



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Board of Internal Economy

TRANSCRIPT

NUMBER 024

Thursday, November 23, 2023



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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Speaker of the House of Commons): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning and welcome, everyone, to meeting number 24 of the Board of Internal Economy. Part of our meeting will be held in camera, as is our custom. However, much of it will be public.

We'll start quickly with the minutes of the previous meeting. This will be public, and then we'll go in camera for a good part of our discussion. We'll then return to the public format for an update on the LTVP working group, the Long Term Vision and Plan for the Parliamentary Precinct, and a discussion of the budget for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Are there any changes to be made to the minutes of the previous meeting? I see that no one is raising any, and Mr. Julian proposes that they be adopted. Are you in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The minutes of the previous meeting are therefore adopted.

[*English*]

Are there any issues or business arising from the previous minutes?

Seeing none, do we have consent to adopt this?

Thank you. It is agreed.

[*Translation*]

We will now go in camera.

[*The meeting continues in camera.*]

• (1105)

(Pause)

• (1110)

[*The public meeting resumes.*]

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (Chair, Working Group on the LTVP and the Centre Block Rehabilitation, House of Commons): All right, we'll go quickly.

There are four recommendations, as follows:

Number one is that a dedicated inclusive space for ceremonial cultural practices be included in the newly created area on the fourth floor of the central courtyard infill, while the overall approach in the building and processes accommodate cultural practices such as smudging and qulliq activities throughout Centre Block with advance notice.

Number two is that the fourth and fifth levels of the central courtyard infill be designed for flexible workspaces available to all parliamentarians, and that further detailed design options be vetted through the working group.

Number three is that gallery seating in the north and south galleries be designed with benching to maximize capacity; that design development and mock-ups be brought back for input and approval; that the east and west galleries be designed to allow for future conversion to benching; and that the building be planned to allow for future increased capacity, based on the approval of the developed benching design.

Number four is endorsing the number of locations and sizes of the leadership suites and standard parliamentarian office units—or POU—proposed, so the design can progress, knowing that allocations can still be further reviewed.

Those are the four.

• (1320)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Chris. That was perfect.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Ms. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. d'Entremont, thank you for making an effort to reduce this to four proposals. We were always talking about 21 decisions to be made, but you've established your priorities.

I consider that the ones we have in front of us have been discussed. Indeed, the committee made the decision to delegate representatives to this working group. In my mind, a representative is someone who liaises with his caucus and with his whip and to whom we have delegated a power of representation.

When Mr. Plamondon, who represents us, brings his ideas and debates them, I can have access to his minutes, so I'm kept informed. As a member of the Board of Internal Economy, I don't expect to have to repeat debates that the working group has held. I expect explanations and I trust the working group. My colleague Mr. Plamondon told me that the committee would be holding three meetings, scheduled for the next three Fridays. You're working hard.

I can assure you that the Bloc Québécois considers Mr. Plamondon to have a representative function. Today, I'm not going to say that we're against the four proposals, since we've already told Mr. Plamondon that we agree.

However, I'd like to ask a question that I think is important. I know there's been a lot of discussion surrounding the designation of a room for smoke purification and qulliq ceremonies. The room you're proposing is going to be well-built and will be able to handle the smoke and prevent the smoke detectors from going off. Everything has been planned to ensure that everything takes place safely and with full respect for indigenous peoples. We fully agree with this decision.

However, we wouldn't want a room set aside for these ceremonies to be used for anything other than what it was created for. In other words, we wouldn't want there to be any slippage and open the door to this or any other room being used for multi-faith purposes. When the Centre Block is ready, we wouldn't want a room reserved for these smoke purification ceremonies to be used for other religious purposes. I'm not telling you anything new when I say that, for the Bloc Québécois, there must be a separation between church and state.

We want assurances that this room is going to be used only for what it's dedicated to, which is purification ceremonies through smoke and qulliq. Can we have the Board of Internal Economy's agreement in this regard? Has your working group made a decision to that effect?

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: Our working group has talked about this on several occasions. That's why we decided instead to talk about ceremonial practices that make use of smoke. I'm thinking, for example, of an eastern religious practice, of the Orthodox Church, which uses a lot of incense. We could also use this room for these practices, because it's designed for smoke. We know that this room is mainly reserved for indigenous ceremonies, but it could be used a little for other purposes, although not much.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: In your note, there was no mention of this. It did say that this space was for smoke purification ceremonies and qulliq. Your presentation note made it clear that the objective was to support the whole issue and indigenous practices. We agree on that.

But now you're adding a usage that's not listed in your note. Can you explain why it's not there? You present us with this new element, of which I was not aware, while we are at the end of the discussion.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: I knew it would take a little longer.

We've had a lot of discussions over the past few weeks, following our last meeting. We received a lot of feedback from every par-

ty. Some people were not against the idea of using this space for other purposes during the week. So we made a few adjustments so that it wouldn't just be indigenous activities including smoke cleansing and qulliq, but the room would be used primarily for those purposes.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you. We'll come back to that, but I'd also like us to address the other two questions.

Ms. Sahota, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Deputy Government Whip): I'll start my comments by saying that we can have a lengthier conversation back at the LTVP.

Just like Monsieur Plamondon is, Mr. MacKinnon, Mr. Gerretsen and I are also on the working group, and we can take it back and discuss it further.

I, too, have issues with the cultural space. I think there should be some flexibility, just like we have flexibility all over, in all of the rooms and how we use them—committee rooms and reception rooms in the evening—but I do think that this space should specifically be honouring our first peoples. The name of the room should be predominantly for the indigenous and first peoples of this country, and their access to that room and their need or use of that room should become a priority.

I'm sure there would be a willingness—and we can discuss it further—that it could be used for other cultural events if needed, but the space should not just be called a room for all cultural purposes. It should be dedicated to them.

That's my opinion on that, and it seems like there's further discussion needed. I know Ms. Gould had some comments about this, as well, previously, so I think we should take it back there.

● (1325)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Before we go to Mr. d'Entremont to reply, Ms. Findlay, perhaps it's good to have all of the questions on the table.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (Chief Opposition Whip): I want to say that we're in agreement with the four decisions that have to be made. Maybe that's where I should start.

Having said that, I actually thought we'd moved past this conversation. Now I feel like this conversation has regressed on the ceremonial practice. It's not religious, necessarily. My understanding is that by changing to characterizing it that way, it would open up the space for more than just indigenous people.

Also, my understanding is that there are no reasons that indigenous people would need use of this space every day of every week of every year, and that there are others who would look to spaces such as this. By approaching it this way, we were not dishonouring indigenous people. It's quite the opposite. It is a place where they can go for ceremony, as they choose and when it's appropriate—when there's indigenous legislation, perhaps, or other things going on. However, to have this large space that only one designated group can use when others could make use of it does not seem reasonable to us, so I feel like this whole conversation now has regressed back to where we were a couple of months ago.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'm going to suggest—if we can go back to the previous slide—that there are five recommendations that were made.

I hear that there is consensus for the bottom four and that the first one.... Let's table that.

Chris, I'm sorry to put this back onto you, but if we could take it back to committee and see if we can come back....

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Chief Government Whip): Can I make a quick suggestion on that point?

The debate that's been had about the designation or the nature of the room is an appropriate discussion. We can do that, but I think Mr. Wright would agree that there are some architectural and planning issues that perhaps aren't affected by that discussion. They can go forward.

Hon. Greg Fergus: That's a fair point.

We agree about the creation of that room and that space, so that, for the purposes of—

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): Yes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: As for its use, that's another issue we can come back to.

Is there a consensus for the creation and use of this space?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I agree.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Ms. Findlay.

Mr. Julian, are you raising your hand because you agree?

Mr. Peter Julian: Actually, Mr. Chair, I'd like to speak.

Hon. Greg Fergus: All right.

First, I yield the floor to Ms. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, I think my intervention was clear. We are not opposed to having a room for smoke purifica-

tion and qulliq activities. We are opposed to this room becoming a space for practising religion. We see a clear difference.

The architectural decision surrounding the creation of this room is important and I don't see a problem with it. However, my concern — which I think is shared by a few members here — is at what stage can we discuss the function and use of this room, in a transparent way, so that we can sort this out together. What do you propose?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Again, for architectural reasons and engineering needs, there seems to be consensus on building this room. We're not going to create another room or do a different design from what already exists. I see a consensus on this, subject to Mr. Julian's intervention. If that's the case, we can at least give the green light to go ahead with the construction of this room. We'll come back to its use later.

Mr. Julian, the floor is yours.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We just have an architectural decision to make now. I think there's a consensus on that. We can have a discussion on the use of the room later.

I think we've decided to adopt all the recommendations that have been proposed. Are there any others left for the next three weeks, between now and the Christmas break? Are you going to come back to them at the next meeting?

• (1330)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. d'Entremont, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: There are a number of decisions that we're going to have to make.

There is now a new schedule for meetings that are coming up over the next number of weeks, on December 1 and December 8. We provide it in your package with the questions or recommendations that we're going to have to look at. That will be coming to the board over the next few weeks. I suggest that we will probably be coming back to you in early January or at the next meeting in the new year.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

[*English*]

We have consensus.

Thank you very much.

We're adjourned.

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