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• (1635)

[*English*]

The Chair (Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 34 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, October 2, 2025, the committee is meeting to complete the original study of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces contaminated sites, which began the previous session.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we continue, I would ask participants to consult the guidelines on the table. These measures are to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of the interpreters. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. For interpretation, use the earpiece and select the appropriate language channel. Again, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. We have Sarah Perreault, mayor, City of Shannon; and Serge Villandré, chief administrative officer, City of Terrebonne.

We'll start with opening remarks, and I'll pass it over to the mayor to please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Sarah Perreault (Mayor, City of Shannon): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, I want to say I was shocked to learn the City of Shannon was being summoned to appear before the committee to talk about the contamination it's been dealing with for 20 years. The only reason people hear about this situation is because there's a monitoring committee, among other things, but it's still surprising. The committee wants to hear from people about contaminated sites, and I have a lot of questions about that objective. Is it to improve communications or to ensure we can speed up the processes?

Shannon experienced a massive trichloroethylene, or TCE, contamination exactly 26 years ago. I'd say that's one of the great contaminations to happen in Canada. Actually, 26 years ago, the city was informed of a major contamination. The federal government

didn't detect it, at least it didn't send the contamination notice; the provincial government did. The Direction de santé publique de la Capitale nationale conducted a water analysis in many Shannon residences. I assume provincial government representatives suspected the contamination at the time. I don't want to ascribe motives to anyone in this case, but the notice came from the Quebec government. You can imagine the shock and horror in the city, because everyone had artesian wells. I can attest to that, because I was living in Shannon at the time. I became an MPP a few years later. This is an issue I am very familiar with, that's why I took the time to tell you a bit of the story.

That contamination is extremely serious. I'll spare you the details, but obviously, people in the city were notified immediately and everyone stopped drinking the water. The federal government partnered with the Direction de santé publique du Québec to implement mitigation processes while we waited for a solution. The solution was to set up a water system, which cost the federal government nearly \$35 million. It paid for everything. It also set up a monitoring committee, which still exists. Coincidentally, I received a reminder today that I'm to appear before the monitoring committee on TCE contamination on June 2.

All this has put a damper on the relationship between the federal government and the City of Shannon. It fuelled concerns and shattered relationships that were already weak. I'd like to remind everyone that in 1914, Shannon wasn't a city. Large parts of the territory were expropriated to welcome 60,000 to 70,000 residents. Today, Shannon has barely 10,000 residents.

All that to say things were done after the contamination, but Shannon is still closely associated with it. When you talk about Shannon, you talk about TCE. That's still the reaction of those who come and settle in our region.

Twenty-six years later, the ground is still contaminated.

As I said earlier, there's a monitoring committee. This large committee brings together 40 to 50 individuals from various backgrounds, including environmental groups, representatives of National Defence and the Quebec government, as well as a citizens' group. I'll spare you the number of experts that sit on this committee. Meetings are often cancelled. I've been mayor for four years, and I've attended only four or five meetings. There should be two a year. There will be one on June 2. The previous one, which was supposed to take place last fall, was cancelled.

All that to say despite this large committee and lots of research, the ground is still contaminated. I'm really trying to understand where we're headed. Is it possible to decontaminate the ground in Shannon and the region? TCE concentrations are high. The water flows to the river. I'll spare you the details, but the monitoring committee wasn't set up yesterday. Is continuing the research on decontamination 26 years later just a way to ease people's conscience? Is decontamination really possible? I honestly wonder. I know a lot of money has been invested.

• (1640)

I also want to talk about our relationship with National Defence. I'd like to take advantage of this opportunity to say I'm not as prepared as an organization of 30,000 or 40,000 people would be. I'm mayor of a small town of 7,000 residents. I don't have a lot of employees.

So I [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. It's difficult for cities like ours to work with national defence. Its hierarchy is heavy. It's not agile. We're the ones responsible for its water and sewer systems, among other things. It's a very difficult situation, even though the representatives, like the commander—they change every two years—are always very friendly.

However, it's still a difficult relationship when it comes to this file. There's also an issue with unexploded ammunition on land adjacent to Shannon. As a result, areas where people used to walk 15 or 20 years ago are off limits. Today, those areas are being used by dirt bikes and ATVs. They're near residences, and we have no control over them. People are complaining. National Defence has closed off those areas, but it can't ensure a complete closure, because it's too complicated to supervise. These are big areas.

All that to say, today, in 2026, the major issues we have with national defence have nothing to do with our relationship. They're more related to hierarchy or agility. We have big issues with national defence. It's going to build 1,100 housing units, and we weren't really informed. There are a lot of issues.

I've set the table. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

[*English*]

Thank you for your comments.

We'll go, next, to Serge Villandré for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Serge Villandré (Chief Administrative Officer, City of Terrebonne): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the City of Terrebonne, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to appear as part of your study on contaminated sites.

Our presentation will focus more specifically on the former Saint-Maurice test shooting range, a vast federal land located within the boundaries of the City of Terrebonne.

It covers 6.5 square kilometres, making it one of the largest undeveloped pieces of land in the greater Montreal area.

National defence used the land for ammunition testing and training until 1967, and there has been no military activity there since. In 2014, the federal government classified the site as surplus.

Despite this decades-old decommissioning, the site is still contaminated, and its effects are still being felt.

This territory represents an exceptional natural heritage site. It's made up largely of wetlands, peatlands and mature forests, and is home to nearly two dozen special-status flora and fauna species. It plays an important role as a biodiversity reservoir and carbon sink.

The City of Terrebonne fully recognizes this ecological value and supports efforts to protect the site in the long term, possibly as a natural protected area, with controlled public access.

However, let's be honest: it's impossible to protect the site in the long term or to let the community use it without decontaminating it first. As long as there are unexploded ammunitions in the ground, this territory remains off limits, dangerous and unusable for both conservation and community needs, and the municipality's needs are real and urgent.

For the City of Terrebonne, the challenges are real. The site's contamination prevents us from building schools needed to serve the surrounding communities dealing with strong population growth. I'm also thinking of opening up and optimizing an industrial park, which is essential for economic development and job creation. Building a U-turn facility at the end of Saint-Roch Street is a major challenge for citizens' mobility. More broadly, we need consistent land development planning for the construction of at least five properties given the scarcity of land available.

Terrebonne intends to ask the federal government to decontaminate the land and make it available to meet the needs of its residents.

These needs fall under normal municipal and provincial responsibilities, but they remain unmet because of contamination caused by the federal government.

A tangible example is the Urbanova interchange project, which crosses over Highway 640. It perfectly illustrates this reality.

This structuring project carried out by the City of Terrebonne, in co-operation with Quebec's ministère des Transports et de la Mobilité durable, requires work on part of the former Saint-Maurice shooting range.

However, during the preliminary work, unexploded ammunitions were discovered, despite national defence classifying the risk as very low after an initial assessment. This discovery mandated specialized decontamination, including the detection, safe excavation and disposal of these historic ammunitions.

The City of Terrebonne had to award a \$1.7 million contract for a safe decontamination of the area. The interchange project is now almost two years behind schedule because of this discovery.

As a result, City of Terrebonne taxpayers will have to bear the costs of a contamination inherited from federal military activities.

Our message to the committee is simple and respectful, but firm. The federal government must assume responsibility for decontaminating these lands. It must compensate the City of Terrebonne for the \$1.7 million spent to allow the construction of an interchange essential to the community's development. Municipalities and citizens cannot and must not bear the financial and operational burden of decontamination alone. Full decontamination, planned and funded by the federal government, is an essential condition for any land transfer, any real environmental protection and any safe public use.

Finally, the Saint-Maurice range represents both a legacy of the past, a real obstacle and a major opportunity for the future, provided the responsibilities are clearly assumed.

• (1645)

The City of Terrebonne wants to be a constructive partner. However, to meet its housing and economic development needs, the federal government must play its full role.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villandré.

[English]

We're going to begin our first round of six minutes with you, Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Villandré, thank you for taking the time to do this.

Ms. Perreault, thank you for joining us.

I understand you were surprised to be invited to appear before the committee, but we'll take this opportunity to check the status of the relationship between National Defence and the City of Shannon. I'll start with the contamination file, because I know that's a big responsibility on your shoulders.

If I understand correctly, the contamination was discovered 26 years ago, and a whole process was put in place after that. I've

met with citizens' committees on a number of occasions. They made representations, they fought and they got the co-operation of the City of Shannon. However, I know a legal decision was rendered allowing for the expansion of a class action lawsuit. Beyond compensating citizens for the contamination, I'd like to know what the current state of affairs is.

Could you tell us what the situation is?

Can we say the water contamination in Shannon is over and citizens can now safely drink the water?

Sarah Perreault: Thank you for your question.

Actually, I can only answer with some reservation, because I'm not an expert.

For those who don't know the city, it's divided into a southern part and a northern part. There were plumes of contaminants throughout the southern part of the city. What we know is the plumes were in the southern part in particular, and the water system was essentially built in that area. Part of the system is also in the northern part of the city.

Properties with wells are located very far from the plumes of contaminants.

The wells have been sealed, so no one drinks that water. Trichloroethylene is a heavy metal, and tends to fall to the bottom of the water table. This means you can't dig in the water table, otherwise the TCE becomes volatile.

To answer your question, no one drinks the contaminated water from Shannon.

• (1650)

Joël Godin: This situation has a negative impact on land value, on life in Shannon and on you, as mayor and city administrator, doesn't it?

Sarah Perreault: Actually, it no longer has an impact on land value. However, 26 years later, those who contact the city still talk about this. They're still worried about TCE, but we reassure them.

There are no more concerns about land value. On the contrary, land is selling well. As you know, it's a beautiful city. I can testify to that.

Joël Godin: You're absolutely right, Ms. Perreault.

Do you have a lot of space left in Shannon for development?

We know you share your territory with national defence, but that you have no control over the expropriated land.

Could you tell us about the situation in terms of development opportunities?

A city increases its revenues through property taxes, which are directly related to land availability.

What's the current situation?

Sarah Perreault: Thank you for the question.

We still have land to develop, but I think in 15 or 20 years, we'll be landlocked. We're surrounded by land expropriated by national defence, and I think too much was expropriated. The area is huge.

As I said earlier, it's like a scar on the City of Shannon.

We'll end up landlocked, and we'll have problems with development.

Joël Godin: Do you have a relationship with the base managers that would allow you to discuss the acquisition of lands being off-loaded by national defence?

Sarah Perreault: Like I said earlier, we talk to them.

I heard the city manager for Terrebonne earlier talk about the financial challenges of decontamination. For us, it's the responsibilities negotiated with the military base that are financially challenging.

We have an excellent relationship with them. I can't say our relations are bad, because that's not the case. I have a good relationship with the commander.

All the cities adjacent to national defence land are probably in the same situation we're in. There's a new commander every two years, so our relationship is set to fail. We meet two or three times, and then they move on. I have to work with someone new, so we have to start all over again.

Obviously, they use a lot of land. There's a project to build 1,100 housing units over the next three years, which means the population of Shannon will go from 7,000 residents to 10,000 residents.

Joël Godin: It's being imposed.

Isn't that right?

Sarah Perreault: Yes, it's being imposed. I don't get to discuss it with them. I'm informed of the situation, but I have no say in the matter. They aren't asking me for any permits; they're just building. So we don't have that much information, although I think it's more of an organizational issue than an unwillingness.

Joël Godin: Can you tell us what the financial impact is? You can't charge tax on land occupied by national defence.

Is there any financial compensation? Is it renewed, adjusted and indexed?

Sarah Perreault: Actually, to compensate for national defence's use of the land, and to compensate the City of Shannon, there are what's called "payments in lieu of taxes". The military base's territory is divided between two cities. There may be a small portion that belongs to Quebec City, but the big moneymaker, as they say, belongs to Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier, which derives 50% of its tax revenue from national defence.

All the major buildings, such as headquarters or industrial buildings, are located within the territory of Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier. In my town, I wouldn't say the homes are falling into disrepair, but they aren't modern. In terms of property values, I would say there's a gap of more than 7% to 8% between the base's territory and my town. So there's a shortfall.

I would add that, given all the complexities I mentioned earlier, I sometimes wish I knew who to contact to have this reviewed, because it's not fair. The intention is to be fair. However, in reality, this compensation is not.

Joël Godin: I hope that national defence is listening to your comments and that the department will reach out to you.

Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

[*English*]

Monsieur Watchorn, it's over to you for six minutes.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us, Ms. Perreault.

I share a life experience with you, because I served as mayor of a small municipality of 5,000 residents for 16 years—the municipality of Morin-Heights. In addition, I work with a former city manager of Shannon, Hugo Lépine. He's very competent. He told me a bit about your experience. So I'd like to ask you a few questions about that.

We know that municipal infrastructure costs a fortune, and we're always looking for ways to fund it. When the settlement was made with the federal government to build your water system, if I understand correctly, 85% of the water mains and streets in Shannon were completely redone.

Is that correct?

Sarah Perreault: It may be 85%, but that seems like a lot to me. In fact, a lot of the streets had to be redone because, when we installed the water system, we obviously had to tear up the existing streets. So, 85% seems like a lot to me, but it's not far off, in my opinion.

Tim Watchorn: Okay.

Ultimately, thanks to the settlement, you still have relatively new infrastructure in the urbanized part of town, I imagine.

Is that correct?

Sarah Perreault: In the urbanized part of town, yes, I'd say that the streets were redone. However, this was 20, 22 years ago. You understand that they're not in mint condition today. When the water system was installed, we were happy.

I'm not criticizing what's been done. I think everyone was acting in good faith. I don't want to dwell on the past. I'm looking to the future. That's what I want to tell you. I want to tell you that, today, in 2026, we have a good relationship with the military base. That said, my heartfelt plea is that it's hard for a representative of a town of 7,000 residents to have a discussion with the representative of a military base. I'm an instrument of the provincial government. I have discussions with the base, I have to talk with the provincial government, but I'm not equipped to do that. I'm responsible for the base's sewer, water system and infrastructure. I have big things to discuss.

The payments in lieu of taxes are no longer where they should be, because the base has gone down in value. In addition, the way they're calculated is not efficient and, above all, it's unfair. I'm not blaming anyone. That's probably the best way we've found, but today, in 2026, we have to ask ourselves some questions.

I would end by saying this. We need to talk to each other more, because the military base has set up in my town, where there's a project to build 1,100 homes. Has a school been planned for? Has any thought been given to the town's road infrastructure handling all this? There's a lot of traffic.

I'm not saying this in a negative way. On the contrary, what I'm saying is that we're going to collaborate. We're going to be there, but help us help you. That's what I'm saying. That's my heartfelt plea.

Tim Watchorn: I think that's a great message.

You're right, it's often very complex for municipalities to deal with the provinces and the federal government. They're not used to dealing with the federal government. You're in a unique situation because a base has been set up in your town. However, the majority of mayors don't have the burden, or perhaps the benefit, in some cases, of having a military base in town.

I'd like to talk about the 1,100 housing units to be built on the military base.

What services does the municipality have to provide in order to accommodate these 1,100 additional housing units that are to be built?

Sarah Perreault: In 1999, we signed an agreement with the federal government. The City of Shannon acquired national defence's road, water and waste water infrastructure. I'll spare you the technical details. The municipality became responsible for that. Funds were transferred. At the time, in 1999, it worked. Today, we're negotiating with the real estate operations unit to try to review the agreement so that it better reflects the municipality's challenges.

That said, these 1,100 units being built means that within five years, the town will have 1,100 new units, because they will be on my territory. Obviously, national defence is building them, but it doesn't consult me about where they're going to be built. I'm also

not consulted on permits or the structures. National defence was spared all of that.

As far as I'm concerned, that's a good thing. I'm ready to see the municipality grow. I'm ready to take on this responsibility, and I see it as a positive thing. However, we need to talk to each other. There have to be committees.

Currently, traffic is already a problem on the Route de la Bravoure. I have one exit, but access to the military base has already been restricted. I understand that there are security-related imperatives, and I'm perfectly comfortable with that, except that, since every person has to show identification, you can imagine how long the lineup is to get into the base in the morning. That creates bottlenecks. So, if we add 1,100 housing units, you understand the impact that will have.

There are three schools, including two elementary schools, one English-language and one French-language. In 2025, I was told that the French-language school would probably be over capacity by 2026. Now, I'm told that 1,100 housing units are coming. Have I discussed this with national defence so that we can meet these children's needs? I don't want to take children out of Shannon and send them to another school. Do you understand? That's a problem.

I'm not negative, on the contrary. However, have we planned for all that?

• (1700)

Tim Watchorn: That's a great question.

Back home, even though we haven't got a military base, we've also experienced children being relocated from one elementary school to another. Communities are mobilizing against this.

I think it's important to have discussions. Your message will be heard, Ms. Perreault. We'll make sure that these discussions take place.

The military is recruiting heavily these days. They've already met their targets this year for the number of new service members. So it's really important, for Shannon and for the Government of Canada, that the new recruits who will be moving into these 1,100 new housing units are welcomed in your town.

Sarah Perreault: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have the floor for six minutes.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Villandré and Ms. Perreault, thank you for being with us. Thank you for your presentations.

Mr. Villandré, I'd like to check something with you first. Over a month ago, on March 25, we welcomed the Minister of National Defence and his team, including deputy ministers and members of his inner circle. This was at the beginning of our study. I spoke to them about you. I said that the City of Terrebonne found it strange to have to pay for this when it is a federal government error, a long-standing federal oversight. It's an old issue. I've been hearing my colleagues in the caucus talk about this for a long time. Members of Parliament for Terrebonne have also mentioned it to me. It goes as far back as Mr. Boudrias, who was already talking about it years ago.

Mr. McGuinty was not aware of it. I don't blame him. He can't possibly know the technical details of all these cases. However, the deputy minister, Christiane Fox, said that it was strange that you thought that in the City of Terrebonne, because there were funds available for you. She said she was going to call you to let you know. That was over a month ago.

Did the department officials call you?

Serge Villandré: No, we've not had any calls from anyone in the department regarding any subsidies to cover these costs, especially since they have increased. Initially, the estimate was \$600,000. Now, we're up to \$1.7 million to decontaminate the site due to the presence of unexploded ordnance.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: So you didn't get a call from the deputy minister. It's not because Terrebonne hasn't paid its Videotron bill.

Isn't that right?

Serge Villandré: No, we pay our bills on time.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Okay.

So you'd like to get that call. That commitment was made here, on the record, on camera.

Serge Villandré: Yes, especially since it's not our responsibility. We just want to ensure that we can develop our region. The construction of the interchange is a key element. It needs to be decontaminated. Since this is federal land, the federal government should normally cover the costs.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: That helps me to segue into my next question. I want to understand something.

Initially, national defence estimated that the work, which will take place this spring, would cost \$600,000. Ultimately, the actual bids came in at \$3.4 million. We're not even in the same ball park. You had to go outside Quebec to find a contractor willing to do the work for \$1.7 million.

How can such a discrepancy be explained? What methodology was used?

Serge Villandré: You're right.

We know absolutely nothing about this field. We've never had to decontaminate a site ordnance. We brought in procurement experts from national defence. They're the ones who provided us with the estimates.

Initially, yes, it was around \$600,000. Then we contacted the only Quebec company that specializes in this field. They offered to do

the work, by mutual agreement, for \$3.4 million, which we found far too expensive, given the \$600,000 estimate.

As a result, we had to issue a Canada-wide call for tenders. At the beginning of the year, a company offered to do the work for \$1.7 million, which is still four or five times more than the initial estimate.

● (1705)

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Even though that's less than \$3.4 million, it's still a long way from \$600,000. We're not in the same ball park at all.

Isn't that right?

Serge Villandré: Yes, exactly. These costs are borne by the municipality, under current conditions.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Yes, that's right. There will be work done in the spring.

Are there any other plots of land besides the one in question, where shells need to be removed?

Serge Villandré: This site does have development potential. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we could connect two industrial parks and take the opportunity to build along that axis.

An area has already been developed for a Hydro-Québec station. We could build at least 5,000 housing units there. We know there's a huge need for them. Then, there should also be a connection with surrounding schools and industrial parks. All of this would take up only 3% of this huge area, which would become a protected area in the long term.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: There's a housing crisis, and farmland is often rezoned. We might as well use contaminated land.

They say that this land is contaminated, and you confirm that there are shells there. However, it's less clear whether there are contaminants in the soil.

Can you clarify that?

Serge Villandré: It's not clear. For the construction of the interchange, we tested the soil, but because this is a road infrastructure project, the acceptable contamination thresholds are not the same. We don't do the same tests as we would for a school, a business or a residential building, for example. More in-depth studies are certainly needed.

So we conducted some studies to assess the bearing capacity and ensure that there are no hazardous contaminants for people who would pass by there in vehicles or on bicycles, for example.

That said, we definitely need to take this further if we want to ensure that this site remains safe for the people who will be using it.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: So there is uncertainty and a fairly significant impact on the city's development. You can confirm that.

Isn't that right?

Serge Villandré: Yes, absolutely.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: The land was transferred in 2015 as low-risk land. Those are the terms that were used.

What technical criteria was that based on?

I know you said you have no expertise in this and you've never done this before, but how can anyone say that this is low-risk land when there are munitions in the ground?

What was that actually based on?

Serge Villandré: I don't know how they evaluate sites. We didn't buy all the land, just a tiny part of it to build our interchange, and when we acquired this parcel of land, we were told that the risks were very low. However, I don't know what criteria that opinion and that decision were based on.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: When national defence transferred the land, it committed to decontaminating it.

Is that correct?

Serge Villandré: Yes, exactly.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: That's what was said at the time. The department said it was going to do it, but now you have to pay for it.

Is that correct?

Serge Villandré: The department said its responsibility was to take the munitions that were removed from the ground and then dispose of them, but it was up to us to get them out of the ground. That's why we awarded a \$1.7-million contract.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savard-Tremblay.

[English]

We'll come back to you.

Mr. Anderson is next.

Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'm afraid that I have to use English. My French is non-existent, and the only alternative is Spanish, which would probably make a mess for all of us here.

Mr. Villandré, you mentioned that munitions were in the ground there. They told you that it was a low risk in the area they did, and you ran into munitions. Did they give you any timeline for when these munitions become inert in the ground?

[Translation]

Serge Villandré: No, we weren't given any information about the lifespan of these munitions or the impact they may have. We got no information about that.

When the department transferred the land to us in 2014 so that we could build our interchange on it, nobody ever told us the risk would be zero at some point.

[English]

Scott Anderson: Okay. Were you told any size for the munitions and whether they were small munitions or large munitions?

[Translation]

Serge Villandré: They're small munitions. The one that was found in the fall was a small munition. I don't know what calibre it was. That's not my area of expertise.

Any unexploded ordnance is dangerous, of course. It can maim or injure someone. That's why we take no risks.

• (1710)

[English]

Scott Anderson: Of course. In effect, you were given no technical information whatsoever about the site.

[Translation]

Serge Villandré: No. We weren't given any technical information.

[English]

Scott Anderson: Okay. Thank you very much.

I'm sorry. There's a bit of a lag in translation, so if I wait a minute, it's because I'm listening to that.

Ms. Perreault, you mentioned a figure of \$35 million. I'm trying to clarify that in my mind. I'm not clear what that was associated with.

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: That \$35 million was to cover the cost of installing the water system in the municipality of Shannon. That was done from 2004 or 2005 to 2010. It was done in stages.

In total, the federal government invested \$35 million to set up that system.

[English]

Scott Anderson: Okay. The federal government paid for that.

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: Absolutely.

[English]

Scott Anderson: Did the military admit that they are the source of the contamination? Was that ever at any point an issue?

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: A citizens' committee filed a lawsuit. TCE is carcinogenic, so the citizens' group sued the federal government, seeking recognition of the causal link between drinking water contaminated with TCE and cancer cases in Shannon, but the Shannon sample was too small to prove it.

Did national defence admit to being at fault, in the sense that it admitted it had contaminated the water? My understanding is that, yes, it did. I don't think the contamination was deliberate. In the 1950s, when they were using these solvents, they didn't know how harmful they could be. The fact has been acknowledged.

However, should national defence, in good conscience, have notified people sooner that contamination had occurred? We know that, by the time it was detected, the department had known about it for several years. I don't want to get into those details, because I don't know why nobody said anything. I don't know if it was knowledge or communication that was lacking. I have no idea.

However, I know that the courts recognized the federal government's responsibility and held the federal government to account for the contamination. Then, from 2023 to 2025, financial compensation was awarded to people who lived there, particularly in places where there were plumes of contaminants. The compensation was awarded primarily for the inconvenience caused by the contamination.

However, the federal government has not acknowledged a link between disease or cancer cases and contamination. In addition, the link could not be scientifically demonstrated because the sample size was too small.

Does that answer your question?

[English]

Scott Anderson: Yes, it does. Thank you very much.

I want to clarify something else. You mentioned that the property values have not lowered. They've recouped, in any event. Does that mean the effects on the water table are gone now? Have they remediated themselves through time, or do they still need remediation?

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: Home values have not actually gone down. This all happened 26 years ago. I don't want to tell you anything I'm not sure of. Have actual home sales declined, though? Did fewer people move to Shannon in the early 2000s? The answer is probably yes, because people were afraid. There was a lot of contamination. Honestly, it was significant and devastating.

Today, we know where the plumes of contaminants are. Now that we have a water supply system, it's safe. There's no direct contamination. TCE is a heavy metal that tends to go down into the water table. It doesn't go up. As long as you don't touch the water table and put holes in it, there's no danger.

We always have to be careful. I should say that national defence has set up monitoring wells. It does a lot of monitoring. It's doing its job. It's not leaving things unmonitored. As a result, people are now coming to live in Shannon, and they're safe in Shannon. There are no contamination issues.

• (1715)

[English]

Scott Anderson: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

Ms. Idlout, it's over to you for five minutes.

Lori Idlout (Nunavut, Lib.): *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.* Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Before I ask my question of each of you, I want to give a little bit of context. This is my first day officially as a member of the national defence committee, and I'm very excited to join it. I understand that this is a continuation of a study that started earlier. I saw in our briefing materials, for example, that there was already testimony provided by Dr. Wang, who testified that Canada's Arctic and the north have contaminated sites as well. He testified that these sites tend to be either "forgotten" or "poorly monitored".

In order to bridge your experience, and to try to make sure I can have some useful information from you, could you share some advice or some suggestions? What could improve, in terms of relationships between municipalities and the federal government, so that we could ensure that these sites that are either forgotten in the north or poorly monitored are getting the attention they deserve?

Maybe I'll ask Sarah to answer first, and then I'll go to Serge.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: That's a great question.

It's actually a hard one to answer because national defence is a department that ensures Canadian security. I would imagine it's subject to security imperatives that go beyond the concerns of cities like mine. I get that.

However, your question is relevant. I would say that, at the very least, information must be shared.

We can't stand by doing nothing when we know there's contamination. I'm not saying the contamination is deliberate, but as soon as someone knows there's contamination, there's a social responsibility. Beyond the fact that national defence is responsible for Canadian security, it also has a social responsibility to ensure the health and safety of people living on Canadian soil. That absolutely has to be taken into account.

When I answered your colleague's question earlier, I would have liked to add one thing. TCE presents no danger now, but the fact remains that the soil in the town of Shannon is still contaminated with TCE. We have some knowledge now, but will we discover something else 20 years from now? I don't know.

We know that we live on contaminated ground, and that's always going to be a concern. It matters. It's extremely important. National defence needs to be more responsive when it comes to communicating and being transparent in this type of situation. Every time this kind of thing happens, people lose trust in the Canadian government. That's serious because these are Canadian citizens living in Canada.

Basically, the government has to be transparent, it has to be open, it has to communicate and, above all, it has to collaborate. Those are the key words to keep in mind.

[English]

Lori Idlout: Thank you so much, Sarah.

You can use up the rest of the time, Serge, if you'd like.

[Translation]

Serge Villandré: Thank you very much.

I agree with Ms. Perreault.

I would add that communication is key, because there is social, economic and environmental responsibility. As I said in my introduction, if we work together, we can use this site to drive economic development. With all the challenges Canada is facing, we need it. The land could also be used for housing. That's important too. There's a program to build more housing in Canada. I think we can work together to develop this site.

It starts with good communication to ensure that responsibilities are shared and that, in the case of Terrebonne, the federal government takes full responsibility for decontamination.

Then, through communication and collaboration, we can develop part of the site and ensure conservation. As I said earlier, seven square kilometres of land needs to be cleaned up. Reasonable, well-thought-out economic development would cover just 3% or 4% of the total area.

That said, we need open and transparent communication with our partners at national defence.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villandré.

[English]

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, it's back to you.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Given that you were initially told the risk was low, the government's official response to the parliamentary petition signed by 1,500 people and tabled in 2023 by my former colleague, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, is interesting. The petition called for all kinds of things, such as accelerating the decontamination process.

I won't dwell on the request; I'll talk about the response. According to the department, preliminary estimates indicated that significant work would be required on the site over a period of approximately 30 years before the property could be considered safe for use. They say that the risk is low, but it will take 30 years for it to be safe.

What am I not understanding?

Serge Villandré: It's certainly a large piece of land. As I said, it covers seven square kilometres. Decontaminating that much land is certainly a lot of work. I don't know what estimates or data they're looking at that would lead them to say that it will take that long.

If we want the site to be safe for everyone, the federal government must take responsibility. Only the government has information about the amount of contaminants, or at least it has access to the data that enables it to say it will take up to 30 years.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: There is still a lack of transparency. You yourself don't know exactly where that information comes from.

Is that correct?

Serge Villandré: We have no access to the data. We have no way of knowing what's what, so we trust the people at national defence because they're the experts on this. We trust the information they give us.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: In 2023, three years ago, the petition called for the following:

2. Expedite the assessment process to determine the amount of unexploded ordnance on the land and the time needed for decontamination work; and
3. Ensure that the site is decontaminated at federal expense as soon as possible.

There were three main points. Now, three years later, has there been any progress?

Serge Villandré: No, there hasn't.

As far as we know, the federal government, or rather national defence, hasn't done any decontamination work.

As I explained earlier, we're the ones responsible for overseeing the decontamination of a tiny part of the site so we can build our Urbanova interchange. We would be happy to partner. If we could get the site decontaminated, that would also create a number of opportunities for things like conservation, housing, economic development and businesses.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Would you say that what you were told in 2015—that national defence would deal with removing the shells—is consistent with what you're being told today, that the department is not going to do the whole job, just part of it?

Serge Villandré: I wasn't there in 2015. However, my predecessors said that decontamination was supposed to happen, but didn't.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villandré.

Thank you, Mr. Savard-Tremblay.

[English]

Mr. Kibble, we go over to you for five minutes.

[Translation]

Jeff Kibble (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your answers, Mr. Villandré and Ms. Perreault.

Unfortunately, I'm going to speak to you in English.

[English]

I'm very sorry and saddened for what your communities have gone through.

I have a few questions for the mayor.

You mentioned 1,100 houses being built on the base and associated playgrounds, parks and schools. Would that be on contaminated land or formerly contaminated land, and if not, would it be close to that land?

• (1725)

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: Thank you.

As to whether the land on which the homes will be built is contaminated, I can't really answer that because I don't have all the information about where they're going to be built at this time.

I know that about 1,100 units will be built and that the vast majority, if not all of them, will be in Shannon. It's possible that the soil is contaminated. As I've said, if the contamination is underground, as long as the water table retains its integrity, it poses no danger. That's the information we have now, in 2026. It's possible that the land is contaminated, but it will not pose a safety risk.

In all honesty, I think national defence is aware of the importance of providing a healthy living environment for military personnel. I have no doubt about that.

[English]

Jeff Kibble: May I ask how many people's health has been affected by this over the years? Is there an approximate number?

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: I don't have an exact number for you. You're talking about something that's been going on for 26 years, and I don't have any conclusive evidence.

The stories of small towns like ours are often told by the people who live there. According to an elderly physician, Dr. Juneau, who was a member of the citizens' committee and who treated just about everyone in Shannon at the time, there were more cases of cancer, particularly brain cancer. There's a causal link to TCE. There were more cases of cancer in a specific area. However, the group and the stakeholders had trouble tracking down everyone who lived in Shannon because they were military personnel. As you know, by definition, they're transferred regularly. The population changed regularly. There were long-standing Shannon residents, but also all the military personnel shuffled in and out. It was very difficult to identify those military personnel and figure out exactly what the population was.

In addition to cancer cases, people have been very worried. Exposure was exponential. The TCE contamination rate was

100 times the legal limit. It was terrible for people. Some of the homes in the contamination areas were extremely contaminated. People experienced so much anxiety, but they still live in Shannon. They're still quite suspicious, and that negative experience has stayed with them.

I hope that answers your question.

[English]

Jeff Kibble: Thank you very much.

I really appreciated your comment when you said you didn't want to look back and that you wanted to look to the future. I think it's very positive and healing to hear that.

You mentioned a review of some things and you also mentioned better communication.

Could you please share some positive, concrete steps—and this is your opportunity to speak to the government through the committee—as a solution from the federal government?

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: I think that, given that the military base is right in the heart of our city, we need to work together and try to find solutions together. What I'm asking of national defence is to find ways to sit down together so that we can share our concerns about the population in my territory.

Earlier, I mentioned the 1,100 housing units. That's one example. We're facing other challenges as well.

Our security services are provided both by national defence and by personnel from my jurisdiction. Who is responsible for what? Even today, in 2026, we're still discussing it. I have a risk coverage plan, but national defence isn't subject to such a plan.

I could give you many more examples like this. National defence doesn't have to obtain permits when it builds on my territory, and I'm not informed about new construction.

If we want to work together, let's create committees or find ways to be able to discuss these topics. Traffic-related issues affect both my city and the territory belonging to national defence. We therefore need to work together to move the Government of Quebec forward.

We need communication and coordination tools. However, the hierarchy within national defence is so extensive that, at times, I get the impression that its members don't even speak to one another. Do representatives from Defence Construction Canada communicate with those from the Real Property Operations Unit? Sometimes I'm not sure.

Let's find tools to communicate.

• (1730)

Jeff Kibble: Okay. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Kibble, we're good for now.

Jeff Kibble: I have five minutes.

The Chair: It's five minutes and you've had six already.

Monsieur Malette, you have five minutes. It's over to you.

Chris Malette (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses.

[*Translation*]

I'm sorry, but I don't speak French very well.

[*English*]

I will be asking my questions in English.

Mayor Perreault, I understand that there will be 1,100 units of housing built on the base in the near future. Do you have any suggestions on how municipalities and the federal government could work together better in future in these cases where there is contamination? I believe it's further to my colleague's question.

[*Translation*]

Sarah Perreault: I'm going to repeat a bit of what I said earlier. The contamination example is a prime example of what not to replicate. What happened in 2000 must not happen again. How can we avoid this kind of situation? I think the answer is to work together, each within our own areas of responsibility.

I understand that national defence has security imperatives that go beyond the concerns of a city like mine, and I fully respect that. What I'm saying is that, where we have shared concerns, particularly with respect to housing and the 1,100 units that are going to be built, we need to find simple and flexible ways to work together. I'm also thinking of spaces for our children in our schools, whether they are children of military personnel or of the residents of Shannon. They are all citizens of the same community. We share the same territory.

Earlier, I mentioned that the base commander changes every two years. The commanders are extremely kind, and I work well with them, but they're only there temporarily. So I can understand that they have other concerns.

Stability therefore has to come from other communication tools, such as consultation tables. I don't have any names, but I do have many ideas.

[*English*]

Chris Malette: Monsieur Villandré, I understand that there are 5,000 new units to be built in your community to house more military personnel. Can you tell me roughly how much the taxation would be on 5,000 new homes?

[*Translation*]

Serge Villandré: For every 1,000 housing units, property taxes generate approximately \$5 million. So that is roughly the cost for national defence.

However, the cost of the infrastructure required to build these housing units must also be taken into account. It is necessary to ensure that there is infrastructure to provide drinking water and to treat waste water. Then, it's necessary to ensure that there are roads.

These, too, represent major investments. We're talking about several tens of millions of dollars in municipal investment. Developers are also needed to ensure the construction of the 5,000 housing units planned for that portion of the land, the former Saint-Maurice firing range.

[*English*]

Chris Malette: Of course, the \$1.7 million for the UXO cleanup is in that formula as well.

[*Translation*]

Serge Villandré: As I said, the amount we have to pay relates to land that did not belong to us. We therefore consider that it isn't our responsibility to assume the costs of that decontamination. If the 5,000 housing units are to be built, that new section of land will need to be decontaminated.

I would point out that, of everything I've mentioned, the areas on which construction is possible represent roughly 3% of the territory. If we make a simple proportional estimate of the effort required by national defence to decontaminate the site, which falls under its responsibility, it becomes clear that it might take one year, rather than 30, to decontaminate the sections needed for the development.

• (1735)

[*English*]

Chris Malette: Okay.

The Chair: We're going to Ms. Gallant now.

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Through you to the mayor of Shannon, with the 1,100 new units, what amount would your community be receiving for grants in lieu of essentially the revenue from the federal government for having the extra housing on that base?

[*Translation*]

Sarah Perreault: Thank you for your question.

I may not have been clear enough. National defence is building on its own land, so it is responsible for the costs associated with the buildings that will be constructed.

At this point, I have no idea what those will be. I know they will be multi-unit housing, but I don't have a specific idea about the assessment of those buildings. An assessment will be done by our assessors, along with those of the military base, to determine the value of the housing units.

Earlier, I spoke about payments in lieu of taxes. We will assess that and then apply the tax rate of the City of Shannon, which, if I may take a moment to say so, is one of the lowest in Quebec. The tax rate is quite low, and it will be applied to these new housing units. The average value of homes in Shannon is about \$460,000. I don't think the units on the military base will be worth \$460,000. Their value will be lower, since we're talking about apartments or multi-unit dwellings.

Does that answer your question?

[English]

Cheryl Gallant: Yes, I'm very familiar with military housing. It is not of the same quality as on civilian land. You mentioned that the land value on base for which you're getting the grants in lieu of payments from the federal government had declined in value.

Was that because they took down buildings, or is there some other reason why your payments from the federal government for having the military base in your municipality have gone down?

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: First of all, these are fairly old housing units that date back several years, so they have to be compared with the houses built in Shannon, which, as I mentioned, have a certain average value. There are many single-family homes on our territory. It's a small resort town surrounded by nature, with properties that often sit on large lots. This results in a loss of value and accounts for part of the difference between the assessments for my city and those for national defence land.

In addition, on my territory, there are the small Canex military stores that, frankly, no longer meet the standards of retail establishments found in a city today. These are commercial buildings, but they are outdated. These older shops and buildings haven't increased in value, whereas the Shannon side has appreciated over time. As a result, there is a valuation gap estimated at about 8% compared to the portion of the base located in Shannon.

As I mentioned earlier, the military base territory is divided between two cities. Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier contains all the higher-value buildings, including the administrative offices and the research centre. When payments in lieu of taxes are calculated, what is located in each jurisdiction is assessed accordingly. This formula no longer reflects the reality of the territory where the Valcartier military base is located.

I don't know whether the same situation exists elsewhere, but in our case, it's no longer equitable. It no longer reflects the situation in 2026.

[English]

Cheryl Gallant: Do the families of serving military personnel live on the base presently?

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: Yes, they're very close.

I'm in my office right now, and from my window, I can see the national defence housing on the left and the city of Shannon's housing on the right.

We live together. We share a territory. The children from the military base go to school with our children from the city of Shannon. It is one and the same community, with the exception that, on national defence territory, military personnel are seeking living environments that better reflect the reality of 2026. The buildings we have in Shannon are more outdated. We've renovated a few of them. These are not new buildings. They date back perhaps to the 1950s and 1960s, I would say, with all due caution.

Many military personnel choose to buy homes on our territory. As mentioned earlier, the reality you are well aware of is that military personnel are required to move frequently. They sometimes choose to live on national defence territory. In my view, the development of the 1,100 new units is driven by additional needs, but also by the need to better meet the current needs of military personnel.

We are one community. We share the same life. We share the same library. Our residents play sports on national defence territory, and we have the same day camp. We work together. We are one community. That's how I see it. We are part of a city, and we share our services.

• (1740)

[English]

Cheryl Gallant: Is the TCE plume currently being monitored?

[Translation]

Sarah Perreault: Yes. As I told you earlier, there is a monitoring committee, a team working on it.

I always try to stay up to date, but we have two meetings a year. There will be one in June.

It's complicated. What I understand is that we're tracking the plumes of contaminants as they move over time. They've been moving for 26 years.

Do we currently have realistic and feasible solutions? I'm not convinced of that today, 26 years later.

Earlier, I was listening to the general manager from the other city speak. There is also unexploded ordnance on my territory. We've restricted access to many areas, but decontamination isn't simple. It's a major challenge.

Is there a lack of will? I don't want to answer that. Of course, if it were simple, we would have done it already. These are major challenges.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mayor Perreault.

Monsieur Earle, welcome. It's over to you for five minutes.

Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses. I'd like to direct my first couple of questions to Mayor Perreault.

You talked a lot about the committee that works collaboratively with you, as mayor. I want to understand the structure of that committee a bit more.

Who participates in it? Is it members of the CAF along with the municipality, or is it other municipalities that are adjacent?

As I listened to you describe it, it sounded like your municipality is a bedroom community for the base.

[*Translation*]

Sarah Perreault: This committee is chaired by the base commander. The committee includes representatives from the military base, representatives from the City of Quebec—because a small portion of the contamination affected its territory—the mayor or a representative from the City of Shannon, representatives from the citizens' group and environmental organizations, as well as representatives from the Regional Environment Council, the Ministry of the Environment, Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks in Quebec, and Environment and Climate Change Canada. It's diverse. It's an important committee.

There is collaboration, but you understand that we meet twice a year. So this committee isn't ideal. It's a good committee, but as for the day-to-day work it does, I can't answer that question. I assume they have a standing committee. I receive data, year in and year out.

I told you that last year we had a foam spill, I believe, from a river water treatment plant. We found out about it because a resident came to ask us for a key to open a gate. When I told you that this isn't effective and isn't agile, that's a good example. Had it been kept from us? I don't think so, because it was in the river and someone had come to ask us for the key to open the boat ramp. However, when I was asked for it, I wasn't aware that there had been a spill. I didn't know what was in the river. So I had to call people and do some research to find the answer. It's frustrating, for a city like ours, to have to chase after information.

Every time this happens—and I want to say this with all my heart—it adds to our anxiety. We wonder if there's co-operation or if things are being kept from us. Every time citizens see this, it always comes back to the same trauma. Are we safe? I believe we are, but every time, this relationship and trust are undermined. It's serious to do that.

We must avoid these situations if we want to work together. I told you it wasn't perfect—it's far from perfect—but national defence needs to improve its relations. I know the department faces many challenges, but these people live in our cities, they are our neighbours, they have social responsibilities, and they must fulfill them just as they ensure Canada's security. Both of these matters are equally important.

• (1745)

[*English*]

Philip Earle: Thank you for that. I really appreciate the answer. There's some really good context.

Early in your testimony you talked about a reduction in population in your community. I believe I heard a number—just doing the simple math on it—that there are as many as 3,000 fewer people in the municipality today than there were a few short years ago. Is that directly correlated to reduced activity on the wing, or is there some

other factor that's leading to that population decline that you described?

[*Translation*]

Sarah Perreault: I don't know what you understood, but if that's what you understood, that's not at all what I said.

On the contrary, the population of the town of Shannon has exploded. It hasn't exploded. That's not true. However, it is growing steadily. Every year, there are newcomers, and the base contributes to that. The town now has 7,000 residents.

When we acquired part of the military base, it increased the town's population. We estimate that about 1,500 people live on the base. This is the figure we can provide because we don't have all the data. Currently, there are 7,050 people in the city of Shannon, and there are likely about 1,500 people on the base, according to our estimate. Our population has not decreased. It has grown. Our city is expanding.

I may have expressed myself poorly. I apologize.

[*English*]

Philip Earle: Most likely I misunderstood, so I do apologize for that.

I think that's good news, because I was concerned that the population may have been declining because of people's fear of the contamination and the related carcinogenics and cancers that may be related there. It is good news that it's going up.

My next question is for the mayor from Terrebonne. I really appreciated your presentation and how you summed it up by saying that there's a legacy of the past that's identified, and then there are the obstacles of the present and the opportunities of the future.

For the minute that I have left maybe provide for me and the committee just a little bit more detail on the obstacles of the present. I know we talked about the ordinance. You talked a little bit, I believe, in your related testimony, about the cleanup and how it's delayed, how it's more cost-effective and how the work is being done by a company from out of the country. Talk to us a little bit more in that regard, please.

[*Translation*]

Serge Villandré: Thank you for your question.

For the past ten years or so, we have been planning the construction of an interchange to connect the communities. When we issued a call for bids and then began the initial work—namely, tree cutting—we found an unexploded munition. We then had to halt all work. Since this is an area we are unfamiliar with, in which we have no expertise, we worked with the Department of National Defence to find solutions. That is how we were able to issue a call for tenders. We based our decision on information provided to us by the department and on discussions held with its representatives.

It must be said that if this interchange is not built, it will prevent not only the construction of 5,000 housing units on federal lands contaminated by unexploded ordnance, but also the development of an entire sector that will allow for the construction of 20,000 housing units south of the highway. I didn't mention this earlier because this sector is not located on federal land, strictly speaking. This interchange is therefore essential to the economic and real estate development of Terrebonne. For us, it is essential that this work be done.

Because of the discovery of the unexploded ordnance, we are two years behind schedule on the work that will bring communities together, if I may put it that way so you can fully understand the situation.

As I mentioned earlier, detecting and removing this unexploded ordnance is not the municipality's responsibility. That responsibility falls to national defence, and therefore to the federal government. That is why we are here today.

I hope that answers the question.

• (1750)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villandré.

Mr. Earle, congratulations on your seven-minute allocation.

It's over to you, Monsieur Savard-Tremblay. I'm going to give you a little extra, too.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's very kind of you. I may not need any more speaking time because, for my part, I've received the information I wanted.

Ms. Perreault said she had plenty of ideas. In fact, there will be a report at the end of this study.

Ms. Perreault, if you have any recommendations for us, now is the time to share them. Afterward, we can discuss them and vote. We are here to listen to you.

Sarah Perreault: Thank you for this pertinent question.

Earlier, I mentioned some units. Honestly, for the average person, unless they've been in the military, it's impossible to navigate the national defence hierarchy.

I think an initiative must come from national defence to enable us to work in a committee in an agile manner. I'm thinking of a situation like the one related to the project to build 1,100 housing units, but it could be anything else, such as a decontamination project.

Currently, transportation challenges are affecting the Government of Quebec. I can press the Government of Quebec on this. National defence, for its part, can also do so. Why couldn't we work together?

Let's sit down together to discuss the issues. I'm thinking of the school service centre. Some schools in my municipality may become overcrowded by 2026. Citizens certainly don't want to send their children farther away. I'm on the outskirts of Quebec City. The nearest school is 15, 20, or 25 kilometres away. Let's work together

to make the school service centre aware that we need an elementary school. We need to do this quickly.

National defence also has some influence. Take the example of the widening of Route de la Bravoure. National defence owns land there. If we don't work together, it will be harder to get it done, and in my opinion, there will be unintended consequences. We need to work together.

That's what I want to say. I don't know what form it will take, but I have some ideas. It can be called anything. I'm ready, and I'm open to suggestions.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: That's wonderful. If you'd like to add anything, now is the time.

Sarah Perreault: Currently, I am experiencing problems regarding tax credits. As I explained to you, I am wondering who I should contact, which door I should knock on, and how I should go about doing this. The commander tells me I need to speak with the Deputy Minister of national defence. I am the mayor of a town of 7,000 people. You'll understand that I don't have a lawyer. Since there are so few of us, we work hard, and we're resourceful. I can tell you that my chief of staff works hard.

I'm telling you all this to explain that it's not easy. I'm currently looking for ways to make it happen.

I have contacts at the military base. There's one person who acts as a sort of liaison. She can provide me with information on a number of things, but she doesn't connect me with the people I need. This person takes my requests and forwards them to the relevant people.

We need to talk, if only to keep citizens informed. National defence closed the military base for security reasons. Citizens need to know this, because they cross the military base to get to neighbouring communities. There are young people who cross the military base to go to work at Village Vacances Valcartier. In the summer, they have to cross the base by bike. I don't want them to take the road and ride their bikes there. There are safety issues.

These aren't just details. These are important issues, and we need a voice to address these matters of safety and flexibility.

I'm being cannibalized by the military base. Because there are businesses on the base, I'm not developing the commercial sector in my area. Thirty years ago, that was fine because there was nothing else. Today, Shannon is a town. I'm struggling to develop it economically because there's a small grocery store on the base and a small pharmacy in a building that no longer meets 2026 quality standards. I want to tell them not to develop that there and not to compete with me.

All these things I'm telling you about are the reality of my town, and I need someone to listen to what I have to say.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

Sarah Perreault: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Perreault, I'll use the expression we often hear when talking about municipalities in Quebec: we say it's a "provincial creature".

It is a creation of the Quebec government, and, particularly in Quebec, federal government bodies must go through, notably, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, or MMAH, or the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Land Use Planning, or MALUP, depending on the acronym in use at the time. You've worked in the provincial government, so you're familiar with the acronyms.

What are you doing to try to improve things with the ministry?

I understand your problem. You're the mayor of a town with 7,000 residents. You want to improve the quality of life for those people. You want your municipality to grow and prosper. However, you have a taxpayer who doesn't necessarily contribute their fair share and who acts a bit like they own the place.

How could you succeed in improving relations with the help of the Quebec government? Perhaps by creating a tripartite committee?

How can we make city management easier?

Your municipality is functional. You are the one who keeps it running, but you are constrained by the Quebec government and by national defence. You are responsible for schools, you are responsible for public safety, but you are not in charge of your own affairs.

How can we make recommendations to ensure that the federal government finds solutions?

As you said earlier, you don't know what's happening elsewhere. Neither do I, but I know what is happening at the Valcartier military base. In Saint-Gabriel and in your municipality, the town of Shannon, these are rather unique situations.

How could we ensure that we facilitate co-operation between national defence, in particular, and the towns in Quebec, but also across Canada?

We need a comprehensive vision. It's likely that the hierarchy and administrative red tape within national defence mean that, in the end, you're the ones left holding the bag. There's a waste of energy. There's a waste of money, and we're adding another layer in Quebec because you can't speak directly to federal authorities.

As you said earlier, help us help you.

How can we help you make this more sustainable, so that the municipality of Shannon can go even further, to become an attractive town, a picturesque town, a vacation destination?

In fact, I am pleased to represent it as the member of Parliament for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. Your municipality is one of the 26 municipalities I represent. Your municipality actually has the lowest tax rate. So that is a source of pride, but I would like to be even prouder. I would like us to work together, Ms. Perreault.

Could you give us some guidance in this regard?

● (1755)

Sarah Perreault: I would say that I am a creature of the provincial government. I'll say it as I see it. Sometimes, I feel that the

provincial government is no more qualified than I am when it comes to negotiating this kind of situation.

I'll just give you an example.

I'm dealing with a security issue. We've already discussed this together. As I said earlier, I am subject to a risk coverage plan. In my jurisdiction, national defence has a public safety service. National defence residences are located in my jurisdiction. Who is responsible for their security?

Currently, this area is not included in my risk coverage plan, but I do have certain responsibilities. For example, I don't act as a first responder, but I will ensure safety on the streets. That is a major problem.

Beyond the problems, there are also challenges—I want to put this correctly—for the people who work there. The firefighter wants to put out a fire. If I tell the firefighter at the military base that he can't respond in his territory because it's on our side, he gets frustrated. He's a firefighter. He wants to be active. It's the same for firefighters in my city. When I arrive to negotiate, we try, but we have to wait to receive legal opinions.

I'm straying a bit from the topic, but this is my reality. If someone tells me, "Ms. Perrault, you're not responsible for security", they'll have to take responsibility for it.

Am I required to verify whether national defence's public safety criteria are the same as the criteria imposed on me by public safety?

In fact, I'm caught in a bit of a bind. If I'm required to have four firefighters on duty or eight firefighters for a response, does national defence have the same obligations?

Is all of this my responsibility?

I'm asking questions, but I don't have any answers. National defence has lawyers. It's a much larger organization than mine. I've sought legal opinions. I've asked what I should rely on. Then I have to knock on the provincial government's door to request a decree, a signed agreement, that's legally binding. If I want an agreement that is legally binding, I have to have it ratified by the Government of Quebec, because I can't have a direct agreement with the government. That's complicated too.

As I told you, I'm a civilian.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

[*English*]

I appreciate your energy, enthusiasm and concern. I think all of us recognize the concerns that you face—and those in Terrebonne as well.

I'm going to give the last question to Ms. Romanado, if you want to wrap it up.

[*Translation*]

Sherry Romanado: Since I don't have much time, I just want to mention to Ms. Perreault that, when my son was stationed at Valcartier, he lived in Shannon. So, I know your city very well. As parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Defence, I can tell you that I'm pleased to work with your MP, Mr. Joël Godin. I can therefore keep him informed of what is happening and work with him to get answers for you.

Mr. Villandré, I have also already spoken with the member of Parliament who represents you regarding the challenges facing Terrebonne. I understand them very well. She was briefed on the situation this week and now has more information. We will therefore have more answers soon.

Thank you.

• (1800)

[*English*]

The Chair: I thank the witnesses for attending today. I appreciate your comments.

I'm going to suspend in a few minutes, but before I do, I need to ask the members of the committee if the PIP interns can stay for the in camera portion that's about to proceed.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. The committee is suspended.

Thank you, again, to the witnesses.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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