

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](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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

	<b>2014 Calculated Need</b>	<b>2014 Funding</b>	<b>2014 Gap</b>
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$145.2 Million</b>	<b>\$106.4 Million</b>	<b>\$39.3 Million</b>

	<b>2022 Calculated Need</b>	<b>2023-24 Funding</b>	<b>2023 Gap</b>
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$159.373 Million</b>	<b>\$120.897 Million</b>	<b>\$38.476 Million</b>

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?

The \$824,000 reduction in the longstanding Community Government funding deficit is a 2 percent reduction over almost 10 years. This is similar to the underfunding in housing. The information above

doesn't reference (unless I missed it) the effect of inflation over the last 10 years, averaging 2.65 %, which would increase the underfunding total by another 20 % or \$8 million. So yes, I will advocate and guide cabinet to the conclusion that the infrastructure of our communities is essential for keeping and growing our population and Yellowknife is no exception. Further the stability and future of our state-of-the-art GNWT government cannot rest on crumbling community infrastructure.

## 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%
<b>Yellowknife</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>19,569</b>	<b>1.7%</b>

*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?

Reading the Yellowknife Street Outreach Report Jan 2023 to Apr 2023, the most interesting figure is: *In the 1st quarter of 2023, the most common source of referrals was self-referrals with 1824 calls and the second most common source was from the public with 1017 calls (figure 4).* I imagine these public calls (1,017) are persons lying motionless on the streets, or so incapacitated, that pGood Samaritans are sufficiently alarmed to call for help. Before the street outreach program, these would likely have been ambulance calls. Sometimes police would be called. Sometimes there would be altercations. Even if we go with the national per capita figure, the GNWT would realize a savings of \$1,312,947 in one quarter. This more than justifies the ask of \$1,100,000 annually from the Yellowknife Street Outreach Program. As the savings are in the courts, correctional centers, hospital and police, the GNWT must offer up the lionshare of funding. It's a solid argument to make.

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?

My election platform is underpinned by On-The-Land Healing options in the communities outside Yellowknife to take pressure off of Yellowknife streets. In the meantime, we have to offer street level solutions through shelters and transitional housing projects to, again, take the pressure off Yellowknife streets. The real goal must be to improve the options for treatment, housing, education and employment in the communities or else we will be caught in an ever growing cycle of covering the costs of the GNWT's misspending, the responsibility for which lies squarely on the shoulders of the MLAs past and present.

2. 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"<sup>1</sup>.

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 need to speak to the people presently running the Street Outreach Program, Tree of Peace, Dene Nation, NWT Disability Council, Yellowknife Women's Society, Salvation Army and

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

any others involved, including RCMP and Bylaw, to see how such a program fits in. These people and organizations are walking the walk every day. Leaving them out of such a decision imperils the good work done to date. If they wanted it, deemed it effective, I would fight for GNWT funding.

3. 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?

In recent years, I have been impressed with both the GNWT and the City of Yellowknife's efforts to alleviate the suffering, crime and violence on the streets of Yellowknife. I played a role in convincing the owners of the old Right Spot building (now the Sobering Centre) to offer it up to the GNWT when it was desperate for a space downtown. Both the city admin and GNWT Health and Social Services staff jumped on the opportunity and made it happen. There have been significant projects like Bailey House, Lynn's Place, Spruce Bow, the day shelter and sobering center. These are all great and all levels of government contribute. The problem for the City of Yellowknife is taxpayer fatigue. People want to keep their taxes as low as possible, streets clean, water and sewer systems operational. A stagnant economy and inflation will be testing them mightily. My goal is to waken the GNWT up to the real solution of investing in and achieving better results from our education system in the communities outside of Yellowknife. The lack of healing options in the communities drives people to our streets, often to be near supports not available to them in their communities. The poor and substandard housing aggravates the situation. The Yellowknife business sector can be part of that solution, particularly the construction industry.

## 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?

My overall vision for developing the NWT is to start investing our GNWT capital and staff time in the 30 communities outside Yellowknife. I am not talking about decentralization, I am talking about getting better results from the services we are offering the communities. The education levels keep people on social assistance. The housing conditions together with the lack of healing options in the communities, further prevents credible education outcomes. On a larger scale, there is mining exploration, which at one time was a larger industry than the mines themselves. Encouraging more exploration will be easier if people understand the benefits. Again better education results can allow people to qualify for the jobs created while the present education outcomes prevent that participation and fuels resistance to resource development. Proper funding and consultation with the Chamber of Mines, its members and Indigenous governments, should set the stage for finding a way to build confidence the NWT welcomes responsible resource development.

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

We must start building housing in the communities. The GNWT spends 2 percent of its \$2.5 budget on fixing our enormous housing problem, well actually not fixing it. The state of our public housing in the communities is the biggest barrier to healing and education. The MLA committee studying the problem in the last assembly stated we have heard the same problems of zero supply and poor maintenance for the past 60 years. Time for a change. I know Yellowknife entrepreneurs want it but the timing for a Polytechnic University is not now. The fundamentals are not there in terms of student enrolment which has been declining for the last eight years. I don't think the political structure of the legislative assembly will allow for an effort to capitalize on the foreign student market when we are not exactly serving our

Northern students. Instead, we should build the 30 Community Learning Centers for Aurora College's students, to bring up their literacy skills to qualify for trades programs and other professions needed locally. Building homes could offer training and apprenticeship opportunities. Contractors in Yellowknife and the regional centers could be the main construction drivers, keeping the money in wages and material in the North.

As for Yellowknife, I have been highlighting the 50-50 lot as a sign of our stagnant economy. That is a real opportunity, not for a southern builder but for the Capital of the NWT, homeland of the Dene, Metis and Inuvialuit. Despite our policies and proclamations of reconciliation and solidarity with First Nations, we have done little to showcase and celebrate Northern cultures; quite the opposite. At City Hall, we have a totem pole from some first nation in the south, an artist's concept of a muskox named after an American entrepreneur, murals on the sides and backs of buildings, and some light standard flags. I like the idea put forth by the city for a cultural center on that lot. People love to say the tourism industry can only get so big and is dwarfed by the benefits of mining but who knows how big it can get? No one could have predicted how successful (if fragile) it could be when the vision of aurora viewing was in the head of the Northern Lights visionary Bill Tait who started it all decades ago. I have more on my website - NWT2023 - about this idea. I will just leave you with the fact that nowhere else in the world (outside of Nunavut) will you find a jurisdiction where half the population is Indigenous. Why can't we be the Indigenous Culture Capital of the world?

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

The remediation industry is new, unlike the mining industry that created and has sustained the private sector in the NWT for the past century. But in many ways, it is still mining - highly technical with a range of employment and contractor opportunities. It's going to require the type of effort attempted when the diamond rush was on and later when Covid hit - a task force of industry and business, including Indigenous business leaders. But, it won't work unless we have MLAs with business experience. I assigned the general manager of NNSL's print division to sit on the Covid business task force. I was made aware of the frustration of poor communication and lack of commitment by the government to engage and take direction from the business community which resulted in few results, if any. We can learn from those mistakes and establish a pipeline from the task force to the cabinet, to ensure clear two-way communication. I will be a voice for such a task force and will bring together many like-minded voices to marshal public and industry unity and support.



## 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.”*<sup>2</sup>

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?
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?

I think it’s important to look at the plans we had, including the NWT Community Wildfire Protection Plans . Did we follow them when we were supposed to? Was action taken in a timely fashion to mitigate the damage from the forest fires we saw this summer? How can the plans be improved and adapted to the lessons we learned this summer, both wildfire and evacuation perspective? We know there were communication gaps and mixed messaging. Proper communications during times of emergency can save lives and property. The funding will have to be found to do this work. We have no other choice.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/sites/maca/files/resources/nwt\\_emergency\\_plan.pdf](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?
2. If you support prioritizing this legislation, will you work with City Council to advocate for change within this legislation?
3. Is there other Legislation that you will be looking to review or create, and why?

I do support prioritizing these reviews, in fact it should be one of the first tasks of the new Assembly. As well, city council and Yellowknife MLAs should be talking and working together publicly as they represent the same people at different levels on many of the same issues. They can have informal talks but should have scheduled meetings with council, perhaps at the regular Monday afternoon Governance and Priorities Committee meetings, every quarter. This way City Council can hold the MLAs accountable for the progress being made and YK MLAs can inform councillors what the barriers might be. Working together, they can formulate strategies and exchange information. The public will get an understanding of what their different levels of government are doing, or not doing, on their behalf on critical issues. The public is pretty well left in the dark on such matters now. I don't think that helps councillors while it shields MLAs.

