

Leading, Learning and Questioning on the Job:

A Message From City of Yellowknife
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I have to say, it's been a really busy first 3 months as Yellowknife's City Administrator. And also a lot of fun! Here's what I've seen from this vantage point at City Hall: things can move fast at this level of government. I've learned that there is a nimbleness at the community level that requires the City, to respond to issues and address concerns. Luckily we have the tools to respond, and continue to refine them. On a daily basis, your local government is faced with questions about parking, food trucks, our downtown, tourism, dog kennels, arsenic, land claims, or sidewalk patios (to list just a few); this list is long, varied, and changes by the hour.

Residents, businesses and other orders of government know that the City of Yellowknife can act pretty quickly. However, I've also learned that just because we are nimble doesn't mean the solutions come fast all the time. Yellowknifers know we face tough and complicated issues. Finding solutions for homelessness, addressing the cost of living and enhancing our downtown are things that don't happen overnight; nor should they.

I've learned that our local traditions take time to change as well. As Yellowknife's first female City Administrator, I think about tradition, privilege, and the assumptions people make about how things are from a gender perspective. Approximately 38% of the City's workforce is female (and 17% of the Directors team) so if I, as a privileged, educated, white-looking female, sometimes feel under-represented, it's a sobering reminder to how others must feel when they don't see themselves in the world around them.

I've learned that Yellowknife needs to speak louder about our role in the Northwest Territories. Marking Yellowknife's 50th anniversary as the capital of the

NWT is an opportune time to reflect on our past and the directions we take in the future. As the capital, we have the responsibility and honour of representing and serving the rich culture, heritage and beauty of not only our community and region, but the entire NWT. Many people who visit Yellowknife may not make it to other areas of the NWT; we need to provide them with a sense of how incredible our territory is. We have work to do in this area and it starts with promoting and celebrating this great place that we live in.

I've learned that we need to get uncomfortable and talk about things that matter. Given the large Indigenous population within Yellowknife from all areas of the NWT and beyond, we must acknowledge that reconciliation is a key factor that has to guide our actions as we look to the future. The City needs to open up the dialogue on what reconciliation looks like in Yellowknife in the next 50 years and beyond. Let's face it, this can be a challenging and uncomfortable conversation, but timely and important. Here are some questions we need to think about:

- How can the City be a better, more engaged, partner with the Indigenous peoples and nations in the NWT, particularly the Yellowknives Dene First Nations, whose traditional lands we are on? We can and should enhance the relationship between YKDFN and City - let's get working on regular Council to Council meetings, common issues, administrative connections, annual feeding the fire ceremonies to begin a cyclical time of the year, and more.
- How can we successfully partner with and seek the guidance of YKDFN on place names that respect and reflect the traditional uses of the area? For example, Franklin Avenue, our main street, is named after a British explorer who passed through on his way to search for the Northwest Passage. I often wonder why is it not named after leaders of the people who have made this area home for thousands of years?
- How can we guide the evolution of our institutions so that they reflect the diversity of our community and territory?
- How can we better create understanding of the different perspectives people bring based on their culture heritage and collective experience?
- How can we support a more diverse slate of candidates in our municipal elections?

In a three month nutshell, I've learned that while we get things done fast at the local level, we have many thoughtful, difficult, and historically significant milestones to reach.

From the City Administrator chair, I keep these lessons, questions, and messages at the forefront of my day as I help make our city the best as it can be.

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