'BRIEN: Really I am not depending on Canada Mortgage and Housing in regard to setting the threshold. I know that the threshold is done annually by Canada Mortgage and Housing. In the meantime, in regard to our evaluation, certainly in Advanced Education and Skills as well, I want to support the most vulnerable in our Province. The most vulnerable in our Province is below that \$32,500. Until I see slippage in that program, I do not think there is any need to go above the \$32,500.

MR. MURPHY: Just a final comment on that then. The thing I noticed though is that while government's threshold, for example, for the Home Heating Rebate, is gone up to about a \$40,000 cut off – that would be the limit of acceptance, of course, you would be able to receive a rebate under that dollar amount. That amount has changed over the years and gone up to the \$40,000 and good on government for doing that. I will leave that with you on that particular point when it comes to that. That deserves some consideration on the part of CMHC.

MR. O'BRIEN: It depends on the program and the desired impact of the program. The desired impact of this program is to support the most vulnerable people in our Province which are all certainly under the threshold of \$32,500. That is where our focus is right now.

I cannot say and predict that at any given time in the future the threshold would rise, for a lot of reasons. Right now our focus is certainly on the most vulnerable.

MR. MURPHY: A thought occurs to me here that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing could be playing an integral role when it comes to the

Office of Climate Change, in particular, Climate Change and Energy Efficiency too. I would suggest that there is, like I said, an important role for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing to be leading the way when it comes to the saving of energy.

MR. O'BRIEN: Well they are leading the way because we are putting \$750, on average, into homeowners' right across this Province, in each and every one of the homes that we have addressed a need. As well, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation sits on that board of the Climate Change Office.

MR. MURPHY: Okay, thanks for that.

I want to come back to the accessible units that are available through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Is there a plan to increase the number of accessible units this year and in future years? Do you have a long-term plan for that?

MR. O'BRIEN: It depends on the requirement. If my memory is right, right now we only have eleven requests across the Province for fully accessible units.

MR. MURPHY: Just eleven and that is it?

MR. O'BRIEN: Eleven and that is it.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

How about when it comes to your own infrastructure, Minister...?

MR. O'BRIEN: Say that again.

MR. MURPHY: When it comes to your own infrastructure, the overall inventory at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units, I know over the years they have been doing some modification and upkeep maintenance on the units. What is the budget for modernization and improvement, and what projects do you have planned for 2014?

MR. O'BRIEN: For regular maintenance, you are talking about?

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: It depends on the need.

MR. MURPHY: For modernization basically.

MR. O'BRIEN: Modernization is \$10 million.

MR. MURPHY: About \$10 million –

OFFICIAL: Roughly \$10 million – not much in St. John's East, though.

MR. MURPHY: What is that?

OFFICIAL: Not much in St. John's East.

MR. MURPHY: No, I guess you could say I would be one of the lucky districts. I have somewhere under 100 units and then I have other subsidized units, of course.

When it comes to the vacant units that will be renovated, do you plan on any vacant units that are going to be renovated and opened up again this year out of all the inventory that you have for closed units right now?

MR. O'BRIEN: That is a continuous process right across the Province as well. I referenced earlier a number of units out in Corner Brook that are either being renovated at this very moment, going to tender, or being renovated by staff.

MR. MURPHY: I am just wondering too when we are talking about the older inventory that might be out there now –

CHAIR: Quick question, George.

MR. MURPHY: What was that?

CHAIR: Quick question; your time has expired.

MR. MURPHY: Just to finish up this particular section of it. When it comes to maintenance, are you finding your maintenance costs are going up as regards the present inventory that you have?

MR. O'BRIEN: Sure there is. Cost of materials is going up. Cost of labour is going up. Tenders are more expensive now than they ever were in the history of the Province, and that is all due to a robust economy. Construction companies have lots of work, but we live within the budgets

and try to do as much work as we possibly can under staff, and they do some great work right across the Province. As a matter of fact, I think there are thirteen units over in Corner Brook that are going to be renovated and upgraded by staff, so we utilize them to maximize our dollars.

Yes, cost of renovations is going up. The modernization piece is more expensive today as compared to what it was a number of years ago.

MR. MURPHY: How much in the budget is scheduled for...?

CHAIR: Okay, George, I am going to make you save that, sorry.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

CHAIR: Mr. Kirby.

MR. KIRBY: One of the situations that I have encountered occasionally is people needing accessible housing in an emergency.

MR. O'BRIEN: Say that again; I did not hear you.

MR. KIRBY: People who need accessible housing in an emergency situation.

MR. O'BRIEN: Do we need?

MR. KIRBY: No, people who need it – that is a situation I have encountered.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: I assume the accessible units that you have in the capital city region are all occupied, are they?

MR. O'BRIEN: Right now they are all occupied, yes.

MR. KIRBY: So, I am just wondering –

MR. O'BRIEN: There is a certain amount of turnover in them as well.

MR. KIRBY: Yes, I assume your department, through Income Support or – I am just wondering how it works when we encounter a situation like that because –

MR. O'BRIEN: Well, either we have the turnover piece, which we just filled recently here in the City of St. John's, either that or we go to the private market to see if we can access an accessible unit through the private market here in St. John's. Then we go to the Rent Supplement. We use any program that we have within Newfoundland and Labrador Housing that is applicable to help us attain that accessible unit.

Like I said, there are only eleven requests right across the Province right now, and I think there are probably only nine of them in the City of St. John's for completely accessible units. Then under the Affordable Housing Initiative, over the next five years we are going to have a number of completely accessible units built there as well. I suspect we will have some of them built in the greater St. John's area, the Northeast Avalon area, as well as other areas right across the Province continually to address the accessibility issue.

It is not a great demand, it is a complex need, but we try to help each and every individual as they come in through the door as best we can with the programs that we have.

MR. KIRBY: How much of the inventory is in need of asbestos abatement or renovation to remove asbestos?

MR. O'BRIEN: Say that again?

MR. KIRBY: How many of your units, how much of the inventory is in need of asbestos abatement or renovation to remove asbestos that had been put there in the past?

MR. SIMMS: Any house built before 1985.

MR. KIRBY: So they are all –

MR. SIMMS: No, we have done a lot of it over the last number of years.

MR. KIRBY: So how many are remaining to be – a lot?

MR. SIMMS: We only started this probably four or five years ago.

MR. KIRBY: Okay.

MR. SIMMS: Do you have any idea?

MR. O'BRIEN: I will get you a number, Dale. I am not really sure right now, but I just want to be on record as well that even though the asbestos issue is a very concerning one of mine, the only time that asbestos becomes an issue is when it is actually touched and moved. We started a program about four or five years ago to address that issue in regard to the units prior to 1995, 1985?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible).

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, 1985. So any of the units there that have some form of asbestos in it, but we started that program four or five years ago. We have made significant progress on that and we will continue to invest in our regular maintenance program to totally renovate the whole inventory, but I will get you that number.

MR. KIRBY: Is there a dollar figure – it would be a high figure?

MR. O'BRIEN: It depends on the actual home itself or the unit itself in regard to how much we would have to spend to abate it. That varies from contract to contract.

MR. KIRBY: Sure. This came to my attention as a result of the fire on Hoyles Avenue in October.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: The Provincial Homelessness Fund: How much money is in the Provincial Homelessness Fund for the current year?

MR. O'BRIEN: It is \$1 million.

MR. KIRBY: It was \$1 million?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: How much was in it last year?

MR. O'BRIEN: It was \$1 million.

MR. KIRBY: It was \$1 million last year too?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: I guess you would have a list of organizations with breakouts of amounts that have gone to them.

MR. O'BRIEN: That is announced every year.

MR. KIRBY: That would include Choices for Youth, would it?

MR. SIMMS: They have accessed some.

MR. O'BRIEN: They have accessed some over of years, but we will be announcing, in the pretty near future, the list of groups that will avail of that program.

MR. KIRBY: Okay. You spend the \$1 million every year, right?

MR. O'BRIEN: Oh, yes.

MR. KIRBY: That is what I thought.

Investment in affordable housing: NLHC and the provincial government are going to partner again with the federal government to extend the Investment in Affordable Housing Agreement for an unprecedented five years – thank God for small favours – \$68 million and that also extends the PHRP.

So we have \$68 million; that is the total amount, right?

MR. O'BRIEN: It is \$40 million in the Home Repair Program –

MR. KIRBY: That is the \$40 million we already discussed, right?

MR. O'BRIEN: – and \$28 million in the IHA.

MR. KIRBY: So it is \$40 million and \$28 million?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: You already gave me the breakdowns for those?

MR. O'BRIEN: I did.

MR. KIRBY: It is still 50-50 cost shared with the federal government?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: That is for the whole amount over the duration of five years.

MR. O'BRIEN: That is correct.

MR. KIRBY: Do you get any sense that is basically it, that is as far as it goes with the federal government? Is it? That is as nice as they get?

MR. O'BRIEN: Oh yes, under that program. Most of the programs, as you know in the federal government, are done by population ratio. That is the way it has worked out. We get our share for Newfoundland and Labrador as compared to Ontario gets a different number. That is the way they are cost shared right across the total program.

MR. KIRBY: Has there been any thought given to building more high density housing on a larger scale in St. John's? I was thinking recently with that property becoming available over where Metrobus used to be, it seems to be an ideal location for any sort of development whether it is mixed housing or what have you. That would be with the City of St. John's.

MR. O'BRIEN: Really in regard to that opportunity, that rests with the Affordable Housing Program. We would certainly welcome any kind of an application or a proposal in regard to that kind of a unit. That is what that program was all set up to do. As a matter of fact, there is one in Gander that was built.

MR. KIRBY: Since I was elected I have encountered a couple of neighborhoods in my district where, I do not know how to put this, the neighborhoods could be a bit more livable than they are now. There is no playground space. I know NLHC has done some work to try and create more outdoor social space, if you will. With the winter we have had it is hard to imagine that we even have such a thing.

I had been in chatting with folks from Housing about the possibility for developing playground space in the Wigmore, Austin, Thorburn area and I have not really managed to make any headway with any of that. Housing does not want to have anything to do with the

maintenance of it. I can sort of understand why I suppose, the city likewise wants very little to do with it.

In the corner over there in Wigmore there is certainly a space that used to be a recreation space. Now it has sort of gone wild. There is a beautiful little brook that runs behind there and likewise over on Fitzgerald Place. I just wonder if there are opportunities to partner with the Grand Concourse Authority or more with the city's Department of Recreation to try and build some sort of, whether it is walking trails or more recreation space.

I do understand that the priority is to retrofit units and to create more units. With all the talk of diabetes, obesity, crime, and all the sorts of problems we have that especially hit low-income neighborhoods harder, I am just wondering, sort of thinking aloud or petitioning you, propositioning you to think more about how we can improve the outdoor living space in those communities. I really think the people in those neighborhoods need it.

MR. O'BRIEN: I am certainly concerned the same way as you are in regard to having that open space and recreational areas. In saying that, we sit on the board, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing does, with regard to the Grand Concourse, and we interact with the city at various times during the year and at various meetings and whatnot. That is purely a city issue.

We cannot run the neighborhood. We can certainly invest in affordable housing and supplement affordable housing for the most vulnerable people in our Province, but we cannot run streets and communities. That is a city issue.

Through your multi-year capital works, which I believe the cities share the share – and do not quote me on this because I am no longer the Minister of Municipal Affairs – I think it is somewhere around \$49 million over three years, somewhere around that area give or take.

MR. KIRBY: It is Newfoundland and Labrador Housing's property right?

MR. O'BRIEN: You have your property on your street and you might have some open space in regard to that property, in regard to a subdivision that you may live in. That open space and play area, whatever it may be, is maintained by the city. That is the way it is, we cannot run neighborhoods. As a matter of fact, to be quite honest with you, as the Minister Responsible – even though as a parent I understand the absolute need for that type of recreational and open space, and more attractive living aspects of a community, from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation we are not in the position to really get in to that.

We are too focused and more focused in regard to making sure that our units are brought up to standards through a process that we started about five or six years ago, making sure that we have enough units and that we have a good balance between the configuration of those units to meet the needs of the people. Really for us to go in and start running communities is adding to the overall Municipal Capital Works program that we provide a city or a community right across the Province.

MR. KIRBY: I hear you.

CHAIR: Dale, I am going to (inaudible).

MR. KIRBY: Yes, sure.

I am not satisfied with that, but I respect where you are coming from. I do not have any further questions in any case.

MR. O'BRIEN: We donate the land.

CHAIR: Mr. Murphy.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, sir.

I am just wondering about the Train for Trades program, if I can get an update on that. Do you have any projects that are at hand?

MR. O'BRIEN: Say that again?

MR. MURPHY: Train for Trades program.

MR. O'BRIEN: Oh yes. It is an excellent program, absolutely.

MR. MURPHY: Can you give us an update as regard to what is going to be happening with that now this year?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, in regard to the work that they do?

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: They are upgrading two units up on Parker.

MR. MURPHY: Up where?

MR. O'BRIEN: Up on Parker.

OFFICIAL: Is it Parker? Barkham.

MR. O'BRIEN: Barkham.

MR. MURPHY: Barkham Street.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, Barkham it is.

MR. MURPHY: Up off of New Pennywell Road.

MR. O'BRIEN: Parker I thought it was, yes.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

MR. O'BRIEN: Sorry about that.

MR. MURPHY: That is okay. A taxi driver will show you the way.

MR. O'BRIEN: That is a fabulous, fabulous –

CHAIR: What?

MR. MURPHY: A taxi driver will show you the way.

MR. O'BRIEN: I spent enough time in those yellow cabs, I should know too.

MR. MURPHY: I know, Sir. Thank you very much for the tips. It was great for my campaign. That is why I said it.

MR. O'BRIEN: All those drivers like me, buddy.

MR. MURPHY: There you go. I still like you too. You make a good pancake.

MR. O'BRIEN: I will give you a pancake, my son.

MR. MURPHY: There you go.

MR. O'BRIEN: That was not the issue.

MR. MURPHY: No.

MR. O'BRIEN: You know that.

MR. MURPHY: Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and vacant lands that could be used for affordable housing projects, I am just wondering, do you have an inventory of land on hand? Or do you say just go for general Crown land and make a purchase from Crown lands?

MR. O'BRIEN: No.

MR. MURPHY: How is that done?

MR. O'BRIEN: Most of the current land that is held by Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is in Southlands, the most of it.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

MR. O'BRIEN: I think you have a bit of surplus land. In the meantime, we have certain inventory, bits and pieces all over the place in various urban communities in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, but we do not have any Crown land.

MR. MURPHY: No.

MR. O'BRIEN: No.

MR. MURPHY: You would keep a record, obviously, then of the lands in your own inventory.

MR. O'BRIEN: Oh, absolutely.

MR. MURPHY: Do you have a list available that we can look at?

MR. SIMMS: We advertise every once in a while and we sell some here and there.

CHAIR: Mr. Simms.

MR. SIMMS: Yes. Oh sorry, Mr. Chairman.

MR. O'BRIEN: What are you asking?

CHAIR: Minister.

MR. O'BRIEN: I just do not understand. You want a list of where our lands are, or do you want the configuration?

MR. MURPHY: Yes, for example with St. John's.

MR. O'BRIEN: Say that again?

MR. MURPHY: How much land, basically, within St. John's and Mount Pearl would you have that would be available for affordable housing?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, I will get you the number.

MR. MURPHY: All right.

MR. SIMMS: For affordable housing?

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: I think what you are saying there is – what I can give you is a list of land in regard to it being available for affordable housing, but, as well, it could be available for any kind of housing.

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: I will give you the land.

MR. MURPHY: Has your department been approached by any private contractors or anything that would be looking to put up affordable housing on those lands, if those lands were available?

MR. O'BRIEN: No.

MR. MURPHY: Nobody has approached you?

MR. O'BRIEN: No.

MR. MURPHY: Has Newfoundland and Labrador Housing approached any private

contractors to put out an offer or anything like that for cheaper land?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes. We have had proposal calls and we have surplus land, which I referenced before. We divest of certain land that we do not need.

MR. MURPHY: But no further uptake from private contractors?

CHAIR: Mr. Simms.

MR. SIMMS: If I can, Minister, just to clarify.

Most of the land we have is in Southlands and we are directed by government, past and present, to get out of the land holding business. We are not in the land holding business. So we sell the land and then it is developed by developers.

The last time we sold land up in Southlands, for the first time ever, we required the developer to build 100, what we consider to be, affordable housing units. We could not do that by price, so we did it by size and said 800 square feet or 900 square feet or something like that, they had to build 100 of them when they do their development. The stakeholders, advocates, were all very, very pleased to hear that, because that kind of thing had not happened before. That is outside of our wing, but we did it anyway.

MR. MURPHY: Okay, thanks for that.

MR. O'BRIEN: George, further to your question, what you are asking for – because I want to be clear in my head. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation has holdings in land, but at various times on evaluation, in regard to not needing that land, we are moving Newfoundland and Labrador Housing out of the business of holding land. So we would offer that for sale.

MR. MURPHY: Okay, all right.

MR. O'BRIEN: It is great revenue into Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and then we use that revenue to support the programs that we offer at various times.

MR. MURPHY: Okay. So from that then – I know that you have some sort of a bank of land

there but eventually Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is going to come to a point where they have no more land left in their inventory if the sales keep up. Would government top up their inventory, or what is the process there?

MR. O'BRIEN: We will make that decision at some point in time because as you know, Crown land is owned by the Newfoundland government and the people of the Province. At any given time under Crown lands there is affordable land – or available land. I should rephrase that.

MR. MURPHY: If there was a potential for getting Crown land from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing would be able to put in a request to government on that particular land –

MR. O'BRIEN: Absolutely.

MR. MURPHY: – to have some sort of a (inaudible).

MR. O'BRIEN: It has never been done to this point in time, but if there was a requirement in regard to a land issue and building units or whatever it may be, there is tons of Crown land across the Province so we would just go through the normal process of moving that Crown land over to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

MR. MURPHY: Okay, but that option is there?

MR. O'BRIEN: Absolutely.

MR. MURPHY: Perfect, okay.

I want to come back to when it comes to community centres, neighbourhood centres, and tenant associations if I may. There are eight community centres, I think, in the St. John's area?

MR. SIMMS: No, eight in the Province.

MR. O'BRIEN: Eight in the Province.

MR. MURPHY: Eight in the Province, sorry.

How much of a grant are they going to be getting now this year?

MR. O'BRIEN: It is \$175,000.

MR. MURPHY: About \$175,000 between the eight?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, \$175,000 each.

MR. MURPHY: It is \$175,000 each, okay.

Will there be any new centres established in the next little while, do you think?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, there are none.

MR. MURPHY: So you are pretty much at capacity when it comes to –

MR. O'BRIEN: We are, yes.

MR. MURPHY: I am just trying to think if there is anything that I might have missed on this. The homelessness report is something that we have been looking for. The research report on homelessness, do we have an update on when that is going to become available?

MR. O'BRIEN: I am reviewing it now.

MR. MURPHY: You are reviewing it now. Is there any anticipated date for release?

MR. O'BRIEN: I would say within the next number of weeks or so.

MR. MURPHY: A couple of weeks?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, once it goes through the normal process.

MR. MURPHY: Two or three weeks, maybe, a month?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, well it depends because it has to go to Cabinet at some particular time. It has to hit that process, right.

MR. MURPHY: All right.

MR. O'BRIEN: The best I can say with the House being opened and all that kind of good stuff, I hope within the next four to six weeks or so.

MR. MURPHY: Is there any talk on the low-income home ownership assistance program that was promised by government? Is there any update there?

MR. O'BRIEN: You are talking about the mortgage assistance?

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: We are having a discussion about that and certainly looking at different models right across all jurisdictions. We are looking at doing a pilot project some time but we do not have it fleshed out yet exactly what we are going to do, but it will be a pilot project to test the market just to see exactly. We have been working with Canada Mortgage and Housing as well to try to work out the parameters on that, and various other stakeholders as well.

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: That is working itself through.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

I do not know if I have anything else.

When it comes to the Affordable Housing Initiative, I think you said there was \$68 million over five years. Do I have that right?

MR. O'BRIEN: In total, but the Home Repair Program is in that number, too, \$40 million over five years for that one and then \$28 million for the Affordable Housing Initiative.

MR. MURPHY: Okay.

I do not know if I have anything else here. I will check with you, Susan, is there anything else that you might think of?

No, I think we are good.

CHAIR: Mr. Kirby.

MR. KIRBY: I just have a couple of quick things.

Last year there was a decision made to hold the annual tenant association conference bi-annually

rather than annually, right? I believe that has had an impact on participation. I have had two tenant associations basically going defunct in the last seven, eight months.

MR. SIMMS: Because of the conference?

MR. KIRBY: Well, it is sort of like what came first, the chicken or the egg. I felt this was sort of an incentive for people to participate, and an incentive has been removed.

I am not saying people get involved in tenant associations and try to improve their communities strictly because they go to Gander every year, but I felt that was one of the few things that people were – I guess it was an advantage, if you will, for participation. I am just wondering, now that we are a have Province again can we look at perhaps having those annually again?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, the conference was in Gander last September or so, right.

MR. KIRBY: Yes, I think there was an announcement made there in September that there would not be one for two years.

OFFICIAL: That is right.

MR. KIRBY: They used to be held annually before, weren't they?

OFFICIAL: Yes.

MR. KIRBY: Is there any chance of going back to that?

CHAIR: Mr. Simms.

MR. SIMMS: (Inaudible).

MR. KIRBY: No, I think you are misunderstanding what I am saying. I think the conference and what that provided to participants was an incentive for people to remain involved all throughout the year in the tenant associations in their communities. I think holding it every two years instead of holding it annually is not necessarily the right direction to go in, I guess.

It probably, whether you realize it or not, provided something more than just an annual opportunity to get together in education and so on. I think there is probably more to it than you realize.

MR. O'BRIEN: Two things – if you could give me the names of the two associations that went defunct.

MR. KIRBY: I certainly can.

MR. O'BRIEN: I would like to know that and just see exactly what happened there.

MR. KIRBY: Yes.

MR. O'BRIEN: As well, I will have a look at an evaluation, uptake in regard to that conference. I think there is good participation, and if I see an opportunity to go back to yearly – I do not know, to be honest with you, I have not really looked at it yet.

MR. KIRBY: These two folded in mid-fall. I am a statistician. I would not say they are directly related, but I have to say there is some correlation in my opinion.

CHAIR: Does he have the names?

MR. O'BRIEN: No, he does not have them yet; he is going to get them to me, yes.

MR. KIRBY: I will let you know which ones.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, absolutely.

MR. KIRBY: The only other question I had, occasionally we see around the city units that are vacant and derelict and look they are bombed for a long period of time. Are there any that have been condemned? There are some that seem like they have been vacant for an inordinate amount of time.

MR. O'BRIEN: In regard to the inordinate amount of time, we try to balance our budget between our staff doing the renovations along with going out to tender, which is a more costly process. We try to do them as quickly as we possibly can. Some of them are quite major, as you just outlined, but we have had about 108 or

so renovations in the city over the last year or so
–

OFFICIAL: Four or five years (inaudible) and now it is down to eighteen.

MR. O'BRIEN: – four or five years and now it is down to eighteen that we need to get done. So it is 108 down to eighteen. That is the reason why it is taking a bit of time there. The simple reason is it is a process that we have to go through, some of the units need more work than others, so you might see them turned around pretty quickly and some of them are major renovations, which takes a bit of time. We have converted a few to fully accessible units in that process. That is something that depends on the situation really, Dale, to be honest with you.

In the meantime, I do not mind getting a scattered letter from you.

MR. SIMMS: You can stop sending them to me.

MR. O'BRIEN: Send them to me.

MR. KIRBY: Oh no, I will keep sending them to you, Len; there is no worry about that.

MR. O'BRIEN: I get cc'ed on them all anyway.

MR. KIRBY: Okay, that is all I have.

Thank you.

MR. MURPHY: I have a couple of more questions.

CHAIR: A couple of more?

Mr. Murphy.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you.

I would like to ask a couple of questions with regard to the Rent Supplement Program. Of course, I think that myself and Mr. Kendell were dealing with an issue at Kenny's Park. Well, it is being dealt with now anyway, but I did have the concerns of some of the residents there at Kenny's Park who, for all intents and purposes, has the rent supplement – the rent is being supplemented with a small grant from

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. In some cases they are telling me that the portability of the grants is not transferable to another area. Why is that?

MR. O'BRIEN: The reason why they are not transferable is because it gives us the opportunity to go in and do an evaluation on the actual unit itself. If the supplement was attached to the person, we do not have that ability; but if we are going to pay the landlord directly, well then we have the right to go in and evaluate that particular unit before we actually allow rent. That is there to prevent slum housing.

MR. MURPHY: Okay. So in some cases, I guess in this particular case, it has worked well.

MR. O'BRIEN: In that case alone, it has worked well.

MR. MURPHY: Yes.

I have not heard from any of the residents down there. I guess if there was any message to that, it seems like most of them are pretty happy now that the situation is being dealt with. I have to go back now and make a revisit; it has been two weeks now since the last time I was there. There was still a bit of a small issue (inaudible) –

MR. O'BRIEN: I have to commend the staff at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing as well. Every case is not the same. We have programs within Newfoundland and Labrador Housing that we have to set parameters around, but Newfoundland and Labrador Housing try to, to the best of their ability, address individual issues on a daily basis. Some of them are a little bit more complex than others, but in the meantime they work diligently to try to make that happen. I commend them for that.

MR. MURPHY: Well, I received a good response out of them, I tell you. I will say hats off to them too.

How many total units would be available for rent supplements this year? How many units do you have registered?

MR. O'BRIEN: We have 1,732, and then we have another 150 on top of that.

MR. MURPHY: That was 1,732 plus 150, and that is Province-wide of course?

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes.

MR. MURPHY: The average supplement per unit would be what?

MR. O'BRIEN: Four hundred.

MR. MURPHY: About \$400? That is going to continue for a while. How long are the contracts for the units that are under the Rent Supplement Program?

MR. O'BRIEN: Annually.

MR. MURPHY: I think that might be it. That is it. I am good.

CHAIR: Dale, are you done? George, are you done?

I want to thank you, Minister, and the staff from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing tonight for taking the time to do this. The answers were pretty blunt at times, so I thank you for that, and I thank all the staff for taking the time to come tonight.

I also want to thank our Committee members for their contribution and their questions this evening. I think there was some good information passed back and forth and I think it was very worthwhile.

Just before we clue up, I need a motion to approve the minutes of the Social Services Committee, a meeting of April 7 for the Department of Education.

Do I have a mover?

MR. POLLARD: So moved.

CHAIR: Moved my Mr. Pollard.

Do I have a seconder?

MR. LITTLE: Seconded.

CHAIR: Seconded by Mr. Little.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: As well, I need the Clerk to call the first heading, please.

CLERK: Subhead 1.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, subhead 1.1.01 carried.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, total heads carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, carried without amendment.

CHAIR: Can I have a motion to adjourn?

MR. LITTLE: So moved.

CHAIR: Mr. Little.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: The meeting is adjourned at 7:31 p.m. I remind the Social Services Committee that our next gathering is Tuesday, April 15, at 9:00 a.m. for Estimates on Health and Community Services.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and good night.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.