



# Nicole Sok

## For Range Lake

### **City of Yellowknife:**

#### 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.*

*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?**

I promise to advocate for increased funding for community governments if I were to be elected as MLA, and additionally, vote against budgets that fail to address the funding commitments the GNWT set for itself.

#### 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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*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. Public Safety can look many ways and I see the territorial government having a role and shared responsibility in that.

**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?**

Absolutely. I touch on zero-based funding in my platform and see no reason that a strategy laid out by the territory itself, can't be implemented. I also discuss in my platform ways in which the territorial government could help NPOs and Indigenous governments, who are predominantly better suited to building and actioning transitional housing projects.

**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**





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**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 CA-HOOTS or Car 867?**

Does this program encompass or replace The Women's Society's Outreach Program? I am all for this type of program though as they have proved their effectiveness and worth to the community in large. Yellowknife would be well served with this type of program to help ease the burden of calls and availability on RCMP. It is my understanding that the RCMP is short staffed and dealing with a shift in calls that are more serious and violent, taking up time and resources. It is a reasonable action of the next assembly to take a look the funding situation and what would help improve things.

**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?**

I have heard time again while engaging with individuals on the street (I will not say vulnerable or homeless, as I am aware that some have homes, jobs etc. but hang out downtown), that after-treatment care is desired. While we have treatment options in place, regardless of people's views on them, what is lacking is after-treatment care. I would consider this to be a priority for the 20th assembly because the status quo is cyclical and doesn't lead to tangible improvement.

I can't say enough good things about Spruce Bough and what that program is doing. They have provided a program that was in desperate need and have actioned it well. Recently I spoke to a few individuals that were in that program or recently moved on from it, and it was highly spoken of.

#### 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?**

The reality is no industry will come close to providing the GDP that the diamond mines produced. Critical mineral mining will provide career opportunities and provide an easy transition to many skilled labour workers. Addressing the challenges to production and scaling of industry is in the territory's best interest economically. That being said, I see opportunities to grow agriculture, and to harness our position for R&D regarding cold weather testing. Remediation will also become a large industry within the next few years, and tourism can be scaled back up and methodically grown. The push for arctic sovereignty, could expand the economy in ways not yet determined.

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

The Airport renewal would be one way to strengthen the economy if built in a scalable way to provide expansion for growth in the sector. It would also create space for aviation based cold-weather testing. Engaging with the automotive industry to determine if a winter test track would be utilized. The construction industry would also bolster the economy as we worked to strengthen our infrastructure and scaled up housing projects, and lastly, the roll out of a polytechnic university will grow the economy.

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

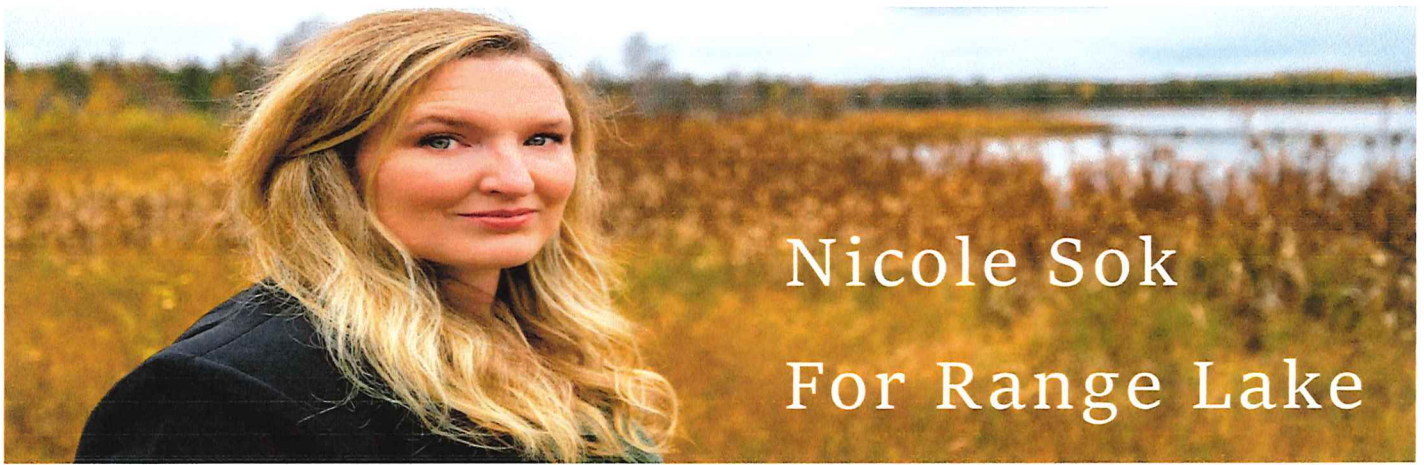
Continued pressure to assure northern companies and workers are being utilized to the best of Parson's abilities would be on thing the assembly could do. Also, passing reclamation legislation that allows for clear policies to be created for companies to adhere to through the process.

#### 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.*





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Question:

**1. What actions will you take or lobby for to ensure that communities are adequately prepared for future emergencies?**

I believe engaging with communities to understand what their potential emergency risks are is an important first step for advocating within the assembly, where necessary. Whether it be addressing funding, collaboration to lobby the federal government, or pushing for territorial projects that will assist the communities, this is a benefit to all northerners.

**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?**

It's my belief that municipalities can't adequately address issues like this when they are continuously underfunded. By addressing the funding gap, it could alleviate the funding pressure. If not, I would advocate for the funding to address the revision of these plans.

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.*

Question:

**1. Do you support prioritizing these legislative reviews?**

I support prioritizing these legislative reviews within the first 18 months of the new assembly, although I question committing to anything as vague as "and many more pieces..." .

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

I would happily engage and work with City Council to address the issues Yellowknife faces where the territorial government could have input, or a role to play in assisting the city.

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

I have ideas in regards to housing, but I'm not at the point where I'm willing to speak into them without stakeholder engagement and more information regarding policies.