

Lieutenant-governor gets \$6,000 per month to live in own condo

By DAVID JACKSON Provincial Reporter



New Lt.-Gov. Mayann Francis will be living in her Halifax condo with a \$6,000-a-month housing allowance until extensive renovations at Government House are finished, House Speaker Cecil Clarke announced Tuesday.

The 200-year-old downtown Halifax mansion that serves as the lieutenant-governor's residence will get major wiring, plumbing and heating upgrades over the next couple of years, starting after current Lt.-Gov. Myra Freeman's term is up. Ms. Francis will take over in a ceremony on Thursday.

The province will also rent 2,800 square feet of space on the 11th floor of the Maritime Centre, where Ms. Francis will be able to look down at Government House. The space will include her office, three staff offices, a reception area, a kitchen for catering events and some private space.

The cost of \$21 per square foot adds up to about \$59,000 a year, making it the least expensive of the options the province considered, Mr. Clarke said. Other scenarios included renting or buying a \$1-million home in south-end Halifax, or renting office space in other buildings that would have cost \$26 to \$28 a square foot.

The province estimates the total cost of work at Government House will be about \$3 million. Mr. Clarke said there's no debate on the project.

"The upgrades at Government House are simply not negotiable. This is a public building and a historic treasure," Mr. Clarke said in a conference call from a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting in Abuja, Nigeria.

"We need to do everything we can to be sure it remains safe and accessible to current Nova Scotians and future generations."

Mr. Clarke said closing Government House for two years will mean five staff, including the chef and housekeepers, will lose their jobs but might move into another civil service position. The affected staff include Walter and Ethel Garnier, who between them have worked at Government House for 108 years. Then-premier John Hamm presented them with a service of distinction award in January.

Mr. Clarke said they'll help compile the inventory of the house and assist with other activities.

Greg Lusk, the province's executive director of public works, said he believes it will be the biggest project on a historic "jewel" of a building done in the province. The renovations will also include ventilation work and adding an accessible washroom and elevator.

He said provincial staff and contractors working in the building, used continuously as a residence since 1805, will have to take extra care with its unique features.

For example, he said a wall in a room used for tea and informal meetings is covered in "Chinese wallpaper" — silk squares from old tea crates that were stuck to the wall and hand-painted.

Mr. Clarke said Ms. Francis's monthly allowance includes the \$1,700 that cabinet ministers receive for housing, plus something to cover other housing expenses like cleaning that would have been covered if Government House wasn't shut down.

The Maritime Centre space will be ready in a couple of months. Until then, Ms. Francis will use the premier's ceremonial office and other space in Province House.

Mr. Lusk said the ceremonial office will be upgraded with fresh paint and new carpet to replace the shag.

The province covers the staff and housing costs of the lieutenant-governor, while the federal government appoints the Queen's representative and covers the salary of about \$100,000.

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