

Upcoming

New North  
Newly Elected Training  
March

Saskatchewan Association of  
Northern Communities

NEW  
NORTH

Inside

- COVID Vaccines Dry Up
- Municipal Legislative Authority Tested Again
- Council Remuneration Policies
- COVID Employee Policies
- NMTA Gets Annual Thrashing
- Nearby Dog Asked to Sit in on Webex for a Quick Second

Monthly-ish Newsletter  
January 2021

## “What Else Can We Give ‘Em?” Province Probably Wondering as Vaccine Supplies Dry Up

Social media feeds came alive with snaps of bemused northerners exposing their wanly naked arms and gamely shooting a “thumbs up” as they too demonstrated that they were up for whatever the ice-bucket challenge version of getting a COVID-19 vaccination is, which, as it turns out, is just getting the COVID-19 vaccination.

After initially dissing the far north east “zone,” wiser, and likely more numerate, heads soon prevailed within SHA, as both sides of the north saw doses arriving via aircraft during the first weeks of January.

The Northern Village of Pinehouse Lake, which spontaneously orchestrated their own major outbreak to prove a point, is still, as of writing, proving that point.

It turns out that the province’s discovery of the far north east zone on a map they had themselves created and subsequent decision to send doses there was linked to a loosening of the guidelines around whether to hold back sufficient numbers of vaccines to administer a second dose, necessary to bring the vaccine’s tech-sheet stated effectiveness to 95%. While one dose is still good, people really need two doses, the second one within a month of the first.

In a declaration so resplendent with hubris that even Greek tragedians would probably have thought it was too over the top, the province said that they felt they didn’t need to hold back any doses because the supply chain was looking pretty, *pretty* secure, based on guidance from the feds.

After the feds denied any knowledge of that, the province confessed that, yes, it was all them, and then, in a show that everything was in hand, went back to their wedding preparations.

The feds did release a document detailing expected vaccine deliveries until the end of March, which showed Saskatchewan getting about 19,000 Moderna vaccines—the ones that the north gets—before February 28. Based on the January numbers, virtually every dose administered in the last two weeks of February will need to be earmarked as a “second dose” in order to stay within the warranty.

The chart containing the Pfizer distribution list was taken offline mid-month when the company said they were cutting

their supplies in half to focus on “other projects” including a new smallpox vaccine and an album of Beatles covers.

In an outcome as inevitable as who’d get pinned for it, by the last week of January the province had declared that they had no doses left, neither the Moderna or the Pfizer. They blamed the feds, of course, for not securing enough.

All in all, as of writing, the province had administered more than 33,000 vaccines—at a rate of about 1000 a day—and was on pace to have everyone in province done by 2025, at which time most of us will already have moved on to wondering if yogurt is fattening.

There had been 3,493 Moderna doses administered in the far north zones through January. The original plan released in December said authorities were aiming to administer 18,000 doses in Phase 1. They will effectively be half way there by mid-February when another expected 6000 doses arrives (assuming they go north)—since every person needs two doses to complete the course.

Although COVID case numbers in Saskatchewan continue to fall, especially in the north, there doesn’t as yet appear to be a link between vaccination rates and a decrease in new infection rates.

A complicating factor is that the vaccine doesn’t really develop its ability to protect against COVID right away. People are still vulnerable for at least a week if not longer, and maximum efficacy doesn’t really occur until after the second dose.

A Long Term Care home in Saskatoon claimed that seven residents developed COVID following a vaccination raid in the complex a week earlier, although, for reasons known only to them, they couldn’t say if those who’d come down with COVID had actually been vaccinated, or just seen something about it on TV.

Apart from that, the most common “adverse reaction,” as they call it, appears to be a tenderness around the site of the jab and some post-vaccination garment reassembly issues.

In late news, Johnson & Johnson have released their Phase 3 clinical trial data. While their vaccine is less effective at preventing COVID than the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, it should be outstanding at preventing nappy rash.

## Survey Bonanza Coming

If you want to know what anyone is thinking a good strategy is to go up and ask them. If you want to know what a lot of people are thinking, you do a survey.

Or you bug their phone, like Google does.

Surveys are useful for planning purposes. They can inform and even dictate a course of action. For no particular reason, New North will be doing a lot of surveying in the next few weeks. We're sorry about that; it's just how life is sometimes.

### Water Operator Training Needs

A survey which should be out by the time you've already deleted this newsletter will ask about water operator training needs. The last year or so has been a tough one for anyone needing to do training, and operators need training to maintain their certification. We normally stage a waterworks workshop every year to take care of that for our northern operators, but it's the second year of the pandemic and, well, we haven't done anything lately and aren't really planning to until normality resumes. ATAP is offering some online content—which is basically just their regular CEU courses but online. We want to know if the current offerings are hitting the mark or if we should be doing more.

### Technology and Connectivity Needs Assessment

Linked to the above, we want to know how municipalities are set in terms of being able to participate in online training, webinars and calls over the internet with government officials on platforms like zoom, Webex, Microsoft Teams, and Clueless Individuals—our favourite—which is just talking at a black screen for 40 minutes.

### Financial Sustainability and COVID Impact

We are also working with a grant from Western Diversification to assess the financial impact of COVID on municipalities. Roy Anderson and Associates will be conducting a survey and interviews on our behalf to help New North assess the short and potential long-term impact of COVID on municipal finances and municipal development corporation business activities.

### New North Strategic Planning

The New North Executive will undertake their strategic planning in the next month or so, and they are hoping New North members and anyone else with an opinion can help them set New North's priorities for the next four years. In a survey conducted by HMC Management, members will be asked to identify risks, threats, opportunities and a variety of common insects.

## Municipalities of Saskatchewan Convention Underway Soon

This is the first of their conventions since Municipalities of Saskatchewan, or Munisask, as it's come to be known, adopted a new name and logo, and the first, and hopefully last, to be delivered virtually.

It is one of the many conventions going around that will be conducted, and attended, entirely by people sorting washing, putting dishes away, cowering in quiet places away from noisy kids, and doing a variety of unrelated activities including attending other less interesting conventions.

The theme of Convention is Stronger Together, which they stole from Hillary's 2016 campaign, who stole it from the Beatles. The logo consisting of five colourful location pin emojis, with an additional one on top signifying a head, is clever and represents the fact we will all be located somewhere in a virtual space and additionally that quite a lot of us could stand to lose some weight. Thanks, Munisask, for pointing that out.

Being virtual hasn't really changed the nature of the agenda, which is the usual gladbag of municipal-related content, because what would you expect? Alanis Morissette? Well I would too, but maybe next year.

They have brought the velvet-throated Danny Hooper back to reprise his role as the human suntan and somehow MC.

The Premier's address will probably mention COVID once or twice because Moe likes to stay topical but keener ears will be listening for any hint of what may be in store for the provincial budget.

The Leader of the Official Opposition's address will not be the same PO Box as last year, as apparently he's moved.

The Northern Regional Sector meeting is usually a blast and this year has particular novelty for us because the topic is "Government Relations' Role in Northern Communities," but mainly because we are also on that panel and ought to show some interest in it.

## From the New North Chair

By Bruce Fidler

**N**ext month the New North Executive will come together for a strategic planning session which will provide us with a road map for the next four years or so.

We think the last road map we did was quite successful, even with COVID trying to derail what we were doing.

I don't know what the vision the Executive will have for the association will be, but I do know that embarking on this journey is a necessary one, for many reasons.

With the new municipal cycle just starting, I think every one of our communities would benefit from strategic planning, no matter how big or small they are.

For one thing, going through these kind of sessions allows everyone to air an opinion which can help us to understand each others' priorities as individuals representing our

communities. It can be a good time to "clear the air," so to speak, and find common ground.

I highly recommend the MLDP Strategic Planning module, which New North has hosted from time to time, and which now can be taken online. Find out more information at [www.mldp.ca](http://www.mldp.ca).

Another thing you might want to look at to support your council undertake some capacity building activity is the Targeted Sector Support Initiative. This program will provide up to 75% of the funding of a project related to regional co-operation, governance and administration enhancement. Municipalities can get money to undertake some kind of newly elected training which can be targeted to your particular council needs.

Go to the New North website at [www.newnorthsask.org](http://www.newnorthsask.org) to find an application guide.

## Provincial Auditor's Annual Slaying of NMTA Makes a Point, We're Just Not Sure What it is

**T**he Northern Municipal Trust Account, or NMTA, is a pool of money set up to capture an assortment of revenues generated in the area known as the Northern Saskatchewan Administrative District (NSAD) from things like mining leases and property sales for expenditures related to the operation of the NSAD as a municipality and for a range of programs that benefit northern municipalities, such as the Northern Capital Grants Program, the Northern Water and Sewer Program, the Northern Subdivision program, and many others. The NMTA is also where municipal revenue sharing goes before it is distributed to the northern municipalities. The NMTA has an advisory board appointed from among northern elected officials and certified administrators. Staff from Northern Municipal Services administer the fund. Annual turnover is about \$30 million.

A few year years ago the provincial auditor got wind of its existence and now, pretty much annually, takes a stab at it.

Among the deficiencies identified by the provincial auditor this year include the spending of \$2.3 million on the municipalities' share of the new landfill built outside La Ronge.

In reflecting on this, the provincial auditor determined that "\$1.8 million of the \$2.3 million is a grant (government transfer) because the amount paid benefits municipalities who are not part of the Northern Saskatchewan Administration District ... Neither *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010* nor *The Northern Municipalities Regulations* provide clear authority for the Trust Account to make a grant for landfills."

The determination seems consistent with those other programs having specific authorizations in the Regulations.

The auditor remarks that "[m]aking grant payments without clear legislative authority increases the risk of making payments that are inconsistent with the mandate of the Trust Account."

Perhaps interesting out of all of this is the formalization of the notion that the NMTA is primarily a resource to support the District, and only secondarily, subject to specific (and time-consuming authorization via amendments to the Regulations), for the benefit of the northern municipalities or anyone else.

In the early days of the formation of the NMTA Management Board (in those days it was the Northern Revenue Sharing Trust Account, or NRSTA), the presence of government officials at advisory board meetings was at the discretion of the board, such was the feeling that the funds of the NMTA could be spent at the board's discretion, and that the role of the ministry was just there to rubber stamp their decisions.

Now, we see a fairly resounding reversal of the notion, sometimes held by northern leaders, that the NMTA is "our money." It clearly isn't, and apparently never was.

New North will be seeking clarity as to the exact nature of the role of the NMTA in the north, and more to the point, the role of the Management Board, in light of the provincial auditor report.

# Municipality Ordered to Have New Election After Court Challenge

Northern Municipalities are nothing if not innovators. We see this time again. A lot of their innovative spirit comes from the limited tools they have available to them, and necessity is the mother of invention, as they say.

For better or worse, there are always limits, as the efforts of the Northern Village of Buffalo Narrows to write their own election bylaws illustrates. The plan came unstuck when the Court of Queens Bench ordered a new election following a resident's application to the court claiming their bylaw was ultra vires, or at the very least, medium vires.

According to reports, the northern village's bylaw disqualified anyone from running in their November municipal election if they had a criminal record, or owed money to the municipality. The bylaw, according to media reports, disqualified 14 people who had sought to run.

Neither criteria is outlandish, as there are precedents for both. For example, in Alberta you are ineligible to run if you are more than \$50 in arrears on your taxes, or if you've been convicted of municipal elections Act violations in the last 10 years, which, quite frankly, who hasn't been.

The Lac La Ronge Indian Band's election act disqualifies anyone with a criminal conviction within the last five years, as well as anyone who has a debt to the Band. The Band's criteria have not been successfully challenged in court, despite being subject of a judicial review. The northern village perhaps took note of that when crafting their own election bylaw.

The northern village's election bylaw, in other words, didn't have anything in it that wasn't unreasonable or unprecedented, or anything that hasn't been contemplated by other municipalities. In the north, for example, you are

required to submit a criminal record check with your nomination papers. The criminal conviction prohibition is really just a practical extension of that kind of thinking.

The problem with the bylaw is that municipalities don't really have the authority to make up their own eligibility criteria for municipal elections to begin with. Although municipalities are told in *The Northern Municipalities Act* that they can make laws for the "the peace, order and good government of the municipality," and that this may be interpreted broadly, the rule of thumb is that if another level of government higher than a municipality—and let's face it, they are all higher—has already got legislation pertaining to that area, then the municipality shouldn't go there, and if they do, to examine very carefully the authority they are given, if any, to play around with.

The very existence of *The Local Government Elections Act*, in other words, is itself telling you that municipalities should be very careful about "innovating" in this area. After all, the argument goes, if the provincial government had wanted to further limit eligibility for municipal office—ruling out anyone who's bad at break-ups, for example—they would have done so.

This is in contrast to First Nations, which are given explicit authority to "customize" their election "acts" based on their own traditions. Municipalities are not given that authority.

None of this is to say that we may never see a time when municipalities, like First Nations, won't be able to make their own election laws. Charter principles will certainly come into play then. One thing we can be sure of is that if and when they are given that authority, northern municipalities will somehow be at the bleeding edge of it.

## MLDP Modules are Now Available as Webinars

The Municipal Leadership Development Program has for well over a decade been the main venue for municipal elected and appointed officials to get training on municipal-related things.

The units or "modules," as they are called, have changed a bit overtime but what hasn't changed is how good they are. What's more, if officials complete six modules in any particular cycle they will be presented with a certificate. It's a bit like collecting Kinder Surprises, although these you can take over the US border.

With COVID, the modules have shifted online and are available as webinars. The cost is the same, and for our money, they are still well worth it.

Upcoming modules are as follows:

Feb 17, 2021, 9am-12.15: Municipal Economic Development Fundamentals

Feb 17, 2021, 9am-12.15: Human Resources in the Municipal Workplace

Feb 24, 2021, 9am-12.00: Strategic and Financial Planning for Municipalities

Feb 24, 2021, 9am-12.00: Public Relations and Communications for Municipalities

**Go to [www.mldp.ca](http://www.mldp.ca) to find out how to register.**

# Elected Officials May Set Own Remuneration, Just Do it Right

Around about this time every election cycle municipal councils across the province will be enjoined to deliberate upon how much money they should be paying themselves to be there, a conversation many find difficult, whether because of a squeamishness about discussing personal financial matters, or because it seems to run counter to a public service ethos of selfless devotion that elected officials are supposed to embody, or because they don't know what money is. For some it just feels like a conflict of interest.

No one should feel awkward about this conversation. They should, rather, take it very seriously; indeed, they have a duty to deal with it.

*The Northern Municipalities Act* provides no guidance as to how much elected officials should get. This is a surprise to many: the municipal world is so tightly controlled by the province that it seems a staggering oversight that they haven't taken a firm hand to councillor pay.

In point of fact, most jurisdictions allow a kind of "community standard" to prevail in setting elected official rates of remuneration.

For this to work, of course, councils need to follow the legislation, which commands that decisions about elected remuneration are made in the public eye.

This doesn't always happen. Complaints to the Ombudsman's office about elected official remuneration, which might arise from concerns about sky-high rates of pay, really boil down to the fact that the decisions about it were not done publicly. Had the proper procedure been followed, the investigation wouldn't have gone far enough for us to hear about it.

In instances where an investigation takes place, the OMB's recommendation is always that the council go back and pass the bylaw properly.

Given that there are no set rates, how should council make its decision? Looking at what other municipalities in your bracket are doing is a good place to

start. Annual "salaries" of \$7,000 to \$10,000 for councillors are typical for towns and villages in Saskatchewan. Mayor remuneration can vary quite a lot; it's not unusual for that role to be considered a full time job in the north. Elected officials often receive between \$150 and \$200 for attending meetings out of town, plus mileage. You can use provincial rates as a guide for mileage, which are around .44 cents per kilometre. (At New North we round-up to .50 cents/kilometre, which we apply across all our programs. Federal government rates are .59 cents, but then again they can print their own money.)

Where council can get themselves in trouble is by setting an annual salary without clearly indicating what it covers.

It is little known that council expenses are factored into northern revenue sharing allocations in *The Northern Municipalities Act Regulations*. The specific regulation is in the side bar.

You can figure out your municipality's allocation by following the formula. It might look complicated, but it really isn't.

From time to time, there are discussions about setting hard caps on elected official remuneration, or introducing a body of some type to determine what is fair and reasonable. In some jurisdictions, like in Australia, for example, Remuneration Tribunals have been established with a mandate to review elected official pay. In Saskatchewan, that function could, in theory, be given to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board.

However, it's very unlikely that caps will be introduced. The main obstacle is that it would violate a key principle of municipal revenue sharing (MRS)—that it be unconditional.

The best way to keep a check on elected rates of compensation is by making the process as accessible to public oversight as possible. This will be helped in the next year or two when government operationalizes the new public accounts section of the NMA Regulations, which will require the publishing of all expenditures over a certain dollar figure.

### *The Northern Municipalities Act Regulations*

#### **Northern municipal council costs formula**

**62.2** The northern municipal council costs amount set out in the administration formula in section 62.1 is the amount CC calculated in accordance with the following formula:

$$CC = (C \times (M \times H \times 12)) + (TF \times TM \times 12)$$

where:

C is the actual number of councillors for each municipality;

M is:

(a) the number of regular council meetings per month as determined by each municipality's Council Procedure Bylaw; or

(b) if no bylaw mentioned in clause (a) exists, one;

H is the councillor meeting honouraria, as determined by the minister based on a survey of averages taken from similar municipalities of the same type;

TF is the travel factor cost amount as determined in accordance with the formula set out in section 62.3; and

TM is the travel multiplier cost amount for travel and accommodations and is:

(a) \$2,000 for northern towns and northern villages; and

(b) \$1,000 for northern hamlets.

#### **Travel factor cost formula**

**62.3** The travel factor cost amount set out in the northern municipal council

costs formula in section 62.2 is the amount TF calculated in accordance with the following formula:

$$TF = D \div 129$$

where D is the distance of the municipality from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan measured in kilometres.

### Municipalities & Employee COVID Leave Policies: You Do You

The Federal NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh has called for a more effective federal sickness benefit to ensure the health and safety of workers, adding that it should equal the salary a worker would ordinarily receive.

The current benefit called the Canada Sickness and Recovery Benefit (CRSB) pays \$500 a week, for up to two weeks, to workers who are self-isolating or at high risk of contracting COVID because of a pre-existing health condition. However, the program has come under fire because to qualify workers must have already missed at least half a week of work. Anyone who takes a few days off to get tested and wait for results would not meet that threshold, and therefore would not qualify, according to Singh.

Singh is proposing that workers be covered in “one or two day increments.”

Data suggests that the program is not working as intended, as CRSB applications have fallen even as cases have continued to rise across Canada.

Anecdotally, workers who suspect they are positive are not taking time off work for fear of losing

income. An effective CRSB program would be at the vanguard of halting the spread of COVID.

A survey of northern municipalities shows a mixed bag in terms of those that are continuing to pay regular wages while workers take time off for COVID-related reasons, and those requiring workers to use sick leave or vacation time.

Legislation passed by the province last year only specifies that employers allow workers to take time off without a doctor’s note, or when they’ve been directed to isolate.

It is up to employers to decide if they will pay regular wages to those ordered to isolate.

It is difficult for municipalities to come up with a policy that can be applied consistently to all employees. While some employees can work from home and no doubt are, others, particularly outside workers—like grader drivers—might find “working from home” a challenge. In those cases, employees might be provided other work to go on with more compatible with the size of their lounge room or backyard, or asked to undertake online training.

### Targeted Sector Support Applications Open Again

As part of the latest deal, municipalities agreed that \$1.5 million would be carved off the top of municipal revenue sharing to create a program for municipalities to undertake capacity building initiatives.

That program is called The Targeted Sector Support Initiative.

The TSS Initiative provides cost-shared grants, up to 75 per cent on eligible costs, to municipalities partnering to strengthen their core municipal responsibilities through projects focused on regional co-operation, capacity building and good governance.

The first intake was last year and saw dozens of municipalities from across the province, including a number from the north, diving in to get a piece of the action.

Examples of past TSS-funded projects include training to enhance the governance skills of municipal officials,

developing regional emergency plans, completing a joint parks and recreation plan, coordinating asset management, harmonizing official community plans and zoning bylaws, undertaking a municipal district feasibility study, and various other projects aimed at strengthening collaboration and cooperation among communities.

The second intake is now open. Municipalities can apply in to at least one of the following funding streams:

- dispute resolution and relationship building
- capacity building
- regional co-operation
- municipal transition

Go to the New North website at [www.newnorthsask.org](http://www.newnorthsask.org) to find the application guide.

### SHA Discontinues Northern Daily Case Numbers as “Perpetual Outbreak” Status Ends

When the COVID pandemic began back in March of 2020, we were suddenly faced with a lot of unanswered questions. Can my dog get it? How long before I can go to Mexico? Is civilization ready for JoJo Siwa? There were other questions too, though few as pressing.

Jurisdictions across the globe struggled with the flow of information about the virus. There was so much about it that was unknown. Is it transmitted in the air? On surfaces? Can you get the virus multiple times? Will it like potatoes?

The first case in Saskatchewan was reported to be a man from Saskatoon who had recently travelled. Immediately, it was associated with people going places. That ruled a lot of us out.

Then community transmissions occurred. Health authorities reported where the cases were, as you would expect. But there seemed no reason to be specific; this wasn't a yard sale.

It was enough to know that it was “out there,” seemed to be the provincial health authority's position. They developed a reporting system based on zones. Daily case numbers identified broad trends, but there seemed no benefit in identifying where the cases actually were. After all, no one was supposed to be going anywhere anyway.

And then some big local outbreaks occurred, starting with La Loche. Leaders in that community demanded daily updates, and they got them. Then outbreaks occurred in other northern communities, and the leaders there wanted what La Loche had,

minus the virus. Pretty soon, daily updates were being given to any northern community which asked for them. They were posted on Facebook. For the first time in history, Facebook had a purpose.

This went on for months.

Then, as abruptly as it had begun, it stopped. Not the virus; it was as virulent as ever. Some people thought it was going viral, even.

No, it was the daily updates that stopped. Why? All that reporting was taking up too much time. Speaking of which, the timing couldn't have been worse. At this point, northern Saskatchewan, with less than 4% of the provincial population, had 50% of its active cases.

Pinehouse alone had almost 200.

Daily numbers will still be reported in outbreak situations, of course. That won't change.

Weeks later, Facebook logins are forgotten; social media has become another pointless waste of time, like tennis.

And we sit here wondering: did that experiment of viewing northern communities as if they were in perpetual outbreak serve a purpose? Is there a benefit to daily local case numbers which the authorities took for granted or have overlooked? Would the numbers have been higher without that information?

The northern leaders certainly think so.

### Does “95% Effective” Mean 5 Out of 100 Will Still Get COVID Despite Vaccination? Well ... No

When tabulating instances of astonishingly bad luck, spare a thought for the person that participated in the Moderna vaccine trial, was given the placebo, contracted COVID, and died of complications relating to their diabetes.

Given the 95% efficacy of that vaccine, even for those with conditions like diabetes, had they been given the vaccine in the trial instead of the placebo, they may still be alive. In fact, it's almost certain they would be, since no one in the vaccine cohort died, or even really experienced major “adverse events,” as they put it.

The Moderna vaccine is extraordinarily safe. Of the 600,000 doses administered in Canada by January 9, Health Canada had received only 90 reports of “adverse events” following the vaccination, 27 of which were considered “serious.” Quite often it is unclear whether the serious AEFI (adverse event following immunization) is causally linked to the vaccination, or due, say, to some bad salmon.

The United States FDA's approval of the Moderna vaccine notes similarly that the vaccine is very safe. Common side effects are a sore arm, a bit of fever, wooziness, and a “general sense of ennui,” although they concede the latter may be related to finishing Bridgerton.

Most of us feel a lot worse for a long longer after polishing off a Margaret River Pinot Grigio.

But what do they mean they say it is 95% effective? That 5 out of every 100 will still get COVID even if vaccinated? Sort of. First up, we need to be clear that that 95% is related to “efficacy,” not effectiveness. Even Saskatchewan's own vaccine cheat sheet gets those two mixed up. The efficacy figure of 95% is the Moderna study's statistical determination based on the relation between the number of people in the trial that got the placebo and got COVID, and the number in the vaccine cohort that didn't.

It might be easier to put it like this:

So far, there have been 33,000 vaccinations in Saskatchewan. If we took a random sample of 33,000 who hadn't been vaccinated and compared them to the 33,000 which had, this is what we'd come up with—based on Moderna's figures: 15 out of 33,000 in the vaccine cohort would contract COVID, compared to 270 in the placebo cohort.

The reason we don't say that 5 out of every 100 would still get COVID even if vaccinated is because that would assume the rate of infection is 100%, which it clearly isn't, and never will be.

## From the New North CEO

BY MATT HELEY

**A**mong the many things we've been doing since the pandemic began is monitor how much municipalities in the north are spending, of their own dollars, to play their part to combat the virus. It's a lot; well into the hundreds of thousands.

Northern Saskatchewan communities have been as hard hit, on a per capita basis, as any in Canada. We've seen symptomatic infection rates of 20% in some places; the asymptomatic rate is anyone's guess.

Municipalities are not resourced to respond to pandemics; they are barely funded for what they are supposed to be doing. They got some money from Safe Start, and some funding to bring forward capital purchases, which they gladly accepted. We've provided some dollars for checkpoints.

Administrators and elected officials are not trained emergency responders, as much as we'd like them to be. But who did residents turn to when the case numbers mounted? And who had no choice but to respond? Many brand new in their roles as well. And unpaid.

Those folks who threw their budgets out the window, bought food for those who couldn't afford it in isolation, rented them

places to stay, paid their bills, performed countless acts of selflessness.

It is in this context that leaders received the news that SHA had decided to pare back daily case number updates. Understandably, the decision was not received well.

If the leaders feel that daily updates helped them keep the outbreaks under control, or even prevented outbreaks by keeping the virus in the public eye, then it is fair to say that's what needs to happen.

Quite apart from the SHA needing to resource the capacity for daily local updates, the health authority needs to think about the impact of diluting the sense of shared responsibility that has characterized the response of the communities, government and agencies to the pandemic.

We all need to be respectful of each others' time and our capacity to commit resources. Everyone is experiencing "COVID fatigue."

Unilateral decision-making is fine, but it has to be preceded by honest and thoughtful dialogue with those affected by the decisions. Let's get back to that.

### About New North ...

Since 1996 New North has been the voice of the municipalities of Northern Saskatchewan. Our goal, as defined by our mission statement, is to advocate, negotiate and initiate improvements in well-being of the residents of the Northern Saskatchewan Administration District. Organized on the basis of strength through unity, New North partners with all northern stakeholders, from government and non-government agencies, associations and First Nations, to enhance the quality of life, create opportunities and build better futures for the people of the north.

#### New North Executive

Mayor Bruce Fidler (Chair)  
 Mayor Georgina Jolibois (Deputy Chair)  
 Cr Jordan McPhail (Treasurer)  
 Mayor Ovide Michel (Member at Large)  
 Mayor Daniel Powder (Far North)

#### New North Staff

**Matt Heley**  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
 Phone: 306 425 5505  
 ceo.new.north@sasktel.net

**Sunshyne Charles**  
*Executive Assistant*  
 Phone: 306 425 5505  
 new.north@sasktel.net

#### New North SANC Services Inc

Phone: 306 425 5505  
 Fax: 306 425 5506  
 Box 1018 La Ronge,  
 SK S0J1L0

#### Monthly Newsletter Subscription Information

If you are receiving this it is probably because you are a subscriber or someone sent it to you. To subscribe or unsubscribe from the newsletter please email:  
**[new.north@sasktel.net](mailto:new.north@sasktel.net)**.