

New North SANC Services Inc. Annual Report 2013-14

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Message from the Chair

Dear Members,

As part of our commitment to providing members, partners and other stakeholders with a one-stop update of our progress and plans for the future, I am pleased, on behalf of our Executive, to present New North's Annual Report for 2014.

With the election of an almost entirely new Executive in late 2012, this year was always going to be one focussed on both revision and renewal, one in which taking stock of past goals and former achievements would need to be balanced by a need to set new directions and plan for a new vision.

The past year has seen significant ground made by New North in addressing some of the key needs of northern municipalities. The year has also been an important one in re-establishing New North as a credible and influential voice for the north.

I am proud of the work we have done in raising awareness of northern issues with government. We have not always seen the progress we would like to see. But our patience is equally matched by our resourcefulness and resilience. As an organization, and as individuals, never has there been a greater need for these qualities.

I think we can all sense that this year will be a challenging one for us. But there will be some great opportunities as well. We look forward to a new housing program, a new disability strategy, and a renewed focus on the economic prosperity of our communities.

Throughout the year, the New North Executive



has met on a number of occasions. We have very good discussions. But it is the respect and trust we have in each other's opinions that I most value and believe in as a person. Together, the New North Executive works very well as a team, and will continue to work together into the future. So, to my fellow board members, I say thankyou.

In closing, I wish to commend the work of the staff of New North in supporting the our vision for the north.

Sincerely,

Georgina Jolibois
Chair, New North

Message from the CEO

Dear Members,

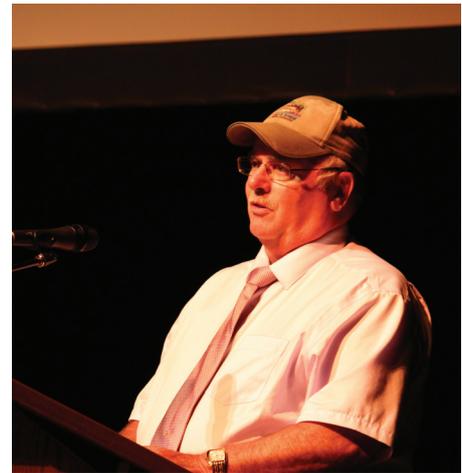
With certainty, one thing that can be said about 2013-14 is that it was the year of the “marquee event”: New North hosted two workshops, one summit, one gathering, and one symposium, in addition to our usual Mayor and Councillor meetings. These were, in the majority of cases, well-attended and highly valued events.

Throughout the year, the question was often asked: why does New North host so many events? From our point of view, the answer is simple: events, especially big events, are a way for a very small organization to have a very loud voice. Events enable New North to project an image of itself, its purpose, its ambitions and its hopes for the people of the north, that is significantly—many times—greater than its size.

With events comes media coverage. The coverage in local and provincial-wide media brought attention to northern issues: justice issues, education deficits, the suicide crisis, as well as crises in housing, all received attention in the media in the days surrounding the events. Media coverage is important in raising public awareness of important issues, and with public awareness comes political pressure.

Of course, the link between the gathering of people in one big venue and results in the public sphere is not always a direct and immediate one. But, as we saw with the achievements radiating from the Northern Housing Summit, the results are there and can be very tangible.

New North events highlight the ability of our organization to leverage the resources of other



partner organizations to achieve mutual goals. This ability extends into many areas, and occurs on both a large and small scale.

Our role is to advocate and help build capacity. Our role is to keep the interests of the municipalities of northern Saskatchewan on the government’s agenda. Looking over the past year, we can clearly see that we, as a collective, have done that.

Archiving a saving of almost \$400,000 for wildfire cost-recovery is one very real way New North has played its role this year. There were many other results as well, as you will see in this report.

I’m always telling people that in the north you can’t get anything done unless you work together. No one will work with an organization that lacks credibility. Our credibility as an organization comes from the support we receive from municipalities. The support we have received from our members this year has been outstanding. For that, I thank you.

Sincerely,

Al Loke
CEO, New North

About New North

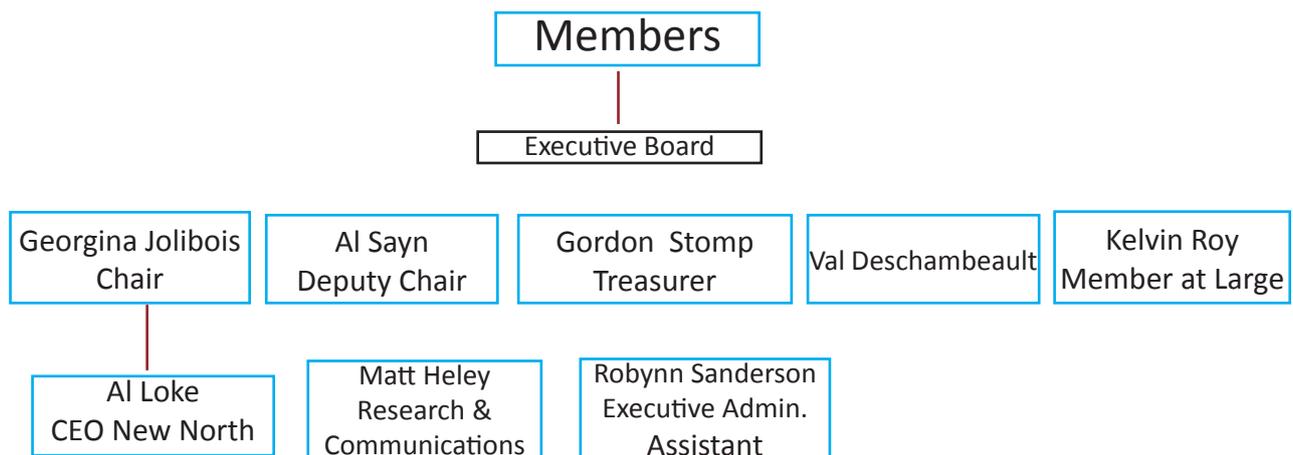
Organization Overview

New North—SANC Services Inc. is a non-profit organization, based in La Ronge, dedicated to serving the interests of the 35 municipalities of northern Saskatchewan.

New North's governance is supplied by a Board of Directors, which is elected from among the Mayors and Councillors of the 35 municipalities. New North's Executive is comprised of Mayor Georgina Jolibois (Chair), Councillor Al Sayn (Deputy Chair), Mayor Gordon Stomp (Treasurer), Mayor Val Deschambeault and Mayor Kelvin Roy.

New North has a staff of three: CEO Al Loke, Communications and Research Officer Matt Heley, and Executive Assistant Robynn Sanderson (with Lindsay Smith on leave).

New North Organizational Chart





Mission Statement

The following **Mission Statement** is taken from New North's Strategic Plan, 2011-2015.

Municipalities are often referred to as “creatures of the province,” insofar as the legislation that governs what they can do is a product of the provincial legislature. But municipalities are also a separate and independent form of government.

For the north, this status is recognized in the Northern Municipalities Act, which is known as “permissive” legislation. The Act is a reflection of the historically and culturally unique space that northern municipalities occupy in the municipal system in Saskatchewan.

New North – SANC Services Inc. (Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities) is organized to:

- **Advocate** the issues and concerns on behalf of the Northern Communities within the Northern Saskatchewan Administrative District (NSAD) of Saskatchewan;
- Organize and co-ordinate **capacity building** training and development activities for the municipal governments and organizations; and
- Build and maintain **strategic relationships**.

Advocacy includes identifying the issues of importance to northerners and northern municipalities and communicating with other governments and organizations to inform them of the issues and ways to resolve them. It includes acting and speaking on behalf of northern municipalities in meetings and activities set up by governments to discuss issues that affect the northern people and municipalities.

Capacity Building is about improving the knowledge, skills and abilities of northerners and northern municipalities. It includes governance, management, and community economic development. There is a need to raise the capacity to some minimum level and to look at structural means of building capacity for the municipal governments of small communities.

Strategic Relationships are constructive relationships, partnerships and cooperative arrangements with other organizations and governments to promote the interests of northerners or to achieve mutual benefits.

In attaining its mission, New North:

- Will promote fair and equitable policies and procedures for all Northern Communities.
- Will speak and act on behalf of the Northern Communities in pursuit of both common objectives and issues of common interest.
- Shall provide leadership for Northern Communities and create a forum to raise public and government awareness of Northern specific issues; and
- Shall support existing and future community initiatives



The outcomes of advocacy are sometimes difficult to measure, as benefits can be both tangible (visible) and intangible (non-visible). The outcomes of advocacy can also be unpredictable. Successful advocacy requires patience, persistence,

a respect for the other's position, and at times, a willingness to compromise.

Northern Housing

Housing in northern Saskatchewan continues to be one of the single most important social and economic issues facing communities.

The provincial government's Saskatchewan Housing Strategy, released in 2011, was precisely that—a housing strategy for Saskatchewan. For all its comprehensiveness, the strategy did not address issues unique to northern Saskatchewan. Several housing programs, such as the Remote Housing Program as well as the province-wide social housing ownership program, had been quietly shelved.

But while the government conceded that it didn't have a plan for the north, it wasn't against the idea. In stepped New North.

Following a meeting with Don Allen, President of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, New North was provided with funding to host the Northern Housing Summit.

The Summit was conceived by New North as a way of taking the discussion about housing in the north back to basics. Nothing would be left off the table. Many of the challenges—high cost of construction, shortages of skilled labour, lack of working capital, and a whole range of capacity issues—would have a chance to be examined from all angles.

An organizing committee comprised of representatives from Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, Northern Municipal Services, and New North's own Executive in Val Deschambeault, as well as the CEO of New North Al Loke, had a timeline of just four months to put together an engaging and thoughtful agenda, gather and invite speakers, find a venue, and get the message out to all the stakeholders.

Prairie Wild Consulting, who was contracted to facilitate, brought with them a charrette-style concept





to the event, a format which is designed to maximize the opportunities for meaningful participation among attendees. Each of the panel sessions was followed by small group activities, which allowed participants a chance to reflect and then provide feedback on the issues that were being presented. The feedback became an ongoing part of the development of a genuine dialogue.

Among the key outcomes of the Summit was the positioning of New North as a vehicle for exerting influence on some recent policy changes announced by SHC, including the new rent-to-income rates for setting social housing rents. New North argued that the province's base rental rates, which were being determined in relation to the Regina rental market, were too high. The rates have since come down in northern Saskatchewan.

The Summit also saw the striking of a Northern Housing Advisory Committee, which has been

working during the autumn and winter of 2013-14 to devise a number of key recommendations relating to, among others, increasing home ownership options for northerners.

The Northern Housing Summit highlighted New North's capacity to quickly mobilize its own, and other's resources, to focus energy and attention on an issue of tremendous importance. The provincial government's recognition that its policies and programs were deficient in significant ways is a tribute to our tenacity in pursuing this issue.

The Summit also highlighted the importance for northerners to lobby government *as* northerners, to place pressure on policy-makers to consider the importance of aligning programs with the specific needs and capacities of communities.

Social Policy, Justice, Policing

New North continued its long-standing focus on policing and justice issues in northern Saskatchewan in 2013-14. Northern municipalities saw huge strides taken when the Ministry of Justice announced their plan to provide municipalities with funding for Community Police Boards, an initiative that New North has been a partner in from the beginning. The Community Policing Agreement between the RCMP, government and New North, signed in 1999, was a Canadian first. Under the new funding arrangement, 13 communities will receive financial assistance to maintain the CPBs. This funding will extend to 2015, and hopefully be ongoing.

Early 2014 also saw the striking of a new Police Advisory Committee. Comprised of senior RCMP officials and members of the New North Executive, the committee is to be a mechanism for regular and ongoing high-level dialogue between the municipalities and the senior management of the RCMP.

Northern Symposium for Safer and Healthier Communities

In September more than 270 people came together at the E.A. Rawlinson Centre in Prince Albert for the Northern Symposium for Safer and Healthier Communities (formerly the Justice Symposium).

Hosted by New North, the event's varied and interesting agenda allowed for meaty and compelling dialogue to occur on a range of broadly-related social, justice, health and education issues. The discussion of suicide prevention and intervention strategies was complimented by the panels focussed on disabilities and supports. The Strategies to Address Community Violence panel saw speakers address indigenous gang identity, community mobilization and the role of the newly emergent victim services unit in northern Saskatchewan.



“It’s time that we take a stand against some of the things that have been keeping us down, especially within our communities. I meet with the RCMP 3-4 times a year now; at one time I didn’t like those guys, because the only times I saw when I was in trouble. Today I can see the human being behind the badge.”

Elder Howard Walker

This year, as in previous years, we saw the participation of almost 40 northern youth. They made a video, but it was clear that what they really got out of the event was the chance to make new friends with youth from other communities—although the kids reported that not having to do homework for a few days was pretty cool, too!

Elder Howard Walker, a speaker of unmatched wit and wisdom, shared stories from his life. Other special guest speakers included Brenda Butterworth-Car, the new F Division CO, and the retired Inspector Jim Potts.

The middle day of the event was crowned by the Northern Excellence Awards, a unique occasion in itself in northern Saskatchewan, which honoured, among many worthy and notable high achievers, the career of retired F Division Commanding Officer, Russ Mirasty.

For many people, the highlight of this event is the Policy Forum--or what used to be called the Bear Pit--where senior officials from government front a Q&A session with event attendees. This year, Hon. Gordon Wyant, Minister of Justice,

Inspector Dupont from the RCMP, and New North Chair and Mayor of La Loche, Georgina Jolibois, took turns at providing their views on a number of important issues.

Topics discussed at the Policy Forum included cyber-bullying, safe shelters for women, lateral violence, addictions, FASD, supported housing, among others.

The Northern Symposium for Safer and Healthier Communities is New North's marquee event for publicizing the ongoing challenge of a host of social issues in northern Saskatchewan. It is one particular way that New North can continue its tradition of intervening in areas of social policy.

Accordingly, New North, which took charge of the media wrangling, ensured that the media made a strong presence. MBC Radio continued to show its legendary support for northern issues by setting up a portable studio at the venue and produced a live broadcast, conducting interviews with speakers and other attendees. Coverage of the event, which was also provided by CTV, CBC and local print media, enabled issues, such as the high rate of suicide in northern Saskatchewan, to receive provincial-wide attention.



“ Unless the province is willing to invest dollars into our communities for training programs, for young people to get help with nutrition and different areas, and families need help too, we will have a bigger problem.” Georgina Jolibois

New North lobbying saved communities in the north almost \$400,000 in 2013 when the Ministry of Environment waived cost-recovery fees.

Action on Wildfire Cost-Recovery

In May 2013 the Minister for the Environment, Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff, announced that his ministry was waiving wildfire cost-recovery fees for the six northern communities that had accumulated a debt to the province. The savings to northern communities would be almost \$400,000.

The announcement by the minister came after some fairly intensive lobbying by New North. Although the ministry's cost-recovery policy had been in place since the early 2000s, it wasn't until the ministry began working on its new **Wildfire Act** (replacing the *Prairie and Forest Fire Act*) that municipalities began seeking to have the clause removed.

Following a consultation by ministry officials at a northern mayors meeting in September 2012, in which the issue of cost-recovery was raised, New North's Environment representative Mayor Gordon Stomp and CEO Al Loke immediately set

about meeting personally with the Minister on the matter. The minister politely listened to New North's concerns, but declined to amend the new legislation.

Over the following months, New North continued to meet with ministry officials in an effort to find alternative means to achieve the same ends. The government was determined to maintain the legal position that "third parties" are responsible for their fire costs.

New North's position was that this policy was clearly unfair, given the very large number of communities with forested areas, as against the the resources communities have to fight fires within their boundaries.

In waiving cost-recovery fees for wildfires, it is our belief that the ministry has set a precedent, and will find it difficult to invoice municipalities in the north ongoing.

Solid Waste Management

Landfills once again filled New North's agenda in the 2013-14 year, as the province's new Environment Code creeps closer to proclamation.

With several communities facing the closure of their landfills, New North sought to engage with government on some of the long-term issues surrounding solid waste management in the north.

During the SUMA Convention in February 2014, the New North Executive met with the

Minister of Environment, Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff, to express concern for the capital funding of landfills, and particularly costs related to meeting the province's environmental regulations.

The result of this lobbying effort has been to get the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry Government Relations, back at the table to work with us to examine the full range of issues related to solid waste management in the north.

“Capacity building is about improving the knowledge, skills and abilities of northerners and northern municipalities. It includes governance, management, and community economic development.”

New North Waterworks Workshop

The 2014 New North Waterworks Workshops, held in La Ronge in April, attracted more than 70 water operators from both municipal and First Nation communities.

Organized jointly with the Water Security Agency, New North provided the administrative and financial management of the event, and oversaw the registration and attendance of the operators seeking to maintain their certification. New North offered operators 1.0 CEU--meaning that in one three-day event, northern operators could effectively cover their professional development quota for their entire 2-year renewal cycle.

This year’s agenda paid attention to emergency management, water analysis and best practices to related standard operating procedures.

The New North waterworks is now viewed by communities and gov-

ernment agencies as an inexpensive and efficient way for communities to ensure that the professionals looking after their water and wastewater have access to adequate training and development opportunities.

New North, in overseeing the organization, agenda, administration as well as funding, for the event, is able to provide the operators with a comfortable learning and networking environment.

With the Waterworks workshop, New North in 2013-14 continued to show its commitment to providing capacity building projects for northern communities. With the increasing emphasis of the provincial government on the safety of drinking water, the New North Waterworks will continue to play a critical role in helping municipalities maintain the high standards of water quality northern residents expect and deserve.



New North Scholarship

The year saw the launching of New North’s very own scholarship. Stemming from an idea by the Mayor of Buffalo Narrows, Estelle Laliberte, the New North Board voted in 2014 to initiate the New North Public Administration and Leadership Scholarship, which opened for applications in late April.

The scholarship is designed to provide financial assistance to students enrolled in studies related to public administration or leadership, which might include courses as diverse as Accounting and Commerce, Public Health, Law, Politics, and even the Local Government Administration diploma.



Administrators Conference

Meeting the ongoing professional development and training needs of municipal administrators and clerks has been repeatedly identified as key to enlarging the governance capacity of northern communities.

The issue, though, has been finding the best way to provide cost-effective, as well as purposeful and instructive, development opportunities.

With Northern Municipal Services providing the vital intellectual and financial support, more than a dozen administrators from across the north gathered at the La Ronge Hotel to take a small step in the right direction.

NMS Manager Hasan Akhtar led a refresher course on various aspects of the relevant legislation as well recapitulated the critical role that administrators play in municipal governance. Contributing to the lively discussions were Municipal Advisors Bruce Leier and Val Antonik, with Executive Director Brad Henry also popping in.

The afternoon saw an overview of the privacy and freedom of information legislation, a particularly topical intervention that many agreed probably could have come a lot earlier in everyone's careers.

The feedback from the administrators was overwhelmingly positive, with most suggesting that such events could be held more regularly. Areas of need identified by administrators as requiring attention include the mentoring of young and new administrators, bylaw officer training, and training related to human resources, asset management, among many others.

As much as anything else, though, administrators appreciated the networking opportunities; the many and ongoing side-bar conversations were probably as instructive and useful as the organized sessions.

New North's pursuit of the professional development needs of municipal administrators fits with our mission of providing capacity building initiatives for the northern municipalites.

“The LGA course is a good base, but really does not prepare anyone as a first time administrator coming into these positions.” Administrator Survey Respondent



Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention

Northern communities received welcome news during 2013 with the renewed focus of the provincial government on the very high rate of suicide in the north. During the year, the New North Executive, through Chair Georgina Jolibois and Val Deschambeault, lobbied the Minister of Government Relations, Hon. Jim Reiter, to continue to provide resources and funding to deal with the social crises wrought by the high number of suicides.

In June, New North joined the Embracing Life Committee as host and financial manager of the Embracing Life: Suicide, Prevention and Intervention Workshop. Held in October, the event was the public launching site of the Embracing Life initiative, aimed at bringing education, awareness as well as devising community-led strategies, around the prevention, intervention and postvention of suicide.

The workshop engaged over 150 people over two days, and attracted extensive attention from print, television and radio. The Embracing Life Committee received recognition at the Health Quality Awards in 2014, with committee member, Marie Mihalicz, from Beauval, receiving individual recognition for her efforts in her community.

Education

During November, participants from various municipalities in the NSAD attended the Northern Education Gathering held at the E.A Rawlinson Centre in Prince Albert. Hosted by New North in partnership with Northlands College and the Northern Labour Market Committee, the key objective of the Gathering was to engage the community and stakeholders in:

- Creating inspiration and excitement for people who work in education in the north
- Share thought-provoking information, stories and materials
- Identify and share best practices in education
- Showcase “home grown learnings” about education in the north
- Provide networking opportunities to connect, build capacity
find creative ways of improving attendance rates and achievement levels in northern schools

Over two days, participants engaged in dialogue on a number of themes, including the indigenization of learning curriculum. Ways of blending “European” style educational environments with land-based curriculum were discussed along with the issues surrounding the promotion and implementation Aboriginal language and culture in the classroom.

The success of the Northern Education Gathering has generated considerable support among the education fraternity in the north for more gatherings this coming year.

New North: Partner in Consultation

Since New North's inception in 1996, we have grown to establish ourselves as one of the three peak municipal associations in Saskatchewan. As the relationship between the municipal sector and the provincial government matures over time, there will be an increasing need for associations like New North to be as vigilant, and as present, as ever in its role as a northern advocate.

Lobbying and advocacy happens on a big scale as well as on a small stage. It can happen in high-powered ministerial meetings and in the offices of government workers. As the representative body of the northern municipal sector, New North sits at a number of provincial and regional tables. In serving its role as an advocate for northern interests, New North is a participant on the provincial government's Long Term Infrastructure Committee and the Municipal Sector Strategic Partnership. As well, we are one of the partnering organizations of the Municipal Leadership Development Program.

In the course of the year, an increasing part of New North's ongoing and daily activities has been to monitor and provide consultation to the provincial government on proposed legislative and policy changes. In doing this, New North works closely with other municipal organizations, such as SUMA and SARM, to ensure that northern municipal interests are being looked after.



Premier Hon. Brad Wall (right) is pictured with New North Chair, Georgina Jolibois

Examples of New North's consultative work include submissions to government on its new Provincial Disability Strategy, providing a northern perspective on proposed changes to liquor regulations, taking a position on the effect of some of the sections being introduced in the new Government Relations Administrations Act, and ensuring changes to the Saskatchewan Housing Corporations's social housing policy, rent-to-income policy are fair and equitable, to name only a few.

The New North Executive retains a critical role in pushing issues forward in its meetings with senior government officials as well as government ministers. The New North Executive met formally with the ministers of Environment, Government Relations, and Policing and Corrections as well as Justice to discuss police funding models in northern Saskatchewan. The Executive also met with many Deputy Ministers, and ADMs.

Although New North did not succeed in resurrecting the ministerial roundtable concept last year, it is still believed that this is an important course for us to take in the coming year, as it often enables a very broad range of issues to be covered in a short time. As well, given the interlocking, cross-ministerial nature of many (if not all) issues, having the key stakeholders and decision-makers together in a single, preferably locked room, is considered by New North to be the ideal setting for us to make our case.

Communications

Given the large number of events New North hosted and was involved in, it is not surprising that the organization registered quite a number of media mentions last year.

In April 2013, New North was asked for comment by the Star Phoenix on Brad Wall's ill-advised remarks about Cameco's role as a "program" in the north. In an article about Mr Wall's suggestion that Cameco did a better job of providing training and other opportunities than government, New North CEO, Al Loke, responded that "you can't expect a private company to look after the north."

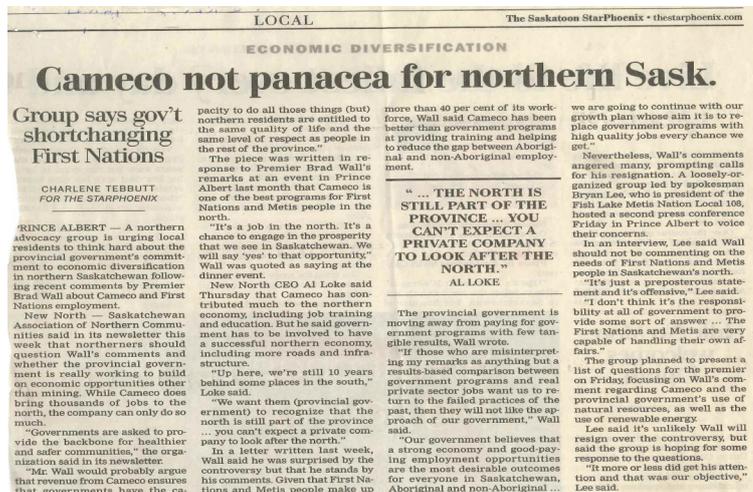
In addition, New North board members were interviewed in the press and on radio about a diverse range of issues, including housing, and suicide intervention and prevention. Board member Val Deschambeault featured prominently as the "face" (quite literally!) of an article in the Prince Albert Daily Herald on the northern housing crisis.

New North submitted a steady stream of press releases during the year that also garnered mentions in the print media and on radio. New North continues to receive a very good reception from MBC, who consistently respond with favourable coverage of issues that New North brings to their attention.

In honouring its commitment to a new Communications Strategy, the New North office continues to work hard to ensure that the lines of communication to communities is as open and as transparent as possible.

The New North newsletter is now a regular monthly

occurrence, and attempts to supply a reasonable mixture of information and commentary.



In June 2014, New North will launch its new website, with a raft of features that will enable members much greater insight into the affairs of the organization. With a dedicated members section, the website will allow members (with a password) to see correspondence that New North receives and sends out, as well as the status of the many and various consultations we are involved in on members' behalf.



New North — Saskatchewan Association of Northern Services executive director and Cumberland House Mayor Valerie Deschambeault stands in front of a banner at the 2013 Northern Housing Summit, which took place from June 12-13 at the E.A. Rawlinson Centre. Herald photo by Matt Gardner

Summit tackles challenges of northern housing

New North's Member Events

Mayor and Councillor Meeting, November 14, 2013

The November meeting saw CEO Al Loke introduce New North's Bylaw Officer options review, which proposed, among other things, that a centrally-organized and administered bylaw officer

Turnor Lake and Green Lake raised the problem of what to do about landfills reaching their used-by date. Both communities have had to explore alternative waste management options with the closure of their local sites.

The RCMP and Ministry of Corrections announced the \$7,000 per community grants for

Community Police Boards. Also on the agenda for the day included a discussion of the new Capital Grants Program, and the proposed Phase 4 of the Northern Water and Sewer program.

Prior to lunch, the Mayor of Prince Albert, Greg Dionne, spoke about the exciting challenges of being mayor, including that of dealing with government regulations. After lunch, the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's Roger Parenteau provided an overview of the new income-based rent structure for social housing.

Mayor and Councillor Meeting, March 7, 2014

The meeting was attended by more than 60 people, including ADM Keith Comstock (Government Relations) and ADM Laurie Pushor (Economy).

Keith Comstock provided an overview of the New Building Canada Fund recently announced by the federal government. Of note was that the \$427 million in funding for Saskatchewan over the next 10 years will be split into two streams. 10% of the fund will be available to communities with populations under 100,000 to compete for. The other 90% is open for everyone, but is intended for projects that are of a regional or national interest. In the north, the distribution of the BCF has not been done on a per capita basis.

The Gas Tax Program is also in the works, and has a total of \$56 million available for the next two years. The money is distributed on a per capita basis, and will begin rolling out in August.

Later, during general discussion, a suggestion was made that there ought to be a northern representative on the selection committee of the Building Canada Fund, if such a position was made available. After nominations and further discussion, Duane Favel was elected as the northern representative.

Executive Director of Northern Municipal Services, Brad Henry, updated everyone on the new round of Municipal Operating Grants (MOG), otherwise known as the revenue sharing distribution. The amount available in the northern pool is \$500,000 (2.8%) less than last year, at about \$19.1 million. This 2.8% drop will not affect everyone equally. However, municipalities were informed that next year's MOG would be higher, probably by around 10%.

Brad Henry also provided an update on the thinking around how municipalities would contribute to the funding of the Northern Water and Sewer (NWS) program. Mr Henry noted that at the last New North meeting there was support for municipalities using a portion of the MOG to help fund their contribution.

Late, in discussion, it was agreed that a special New North meeting would be held in La Ronge to discuss this issue further (that meeting took place on March 20th).

The Assistant Deputy Minister of the Ministry of the Economy, Laurie Pushor, spoke of the provincial government's economic plan, as well as outlined some of the problems faced by the province. The ministry is seeing capital expenditures decreasing after the boom. The ADM defended

the reworking of the uranium royalty structure, which he said was needed to enable the miners to compete on the world market. He noted that the forestry industry was making a comeback after the industry's collapse. Of great interest in this regard is the ministry's efforts to persuade SaskPower to be a partner in the biomass industry.

When questioned about a possible northern economic strategy, Mr Pushor responded that

Mayor and Councillor Meeting, March 3, 2013

The May 3rd meeting in 2013 was attended by more than 40 elected officials and administrators from across the north. The before-lunch agenda included an update from the Strategic Communications Plan, as well as a presentation by Thomas Sierzycki, the Coordinator for the Community Vitality Monitoring Partnership. Mayors and Councillors also had an opportunity to come to the microphone to help set the policy agenda for the New North executive.

Issues raised by elected officials included cell coverage, power outages, roads, long-term care facilities, as well as some issues New North is already working on, such as housing. A fairly in-depth discussion was also had on the issue of community-based sentencing, brought forward by the elected officials from Buffalo Narrows and spoken on by Mayor Estelle Laliberte. This issue—that drug offenders are being put back into communities—is one that the New North executive, with the support of members, will be pushing hard on in the coming months.

The afternoon session was a highlight of the day, with two ministers, the Hon. Jim Reiter, Minister of Government Relations, and Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff, engaging in both a formal and informal dialogue with the northern elected officials.

Mr Cheveldayoff announced that the ministry was writing-off the wildfire cost-recovery expenses for six affected communities. Although

he believed the government was “strategized out.” However, some ways in which his ministry could help with a strategy would be to provide a planning template, called an “A3.” The ministry also conducts supply chain analysis, and that information might be useful in enabling communities to identify gaps. The ADM committed his ministry to helping New North put together an economic strategy.

the ministry did not provided details to New North, it is believed these costs relate to provincial fire-fighting support provided to communities on the west side over the last few summers. The announcement was a welcome one to northerners, and to the New North executive, which has been lobbying strongly on this issue for some time. The waiving of costs is an indication that the ministry is listening to the concerns of northern municipalities, and is consistent with its goal to achieve a fair and balanced result in its dealings with northerners.

Mr Reiter provided more details about the ministry's distribution of the Municipal Operating Grants (MOG), which includes \$500,000 for waste-water redesign work, and \$250,000 for capacity building projects.

The final presentation of the day was from Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's Northern Director Roger Parenteau and Executive Director Dianne Baird. Their presentation focused on the changes to the rental caps for social housing. Initially, the policy raising the rental cap on social housing to 30% appeared to send the rent of those on high incomes into the stratosphere. Sask Housing indicated that there would be a “community market” rental cap as well, that will limit the maximum to \$1200 per month.

New North Issues and Briefs

The following section contains summaries of some of the briefing notes, position papers and commentary that have been made available through the year. The positions that are outlined here do not necessarily represent an official New North position, but are rather produced for the purpose of discussion.

Key Themes of New North Lobbying Agenda

We ask that the province consult and work more extensively, cooperatively and openly with the communities of northern Saskatchewan to address the most common problems faced by northerners:

- Very large geographic area with poor or inadequate road connections
- Lower than average median household incomes
- Very high rates of unemployment, high rates of dependency
- High vulnerability of households on fixed incomes; very high cost of living; very poor health outcomes
- Very low housing vacancy rates
- Lack of emergency shelters
- Substandard educational outcomes

Highways and Roads

Key Messages

- Northern road repair/reconstructions do not rate highly (if at all) in the ministry's long-term capital works program
- At least three northern roads are regularly in the top ten in the CAA's Worst Roads in Saskatchewan list.

In order to ensure provincial largesse is spread evenly and equitably throughout the province, the ministry ought to provide a focus to road prioritization that does not exclude, and in fact considers, the health, safety and vitality of northern communities.

As a matter of course, absolute priority in the allocation of road funding ought to be given to projects that provide communities with basic access. Community access roads that represent a community's only means of getting in and out, and which are periodically or seasonally inaccessible or impassable, ought to be prioritized.

Northern Housing Issues

Key Messages

- With rapidly increasing population rates in northern Saskatchewan, rental accommodation options need immediate attention
- The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's extensive stock of social housing is ageing, and not being replaced
- With rising wages in some parts, northerners are increasingly hungry for home-ownership options
- The construction of new housing must be viewed as serving economic development needs
- Governments, in partnership with municipalities, need to find ways of generating "seed" capital for community-driven, private housing developments

Housing will continue to dominate public policy debates over the next decade. Housing policy in Canada has traditionally been the domain of the federal government, and it continues to provide more than half of all money spent by governments on housing. While nowadays the provincial government is the delivery mechanism for housing funding, their hands are often tied in how they can use it. The government has used creative ways to free up federal money for housing (the Headstart on a Home program, for instance), but such opportunities don't come along very often.

In northern Saskatchewan, the "housing market" in many communities is simply the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's stock of social and affordable housing. The heavy reliance of northerners on government housing means that market-based solutions to increasing housing options needs to be seriously rethought for the north.

To begin with, northern Saskatchewan communities--which includes First Nations--have shown a willingness to embark on "social housing" construction which, in some cases, appears to be very successful. The impediment preventing the wider use of these types of programs is the "seed" funding needed to get them off the ground.

Mandatory Training for Elected Officials

Key Messages:

- Adequate training for elected officials is essential to developing higher standards of governance in the north
- There are no constitutional or other impediments to requiring mandatory training as long as it is done fairly and non-discriminatorily
- Already-elected officials could be "grandfathered" in (that is, excluded from the policy)

No country, state, province or municipality has a program of mandatory training for elected officials. However, municipal governments, despite their being subject to same basic democratic process as other levels of elected government, are enabled with considerable flexibility as to who can hold office, and under what circumstances. In Canada, municipalities are not subject to "right to vote or hold office" provisions of the Charter of Rights. They are subject to provisions related to discrimination, however, so any mandatory training scheme would need substantial popular support and justification from municipalities. Northern Saskatchewan could "put itself on the map" if it pursued this.

Long-term Care

Key Messages

- The time is right for governments to provide funding for seniors to stay in their home communities
- Remote and northern communities have historically felt the brunt of government neglect on this issue

While chiefly the jurisdiction of the Health Authorities, the under-provision of long-term care facilities in northern Saskatchewan has telling impacts on municipalities. With average life-span of northerners increasing--although not as quickly as in the south--there will be a growing need in the north for age facilities.

As well, as a result of life-style and other historical factors, health indicators suggest that northerners are more likely to suffer from critical and chronic illnesses than residents in the south. Ironically, although such illnesses lead to a proportionately greater and growing need for long-term care facilities, the north has a total of just 14 beds available, resulting in a waiting list of dozens.

Volunteer Firefighters

Key Messages

- A combination of municipal, provincial and federal approaches might could be used to ensure an adequate supply of incentives to encourage the enlistment of volunteer fire fighters
- Joining with existing lobbying efforts to redirect provincial taxes on fire insurance to municipal services might be an appropriate direction for New North to take

Since 2011, volunteer firefighters have been able to claim a non-refundable exemption of up to 15% of the first \$3000 of taxable income, or the first \$1000 of their allowance if they receive an honorarium.

Options to improve enlistment and retention of volunteer firefighters might include:

1. Federal government to amend legislation to increase tax exemptions on income and allowances
2. Municipal Tax Abatement for Volunteer Firefighters
3. A provincial government re-fundable tax credit. For example, in Nova Scotia, volunteer fire fighters are able to receive a \$500 refundable tax credit (which would cost the government approximately \$3.5 million a year).

The Saskatchewan Fire Chiefs have lobbied the provincial government to release the \$3.5 million dollars they collect in fire insurance taxes to local fire halls to help improve service, equipment levels, etc.

Mineral Resource Infrastructure Contribution

Key Messages

- Municipalities of northern Saskatchewan supply a considerable amount of labour, infrastructure, and “good will” that contributes to Saskatchewan being one of the best places in the world for miners to make money
- The debate about mineral resource “revenue sharing” needs to be radically shifted from its present position

Northern municipalities across the country, not just in Saskatchewan, have remarkably similar positions on resource revenue sharing. They want to see more of it.

Governments’ position is rarely as explicitly stated than in the 1993 report, very aptly-named “The Government’s Position on Proposed Uranium Mining Development in Northern Saskatchewan.”

In it, the provincial government of the day acknowledged the view of northerners that the “benefits of uranium mining go primarily to northerners”; and a “desire for greater economic self-sufficiency.” However, it rejected the idea of revenue sharing as a way of achieving these objectives. Instead, the report proposes (and the government followed-up with) a number of programs to help diversify the northern economy, provide more opportunities for northerners to find work in the industry, and so on.

(As a side note, it is interesting, looking around now, at how many of those programs have been de-funded over the years--the latest, and possibly last, being the Northern Development Fund, in the recent provincial budget.)

The key argument by government at that time as to why revenue sharing was not a preferred policy option is that it is not “appropriate for governments to collect revenues and allocate expenditures on a regional basis. Revenues must be collected on the understanding that they will be used in accordance with where they are most needed where they can achieve the most public good.” Besides, the report went on, the government already spends more in the north than it takes out in revenue.

The appeal to “public policy” objectives (that is, the achievement of the best outcome given the limited resources available) would be fine, except that it glossed over the point that revenue sharing is exactly about whether resources are being allocated fairly and adequately, and who should be making those decisions. By and large, the argument about resource revenue sharing, as it is proposed by northerners, is really not simply about money, but about control.

Much later, when the northern municipalities approached the uranium miners for an annual dividend, they did so with the aim of using it to (re)build infrastructure: landfills, water and sewer systems, roads, community buildings. Infrastructure like this is intended to last several generations. There was implicit in the argument by New North that mining should have long-term benefits for the municipalities--benefits that may outlive mining operations themselves. So, revenue sharing is a way for northern municipalities and other communities to create their own kind of policy about how corporations ought to be relating to the world in which they operate, and the legacy that they ought to be leaving behind. This is the terrain upon which arguments about resource revenue sharing ought to be conducted upon.

Bylaw Enforcement Officers (BEOs)

Key Messages

- Regional approach to bylaw officers (BEOs) is appropriate, feasible and has community support
- Main issue will be finding support from funding partners to get the program off the ground
- Any program will need to be supported by training
- Creating a program with a focus on dog control is essential

Options for Bylaw Officer Deployment in Northern Saskatchewan

1. Each municipality employs its own BEO (ie, La Ronge, Prince Albert)
2. An officer is located within a regional centre and serves surrounding communities. Although legally employed by one municipality, the communities would sign on to an agreement whereby the costs of the officer would be shared, with each community contributing in some part to that cost. The officer would visit each community on a rotational basis. The municipalities could form an agency or corporation to facilitate and coordinate the agreement, similar to the models used in the various agreements in the La Ronge-Air Ronge-Lac La Ronge area.
3. An officer would be located and employed by a particular municipality. Their services to surrounding communities would be on a fee-for-service (or contractual) basis.
4. A non-municipal agency or entity could be asked to take the legal responsibility of employing a BEO. Municipalities could contract services as required.

Option 1 is suitable to large municipalities, or municipalities with significant financial capacity. Research by SARM suggests that most non-city municipalities that go this way underemploy their BEO. Any municipality that employed their own BEO in the north would be advised to follow options 2 or 3, and create agreements with surrounding municipalities. The research in large urban areas (mainly the cities), by contrast, shows that BEOs are highly utilized, to the extent that these communities are not willing to sub-contract their BEOs to other communities.

New North research suggests that the most oftenly required service of a bylaw officer would be dog control. It is entirely possible, therefore, that rather than go down the BEO path, municipalities would be better off focussing on seeking regional solutions to the dog issue.

Solid Waste Management

Key Messages:

- Adequate solid waste options for northern residents are important to continue to improve the quality of life and well-being of northerners
- Recycling solutions need not be large-scale; municipalities and the government can begin the process of changing attitudes to recycling in all communities with “small step” solutions. e.g. locating portable recycling trailers in communities that can be transported by an ordinary sized pickup truck
- Government and municipalities need to work out a way to fund landfills for the course of their life-cycle (ie, asset management)
- Regionalization is not a lost cause; however, if pursued it should not distract from dealing with more immediate concerns
- Northern municipalities and government need to keep the lines of communication open to deal with issues that are systemic in nature

Partly in response to public concerns, and partly as a result of making up for years of policy neglect, the costs to municipalities of providing solid waste management to residents has grown in recent years. They will continue to grow into the future.

At present, most municipal landfills in northern Saskatchewan still have significant life left in them. At the same time, most municipal landfills are non-compliant or borderline non-compliant with provincial regulations.

For northern municipalities, the key issues are:

- Lack of recycling capacity--limiting the life-span of solid waste sites by as much as a third
- Underfunding of site maintenance
- Little to no capacity to charge user fees
- Heavy, if not total, reliance on revenue sharing to cover all costs related to waste management
- Some landfills closure, with a prohibitively high cost of site decommissioning
- Limited or no co-ordination of costs with communities that share the site

The Ministry of Environment has indicated that it does not require that closed landfills need to be immediately decommissioned. The ministry has also indicated (as much through its actions) that it does not take a summary view of non-compliance, but is rather interested in working with municipalities to find solutions to problem issues.

New North-SANC Services, Est. 1996

There are some of our achievements over the years:

- Initiated Victim Services in the Far North
 - Successfully lobbied for a \$4.5 million commitment to infrastructure
 - Negotiated an extension of the Remote Housing Program
 - Brought together northern people to act as a single voice in dealing with issues affecting the north
 - Negotiated the Mortgage Discount Option Program, which has given opportunities for northerners to become home-owners
 - Successfully lobbied for the establishment of the Northern Municipal Trust Account
 - Lobbied for a major water and sewage study for the north
 - Lobbied for stronger laws around liquor, including the ban of bottled liquor containers in the north
- ...and much, much more!