



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE

**CITY RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY
FEASIBILITY and BENEFITS STUDY**

Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY	1
	2.1 Model.....	2
	2.2 Student Recruitment	2
	2.3 Student Housing	3
	2.4 Programming	4
3	CONCLUSION	4

1 INTRODUCTION

In June 2018, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) released the *Aurora College Foundational Review* (Review), a commissioned report that provided a roadmap for the transition of Aurora College into a polytechnic institution. In October 2018, the GNWT responded to the Review, accepting or partially accepting all recommendations. However, a key recommendation to headquarter the polytechnic institution in Yellowknife was deferred to an undetermined future date.

In 2018, recognizing the potential community benefits of such an institution, the City of Yellowknife (the “City”) engaged a contractor (StrategyCorp Inc.) to develop a feasibility and benefits study for a university in Yellowknife (the “Study”). StrategyCorp Inc. worked closely with the University/Post-Secondary Advisory Committee (UPAC), conducted interviews with key stakeholders/experts, and reviewed peer models to develop options for a post-secondary institution that would be feasible in Yellowknife’s context.

Following the Terms of Reference for the Study, StrategyCorp Inc. analyzed the benefits of a university located in Yellowknife, NT and included the following details:

- (i) Benefits of a university located in Yellowknife;
- (ii) Options to expedite the establishment of a university;
- (iii) Available community supports;
- (iv) Potential options on financing/funding source; and
- (v) Potential programming opportunities

The City’s Response to the Recommendations of the Study (City Response) examines the feasibility of each recommendation and the articulation of a path forward for the City.

2 KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The Study emphasizes that, while the City does not possess the legislative or regulatory authority to establish alternate models of post-secondary education delivery, the City should work to maximize the positive impacts that the GNWT’s development of a new post-secondary institution could have on Yellowknife.

The Study established a positive correlation between a polytechnic institution and the local economy. The location of a campus in close proximity to Yellowknife’s downtown can assist with revitalization of the downtown core and help community and business sustainability. An expanded (and responsive) course offering can assist with labour market skill development and any influx of students could help relieve immediate labour market shortages and demands for

local businesses. A more diverse educational facility could assist with business incubation and academic research and any infrastructure spending could attract and retain human capital in the Territory.

2.1 Model

The Study determined that a polytechnic university would be the most feasible path to transform the post-secondary system in the Northwest Territories. Such a model builds on the existing assets and programming, while testing and refining new university based curriculum. In August 2020 the GNWT released the discussion paper on 'Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance'. The City submitted feedback regarding the proposed governance structure on September 14, 2020 (Attachment #1).

Recommendation – Federated Model

The Study recommended that a federated model would accelerate establishment of a polytechnic university. Benefits of a federated model include leverage of resources, authority to grant degree-eligible credits, atmosphere of innovation and localized decisions.

Accept

The City accepts that the federated model would be the best path forward to transform post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories. Although establishment of a post-secondary institution is outside of municipal jurisdiction, the City is committed to working with other stakeholders to lobby the Government of the Northwest Territories to make this transformation a priority.

Action

- Evaluate by-laws to ensure there are no barriers to success for establishing a polytechnic institution within the City of Yellowknife boundaries.
- Work with the GNWT, Aurora College and Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) to identify a suitable location for an expanded campus.

2.2 Student Recruitment

The recruitment and retention of students from both within the NWT and elsewhere is critical to the success of higher education in the NWT. Providing a supportive and positive student experience is critical to delivering programs that meet the needs of a diverse student population, and aids in student retention and success.

Recommendation – Increased Marketing

Marketing efforts must be prioritized and directed to students from outside the NWT, both nationally and internationally to achieve the student population required to support a new model for higher education in the NWT.

Accept

Yellowknife is an attractive university location, in part given the size of the City's population, our amenities, housing and part-time employment opportunities, as well as interest from southern and international students to study in a major diverse Northern city centre. The City will work with the GNWT, stakeholders, and any newly created institution to create materials that will serve as a useful tool to draw enrollment in the polytechnic by presenting Yellowknife as a desirable place to live, work and study.

Action

- Work with partners to market Yellowknife as a desirable place to live, work and study.
- Assess City services, infrastructure and programs to determine what, if any, additional services will be required and whether such services, infrastructure and programs need to be further tailored/upgraded to suit the needs of students.

2.3 Student Housing

Community and other supports will be required to make the Northwest Territories an affordable destination for students to study and live.

Recommendation – Address affordable and available student housing

The higher cost of living in the north must be addressed to achieve success. A Yellowknife university/campus would likely need to offer both student and mature student (families) subsidized housing units.

Accept

The City is prepared to proactively work with developers and other partners to create affordable student housing as student population increases, as well as with the community to identify and establish student supports (e.g., daycare, mental health supports, apprenticeships, part time employment and social opportunities).

Action

- Work with the GNWT, Aurora College and YKDFN to identify suitable locations for student housing.

- Develop a toolbox of incentives through policy and regulatory measures that advance the goal of increasing affordable and student housing options.

2.4 Programming

A polytechnic university is most aligned with the NWT's labour market needs and can help to drive the City of Yellowknife's overall growth objectives through new educational pathways and research to drive economic diversification. Post-secondary education transformation is essential to advancing and supporting the labour market in Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories. On September 1, 2020 the GNWT requested feedback on the discussion paper released on 'Northwest Territories Polytechnic University Initial Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization'. The City outlined concerns regarding the discussion paper in a response submitted on September 25, 2020 (Attachment #2).

Recommendation – Maintain current curriculum and develop new-university-based programming.

Programming must align with labour market needs to be successful. The Study determined that the labour market will have continued needs for university and college graduates.

Accept

The City recognizes that decisions regarding programming to be offered are the responsibility of the territorial government. The City acknowledges that the programming offered must meet the needs of the labour market to be successful. Developing 'niche' programming could also assist with student attraction.

Action

- Work with stakeholders to encourage the GNWT to ensure programming addresses labour market interests & opportunities.

3 CONCLUSION

Universities are valuable assets of cities. They are places where innovative brain power and talent gather. However, universities do more than merely educate. As knowledge creation hubs, they stimulate local industry and contribute to the attraction and retention of people who contribute to a city's economic strength.

A campus in the city can create an integrated and vibrant city-university neighborhood. It can become a place in the city full of activity, which is attractive to both locals and visitors. As such, the City is committed to working with the GNWT to identify land (as may be required) suitable for development of a campus and student housing.

Recognizing that the City must act with a sense of urgency in promoting economic development in, and that many of the levers for establishing a university/polytechnic lie beyond the City's direct control, the City places high priority on working with the GNWT on this initiative. (City of Yellowknife Economic Development Strategy 2020-2024). The City's Economic Development Strategy further supports the recommendation that the City continue to be a champion of a university/polytechnic in Yellowknife with development of a downtown campus.

Attachment #1



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

September 14, 2020

Honourable R.J. Simpson
Minister Responsible for Education, Culture and Employment
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Dear Minister Simpson,

Re: Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance

I am writing today to provide feedback on the Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance discussion paper on behalf of the University/Post-Secondary Advisory Committee (UPAC). The purpose of the UPAC is to provide advice and guidance to the City of Yellowknife throughout the development of a response to the University Feasibility and Benefits Study and inform the City's efforts to establish the presence of a university/post-secondary institution in Yellowknife, as articulated in the Aurora College Foundational Review Report. The UPAC met in September to discuss the Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance discussion paper and would like to submit the following feedback.

Indigenous representation

The Indigenous representation on the Board is extremely important. However, the residency requirement of these representatives is problematic. This does not recognize the reality that Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories (NWT) may be residing elsewhere and be looking to come back to the NWT to provide knowledge and support. Three Indigenous people is insufficient and we find disproportional to represent the large Indigenous student body and overall NWT population. We would suggest the inclusion of an Elder in this specific representation to provide valuable perspective and knowledge.

There is also a lack of information regarding how these representatives are appointed, for how long and terms for removal from the Board and there needs to be some language around regional representation of the Board.

The Bicameral system

The proposed 'bicameral' governance structure lacks clarity in roles and method of co-ordination between the Board of Governors and the Senate. Some explicit wording on how these two bodies relate and cross-fertilize is required. How do these groups work together? It appears to be a top-down Board-dictated relationship. In fact, these groups are inter-dependent but having a senior body (the Board of Governors) that maintains management and control negates the importance of the Senate and its programming responsibility. The Board appears to be able to supersede, if not completely contradict, autonomy of the Senate and appears to verge on 'over governing' rather than having the deft governing body of a small organization. Our preference would be to have a single body Senate that would build in all members of the board and individuals from outside the university to bring depth and dimension into the decisions being made.

Board Membership

We see a lack of coordination with partner organizations in the governance structure and would like the Board to have the flexibility to appoint ex-officio (non-voting) members. Other groups like the City of Yellowknife or education facilities/providers have a vested interest in the polytechnic and also can partner and assist in the successful deployment of programs and student supports in the community and should be given the opportunity to provide input and be involved in the discussions.

Further to board membership, we suggest the membership of the Board and Senate not be limited to residents of the NWT. The narrow view of local membership limits the success of the polytechnic as we see significant contributions can come from the Canadian population and international academic world. This diverse expertise can also make the polytechnic more marketable outside the North.

Expertise requirements

The expertise requirements are important, however, we see that there appears to be little emphasis on post-secondary organizational experience. Oversight and management (i.e. the Board) requires academic experience and as the expertise requirements stand in the document, any member of the government can fill these roles. There is a concern that these Board members, appointed by ECE, will be employees of the GNWT and therefore contradict the 'arms-length' spirit of governance. Specifying that the Board will comprise of non-territorial government (i.e. non-Government of the Northwest Territories) employees would ensure the Board is populated by community members and better represent the needs of residents and the polytechnic rather than what the government sees these needs to be.

Recommendation

We found the timeline for consultation and comments to be insufficient to support meaningful consultation and would appreciate a longer timeline to prepare comments on such an important and complex topic going forward. Many organizations are in the midst of re-starting or recovering from the disruptions of COVID and September is generally a busy time for academic stakeholders. We would have appreciated ECE's flexibility on the consultation timeline, which was requested but denied.

Should you have any questions regarding the UPAC and its position on this discussion paper, please do not hesitate to contact me at my office at 867-920-5693 or by email at mayor@yellowknife.ca or contact the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Julian Morse at _____ by email at jmorse@yellowknife.ca.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Alty
Mayor

DM#625020



Attachment #2



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

September 25, 2020

Honourable R.J. Simpson
Minister Responsible for Education, Culture and Employment
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Dear Minister Simpson,

Re: Polytechnic University Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization Discussion Paper

Thank you for your September 1st letter inviting the City of Yellowknife to comment on the Polytechnic University Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization Discussion Paper. I am writing today to provide feedback on the discussion paper on behalf of the City of Yellowknife. The City's response was informed by input from members of the University/Post-Secondary Advisory Committee¹. The purpose of the UPAC is to provide advice and guidance to the City of Yellowknife throughout the development of a response to the [University Feasibility and Benefits Study](#) and inform the City's efforts to establish the presence of a university/post-secondary institution in Yellowknife. Although the City is encouraged by recent efforts to implement recommendations from the Aurora College Foundational Review, we would like to provide the following feedback:

(i) Areas of Specialization

Overall, the areas of specialization are too broad and do not focus on what a polytechnic university should, or could, offer here in the North.

For example, concerns were raised by the committee regarding the exclusion of the social sciences as an area of specialization. The public sector is a large employer in the North and such a program would provide Northerners with the critical thinking skills necessary for being successful in research and analysis. Social science degrees are popular with international and Canadian students and excluding this area of specialization could be a missed opportunity to expand the student population.

It is also concerning that while technology is a major industry driving our economy and development, it appears from the Discussion Paper that this proposed area of specialization is almost entirely limited to technology as it pertains to machinery and the trades. The skills for tomorrow involve a high-level understanding of more advanced technology like coding. Having no technology focus in a place where remote work can bring employment to remote places is a missed opportunity as even mining is moving towards remote and automated technology.

¹ University/Post-Secondary Advisory Committee Terms of Reference - https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Current_Committees_of_Council/University-Post-Secondary-Advisory-Committee/UNIVERSITY-POST-SECONDARY-ADVISORY-COMMITTEE-TERMS-OF-REFERENCE.pdf

(ii) Development of the Areas of Specialization

It appears that the development of the proposed areas of specialization and research was done without adequate consultation and input from experienced stakeholders and other education providers in the NWT about what programming is needed. The final product appears to underestimate, rather than celebrate, the academic strengths and opportunities of the Northwest Territories and its people. Overall, there is aspirational language in some of the positioning of the polytechnic university but this falls flat when it comes to the actual programming.

(iii) Student Attraction and Academic Wants

Attracting students from outside of the NWT and Canada is a way to maintain a large student body with a plethora of diversity and skills but the proposed areas of specialization do not describe competitive programming that will attract people to come study in the NWT rather than elsewhere. The City's feasibility study stressed that without attracting a large body of students from outside jurisdictions, a polytechnic university would not be feasible. Accordingly, the areas of specialization need to be marketable to a wider Canadian and international student base.

Universities must provide an educational product based on what the market requires. The City encourages the territorial government to perform a thorough analysis to determine what educational products are currently offered elsewhere, find the gaps and determine how we can fill those gaps and excel.

Conclusion

The areas of specialization as proposed are not markedly different than what is currently offered in the North. A true Aurora College 'transformation' will require new directions and ideas and the proposed approach is not ambitious. It is unclear whether the polytechnic university will truly be different from the existing Aurora College. The strongest model will be one which brings institutions together, building on existing strengths and using them to our advantage.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this critically important step in the Aurora College transformation. I hope the City's perspective helps push you towards the ambitious approach this Territory needs and deserves. On a final note, I would like to state that members of UPAC voiced their disappointment regarding the timeline for consultation. This short timeline was deemed insufficient to support meaningful consultation. Moving forward, the City submits that provision of a longer timeline to allow stakeholders to prepare comments on such an important and complex matter would be more appropriate.

Should you have any questions regarding the UPAC and its position on this discussion paper, please do not hesitate to contact me at my office at 867-920-5693 or by email at mayor@yellowknife.ca or to contact the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Julian Morse at | jmorse@yellowknife.ca.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Alty
Mayor

DM#625824

