

## 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?

**Answer: Yes, I can commit to advocating for increasing funding to community governments to continue to close the funding gap. Our community governments are the backbone of our territory and they need adequate funding to ensure crucial supports for our residents. My family is also a city worker family – and I believe our city workers need to have the resources available to not only get good work done, especially in the aftermath of our unprecedented wildfire year, but also be paid a fair wage for that good work.**

**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?

**Answer: Yes, increasing the capacity within the community to address its most pressing needs in practical and direct ways is an important part of my vision for helping to foster caring and compassionate communities that are in a position to provide support, and ensure nobody gets left behind. I will be advocating for the GNWT to provide funding for Street Outreach, and work with the City to expand and improve its capacity. The folks who do this crucial work deserve stability through wages and benefits, and increasing the amount of people we have to work shifts with our vulnerable population will benefit the program, as well as the safety of folks who are sleeping rough or utilizing our shelter system.**

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?

**Answer: Yes, the new homelessness strategy must continue to gain momentum and be actioned with adequate funding in the life of the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly, and I will be advocating for an action plan to be developed that holds the government to timelines and expands on how we will reach positive outcomes.**

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"<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?

**Answer: Yes, supporting practical interventions that address the immediate and concrete needs of individuals should be a priority for the GNWT if it is to be genuinely responsive to the needs of NWT residents. This type of program is exactly what Street Outreach's model could and should be expanded into providing. As noted by other candidates, early intervention in models like CAHOOTS both help**

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

**people faster, and save strain on our resources in the health and justice systems by seeking to address health and safety issues much more quickly.**

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?

**Answer: I think NGOs and grassroots solutions currently addressing these issues are showing the most promise and success stories, and point a clear path forward. The GNWT needs to focus more on supporting communities, including community organizations, and ensuring they have the tools and resources they need to continue the kinds of programs and services that address the immediate needs of residents in a practical way that is based more directly on local circumstances, needs and priorities.**

**Several Yellowknife NGOs are working tirelessly to reduce homelessness across several demographics. The one I am most familiar with would be the YWCA NWT's approach to ensure housing security for women and families, not only with new family housing building opening this month, but also its housing subsidy program that assists folks in paying rental arrears to ensure they are not left out in the cold. In my time with the Y, I've learned that when we include wraparound social supports in housing, folks are best placed to find their footing, and move forward out of transitional housing arrangements in their own right time, with the tools they need to do well.**

**In addictions recovery, I'd be remiss to not mention programs that centre land-based healing for Indigenous folks and their successes. The Aurora Village healing camp, and Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation's urban land-based healing location are both excellent examples of what is possible within and nearby to our City.**

**For mental health, I will be immediately seeking more information as an MLA as to the capacity for more youth mental health counsellors (CYC) in schools – I recognize that we should take a region by region and community-based approach to each situation, but I am concerned that youth won't have rapid access to supports if they are not in schools. Mental health services in the territory need to be accessible and responsive to the needs of residents, especially children and youth. I want to see the GNWT make careers in mental health accessible and attractive to community members, to help ensure that children and youth are able to receive culturally safe mental health care in their own communities. This also means ensuring that mental health providers are supported, compensated, and not overburdened with impossible caseloads and bureaucratic barriers.**

**NGOs play an important role in supporting youth mental health in the NWT and have demonstrated success in engaging youth. FOXY/SMASH has shown us that arts-based approaches to supporting child and youth health have important benefits. The Western Arctic Youth Collective has also been critical to responding to youth mental health crises at the community level. I look forward to supporting the work of NGOs by calling for consistent funding to allow this important work to continue, and to build closer relationships between government and NGOs to ensure that the expertise of folks working directly with youth is being considered in policy and planning.**

**As to striking a balance with other GNWT priorities – these three issues, which represent a baseline for wellness for our residents, must take top priority for the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly. The role of government is to support communities by paying attention to residents and to be guided by their priorities, concerns and**

needs. I'd argue the old way of parceling out responsibilities on these core social needs is not working – a whole of government, and whole of Cabinet response has to be fundamental to how we move forward. None of these issues are new, nor are they going away without dedicated and priority resources, actions, and measurable outcomes.

## 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?

**Answer: We need an economy that serves the needs of NWT residents, not the other way around. People need good, meaningful jobs in their communities that provide them and their families with the financial resources to thrive, not just survive. One way the government can help achieve this is by directing more of its support and attention to helping create and sustain a bigger number of local businesses in a greater variety of sectors, in addition to its support for traditional powerhouse sectors like resource extraction, government and tourism. With so many of the NWT's goods and services still coming to us from down south, we should be asking ourselves if there are opportunities to help local businesses and entrepreneurs start or grow businesses to meet local needs locally, creating a richer and more diverse business "ecosystem" that provides not just more local buying options, but also more local employment opportunities for residents, and which is better able to weather economic ups and downs by being spread across a greater number of sectors.**

**I think we are at a crossroads, or inflection point, on how we want to approach economic success, as a territory. Do we want to continue down the path of boom/bust with resource development, with**

government as economy holding us together in lean times? Is economic growth as an end to itself what we are truly seeking? Do we want to maximize every dollar we can squeeze out of resource extraction? Is more always better?

I firmly recognize that our economy will almost always include resource extraction, and to this end, we need to be looking at the sustainable development of rare earth minerals, especially through the lens of ensuring Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations are maximizing economic benefits of exploration and mining.

That said, I'd also like for us to focus a bit more on services and goods that are produced in the north, for consumption in the north. I think that thinking local may be a key to success for our territory, especially in turbulent times we are facing. There's no way to eliminate all imports, but when it comes to creating in the north, for the north, the GNWT and residents have begun to have some of these conversations. Examples would be around agrifood and forestry. An example I gave to the Sir John Green Team and Debate Team earlier this week was that if we had 5 or 6 pellet plants up the length of the Mackenzie River valley, we could reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, while also keeping dollars for heating directly in the north. It may not be a huge economic driver in the way that diamond mines are, but it is sustainable, and it does reduce costs and climate impacts in the long term.

I think Northerners are creative and want chances to thrive and create in their own communities – and I want the GNWT to support that creative impulse to ensure our local economies are strong, sustainable and vibrant.

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

Answer: My campaign focuses on how we can create an environment for small businesses to thrive locally, through initiatives and supports they are looking for. Buy local isn't just a slogan, it's a Northern way of life. During the pandemic, we saw how fragile supply chains can be. Spending more locally means that we support our neighbours with our dollars as well as our kinship, helping to grow local businesses and jobs. Economies that produce more of their own goods and services are more sustainable and do a better job of meeting community needs. The GNWT seems to spend a lot of time chasing major projects exclusively and trying to grow territorial GDP without a lot of success. I think it's time for a shift in focus that sees the GNWT investing more of its attention and resources to supporting and growing local businesses, where its efforts will have more of a direct positive payoff for NWT residents.

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

Answer: Currently, the GMRP is definitely an example of doing this right – and I'd like to see that kind of interjurisdictional relationship building continue as the GNWT seeks to develop the right-sized supports for growth in this area. ITI has completed a public engagement on the remediation economy last winter, and I expect the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly will be keen to support this area of growth, especially in

terms of retaining benefits of the work within the NWT, and especially with Indigenous partners. I think the key to success of ensuring economic benefits stay in the north is prioritizing training northerners in the technical skills required to do the specialized work that is needed. I believe Parsons and the GMRP are already working on this direction, but I will be pleased to advocate for more training opportunities for northerners.

## 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?

**Answer:** My main concerns for future wildfire seasons are making sure we have all the resources that the Forest Management staff need. I have had the pleasure of working with these folks for the last five years in the Department of Environment and Climate Change (formerly Environment and Natural Resources) -- and I know just how hard they work. They do their absolute best with the science and predictive data they collect every year preparing for the season. Unfortunately, the fires that we saw this past summer was unlike anything anyone had ever seen before in the history of the territory. I want to listen to them, the experts, as to what it is they need to better prepare. They also have to continue to listen to communities and Indigenous governments to know what they need, too. And as MLA, I will be supporting what they need in their budget to get the work done safely and properly, both preparing and fighting wildfires in 2024 and beyond.

Clearly, we also do need to improve how we evacuate as a community, should we need to do it again in the future. I think what we all saw this summer was confusing for almost everyone. Residents saw that no one had fully contemplated a large-scale evacuation with interlocking pieces between multiple governments - municipal, territorial and Indigenous. A key part of emergency response planning is also regularly practicing your plans in tabletop exercises, and performing checks on all necessary equipment

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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)

needed in emergencies. I would like to see the GNWT work with its partners to address key areas of weakness, as identified by any and all after-action reports and audits of what happened this summer, as well as with the floods in the South Slave and Dehcho. As MLA, I'll be advocating for equity of emergency response planning for evacuations, too – we need to do better for our unhoused population, by ensuring harm reduction planning is incorporated properly from now on.

- 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?

**Answer: Yes.**

### 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?

**Answer: Yes, ensuring communities have the tools and resources they need to most effectively address local needs and priorities is a key part of my platform for helping to foster strong communities. I would support these legislative reviews to ensure our municipalities have all the legislative authorities they need to operate effectively.**



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

**Yes. Stronger relationships between City Council and Yellowknife MLAs can benefit all residents.**

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

**Yes, but at this time, I cannot unilaterally state what I will prioritize until meeting and discussing with the rest of my colleagues.**