

Dear Candidates,

Thank you for putting your name forward in the upcoming Territorial Election. The City values our partnership with the Government of the Northwest Territories, and we believe that when we work together, we can accomplish more.

As a City, we believe the following issues are important and we would like to hear from candidates on how they would work to address them in their term:

1. Community Government Underfunding
2. Social Support
3. Economic Development
4. Emergency Management
5. Legislation

These issues are all directly related to City Council's recently approved 2023-2026 Strategic Directions; we encourage you to review them here: https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/City_Council_and_Mayor/Council-Strategic-Directions-2023-2026/Council-Strategic-Directions-2023---2026.pdf

We are asking all Yellowknife candidates to answer the questions below. Once received, answers will be posted on the City's website by the next working day. We will be notifying residents of the webpage via social media and other communication channels, and we will be encouraging them to read the answers before Election Day.

Once again, thank you for putting your name forward and we look forward to working with the successful candidates during the 20th Assembly.

Sincerely,

Yellowknife City Council

Community Government Underfunding

Background:

In 2014, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) and the Northwest Territories Association of Communities (NWTAC) completed a review of community funding policies with the participation of a stakeholders group of community leaders and administrators representing a cross-section of Northwest Territories (NWT) communities. The Funding review process was completed in a transparent, inclusive and comprehensive manner.

The review found that communities in the NWT were underfunded collectively by \$40 million annually in annual Operations & Maintenance funding, Capital Infrastructure funding and Environmental funding. Since 2014, the funding gap has only decreased by \$824,000.

	2014 Calculated Need	2014 Funding	2014 Gap
Operations & Maintenance	\$55.3 Million	\$47.7 Million	\$7.6 Million
Water, Sewer & Waste	\$24.3 Million	\$15.9 Million	\$8.3 Million
Infrastructure	\$65.6 Million	\$42.5 Million	\$23.4 Million
Total	\$145.2 Million	\$106.4 Million	\$39.3 Million

	2022 Calculated Need	2023-24 Funding	2023 Gap
Operations & Maintenance	\$60.632 Million	\$51.519 Million	\$9.113 Million
Water, Sewer & Waste	\$27.667 Million	\$20.629 Million	\$7.038 Million
Infrastructure	\$71.074 Million	\$48.749 Million	\$22.325 Million
Total	\$159.373 Million	\$120.897 Million	\$38.476 Million

This core funding is required to sustain core services and infrastructure, and not frills. Since the review, there have been small increases but no implementation plan to close the underfunding gap. This shortfall makes it difficult for communities to effectively deliver essential services, maintain infrastructure and assets, and be resilient for future challenges.

In addition, as the Conference Board of Canada's 2015 report (*Economic Impacts of Community Spending on the Territorial Economy*) calculated, by closing the community funding gap, 220 additional permanent jobs across the Northwest Territories would be created.

Every year that municipal governments are underfunded makes it harder and harder to ensure all of our residents have clean drinking water, well-managed garbage and sewage disposal, safe roads, recreation facilities, fire and ambulance services, and more.

Question: Will you promise to increase funding for community governments during your term if you are in Cabinet, or to advocate for an increase if you are a regular member?

I will certainly advocate for increased funding to help close the municipal funding gap with one key requirement. Relief for residents and ratepayers needs to be top of mind so as part of this there needs to be:

- 1) A commitment or requirement to not raise municipal taxes an equivalent amount due to this funding. For example, if increased funding from the GNWT equates into what *would* be a 5% tax increase on citizens, the City needs to commit to not raising taxes this amount for a set period of time.
- 2) Measurability. The city needs to be able to provide measurable and trackable results showing this funding is being put to good use, example # of projects completed, potholes fixed or streetlights repaired that it otherwise would not be able to do without said funding. Considering that most of this type of information is already widely provided by the City to residents it should not be too onerous of a task to be able to show measurable improvement in services and infrastructure tied to the additional funding.

Social Support

Background:

The impacts of homelessness, addictions and mental health have always been present in Yellowknife, but recently, the impacts have become increasingly visible within the community. Point in time counts of residents experiencing homelessness in Yellowknife in recent years also shows that more than 90% of residents experiencing homelessness have moved to Yellowknife from another community in Northwest Territories or Nunavut. While significant work is happening to address homelessness, addictions, and mental health, individuals and families continue to struggle with these complex and often intertwined challenges.

Residents Experiencing Homelessness in Relation to Total Population: Yellowknife compared			
City	Residents Experiencing Homelessness	Total Population	Residents Experiencing Homelessness as a % of total population
Calgary	3,117	1,462,927	0.2%
Edmonton	1,636	1,386,788	0.1%
Vancouver*	2,181	2,542,278	0.1%
Whitehorse	195	21,732	0.9%
Yellowknife	338	19,569	1.7%

Notes: Figures pertaining to homelessness come from each City's 2018 point-in-time counts. Total population figures are Statistics Canada figures from the 2016 Census. Vancouver figures pertaining to both homelessness and total population refer to Metro Vancouver. Source: Nick Falvo, "Responding to homelessness in Yellowknife: Pushing the ocean back with a spoon."

In March 2023, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) released the newest figures (2020) for the costs of substance use – costs to our medical system, justice system, lost productivity, etc. Unfortunately, the cost to the NWT due to substance use has continued to grow from 2017 (\$181 million) to 2020 (\$230.37 million). Per capita, in 2020, this worked out to cost every person in the NWT \$5,080, regardless of age (the average across Canada is \$1,291/person).

City Council recently approved our 2023-2026 Strategic Directions, and specifically prioritized working with partners to address pressing social issues. In particular:

- Advocating for enhanced outreach and social support services
- Working with all partners towards a safe, supportive and compassionate community for all

Question:

1. Currently, the GNWT does not provide any funding for the Yellowknife Street Outreach program. Through your leadership, would you work with the City to co-fund the program, so that it can be expanded and improved?

Yes, I would commit to working with the City on additional funding options as this type of program is of incredible importance in helping to address homelessness and addictions in a meaningful and practical way. However, same as the answer for further Municipal funding, there needs to be conditions attached to this that result in the City committing to not raising taxes on residents further due to said funding.

2. The GNWT's recent "A Way Home – A comprehensive strategy to address homelessness in the NWT" has many great initiatives, including:
 - setting up Regional Partnership tables;
 - establishing long-term funding options to improve operator sustainability starting with zero-based budgeting to help identify and address funding gaps and accurately determine the cost of addressing homelessness through shelter operation in the NWT; and
 - increasing GNWT funding for transitional housing programs to improve community-driven solutions to address local needs; and more.

Will you ensure these actions are implemented and funded?

I would need to learn more specific details about some of these initiatives in order to answer meaningfully and honestly. However generally speaking I do agree with the intent behind them and do support working towards them.

3. In Eugene, Oregon, there is a program called CAHOOTS – which is a two person team consisting of a medic and a crisis worker who have training and experience in the mental health field. They do patrols and respond to calls through 911, and have the tools for a non-violent resolution of crisis situations. There are also many similar models across Canada where a police officer and a social worker respond to calls – including the Yukon's program called "Car 867"¹.

To implement a program like this in Yellowknife, the GNWT must participate as it is responsible for public health, operates 911, and holds the RCMP contract. If elected, would you fund and implement a program like CAHOOTS or Car 867?

I would support a program like this but would want to hear opinions and feedback specifically from the RCMP in the NWT as their desire (and ability) to participate in such a program is critical. Provided RCMP are in support of it, yes I would advocate for funding and implementing such a program.

¹ <https://yukon.ca/en/news/government-yukon-and-yukon-rcmp-team-launch-new-mobile-crisis-response-team>

4. What actions and programs established so far do you think are working, and what needs to be done differently to address these issues of homelessness, addictions and mental health? How would you prioritize or sequence the actions you feel are needed, and how would you balance these with other GNWT priorities?

I believe the Street Outreach Program has done a tremendous job of helping to resolve situations that might otherwise result in someone ending up in a jail cell. I believe programs like this, as they are measurably helping, should be supported further so that they can do more to help. As to what needs to be done differently, I believe that Indigenous peoples and governments should have the final say on what treatment solutions will look like and where they will go (example, on the land healing, and where, and program particulars) In short, I do not believe that the GNWT should largely make a decision and then “consult” Indigenous partners in order to get a check-mark, it should be the other way around.

Economic Development

Background:

This year, Council identified economic diversity as a key pillar that we would like to focus on during our time in office. Actions to be taken include establishing an accommodation levy and creation of a destination marketing organization; land development to support growth readiness; modernizing development incentive options; and more.

Diversity is the key to a strong, sustainable and resilient economy. The sustainability and growth of the NWT economy requires strategic investment and diversification; however, it will not be easy.

As the GNWT's 2023-2024 Economic Review states: *"Maturing diamond mines, labour shortages, and a lack of economic diversification will continue to dampen economic growth. These challenges are heightened by high inflation and higher interest rates. Most pressing is the lack of workers that is putting a brake on private sector activity, as well as the impending closure of the Diavik diamond mine. There are currently no other projects on the horizon large enough to fill the economic gap that will be left by the closing diamond mines."*

Question:

1. What is your overall vision for economic development in the NWT?

We need to find "the next big thing" while at the same time diversifying and strengthening other areas (tourism, education) that show tremendous potential. The economic engine of the territory is the mining and resource extraction sector and we need to keep this going and promote new mines to replace the ones soon to close, while keeping in mind that this needs to be done in a safe and sustainable manner that does not incur the same type of long-term damage to the environment as previous mines have. Further, we need to knock on doors that we previously haven't, looking at alternative anchor customers that could help justify major infrastructure projects. For example, up until now the only serious talk of a customer that would justify Taltson and projects like it have been mines. Data Centers in the north could also use this power but would be a non-extractive, long-term stable investment and revenue source that would also help the rest of the country reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. By moving an industry into the north that does not require massive energy and carbon expenditures just for cooling (40% of energy expenditure for Data Centers in the south goes just to cooling) we could help advance the economy of the North while also helping the rest of the country. It's a win-win, and we should be seriously looking at options like this instead of just hand-wavingly dismissing them which is exactly what we've done up until now.

2. What actions or investments would you take to strengthen and diversify the economy?

Please see answer to #1 above.

3. With the Giant Mine remediation beginning, what actions or investments would you take to maximize the economic benefits remaining in the north?

The most important thing we should be doing with Giant Mine remediation is consulting directly with the local business community to understand how we can help them realize the most potential benefits and opportunities in order to maximize dollars staying in the North as much as possible. Things like the Business Incentive Program deserve some serious scrutiny as it's easy for shell companies to get on the list with little oversight. Again, real consultation with the business community *before* decisions are made is key, versus token consultation in order to get a checkmark which is sadly often the case.

Emergency Management

Background:

As the NWT Emergency Plan notes: *“The hazard environment in the NWT continues to evolve, primarily due to the effects of climate change. There is a need for continuous improvement using lessons learned and best practices to ensure the territory and communities remain ready to meet the challenge of new or evolving hazards.”*²

Over the past three years, communities have activated their emergency plans more and more: COVID-19; floods; wildfires; evacuation reception centers; and more. However, communities receive no core funding for emergency preparedness which makes it difficult for communities to meet the challenge of new or evolving hazards in all phases of emergency management – mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Question:

1. What actions will you take or lobby for to ensure that communities are adequately prepared for future emergencies?

We need to make the requirement for permanent fire-defense measures in our communities a part of the fabric of life in the North, just as we already do for smoke detectors in our homes or seatbelts in our vehicles. These things are not controversial and it is universally agreed that it costs us less and is in the public interest to have them as a **legislated requirement** but it wasn't always this way. So too we need to shift the thinking on fire defense and make the case and argument that by spending the money and resources up-front, *before there is an emergency*, it will cost us far less than repeat evacuations and the loss of homes, property or even lives.

With the above in mind, the two actions I will take and lobby heavily for are as follows;

- a. Enact and then execute legislation requiring the establishment of adequate permanent fire defense measures for all communities in the NWT which require it.
 - b. Advocate and work towards the creation of Community Action Groups to respond to emergencies as they arise. These are not paid government officials but rather residents who will be available to defend their communities against natural disasters (and have the tools and supports to do so) as needed.
2. All NWT Community Wildfire Protection Plans will be five years old or older in 2024. Will you commit to funding, or advocating for funding, updates to these plans for any community that requests one? Yes.

² https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/sites/maca/files/resources/nwt_emergency_plan.pdf

Legislation

As Legislators, one of your core duties is to review and approve legislation.

Over the years, the City has advocated for the review or creation of a number of laws, including:

1. Modernizing the *Property Assessment and Taxation Act*;
2. Modernizing and providing more clarity on the *Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief Act*;
3. Drafting a *Building Code Act*, as we're the only jurisdiction in Canada without this Act;
4. Repealing the *Cities, Towns and Villages Act*, and creating a *Cities Act* and a *Municipal Governments Act*; and
5. And many more pieces of legislation.

For more information on why the City is advocating for these pieces of Legislation, please read our resolutions on the items over the years: <https://nwtac.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-NWTAC-Reaffirmed-Resolutions.pdf>

Question:

1. Do you support prioritizing these legislative reviews?

Yes

2. If you support prioritizing this legislation, will you work with City Council to advocate for change within this legislation?

Yes

3. Is there other Legislation that you will be looking to review or create, and why?

Specific to Municipalities, other than the legislation I mentioned related to the Emergency Management question, no.