

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.

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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?

As of June 2023, it is my understanding that an advisory council comprised of representatives from the Northwest Territories Association of Communities and the Local Government Administrators of the NWT were working with the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs on a comprehensive review of all community funding policies. If that has in fact been completed, then I would like to review it and ask questions on it before making policy commitments in this space.

Historically, some communities were overfunded while others were underfunded and Federal infrastructure funds (formerly the gas tax) were not being fully expended by several communities. I hope that the 2023-24 review will help provide clarity on the full range of funds available, identify any that are chronically under funded as well as find ways to fully utilize any that are not. With this understanding and, hopefully recommendations flowing from that review, the GNWT can be in a place to make better policy for the funding of municipalities.

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.

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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?

This is a great program and I would like to see it continue, improve to provide better value to the community and possibly expand. However, I would first like to know 1) what are the current total costs; 2) what improvements are contemplated and why; 3) what kind of expansion is being considered and why; 4) what efforts have been made to identify other funding sources or in-kind contributions to defray costs.

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; *Yes.*
 - 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
 - *Whether individual agencies or operators want to undertake a zero-base budgeting exercise should involve them in that determination.*
 - increasing GNWT funding for transitional housing programs to improve community-driven solutions to address local needs; and more. *Yes. Practically, this work needs to also consider what funding is available from potentially multiple Federal departments as well as via CMHC. Indigenous governments must also be at this table to ensure that all levels of NWT government are maximizing existing and potential resources to increase housing availability across the housing spectrum.*

Will you ensure these actions are implemented and funded? *See responses in red*

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 am familiar with versions of this program operating elsewhere in Canada. These are exciting programs that appear to provide a path by which to break down a disconnect between law enforcement and social or medical supports. In theory, this is an opportunity to provide more appropriate responses to individuals in crisis and also reduce the pressure on law enforcement to respond to situations better suited to social services and/or medical professionals. I am not familiar with any evaluations or research done to confirm these assumptions as to the effectiveness or outcomes for clients or for the personnel involved.

Without spending significant time to undertake the research and program development necessary to scope out a concept, it is not responsible to blanketly commit to funding a new program. The questions I have include: 1) the cost to implement as well as ongoing costs; 2) staffing required by law enforcement; 3) staffing required from health and/or social services and whether or what additional training may be required to be present at police emergency service calls; 4) applicability to different sized communities across the NWT with different availability of staff to participate; 5) evaluations for effectiveness and impact done by communities who have undertaken similar programs; 6) inquiries with NWT communities how this approach would need to be adapted to community policing priorities.

Fort Liard is already participating in a Community Safety Officer Pilot Program and I would be interested to know the impacts and outcomes of this NWT-based program and whether or how to expand it in the NWT before starting a new pilot in a similar space.

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?

There are three programs I would like to highlight:

1. Integrated Case Management (ICM) has been very successful in supporting clients with more than one government service requirement such as income assistance, housing, health care, social services, etc. I was proud to be the Minister of Justice when this program was moved from a pilot in 2019 to a permanent program.

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

2. Indigenous patient advocates and the Office of Client Experience where these positions are based is a patient-oriented approach to health care and provides system navigation support to clients who have or are struggling to access care. I understand anecdotally that the initial client and staff response to this program has been positive.
3. The Community Safety Officer Pilot Program underway in Fort Liard is meant to be a community-driven initiative that focuses on crime prevention strategies and relationship building between the community, service providers and the RCMP. I was proud to see this program funded during my time as the Minister of Justice and would now like to see what improvements may be needed from the pilot in order to see success in other centres. For example, in Yellowknife, this could be an important bridge beyond what the MED officers are responsible for but without requiring a full RCMP response.

The challenges and impacts of homeless, addictions and mental health are often interrelated.

We should continue to address the social and human needs that are too often the underlying causes for homelessness, addictions or poor mental health; for example, housing availability, social indicators of health, primary care, educational access, social and cultural wellbeing.

Some of the most vulnerable persons often have the most difficulty accessing services particularly when a suite of services are needed to meaningfully address their needs.

The Integrated Case Management (ICM) office should be expanded. ICM provides case management support and pathfinding for clients dealing with at least one government service such as income assistance, housing, child and family services, mental health services, etc. and has very positive outcomes from clients who may have otherwise struggled to coordinate and manage all of their needs.

The proposed wellness centre should be a place where wrap around-style services like ICM are available so that clients can access not only a safe shelter but also counselling, income assistance or child and family services.

All of these types of responses, from emergency sheltering to income assistance and wellness, need to also be available to the greatest extent possible in all regional centres and, also to the greatest extent possible, in all communities. The “greatest extent possible” must take into account some economies of scale that come with a larger population base but also with any specific areas of need that could help focus what resources be directed where. This would help reduce the need for people to leave their home communities in order to access services and then be at risk of being homeless in Yellowknife.

We need a strong education system starting from early childhood education through to opportunities for employment training.

As for balancing all of these with other priorities, I think it is likely that health, education and economic prosperity will consistently be priorities across the NWT. Different departments are responsible for achieving each and given the interconnections between each, they should be simultaneously pursued.

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

The mineral resource sector will continue to be the financial foundation of our private economy for the foreseeable future. However, for that future to be prosperous, we need more exploration, more advanced exploration and a clear and faster pathway to turn an advanced project into an operating mine.

At the same time, economic diversification is essential. Not only does it reliably provide local jobs – and 5-10 new jobs in a small community can have a huge impact on that community – but many of the small and medium-sized businesses that are the product of diversification have a direct impact on the quality of life in communities such as in form of retail, restaurants, professional services or tourism products.

We must overcome high costs of living and high costs of doing business. Key drivers of high costs are energy and transportation which contribute to high costs both directly as well as indirectly in terms of the higher costs for local goods and services. We need to pursue pathways off diesel and modernization of energy infrastructure capable of adapting to new technologies including intermittent renewables.

Another challenge is the tight labor force that is still being felt across all sectors. We need to ensure our students are healthy and appropriately educated to meet these labor market needs and that education opportunities are relevant to near future labor market needs. I would like to ensure stronger connections between high schools, Aurora College, Mine Training Society and industry to ensure training is available ahead of any anticipated shortage and available at times and in formats that align with industry needs. We can continue to maintain and improve the pathway for skilled trades to become sealed journeypersons such as SNAP in high schools and streamlining apprenticeship credentials.

Consider a “labor mobility act” that streamlines acceptance of documentation and credentials to enable certified out-of-territory workers to obtain registration decision in a timely manner. Put immigration under one department, expedite work permit issuances and resolve language and medical test barriers.

We also need somewhere for prospective employees to live at affordable price points. New housing will also require land availability which in turn requires land certainty and therefore meaningful progress towards the settlement of outstanding land claims. On lands not subject to negotiations and interim withdrawals, all levels of government need to move faster to finalize a process for the transfer of land to municipalities and then identifying what parcels will be for development. There should be no land zoned for development sitting empty or idle in Yellowknife; identify and resolve the barriers to development.

Encourage timely regulatory reviews. Ensure all government entities responsible for regulations, registries and permitting, including regulatory boards and occupational health and safety agencies have adequate technical staff who have opportunities for ongoing professional development.

Establish standard targets for all government services including payments, permits and approvals. Publish those targets.

Create a path towards a one business-one application system (such as tourism licensing) including collaboration across all NWT levels of government. Provide a coordinated business support eco system. This means ensuring known pathways or agencies with the capacity to support businesses with funding and through professional skill in: business planning, start up investment and loans, marketing, digitization, venture and export growth.

Complete the transition of Aurora College to a Polytechnique and build a modern, attractive campus and associated student facilities.

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

There are two things I would like to see done early:

- a) What happened to the engagement work that was done earlier in 2023 about the prospects for “remediation economy” opportunities across the NWT? The Department of Environment and Climate Change is the GNWT lead for identifying and maximizing remediation opportunities. The discussion paper and subsequent engagement was an opportunity to scope out the potential future in this sector and local industry’s interest and capacity as well as any areas that will require additional support in order to be ready to capitalize on opportunities.
- b) There is a lot happening in this space across GNWT departments as well as within other levels of governments including potential Federal funding. Unfortunately, some work risks being duplicative (multiple efforts to map out labor market needs) while other areas seem to stagnate (sustainability of the Mine Training Society, for example). I would like to see a gathering of both industry and education professionals to map out on one side what skills, trades and certifications are needed in the immediate and medium terms and then to describe what programs are being offered or may be in development to meet those needs. Ideally, there should be straight pathways from high school through to either apprenticeship programs or post secondary programs and then on to internships or journeyperson designations, etc. Similarly, there should be no delay in post secondary academic credits for trades or other certifications; these programs should align to the timing of their associated industry’s high needs for staff so that students can maximize their work opportunities and industry can reduce their labor needs.

With the right connections, contacts and training pathways assured, I would then look to who the contracting authorities are for specific projects and ensure that their processes are clear, accessible and designed to encourage bids by local companies including small and medium sized businesses or, for largely or more complex aspects, encourage partnerships that meaningfully engage local businesses.

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?
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?

We should ensure future infrastructure projects incorporate climate mitigation and adaptation in their designs so that our future infrastructure is energy efficient at the least and carbon neutral at best as well as resilient in the face of more climate extremes.

We should consider at what level of emergency there should be a “Territorial Incident Command Centre” where all municipal, regional and Territorial emergency management personnel be combined into a single physical space to ensure seamless communication between levels as well as towards the public and avoid duplication of roles or responsibilities.

While ‘best practices’ may have evolved in terms of the content of Community Wildfire Protection Plan, in order to get started immediately and before next year’s wildfire season, I do not propose to spend time and effort for more plans but to focus on the status of implementation of these existing plans and ask the narrower question of what has not been done that is outstanding and still relevant.

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?
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?

In my platform, I have expressly noted the need to modernize the *Cities, Towns and Villages Act* to provide appropriate administration of communities of different sizes. I agree that the other pieces of legislation noted above also require attention.

The process by which the GNWT undertakes legislative review is expected to include engagement both with the public at large as well as stakeholders with particular knowledge of a subject area and/or as an entity particularly affected, such as a municipality in respect of some of the above examples. In the last four years, I have brought together city counsel, Yellowknife MLAs and relevant department representatives depending on matters at issue to engage and discuss issues of shared concern.

There are many pieces of legislation across the GNWT that require review, amendment or establishment. My attention has been focused on my areas of responsibilities from the past few years including:

- Implement the new Liquor Act with the development of Liquor Regulations;
- Finish work outstanding since 2017 with Cannabis Regulations;
- Complete the Mineral Resource Act Regulations so that we can finally see the implementation of the Mineral Resource Act;
- Modernize the Public Service Act; and
- Several policy items across departments.

There are many important pieces of legislation, regulation and policies that require review across departments. We must take a whole of government approach to this issue and not prematurely determine what is a priority without consideration of the full list of what is due or overdue.