

Dear Candidates,

Thank you for putting your name forward in the upcoming Territorial Election. The City values our partnership with the Government of the Northwest Territories, and we believe that when we work together, we can accomplish more.

As a City, we believe the following issues are important and we would like to hear from candidates on how they would work to address them in their term:

1. Community Government Underfunding
2. Social Support
3. Economic Development
4. Emergency Management
5. Legislation

These issues are all directly related to City Council's recently approved 2023-2026 Strategic Directions; we encourage you to review them here: https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/City_Council_and_Mayor/Council-Strategic-Directions-2023-2026/Council-Strategic-Directions-2023---2026.pdf

We are asking all Yellowknife candidates to answer the questions below. Once received, answers will be posted on the City's website by the next working day. We will be notifying residents of the webpage via social media and other communication channels, and we will be encouraging them to read the answers before Election Day.

Once again, thank you for putting your name forward and we look forward to working with the successful candidates during the 20th Assembly.

Sincerely,

Yellowknife City Council

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, if elected, I will work to increase funding for community governments. This is not simply a Yellowknife issue—a diverse range of NWT communities are being chronically underfunded according to

the GNWT's own calculations. For many years, the NWT Association of Communities has sent resolutions to the GNWT calling for the gap to be closed, so this is an area of common ground amongst communities in various regions. I will emphasize that unified interest, rather than allowing this issue to be perceived as a question of "Yellowknife vs. the communities." The GNWT must create an implementation plan to close the funding gap that ensures no community will lose funding—rather, those being underfunded will have their funding levels increased more quickly, through a phased approach.

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 – In my conversations going door-to-door, I have heard from health care workers, RCMP officers, City staff and other residents that the YK Street Outreach program is “worth its weight in gold”. And there is so much potential for Street Outreach to be even more impactful—since it is a mobile outreach service that literally and figuratively meets those who are struggling “where they are at”, those interactions are important opportunities to provide advanced first aid, case management, links to mental health and substance use counselling, harm reduction kits, and public health services such as STI testing and immunizations.

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 – the GNWT’s Homelessness Strategy cannot become another glossy piece of paper (or pdf) that sits on a shelf. There must be a detailed implementation plan with timelines, adequate resourcing, measurable targets and regular public check-ins to ensure government leaders and staff are held accountable for what progress they are making.

Homelessness is a complex issue that cuts across many GNWT departments (including Housing, HSS, ECE, Justice, etc) and initiatives to address it often get stuck in the famous government “silos”. Already many committees have been struck and the Integrated Service Delivery unit established—so it’s not that staff from various departments don’t talk to one another—rather, it’s the siloing at the very top that stymies us, and this is what I would propose to address head-on. I would make homelessness a strategic priority that does not fall under any one department’s mandate, but one that all of Cabinet and all Deputy Ministers are held accountable for making progress on.

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 – as I mentioned in my response to #1 above, there is so much potential for Street Outreach to be expanded along the lines of the CAHOOTS program and more effectively integrated with 911, public health, police services, and Integrated Service Delivery.

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

If implemented well, a program like this should ultimately save us money since it will avoid separate interventions by each of the front-line services, and allow for more early interventions that would prevent serious illnesses and escalations in violence.

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?

In my experience on the Board of the YK Women's Society, we have seen some real positive breakthroughs in individuals' lives through harm reduction-based programs such as supportive group living with wrap-around services (eg. Spruce Bough facility, formerly the Arnica Inn), the Managed Alcohol Program, the Street Outreach van, and the Common Ground program which has employed underhoused people on a day-to-day basis to work around the City doing litter pick-up, snow removal and construction of garden beds. The Society has also hired an Indigenous elder to support Spruce Bough residents and run culturally-based programming, and is acquiring funding to take participants out to more on-the-land programming.

Other non-profits in Yellowknife are also running very important supportive living programs, such as Home Base for youth, YWCA for families, and Salvation Army for men. Outside Yellowknife, many communities and Indigenous governments have established on-the-land healing programs, which are an essential part of the solution. These need to be complemented with more availability of decent housing overall and more supported living facilities, such as the [Kaduyile men's group home](#) in Fort Good Hope run by the K'asho Got'ine Housing Society, so that people needing more intensive ongoing supports don't have to leave their communities, and those returning from treatment programs have a supported place to live so they don't fall back into old patterns.

I would start by ensuring the GNWT better resources and supports existing programs that are proven to work. For example, the Managed Alcohol Program (MAP) was established during the pandemic by the YK Women's Society in partnership with GNWT-HSS, with support from physicians; however, support has fallen away. The GNWT has since moved away from supporting the MAP concept, asserting that dispensing alcohol without medical supervision is good enough, leaving the program under-resourced and unable to provide pathways to recovery through reduced alcohol use over time. I believe medical supports need to be re-established. Then we could go further and establish a comprehensive withdrawal management and addictions unit based out of Stanton Hospital, similar to best-practice models in [Sudbury](#) or Edmonton ([Addiction Recovery and Community Health](#)), which have been celebrated for their results and cost-effectiveness.

The NWT Alcohol Strategy—released this year—offers a holistic vision for dealing with alcohol, beyond acute addictions (including prevention, communications, policy, community safety, and treatment). Similar to the Homelessness Strategy--it needs an implementation plan with timelines, adequate resourcing, and measurable targets. When it comes to mental health overall, we need to focus on prevention and early intervention, starting with re-establishing mental health counsellors in every school.

In terms of balancing GNWT priorities, for too long we have positioned issues such as health, economy, and housing as separate, with each department's initiatives competing for attention and funding. I believe we need to integrate and streamline our approach so that initiatives are community-based rather than department-based, meeting people's most urgent needs and building from there.

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?

First, I hope we can shift the way we think about "economy" – it is not the things we take out of the ground for export or numbers on a corporate balance sheet – our economy is our people and how well we can support our families and community programs and services. Currently, about 80% of the GNWT's budget comes from federal grants and transfer payments, based on our population size. This provides a high degree of economic stability. However, we need more local economic generators to ensure we can sustain a vibrant range of local businesses providing both the unique goods and services and the diverse job opportunities, that make us excited to live and work in NWT communities.

Mines can help us, if we actually capitalize on them. Over the past 25 years, only 47.5% of mine employees have been NWT residents, and by 2022 only 37% were residents. Furthermore, we cannot be dependent on non-renewable resource extraction as projects have a finite lifespan and are extremely vulnerable to changes in worldwide commodity prices far beyond our control. Clearly we need more economic diversification into sectors such as tourism, fishing & local foods, biomass energy systems, arts (such as the film industry), postsecondary education and research, and others—based on realistic assessments of opportunities for market growth and the strengths and interests of NWT residents.

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

As MLA I would push the GNWT to better work with industry to transition mine workers into related trades that are in desperately high demand, such as housing construction and repair. I would also push for more rigorous and better enforced northern procurement policies so we stop hollowing out northern sectors such as the construction industry, and ensure jobs stay local.

Currently, we have a critical shortage of local workers both in the private sector and in health care and child care and education, which is crippling our ability to ensure our workforce is trained and well enough to work. I would focus on economic foundations: increasing the supply of decent, affordable housing; working with child care providers to ensure more spaces are available; investing more in early childhood education; better recruitment and retention of health care workers; more holistic mental health care and addictions treatment; and improving training opportunities in the trades, health care, education, social work, land stewardship, fishing and tourism.

By reducing leakage of northern dollars to southern companies and workers, and by building up a skilled and creative workforce, our population could become more resilient and able to take advantage of shifting market opportunities.

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

The Giant Mine remediation project presents significant economic opportunities for NWT residents and businesses; however much of the work is highly skilled and specialized.

We need to work with the federal government and Parsons (the Main Construction Management company) to ensure incentives are in place to:

- Encourage specialized workers coming from the south to relocate to the NWT—including assistance in finding housing, and assistance to families with school enrolment, finding a family doctor, etc.
- Offer opportunities for on-the-job learning, apprenticeships, job shadowing and mentorships wherever possible for NWT residents, in order to prepare them to take on these more specialized jobs.

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?

The independent third-party investigation for the territory into this year’s emergency response needs to be completed in time for changes to be implemented before next spring, including detailed emergency plans for all facilities and areas of government responsibility. Expert recommendations must be followed—with implementation plans and resources attached—unfortunately, the conclusions of previous reviews such as for the 2014 fires went largely unheeded.

The territorial review must be integrated with the City’s review and include input from members of the public as well as partner organizations such as the non-profits running critical social services like shelters.

We need to further integrate a climate change lens into all decisions, including planning and design for transportation, facilities and communications infrastructure. We also need to integrate a harm reduction lens into decision-making that doesn’t pretend to eliminate all risk but begins by trying to understand people’s actual situations and the supports they need to stay safer.

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?

I would commit to ensuring any community that requests it receives assistance in updating its emergency plans—ideally with input from third party experts who have experience dealing with emergencies in other parts of Canada.

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?

Yes, I support prioritizing these legislative reviews. I was well aware while serving on Yellowknife City Council about how current legislation prevents the City from being empowered to operate as efficiently and nimbly as possible in serving residents and making progress on priorities such as housing.

I am also aware that the Legislative Assembly has tended to be reluctant to prioritize legislative change if it is perceived to be mostly benefiting Yellowknife. If elected, I will work to raise awareness amongst my colleagues about the broad NWTAC support for such changes, and how changes could benefit communities across the territory.

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

Yes. In the past, joint meetings between Yellowknife City Council and Yellowknife MLAs have been irregular. I will work to facilitate more regular meetings, with focused agendas.

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

I am proposing an overhaul of Northwest Territories Power Corporation (NTPC) governance, starting with the tasks that were assigned to the last Minister of NTPC that do not seem to have been completed, including a NTPC Board governance review to strengthen accountability and transparency. This process may well lead to changes to the *Northwest Territories Power Corporation Act*.

Due to low water levels in the hydro system, Yellowknife has been powered by diesel since the fall of 2022, to the tune of 1.3 million litres of diesel per month in the North Slave, at great expense to taxpayers and to our environment and climate. To find a way out of this crisis and implement a roadmap towards net zero emissions, we need a forward-thinking, dynamic, efficient organization in charge of ensuring we have a clean, affordable electricity system. Unfortunately, the NWT Power Corporation (NTPC) is an arms-length corporation that has neither built-in incentives to be more cost-efficient, nor incentives to serve the public's interest through robust long-term infrastructure that can reduce emissions and be resilient to climate change effects. Its Board is currently made up of Deputy Ministers who are all very busy and unlikely to be energy experts.

I am also proposing that the territory pursue district biomass heating initiatives in areas such as downtown Yellowknife. Pending the recommendations from the City's District Heating Framework, this may also require territorial legislative change.