

October 2023

To: Her Worship Mayor Alty
City of Yellowknife

From: Mathew Spence
Candidate for Yellowknife Centre
Legislative Assembly of NWT

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the City of Yellowknife's Candidate Questionnaire.

The City's 3 key pillars and accompanying objectives in the "*Council Strategic Directions 2023- 2026*" parallel, to a very large extent, the platform and actions I have committed to in my campaign.

Through my professional career here as a Yellowknife resident and as a former councillor in Iqaluit just prior to it becoming the Capital of the Nunavut Territory, I have had a particular empathy and some insight into the challenges which can emerge in managing expectations, roles and responsibilities between a Capital city and a territorial government. I am also keenly aware of the kind of censure of outlying communities and MLA's of constituencies outside of Yellowknife perhaps captured best by the "*..Yellowknife gets everything..*" point of view.

With this in mind I would commit, if elected, to work with City Council on helping to resolve issues the City may have in working with the Government of the NWT. Further, I would work to have the 6 MLA's representing the other Yellowknife constituencies collaborate as a body to bring issues concerning the municipality for consideration by the Assembly, Ministers, and Cabinet.

Having seen the significant legislative agenda your questionnaire lays out, I would like the opportunity to explore with you whether there might be a more efficient and responsive option than legislation. It may be that, given the scope and responsibilities of the municipality as the Capital and holding half the NWT population within or near its boundaries, the goal of having a suite of territorial-wide legislation that tries to capture all Yellowknife desired municipal authorities may be impractical.

Attached is my response to the City's questionnaire. Should you or your Council have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Matt Spence

Let's Chat

votemspence@gmail.com • 867-686-1212 • www.mattspenceformla.com

Authorized by Alan Vaughan Official Agent for Matt Spence 867-686-1212

To City of Yellowknife

SUBJECT: Invitation to Respond to Municipality's Questionnaire to Yellowknife Candidates for Assembly Elections

Issues:

1. Increase of "core" funding:

REPLY

- I appreciate that the \$5M the Assembly approved for 2023-2024 to reduce the projected gap identified between that received and that required is insufficient. However it would be irresponsible to "promise" increases to the budgeted core funding that would meet the identified gap of \$35M in 2024/25. The recent catastrophic emergency responses have likely and dramatically changed all budget estimates substantially. These costs have yet to be determined nor has there been solid commitment by the Government of Canada as to what it might provide in offsetting the costs. It should be noted that, while expressing optimism the Federal Government will be forthcoming, the GNWT has yet to receive the \$62M request associated with the floods of 2022. Further, with a reducing population, and a shrinking economy, GNWT revenues may decline, or at best not grow at the pace of inflation.
- To be realistic, the extraordinary costs of these disasters, compounded with inflationary pressures plus flat or shrinking revenues, will require prioritizing at all program and service levels, both of the GNWT as well as communities.
- I would commit to ensuring such prioritizing be undertaken in close consultations with the City of Yellowknife.
- I would ensure costs associated with responding to the wildfire and subsequent evacuations of communities into Yellowknife and the ensuing evacuation of Yellowknife be included in the submission to Canada for reimbursement under the Disaster Assistance.

2. Social Supports:

- (i) Support GNWT co-funding Yellowknife Street Outreach Program
- (ii) Support through funding 3 of the initiatives of the "A Way Home – Comprehensive Strategy to address Homelessness in the NWT";
- (iii) Support and implement a program similar to "CAHOOTS" – 2 person teams consisting of medic and crisis worker experienced in mental health field to do patrols and respond to 911 calls (RCMP contract and 911 operations)
- (iv) what actions and programs do you think works and what needs to be done differently?

REPLY:

The GNWT has announced a one-year delay in the targeted opening of the Recovery Centre that is now proposed for 51st Street. The delay is quite regrettable – construction should be accelerated to the extent feasible.

In addition to investing in a facility to provide overnight accommodation and day-time safe supervised recreational and gathering spaces, we also need to enhance efforts to assist those living on our streets to transition to stable and supportive housing. The government should consider the provision of a full range of on-site medical, counselling, addictions and other support services for the homeless in the proposed centre on 51st, or if that is not practical then perhaps in a well-defined portion of Centre Square Mall or in another centrally located space.

And the government after consultation with representatives of not for profits should:

1. set out strategies and plans that include quantified targets for assisting our street people in their transition to supportive housing
2. Identify enhanced measures to address the full range of needs of our homeless

3. Economic Development

- (i) What is your vision for economic development in the NWT
- (ii) What actions would you take to strengthen and diversity economy
- (iii) What actions and investments would you take to maximize the economic benefits of remaining in the North related Giant Remediation

REPLY

Any measures and actions taken to move strengthening the economy of the NWT requires collaboration and cooperation among all levels of government including Indigenous governments, educational institutions, regulatory agencies, and the private sector.

Our business community is under severe pressure today, as a result of the recent evacuation on top of last year's COVID 'stay at home' orders. The Fraser Institute's recent report on the state of mining in Canada has the NWT ranked second in resource potential but last in terms of a stable investment climate, and this is reflected in the noticeable drop in investment in exploration and new mines. Our population is shrinking, tourist visits to Yellowknife declined during COVID and the fires, and investment in exploration and mines has fallen, all further compounding the problems for our business community.

The government should commit to very promptly seeking out 'stimulus measures' such as:

- a. combing its capital plans for 'shovel ready projects';
- b. encouraging NWT agencies & crown corporations, municipalities and School Boards to advance expenditures on 'shovel ready projects' like addressing deferred maintenance in public housing and schools; and
- c. contributions to current year tourism advertising programs

As is now done in Alberta, to help grow our population and to assist our businesses in recruiting employees, we could provide a one-time tax credit of say \$5,000 to every immigrant or Canadian citizen that moves here, becomes an NWT income tax paying resident, and is employed for at least 12 months in the private sector.

Our Polytechnic University, when established, could be promoted as a centre for international students and for Sub-Arctic research. University towns are healthy; our Polytechnic University can become a major employer and contributor to the community economy over time, while fulfilling its primary education mandate. In addition, directed University research often leads to business and job creation. (Specifically related to Giant Mine Remediation Project: Poly technical University could act as a knowledge centre for research and study of sciences, technology and measures in remediation and reclamation of contaminated as well as non-contaminated sites by using the Giant Mine Remediation Project as a "learning" campus.)

We need to aggressively and more effectively push for federal dollars to help fund our transition from 'fuels'-based electricity, to renewable including hydro (Taltson project etc.) at an affordable cost to rate payers. This would help achieve emission targets.

The GNWT needs to continue lobbying the federal government to assist in the development of the Mackenzie Valley Corridor and 'roads to resources' like the Slave Geological Province Corridor Project. Climate change is reducing effectiveness of winter roads and barging for communities. Working mines need reasonably priced access. As the NWT grows through infrastructure investment, so will Yellowknife.

We need to find ways to take full advantage, in an environmentally friendly way, of the viable minerals like rare earths and lithium that are in our backyard and relatively easy to access and mine. This could be the beginning of the much-needed reinvigoration of our mining sector.

The timely settling of outstanding settlement agreements in the southern NWT would foster new economic opportunities for the territory and create a stable and predictable investment environment. The GNWT should make the necessary changes to its negotiating mandates to help create the winning conditions necessary to get the agreements to the finish line.

Other measures I have proposed for growing the supply of our housing and growing the supply of day care spaces would also contribute to a healthier Yellowknife economy.

4. Emergency Management

- (i) What actions would you take to ensure communities are adequately prepared for future emergencies/
- (ii) NWT Community Wildfire Protection will be 5 years. Will you commit to funding or advocating funding, updates for plans for any community that requests one.

REPLY

We need to be better prepared for the full range of critical incident disasters - pandemics, natural and man-made catastrophes such as fire and flooding, extended infrastructure and service disruptions of electrical power and/or telecommunications, and catastrophic environmental events.

There should be a fulsome, contracted third party review of what the GNWT did in the face of catastrophic flooding, fires and epidemics that devastated our communities, and from that critical review set out a plan that will make us better prepared going forward, and facilitate coordination of efforts and authorities between the many federal, municipal and Territorial agencies involved in crisis management...with regret this year wasn't a one off.

The GNWT needs to reach out to national not-for-profits, like the Red Cross, to better understand their potential role, and set out co-ordinating protocols in advance of the next inevitable disaster.

There should be ready to go, approved programs to assist people and businesses with evacuating and post evacuation, and/or forced closure/stay at home orders during epidemics. Such assistance programs need to help both businesses and residents respond to the full range of their social, health, and financial recovery needs.

We should facilitate communities reducing the severity of flooding, fires and epidemics through, for example, stockpiling emergency supplies and equipment, advanced training of key personnel, removal of fire fuels, preventing the construction of buildings in flood prone areas, and contributing to the relocation of existing buildings from flood prone lands to 'higher land'.

5. Legislation

- (i) Support prioritizing of Legislative review or creation of :
 - Property Assessment and Taxation Act
 - Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief Act;
 - Building code Act (only jurisdiction without one);
 - Repealing of cities towns and villages Act – Create a Cities /act and a Municipal Governments Act;
 - And many others
- (ii) Will you work with City to advocate for changes
- (iii) Is there other legislation you will look at and why

REPLY

My experience with the Government of the NWT is that it has traditionally had a tendency or preference to rely on using “Policies” and “Regulations” for defining roles and responsibilities. Legislation, whether developing new legislation or revising existing, is a complex, time-consuming process. This is in large part due to the all-encompassing, broad based and mandatory consultation processes required. And when any of the Legislation the city has cited for revisions is opened up, it will have to be opened up to all communities ensuring an even lengthier and involved process.

Having seen the significant legislative agenda your questionnaire lays out, I would like the opportunity discuss with you whether there might be more efficient and responsive options, other than only legislation, for setting out an updated relationship between the City and the Government of the NWT.

With this in mind I would commit, if elected, to establish a working relationship with the Council of Yellowknife on issues the City might have in working with the Government of the NWT or where authorities, roles and responsibilities might overlap or be causing conflict. Further, I would work to have the 6 MLA's representing the other Yellowknife constituencies, collaborate as a body to bring issues concerning the municipality for consideration by the Assembly, Ministers, and Cabinet.

ADDITIONAL

Detailed, specific Actions to each of my Platform can be found at:

Website: www.mattspenceformla.com

My platform complements the key areas the City has targeted in its “*Council Strategic Directions 2023-2026*”. As the platform was also developed in consultation with residents of Yellowknife Centre and various NGO’s active in the riding, I am adding the other four areas of my campaign platform as I believe that actions and success in one will positively lead to progress in other areas.

1. Ensuring timely access to comprehensive health services here in YK.
2. Expanding affordable housing opportunities, both rentals and homeownership, for middle income earners.
3. Increasing the numbers and options available for day care.
4. Supporting our vibrant immigrant communities

1. Ensuring timely access to comprehensive health services here in YK

Making it more rewarding for medical staff to be here on a permanent basis, rather than a temporary placement, should help to reduce the numbers of those here on locums. This would serve to reduce costs and increase the continuity of service to patients. Allowing pharmacists, as is now happening in some provinces, more latitude in writing and renewing prescriptions without needing to first consult a doctor should help to free up ‘doctor time’ for meeting with patients.

Reducing medical travel to the south should help improve timeliness of service, while reducing costs to the health system. And the GNWT could undertake cost benefit analysis of treatments and consultations now typically done in the south, to identify those that with an appropriate investment in staff and equipment could be done at a lesser total cost here in YK.

We should facilitate, and consider rewarding, our doctors and nurses for helping us recruit permanent medical staff. And we should adopt best practices from the provinces, to ease entry/practice by internationally trained doctors and nurses to work here.

2. Expanding affordable housing opportunities, both rentals and homeownership, for middle income earners

The GNWT should, in addition to its plans for social housing, also set targets for the supply of affordable homes and rental units for middle-income Yellowknifers. Our adult youth, and those moving here for employment, would directly benefit from the GNWT starting to take an interest in their housing needs.

GNWT controlled lending programs should be fully accessible to individuals (home owners) to help individuals finance the cost of adding rental suites and ‘garden’ homes to their property or converting part of their home to rental suites

We should support and facilitate adjusting the GNWT rules governing the issue of development and building permits by municipalities, to reduce timelines and increase predictability. And the GNWT should consider providing a ‘servicing subsidy’ for block transferred lands, to reduce the cost of new housing.

To further augment affordable housing, I would propose providing a start-up contribution to help new Housing Co-ops to get set up and to assist in covering initial costs such as drafting business plans for consideration by funding agencies.

3. Increase child care options and spaces.

The GNWT publicly committed to using federal dollars to help add, over the 2021 base line, 300 spaces right across the NWT by the end of 2026, for children under the age of 6. And this is to be done, with at an out-of-pocket cost to parents of \$10 per day, while adhering to GNWT service and other standards.

This is great for families that get to the top of the 'waiting list'. However, waiting lists are quite long, with reports of it taking up to or even more than a year to get a space. The GNWT has not shared a forecast of Yellowknife 'demand', to put the target of '300 new spaces' across the NWT in perspective.

Some operations have closed, some have curtailed expansion plans, and there has been no rush to start up day care operations, as the Gov't subsidy plus a client fee of \$10 does not well cover their required financial expenditures and returns. The recently announced updated program guidelines will help, but are not expected to result by themselves in the aggressive growth required to meet Yellowknife need for spaces.

The Gov't in consultation with the YK Day Care Association and other interested knowledgeable YK participants in the industry needs to set the number of additional day care spaces needed in Yellowknife, making full use of operator waiting lists.

We need to see a reasoned costed plan from the GNWT that meets agreed-to demand for day care spaces. To fit within budget constraints, the GNWT may need to relax the requirement for a fixed \$10 cap on user fees, by considering pricing flexibility for some licensed facilities, and/or allowing operators to 'up charge' for incremental and/or upgraded services to provide them with more financial incentives and market place differentiation.

We should encourage and facilitate the City, GNWT, School Board and larger businesses to offer up now underutilized space in their premises for affordable day care, and encourage larger private and public developments to include 'day care space' in their building plans.

3. Supporting our vibrant immigrant communities. We can and should Increase attention to growing our immigrant and refugee communities and addressing their unique needs.

The Gov't should set annual published annual targets for numbers of both permanent immigrants to Yellowknife and those coming on temporary work permits, and publish a strategy for attaining such targets

A keystone element of attracting more new comers, should be encouraging and facilitating Yellowknife immigrant communities to reach out to other candidate/potential immigrants to encourage them to move here - doctors, nurses, skilled trades and services people, entrepreneurs.... Who better to promote the NWT as a great destination, than by someone that is here.

We should consider providing a one-time contribution against documented costs incurred by individuals sponsoring and then actively supporting an immigrant or a refugee as a permanent resident in Yellowknife.

We should find ways to support family reunification, and the GNWT should make arrangements so that the annual required health review for residents here on temporary work permits can happen here in YK.