



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?

Yes, I have included “significantly narrowing the municipal funding gap” in my 20 for the 20th Assembly. In addition to not properly funding municipalities’ core needs, the GNWT has also downloaded the responsibility of climate change mitigation and adaption to communities that are woefully underfunded and don’t have the capacity or resources to address it. I will strongly advocate for additional core funding to municipalities and re-evaluating the funding formula. Increased funding to communities will stimulate local economies and provide more employment outside the capital which leads to healthier communities and the ability for more people to return to their home communities.

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 spend a lot of time in the downtown core and see the need for expanded services for the vulnerable population. I've called for the Street Outreach Van numerous times myself and have seen firsthand the impact they're having for people in need. I would like to see true wrap around services from the GNWT for the vulnerable sector and I think Street Outreach could play a big part in that. We need to bring the solutions to the people, not make the people go to multiple places for help and struggle to navigate the GNWT's system that is not user friendly. I envision a program that includes:

- expanded hours of operation;
 - a living wage for its employees;
 - proper training for workers including from a trauma-informed and culturally appropriate perspective;
 - mental health supports; and
 - GNWT navigation services.
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?

Yes, I will. All of these items are things I've spoken to and supported throughout my time as MLA. I often stated the need to replace the YWCA's Rockhill Transitional Housing that burnt down and



for increases in funding to NGOs who are working with the vulnerable sector. Regular MLAs in the 19th also secured multiyear funding for NGOs so that they would not have to waste limited time and capacity applying on the same money year after year. I'm proud that as Regular MLAs we were able to get that concession from Cabinet along with other items such as the Indigenous Patient Advocates and increased mental health supports.

Regional partnership tables are key as people often end up in Yellowknife due to the lack of services in communities. We must strengthen supports outside the capital so that people can return to their home communities and then we will start to see an improvement in Yellowknife's downtown core. Part of my platform includes five regional wellness/treatment centres run by each regions Indigenous Governments. My plan would allow residents to access mental health and addictions services in their own region, including detox and aftercare, so that they would not have to come to Yellowknife or travel further south for help.

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?

Yes, I think this is a great idea. A lot of our crime and crisis situations arise due to the deep-rooted trauma that many in our territory have faced. If we can implement programs and services that divert and diffuse situations prior to them escalating to criminal charges we will save money and prevent vulnerable people from being further lost in the legal system. I've witnessed firsthand, thanks to a constituent I have, the difference it makes when the police come from a trauma informed approach. The response from those involved shifts when they are treated with compassion and understanding rather than like criminals. I would love to see that type of approach happen in the territory, as well as seeing the implementation of First Nations Policing.

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?

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



NGOs such as the Tree of Peace, Yellowknife Women's Society, YWCA, Native Women's Society etc. provide many excellent programs and services that attempt to address the housing, addictions, and mental health crises people are facing. Sadly, there isn't enough funding, resources, or capacity within these organizations to meet the high demand for supports and help that people have in our territory.

I'd start by expanding multi-year funding opportunities as well as increase funding to NGOs so that they can afford to pay a living wage; expand programming; and train staff in a trauma-informed and culturally informed manner. We need to construct regional wellness/treatment centres run by the local Indigenous Governments with in residence Elders that offer detox, treatment, and aftercare services. We need to ensure the Social Work program returns to the College/University so that people from the north are the ones caring for each other. People that understand the north and are invested in staying. I would make this one of the main priorities of the 20th Assembly in conjunction with addressing the lack of affordable housing. People will never be mentally well if they do not have safe, healthy place to live.

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?

As we diversify our economy we must recognize that it will take time and therefore must be done in conjunction with supporting the number one driver of our economy and that's the



resource exploration and extraction sector. In 2020, Canada released its Critical Mineral Strategy and the NWT plays a key role as a supplier of the minerals needed for the future green economy (eg rare earth elements, lithium, zinc, etc.). The GNWT needs to push for a North of 60 Mining tax credit from Canada with project-specific assistance to northern projects once it's provided.

As we continue to support our proven industry, I envision the NWT moving towards self-sustainability by heavily investing in the Agri-food sector. The Federal Government offers significant funding for agriculture programs and it's time we tap into them. I would like to see the development of an aggressive Agri-food Strategy that would ultimately lead to the growing of fresh food in every NWT community. The Agri-food sector is not just about farming but includes culinary festivals, restaurants, and a host of other spin-off industries that would play into NWT's tourism sector as well as improve the overall health and wellbeing of residents.

Thirdly we need to invest in our Arts and Culture programs including our burgeoning film and television industry. We need to make the Arts Council independent again and look towards the construction of proper Arts spaces around the city to add to our tourism opportunities.

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

We need to build all weather roads to support community supply chains and facilitate the transport of metal and mineral concentrates from future mines. Construction and maintenance of these roads will provide employment opportunities as well as an influx of federal ICIP and National Trade Corridor dollars. This funding may even come with no GNWT investment required as we saw in the 2023-2024 Capital Budgets this year for several highways with 100% funding by Canada. A crucial project that must be aggressively pursued is the Mackenzie Valley Highway as low water levels across the territory are impacting the barging season each year.

The GNWT needs to invest in green, renewable energy to reduce cost of living for residents as well as make it cheaper for industry and companies to do business. This could be run of river hydro, solar installations, SMRs, or hydrogen cell technology. We should invest in innovation and research, from both a food growing, agricultural perspective but also in the resource sector to expand the life of the current mines and to reduce the cost of future exploration and mining projects. The cost of energy is cited in both industries as the number one expense that prohibits growth and expansion.

Lastly, for better certainty and efficiency for all people in the economic sector, we must advance land claims and Indigenous reconciliation so that the owners of the land are true partners in any development, industry, or extraction project and receive maximum benefits in the forms of jobs and IBAs.



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

The Departments of ECE and ITI should work with the Mine Training Society and Aurora College to develop a workforce plan that includes the analysis of employment trends in the NWT. This plan would incorporate the proper training and educational programs required to ensure NWT residents are qualified for employment at Giant Mine or for any other resource sector job in the NWT. This includes the higher paying, skilled-labour and professional jobs in the remediation and extraction sectors. This workforce plan could also inform programming at the future polytechnic as it develops.

We must also advance the procurement review and reform started in the 19th Assembly. This review took way too long and there were many pieces of it that should already have been in effect. We must ensure northern dollars stay in the north with true northern firms. I'd like to see the development of an Indigenous Procurement Policy early in the life of the 20th Assembly.

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



The GNWT needs to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment on all infrastructure assets in the NWT with respect to climate change. They could utilize the PIEVC Protocol (<https://pievc.ca/protocol/>) that would allow them to identify and prioritize higher risk components and the nature of the threat to them, as well as the community's capacity for response. This information could then be used to form the basis for proposals to access federal infrastructure money or disaster mitigation funding on behalf of communities that are currently being left on their own with no resources and limited capacity to cope with climate emergencies.

Using the risk assessments, create a comprehensive, territory-wide, dynamic Emergency Response Plan (ERP) that includes proactive planning, training, and testing in accordance to the protocols established under the Federal Emergency Management Act. This must include any possible emergency scenarios with action plans to respond to or mitigate them. This plan would include regular updates with contracts in place through which contractors already know their roles and pricing is predetermined.

Create a Department of Public Safety with oversight by properly trained officials that would encompass areas of the GNWT such as the Emergency Management Office, Highways, Med Response, 911, etc.

Most importantly, we need to listen to Indigenous people about fire and forest management and use traditional knowledge and science to inform our firefighting efforts. This summer saw precious medicine, wildlife, and food destroyed which has deeply hurt the Indigenous communities.

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. As part of the territory-wide ERP I propose be developed above, each community would have its own plan that clearly identifies any risks to the community; the resources in place to address the emergency; and routes of egress and evacuation already pre-determined. This is a tenet of emergency response planning, everyone has a part and everyone knows their role. This must happen from the territorial level down to each community, organization, or business.



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, I can see that they all need addressing, in particular the lack of a Building Code Act which causes a lot of uncertainty in the NWT.
2. If you support prioritizing this legislation, will you work with City Council to advocate for change within this legislation?
I think it's imperative for MLAs to work well with all municipal governments which is why I often asked to meet with the Mayor regularly over the last four years outside of group meetings. I would suggest that the City look to establish its own bilateral with Cabinet and another with regular MLAs, so its unique needs can be addressed. Meetings with all Yellowknife MLAs at once is good, however, the dynamic of consensus government leads me to believe that a lot could be accomplished if the city were to meet with regular MLAs and Cabinet separately in order to advance their goals.
3. Is there other Legislation that you will be looking to review or create, and why?
I'd like to see the Residential Tenancies Act opened up. I've heard from both landlords and advocates that this piece of legislation is out-of-date and archaic. Given the state of Housing in the NWT I think we must modernize it such that it works better for all stakeholders.