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**Official Report
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Tuesday 17 February 2015

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 17 février 2015

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Tuesday 17 February 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Mardi 17 février 2015

The committee met at 0905 in committee room 1.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): I'll call the meeting to order. Welcome back, everybody. It's nice to see so many smiling, happy faces. We're all happy to be back.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: You looked that way.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): No, I looked over—I looked right at you. You surprised me on the corner the other day.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Before we get on with our intended appointments today, we need to adopt a few subcommittee reports. I'd like to ask for the subcommittee report dated December 11, 2014. Would someone move adoption of the report, please?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated December 11.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): All in favour? Opposed? Carried.

For the subcommittee report dated December 18, 2014? Mr. McDonell.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated December 18.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

For the subcommittee report dated January 22, 2015, could someone please move this report? Mr. McDonell.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, January 22, 2015.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

For the subcommittee report dated February 5, 2015, can I have someone please move adoption of the report? Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, February 5, 2015.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

For the subcommittee report dated February 12, 2015? Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, February 12, 2015.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. LAURA SMIT

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Laura Smit, intended appointee as member, Walkerton Clean Water Centre.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): We will now move to the intended appointments we have to review today. We have one intended appointee to hear from, and then we'll consider the concurrence, following the interview.

Our first intended appointee today: Laura Smit, who is nominated as a member of the Walkerton Clean Water Centre. Can you please come forward, Ms. Smit? Thank you.

Welcome. Thanks for being here this morning.

Ms. Laura Smit: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): You may begin with a brief statement, if you wish. Members of each party will then have 10 minutes to ask you questions. Any time used for your statement will be deducted from the government's time. We will start questioning with the government. Thank you.

Ms. Laura Smit: Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to speak to you today. It is an honour to be considered for the position on the board of directors for the Walkerton Clean Water Centre.

I'd like to tell you a bit more about myself, in addition to the information that you have in front of you.

I began my career in the drinking water industry in 2001, when I went to work for a small, rural municipality at the township of Severn. I started as an operator-in-training, eager to learn and with the ability to think quickly on my feet. I now hold class 3 licensing in all of the disciplines—water treatment, water distribution and supply, waste water collection and waste water treatment—and I'm the utility supervisor designated as the overall responsible operator for our systems.

I am also very involved in my community. I enjoy volunteering, and specifically, working with the soccer clubs in our area as a referee and a coach. My favourite games to referee are of the young children, who have such an amazing love of the game. I enjoy fueling the passion the kids have for the sport I love.

Through my career, I've built industry-specific knowledge through hands-on experience and through the education process built into the training of drinking water and waste water operators in Ontario. In addition to that, I also was a member of the mandatory renewal development course for drinking water operators in 2011 and in 2014.

My on-the-ground knowledge and experience makes me an ideal candidate for this position, bringing the perspective of an operator to the table, as one of the key points in the mandate for the centre is to train and inform operators, owners and operating authorities. I volunteered my time as the vice-chair of an industry quarterly magazine, Pipeline, helping to bring this voice to the surface.

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I also bring the perspective of small systems. Many of the issues that small systems face are ease of access to services and products at reasonable costs in a timely manner. For the township of Severn, we are lucky that we are not located too far from the GTA, so our access is only slightly cumbersome, but it's not the same for isolated communities trying to do similar work in northern Ontario.

I also worked for a brief period of time as the manager of the Jasper Waste Water Treatment Plant in Alberta. There, the location is serene and idyllic; however, trying to operate a waste water treatment plant in an isolated, small community in northern Alberta was a challenge, to say the least.

I do understand that this posting is specifically for the application of drinking water systems, but in a small system we do everything. We become jacks of all trades, not just experts in one area. That is what it means to be a small system operator in Ontario, critical to meeting the mandate set out for the centre.

The Walkerton Clean Water Centre arose out of a tragedy nearly 15 years ago. I've spent almost that long in the industry, and have watched our industry undergo massive, important changes. The role that the centre has played in the direction of training for new operators, as well as the continued education of existing operators, is critical.

The research coming from the centre is also crucial for the drinking water industry. Applying this homegrown research means that Ontario's issues are resolved with an Ontario solution. I have been lucky to be able to access the research in the past as we investigated new treatment solutions at one of our drinking water systems. We were able to use the conclusions of the centre's research to confirm the best solution for our system.

Thank you again for your time today, as I welcome the opportunity to become a member of the centre, to be able to promote, utilize and endeavour to ensure that its mandate of training, research and technology for the drinking water sector in Ontario is met.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Ms. Smit. On the government side, you have six minutes and 37 seconds. Ms. Malhi?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: How did you hear about our position?

Ms. Laura Smit: I was actually contacted by Mr. John Stager, the chair of the board. He asked me if I would put my name forward and consider this position.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Were you interviewed?

Ms. Laura Smit: He did an interview over the phone, yes.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Ms. Wong?

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you so much for your presentation this morning, but also for sharing your own personal passion about this issue of water and Walkerton. All of us in this room are quite familiar with the tragedy, but I just want it to be on the record. As someone who is coming from public health, I was around in the time when the Walkerton tragedy occurred.

In terms of your expertise—because you obviously came with some professional expertise, and you talked in your presentation this morning about new research and new treatment solutions—can you share with the committee what would be your priorities as a new member on this particular board?

Ms. Laura Smit: My priorities in general, where I have been trying to raise awareness, are on training and access to services, and the same information for smaller communities that are out there. A lot of times when we go into things that are being developed—policies and information packages—they apply to large urban centres, and it's difficult to then turn that solution into something that is applicable at the smaller setting. My goal is really to make sure that we're not under-represented, and that somebody thinks about that before something comes forward.

Ms. Soo Wong: Well, thank you very much for your expressed interest and for your consideration, because being a public servant—that's what you are professionally, and now your consideration of sitting on this public agency. Thank you for your interest.

Ms. Laura Smit: Thank you.

Ms. Soo Wong: I don't have any more questions.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Any further questions? Thank you very much.

The official opposition: Mr. McDonnell?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: Thank you for coming out today. I see you're part of a small system. Maybe just explain the size and the nature of the operation you work for.

Ms. Laura Smit: The township of Severn encompasses about 12,000 residents in total, but I believe our total is about 3,500 of those who are serviced with municipal drinking water, and only half of that is serviced by waste water. In our rural municipality, we actually have six drinking water systems and three waste water systems. Instead of having one large, interconnected grid system, we have isolated pockets of servicing that are around our areas of development.

I've often joked that in our six systems, we have three that take from surface water—so from Lake Couchiching—and three that are groundwater. And even though we're small, if there's a technology out, we're using it in

one of our plants for tackling a specific problem. We do encompass a lot of the treatment options that are out there for drinking water, even though we have a small system. It's just on a smaller scale than the urban centres.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Are your three—or six plants—are they all similar in nature, the drinking-water plants?

Ms. Laura Smit: No. Two of them were built around the same era; they are more similar, I would say. But each of the systems is quite distinct and separate. Even the three systems that all pull out of the same lake source operate differently and have different technologies in the plants.

Mr. Jim McDonell: We had a number of small systems in the township I was mayor of. Can you elaborate on some of the problems that you have related to the small size?

Ms. Laura Smit: Some of the issues are—going through budget season right now, our annual budget was just passed—that water and waste water aren't—people don't see it unless there's a big red flag in front of them, because it's buried infrastructure and it's in a building that they never see. People tend to see libraries, community centres and things like that. So I am grateful for the council that we have, that they are forward-thinking and we don't have to tackle that. But I know in some of the small communities it becomes difficult to want to allocate resources to something that the constituents aren't clamouring for.

Another one is definitely training and access to training. Under the legislation, we are required to complete a certain amount of training for our licensing, and some of the training providers outside the Walkerton Clean Water Centre, they're out for a profit. And we understand that, but what will happen is, they'll come out in the spring with a brand new training schedule, and unless they fill the room with a minimum number of people, they cancel the course, and now the people who require that training—it's not accessible to them in an easy location.

I sent a couple of our staff to a course last week and there was somebody from Thunder Bay at a course in Barrie. That's a long distance to be driving to complete required training. The Walkerton Clean Water Centre doesn't have the same mandate, so that's where they can go out and provide that training to people where it's less accessible for the operators out there.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Now, OCWA also does a lot of training. How do you find them as an alternative?

Ms. Laura Smit: OCWA did a lot of training for many years early on. They've only recently started getting into training outside of their own operators again. They are a viable alternative. The hub area near us does a couple of training sessions, but again, the OCWA operators generally are still attending some of the similar courses that we are, outside of their OCWA-provided training.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Some of the regulations coming down are more around the large centres. Do you have any examples of ones that are very hard to put in place and somewhat seem, I guess, unnecessary, you might say?

Ms. Laura Smit: I don't know that I would say it would be unnecessary but one of the—under the Clean Water Act, the idea that we can improve the efficiency of our systems is an underlying tone to that act. One of the ways that we can do that is remove any leaks that we have. I find it frustrating when I've attended some of the training for leak detection, because it is meant, and driven, for the large urban centres. So how do I take that technology that's out there for the large urban centres and apply it in our small system so that we can make our system as tight and as efficient as possible?

The other part of that is that we're supposed to be accounting for all of our water consumption. We track how much water comes into the plants, we track how much water goes out, and we meter all of our residents. And we're supposed to do these big accounting water-loss audits. On a small system I have so much other stuff I need to do, that's a difficult process. And it's not something we complete regularly, so it's a big, cumbersome process. In a larger centre you can have people assigned so that they can manage that data. That's one of the aspects that I really wish we could fine-tune a little bit so that we can improve our efficiency, because we want to—just maybe not in the same ways that the larger municipalities are geared towards.

0920

Mr. Jim McDonell: Yes. Especially when you look at a closed system—I mean, much of the water goes outside, watering grass, so you've got to wonder in some cases what useful information you're providing versus the manpower it's taking.

Ms. Laura Smit: Exactly.

Mr. Jim McDonell: With the agency and your work in it, what are you hoping to change or bring back to the board?

Ms. Laura Smit: I haven't been too involved with the board's actions to date, so I'm not really sure of where they're sitting and any of the events or areas that they're trying to focus on. As I said before, my focus will be on training and small systems and just making sure that I stick my hand up to speak for those two things, as we're discussing. But I don't really have a clear direction of what the board is working on right now.

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's clear that the small systems in rural areas are much different, and some of the regulations don't, in my mind, make a lot of sense. In a high school, they have to test their water twice a day because they're not on the water system. The testing takes probably close to a week to get results back. If they miss one of the tests, they have to put up a sign saying it's not safe. It takes them a week to get a result back. It undermines the public's confidence in the system when you see a sign up saying it's not safe, whereas if they had taken the test, they wouldn't know for a week anyway. It's just regulations to death.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I come from a small town. In the riding I represent, we're all mostly small communities, and it's an issue when regulations are brought down in a one-size-fits-all system for the province. You have

just explained that doesn't work. I certainly know that doesn't work. In fact, where I live, we hired OCWA to do most of this work for us because of the manpower, training—whatever was going to be involved in it. When I was on council there, we decided to use them because of, we thought, cost savings, whatever.

I see that as an issue when you get outside of the larger centres, where you say you don't have a person specifically assigned to test water every day; you have a different bunch of people doing it or whatever. We see this in a lot of businesses when you have to fill out government forms, whatever. Some of the larger municipalities certainly have people assigned to do all these things, whereas the smaller ones don't.

In fact, we just had a bunch of applications go through for ice storm damage, which just got to be a fiasco because of the paperwork involved.

Do you have a magic wand to help cure some of this paperwork burden—"overburden" I would call it—for small municipalities? It just gets to be unbelievable.

Ms. Laura Smit: I wish I had a magic wand to be able to do that.

Speaking to some of the changes that have come over the last 15 years, record-keeping and document control is a massive part of what we do now. When I started with the township, we only had five systems—one was added on—and there were three of us, and now there are seven of us. The workload has changed fairly significantly. A large majority of our job now is spent doing record-keeping, ensuring compliance and conformance, as well, for our audits. It's a heavy burden for people who also want to go out and dig a hole with their shovel and make a difference by actually fixing something instead of filling out the paperwork for it. It is difficult, but that's just what we've come to understand as being the place that we're at right now.

I think the regulations had—that pendulum had definitely swung to over-regulated, over-prescribed, and we seem to be backing off a little bit, streamlining a few processes, and there's ease of familiarity with the process as well on both sides, ours and the ministry's, to be able to access that. I wish I had a magic wand, but—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I would suggest that—
Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Yes, we're done.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Apparently, I can't do that.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Sorry. There we go.

Thank you very much, Ms. Smit, for being here this morning.

Since we only have one intended appointee this morning, we're going to move forward with concurrence right now.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Sorry. You'll need to step down. Pardon me.

Ms. Laura Smit: Thank you.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Chair?

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Mr. Rinaldi?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Is it too late to ask a question? I guess I am. Okay. That's fine.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): You can once we're done here.

We will now consider the concurrence for Laura Smit, nominated as member, Walkerton Clean Water Centre. Would someone please move the concurrence? Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Chair, I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Laura Smit, nominated as a member of the Walkerton Clean Water Centre.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you, Mr. Rinaldi.

Is there any discussion? All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

Congratulations, Ms. Smit. Thank you very much.

Ms. Laura Smit: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Now we have a few extensions to consider, as we've got some intended appointees who are going to expire on the 27th. I'm going to consider them all as one, so I'm just going to read out all their names.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Shara will be happy that I mention this. Inside your Pushdox, right at the bottom, there's a tracking sheet for our intended appointees, so you can look at it that way. All right?

Do we have unanimous consent to extend the deadline to consider the following intended appointees, who all expire on February 27: Mr. Gérald Naud, nominated as a member of the Social Benefits Tribunal, Social Justice Tribunals Ontario; Erica Phipps, nominated as a member of the Pesticides Advisory Committee; William R. Apted, nominated as a member of the Ontario Review Board; and Jeffrey Weinstein, nominated as a member of the Ontario Review Board, to March 27, as the date we would extend it to?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Yes, February 27 is the date that they will expire, so we want to extend it to March 27. Do I have unanimous consent to do that? That's great. Thank you very much.

That just about brings our meeting to a close, but I do want to mention, for those of us who have our iPads here this morning—and for those who don't—that Shara is here. She can assist any of us with any issues that we're having with the pilot.

Ms. Wong?

Ms. Soo Wong: I don't have one, so I don't know what you're talking about.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Okay. Ms. Wong is subbing in the committee.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm not part of the pilot. How's the pilot going?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Great.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Okay, the meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 0929.

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