



New North's
**Northern Justice
 Symposium**

May 15-17, 2018
 Plaza 88, Prince Albert

For Registration details, go to:
www.newnorthsask.org
 Or call 306 425 5505

Upcoming

- April**
 New North Waterworks
 Northern Administrators
 Conference
- May**
 Northern Justice
 Symposium
- June**
 New North AGM

Saskatchewan Association of
 Northern Communities

**NEW
 NORTH**

**Monthly Newsletter
 February 2018**

- This month ..
- SUMA Wrap
 - The last word on revenue sharing hopefully
 - Northern Justice Symposium teaser
 - New North Executive buys tie

Northern Delegates Seen Quietly Arguing About How to Get Fire Truck in Back of SUV, at this Year's SUMA Convention

The northern presence was down a little from last year—this being the Regina one—but it was still noticeable enough at the tradeshow, in the line for coffee and cheering on the women's soccer down stairs, as delegates took in the excitement of the annual SUMA Convention in the wind capital of the world early February.

Although not on the formal agenda, wind featured heavily as an item of discussion over the four days, as did the absence of snow, the whereabouts of the nearest Walmart, and the relative merits of staying at this restaurant to have cake, or going somewhere else.

Delegates got to see the premier say some cryptic things about revenue sharing, the new Minister of Government Relations doing the same but in an arguably nicer tie, and everyone putting on a brave face when Loraas or whoever it was ran out of those little garbage cans.

And if you felt the highlights included the endless champagne fountain, the Estonian folk dancing troupe and the unforgettable re-enactment of the siege of Sevastopol, it's possible you were at a different convention.

Full coverage page 4

NewNorth News & Updates

New North Administrators Conference: April 12, Prince Albert

Numbers will feature heavily on the agenda of this April's Northern Administrators Conference, along with what you do with them, what people would like to do with them, and with any luck, where you can get more of them.

Getting every community to deliver their 2017 financial statements is our collective goal this year, and we don't really care if the auditor likes them or not, or would prefer not to offer an opinion, because a positive opinion on an audit is not a requirement to qualify for the northern capital grants program, set to expire in September.

With most northern hamlets, and the odd village, falling somewhere in wide gulf between currently compliant with municipal legislation and currently eating an icecream sandwich, there's a lot for everyone to do to pull them over the line.

One thing we are doing is bringing in auditors from MNP to go over what a financial statement is and how to read it—because, let's face it, most of us don't really have a clue—and a whole range of other really helpful things to do with accounting and bookkeeping which, if I were an accountant, I could probably explain to you in more detail.

Northern Excellence Awards Celebrate Excellence

You can throw a stone into any crowd in the north and have a good chance of hitting someone who's making a positive difference to their community.

We wouldn't actually do that, of course, because it would be very annoying.

However, what we can do is have an award, like the Northern Excellence Awards, where you get to nominate someone who has done something to help make their community a better place, and deserves some kind of recognition for it.

The nomination categories include Youth of the Year, Elder of the Year, Citizen of the Year, and RCMP Member of the Year. A ceremony to

As well, we will be checking in on the progress of the dog control initiatives that are happening around the province and throughout Canada with Dr Jordan Woodsworth from the U of S vet school; and Kerry Desjarlais will tell us all about her new baby and, if there's any time, go over the permittee responsibilities with respect waterworks.

There may be something about asset management, too, but we're still trying to figure out what that is.

Northern Municipal Services will be around to tell us about grants and such and also how to construct an out of office email chain that can generate its own electricity.

Unlike the last Administrators conference, we will be serving lunch this time. ■

New North Waterworks: April 18-19

Registration information for this year's waterworks conference should be available early March, which will hopefully give everyone enough time to go down to the waterworks, find Darryl, tell Darryl to tell Wayne, then go find Wayne because Darryl had something else to do, pick up the mail on the way to find Wayne, and leave a message with Sherryl to tell Wayne you're looking for him.

Have a look at www.newnorthsask.org if all this appeals to you. ■

present the awards is on Wednesday May 16, the middle day of the Northern Justice Symposium.

Last time Excellence Award recipients included RCMP members Cst. Karlo Malik, of the Patuanak Detachment, Sgt. Tara Norman for her contributions in Patuanak/English River during her posting in 2014 and 2015, and Cst. J.P. Gauthier of Waterhen Lake Detachment.

Marya Walker from La Loche was awarded the Citizen of the Year.

To find a nomination form for the Northern Excellence Awards, go to the New North website, at www.newnorthsask.org. ■

From the New North Chair

BY BRUCE FIDLER, MAYOR OF CREIGHTON

Hello again.

Anyone who knows me knows that the state of northern roads is one of my driving concerns, no pun intended.

Maybe it comes from having spent years driving all over the north for my job, or just a general sense of unfairness of what we have to put up with, but whatever it is, I think it's about time we double-down on our efforts on highways this year.

We've heard all the reasons why Saskatchewan has such poor roads. A small population, a huge highway network, not enough money to go round, so on and so forth.

All that is fine, but the plan we should be pushing for won't cost a lot of money. If you consider how much is going into the Regina bypass, our plan represents a rounding error.

What we are looking for is \$8 or \$10 million a year being specifically put into new capital replacement in roads, focusing on a few key stretches of road across the north.

After 5 years or 10 years you might only have 80 kilometres of new paving, but you would have taken care of a host of black spots that are currently putting our people in danger. If government had started that 10 years ago, and kept to it, we'd be on the second 80 kilometres by now.

We have long roads, but to fix them you first need to take small steps. Bigger steps would be better, and it's about time, but there's no point pushing for something you won't get.

Now, about SUMA Convention. In our view, what you get out of SUMA, like any convention or gathering, comes down to what you put into it. New North took the entire board down as usual, and we believe we had a good convention. For starters, we got to sit down with the entire SUMA Executive for supper, and along with the Mayor of Prince Albert, Greg Dionne, we strategized about how we can work together to make sure our voice and our concerns are heard. As an aside, SUMA President, Gordon Barnhart, will hopefully be joining us on a northern tour later in Spring.

As well, we got to sit down with the Minister of Highways, Dave Marit, and the new Minister of Government Relations, Warren Kaeding. Minister Kaeding was in the job for just 4 days before making his first big speech to his new stakeholders in the municipal game, but we hope that he stays for a while longer yet, as that minister's role has had too much turnover in the last few years. We value respectful long-term partnerships and look forward to working with Minister Kaeding for at least the next two years, if not longer.

I hope you had a successful Convention as well. We'll see you all again at New North's own Gathering in June. ■

Federal Budget Delivers on Some Key Issues

It's easy to get cynical about federal budgets, especially when some of their more fullsome promises require a financially-strapped province to open its wallet, dad, but this year's federal budget does seem to have some real meat in it, and should be of considerable interest to northern folk.

Catching our eye is the \$500 million of 10 years for a Métis housing strategy, which will, if properly implemented, potentially have big impact in northern municipalities where private ownership in most communities is scarce, rental units are not especially cheap, and the overall quality of units, especially SaskHousing units, needs improvement. The success of self-driven

housing programs in Ile a la Crosse, Pinehouse and La Loche are potential models for how this money could be rolled out.

As well, the budget commits considerable funds to dealing with the opioid crisis in First Nation communities and elsewhere, and \$150 million is set to go to the provinces to launch treatment programs. We will certainly be advocating strongly for some of that money to end up in the north.

If you're a fiscal conservative—and most of us are, of course—then you'd be relatively pleased with the damage there: a deficit of \$18 billion, projected to be \$12 billion in a few years. ■

SUMA Wrap

Northerners Survive Four Straight Bad Hair Days in Breezy, Freezy Regina

SUMA doesn't seem to be as captive to its traditions as other organizations, and there's not much at its annual convention to connect you to its 100 year history, either, in the way we at New North celebrate the glazing of the original ham, the flaying of the porcupine, or the casting of stones. The piping-in of the Board and special guests on the opening morning of Convention might mean something, or it might not. Perhaps the bear pit was an actual bear pit in the early days. The resolution session once started on Monday and finished sometime on Tuesday. It now starts and finishes on the same day. Sometimes they have a plated meal at the banquet, sometimes they don't. The coffee is great some years; other years it's just disturbing.

This time around, there were few breaks with recent traditions, at least, although there were a few "firsts." The New premier, Scott Moe, made his first major appearance since his election, and seemed to take a while to find his voice, but he got there, in the end, making the undulating cadences of the prairie preacher all his own, with only the occasional trademark Wall double-barrel side-hand gestures, full-body half swivels, and shout-outs to his wife Tami (just kidding!).

Northerners certainly noticed the absence of any reference to the north—something Wall in recent times made a point of doing—unless you include Moe's stating that the "economy is [their] northstar," which we suppose is close enough.

The other first was the space given to one of the NDP's Nicoles, Nicole Sarauer, the interim leader, and for many, the person who should be the always leader. The official opposition, as far as we know, has never been given a right of reply, and some wondered if they ever will again, in a surprisingly partisan address in which Nicole pointed out that the province may have a new premier, but everyone else is the same, chided the SaskParty for adding a new ministry when they ought to really have enough already, and then probably said something about the deficit.

Elsewhere, Convention was the same as always. The education sessions are typically well-attended, and the ones we attended were as

well, like the session on solid waste standards led Sarah Keith, Environment's new manager of land, air, and when available, sea. Interesting out of this was the point that it's a misconception that landfill regulations have become more stringent. In fact, the regulations haven't changed for decades, still governed as we are by the Municipal Refuse Regulations from 1986. Another myth busted was that people are not allowed to bury their own self-generated waste in their backyards. In fact, you totally can. This is information they may want to keep to themselves.

The northern regional meeting was something different, though, with the normal SUMA update on northern-related activities replaced with a group of presentations on renewable energy. Solar power doesn't seem to be playing a big role in SaskPower's renewable roadmap, and with only 400 domestic and household installations in this province, few people seem to be jumping on board, either. But solar still has a place, as the Northern Village of Green Lake is showing, where they are saving thousands of dollars annually using the sun to power their recreation centre, the vast bulk of its capital outlay for the project coming from federal and other grants.

The Town of Lumsden went into a unique arrangement with a company that installed solar panels on a municipal building, then sold the power to the municipality at cheaper rates than SaskPower, saving about \$2000 annually. It's an ingenious idea—and certainly worth looking into doing yourself if you're an adventurous entrepreneurial mayor with a development corporation.

Wind is SaskPower's renewable of choice, but it's expensive to get going, and as the community of Hazlet's presentation strongly implied, maintenance is a pain. Still, the tiny village of less than 100 has produced more than 200,000 kilowatt hours from their turbine since 2011—enough to meet the needs of 2 or three homes a year. Luckily, they are only using it to create ice for their rink. SaskPower gets about 5% of its power from wind right now, and is aiming for 30% by 2030. Virtually all of that could be achieved by sticking a couple of turbines on Victoria Avenue. ■

Northern Justice Symposium: Empowering Our Communities

There was really only one thing on the collective mind of the planning committee for this year's Northern Justice Symposium: seek out, and make a stage for, community success stories.

If that seems like an obvious thing to do, it hasn't always been, perhaps because it wasn't always easy to do.

The Northern Justice Symposium is one of the outcomes of the tripartite Framework Agreement for Community Policing Initiatives, whose signatories are the Ministry of Justice, the RCMP, and New North, on behalf of the northern communities.

Another outcome of that agreement are the Community Police Boards, sometimes known as Community Safety Boards, Community Consultative Groups, or in the early days, Police Management Boards. Although they can have representatives from local leadership, and are sometimes thought of as a committee of the municipality, they were intended to include grassroots representation and people from outside the usual leadership group.

Early on, these boards and committees had the important role of acting as an interface between the community and the RCMP. The creation of this role was a reflection of the generally antagonistic relationship between the community and the RCMP at that time.

Although one or two of the terms of reference of the CPBs in the tripartite agreement would raise some eyebrows today (for example, CPBs were to be "consulted regarding preferred RCMP staffing attributes"), much of it is still relevant, to such an extent, that the RCMP would ideally like to incorporate many of those terms into their everyday practice, if they aren't already.

For example, the need for the RCMP to "provide cross-cultural and socio-economic training" is probably a given, but difficult to do at Depot, we are told, given the range of postings recruits can be sent to (although it could still, and should be done, afterwards, as ongoing professional development).

Even so, the changing role of the local justice groups today reflects both the more dynamic approach communities are taking to deal with their own challenges, and the fact that the RCMP has managed to internalize—or at least, is doing a fair job of giving that impression—many of the principles of the original agreement.



What we have now are groups that are increasingly about advancing their own community justice initiatives, and perhaps less about keep the cops in check. The change of focus and approach has huge upside, for the community and the police. This year, the Northern Justice Symposium will be checking in on a number initiatives being spear-headed by northern community safety boards, as well as initiatives coming out of some of our neighbouring First Nations. The cross-learning and networking opportunities of this event are perhaps its strongest draw-card, and which have actually gotten even better in recent years as more and more First Nation communities choose to participate and share their stories.

As well as a focus on community-driven initiatives, we will also have the usual, "high-level" information down-loads from government. This includes a presentation on the new Rural Crime Protection Unit, set to begin in April, and an update on the Northeast Youth Violence Reduction Partnership, among many others.

Coming back is the Northern Excellence Awards Luncheon (see earlier), where we get to celebrate the efforts and achievements of award-worthy individuals in categories such as youth of the year and RCMP member of the year.

Delegates will be fed every day, get to see some outstanding entertainment, have their souls nourished by some Elder's Wisdom, make new friends and see some old ones.

And, courtesy of the City of Prince Albert, you'll also get free parking in the downtown area. ■

To register, and see the finalized agenda, go to New North's website at www.newnorthsask.org, or call us at 306 425 5505.

Revenue Sharing is Not Dead, Just Sleeping

Recent comments suggest the formula might be in for a major re-think.

The revenue sharing issue has become a such quagmire of confusion and anxiety it was probably a relief to many when the new Minister of Government Relations indicated that he is proposing the pool be frozen at this year's level of \$241 million until 2020. Contributing to this confusion and misunderstanding was the budget decision last year to give 109 municipalities a hair cut in the form of the cancellation of \$30 million in "grants in lieu," which, intended as such or not, was a brilliant move, with the resultant and added spectacle of the Ministry of Government Relations transforming from a couch floof into a fully-functional battle kitty under then-minister Donna Harpauer, and press conferences conducted partly in French, not that anyone was complaining.

While those of us of a less adult disposition wondered why the City of Regina didn't just cut off the water to the legislative building last March, wiser heads prevailed, and it looks like everyone is returning everyone's calls and trying to move on best they can. That still doesn't explain why the coffee keeps getting taken away at Convention, unless those things are not connected.

More recently, Premier Scott Moe's remarks at SUMA Convention that the grants in lieu question could be a part of future revenue sharing discussions has had the subsequent effect of making something that should never be apart of this discussion, suddenly a part of this discussion. In fact, in a move roughly equivalent to holding the sector's arm and asking why it's hitting itself, government has also suggested that perhaps all funding flows to municipalities should be looked at, too. This may include actual grants in lieu of taxes, funding for policing, anything coming from cannabis tax revenues, electricity surcharges and what have you.

Still, the revenue sharing formula, as far as government is concerned, is broken and a "re-tooling" is needed. It's broken because government included once-exception things in the provincial sale tax, like children's clothing and the Kona Burger at OJs, meaning that the 1 point of PST that was the basis of the revenue sharing pool is now sizably and, with respect municipal funding, uncomfortably bigger than it was 5 years ago. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to simply continue with the 1 point of PST, adding about \$30 million to the pool at its highest level, and pretty much giving back the money they took from cities and towns (not that we'd be happy with that, mind you). In fact, now that insurance is out of the PST basket,

that way of determining the pool seems passable. Other options may have included either lowering the point of PST to something else, or calculating the revenue sharing portion on a percentage of value basis (just like they do with property taxes). These options would provide government considerable flexibility while still, at least in theory, linking municipal funding to the ebbs and flows of the provincial economy. And they could do it right now.

So why isn't anything being done now?

The government has a budget to balance, which they are committed to doing before the next election. Although we don't know how sales taxes would have stacked up for municipal funding in 2019-20 had everything else stayed the same, it's fair to think that with the economy rebounding in the last year or so, revenue sharing would've gone up from this year. Instead, we have the possibility of a freeze.

It was getting too good to be true?

The current budget crisis, like any crisis, as well as the change of premier, has provided government a handy opportunity to do a reset on revenue sharing. Why might they want to do that? Let's look at some numbers. Between 2007 and 2018 revenue sharing jumped from \$127 million to \$241 million. That's a lot in percentage terms, but in dollars it's dwarfed by the amount local governments have been slogging property owners over that same time. In 2006, the total municipal tax levy was \$575 million. In 2016, it was \$1.25 billion. In the four years between 2010 and 2013, when revenue sharing jumped by almost \$100 million, municipal tax levies went up about 37%, or about \$250 million. The sharp increase cannot be solely attributed to assessed value. For example, between 2013 and 2016 the municipal tax levy increased by about 7% a year; over that same period, school tax levies (and remember, the EPT mill rates remained constant) went up by an average of 3% a year. Overall, if one justification for revenue sharing was to ease the burden on local taxpayers, it didn't really have that effect: the 100% rise in revenue sharing has been matched by the doubling of municipal taxes, to the point where revenue sharing in 2016 was at virtually the same ratio to the municipal tax levy as it was in 2007 (at about 1:5). And if local governments always had that "tax room" to begin (and let's not forget, the province also dramatically cut education mill rates in 2009), the province may be wondering why revenue sharing needed to be so generous.

But is it?

Of course, tax increases have not been widespread, and growth in the cities' tax base has had a disproportionate affect on the aggregate. From 2010 to 2016, for example, the towns' tax levy increased by 40%, versus 60% for the cities'—but that 40% represents just \$37 million out of the \$500 million in growth in tax levies during those years. This sounds about right: a community not impacted by the challenges of growth may not have seen taxes rise as much as one that is (or maybe they are just more efficiently governed?).

And in the north, the rise in revenue sharing has kept pressure off taxes. Property tax levies here are often a hypothetical proposition, because receivables, and allowances, are so high, and enforcement is impossible. However, it does notionally represent what a community needs to raise once all other revenue, like revenue sharing and other grants, are taken into account, even if that own-source revenue figure is mainly aspirational. Across the board, that notional figure is well below that of the towns in the south, suggesting that, in the north, revenue sharing is a factor in helping northern communities offset the high rates of poverty, low levels of commercial activity, and higher costs of doing business.

Then There's The Municipal Infrastructure Deficit

Here's a game you could play with any elected official at SUMA Convention: ask them to explain why municipal funding from government is so important without using the words infrastructure, deficit or crumbling (and here's a tip if you get tired of talking to them: send them out to the foyer to get coffee while a session is in progress; you'll literally never see them again). I bet they can't. The reason local taxes are not creeping lower despite increasing revenue sharing is because municipalities are effectively socking it away to address long-term infrastructure issues. Municipal reserves and unallocated cash has been building, which government has noticed, but that simply means local governments are budgeting responsibly. The irony of premier Brad Wall telling municipalities to dip into their reserves to make up for falling revenue, while pumping billions into the Regina bypass, was not lost on many municipal officials.

Was the Basis of Revenue Sharing Flawed from the Beginning?

Municipal revenue sharing grants were originally called municipal operating grants. They stopped

calling them that almost straight away. It was a positional decision, because if municipalities were using it to address capital expenditures, there would be no need for the province to have an additional capital fund, which was the desired position of the associations. But this really just begs the question. If increased capital expenditures have been the effect of increasing revenue sharing, then perhaps it should have been locus of revenue sharing to begin with, and calculated accordingly. In Alberta, for example, that is exactly what the government transfer is: it's a capital transfer. Within this framework, there could have been no way for the province to point to growing reserves as a justification for trimming revenue sharing (it's also why the province has such a problematic relationship to asset management, and by contrast, why the associations, and municipalities, should be strongly behind it).

A Different Conversation for Us

The idea of severing northern revenue sharing from the broader pool is something that comes up from time to time. It's a strange argument, given how things have gone, but you can see where it's coming from. Revenue sharing has a different meaning for northern communities. To begin with, fluctuations cannot be made up by the tax base. In the north, revenue sharing is the only game in town, comprising more than 50% of municipal revenues, up to 95% in some communities. Not only providing the foundations for accountable and transparent local government, northern revenue sharing (NRS) contributes substantially to the quality of life and well-being of northern residents. Because of the wide range of uses to which NRS is put, it is no exaggeration to say that, without it, we'd have higher infant mortality rates (because of enteric illness), a growth in rates of chronic illness such as tuberculosis and other infectious diseases (because of overcrowding), significantly higher crime rates, lower employment, run down parks and recreation sites, and so on. It's not really a question of sustainability, since these communities will exist no matter what. In the north, government has to decide what level of crisis they're willing to deal with. In the last ten years, most indicators, whether we're talking income levels or rates of poverty, have improved, suggesting things are getting better. And for us that's the key problem of being a part of this bigger conversation, since these very basic determinants of our residents' well-being shouldn't be open to negotiation, and should absolutely not be dependent on what happens in the cities. ■

FROM THE CEO

MATT HELEY

Provincial Court Judge Gerald Morin perhaps wouldn't call himself an activist judge, but he is probably as close we'll get in Saskatchewan right now. In an interview in the press recently, he joked—or half-joked—that the province of Saskatchewan should be subject to a dangerous offender application because its policies, past and current, are why so many indigenous people are ending up in jail.

Judge Morin presides over Cree court. Cree court is, as you might expect, a court conducted almost entirely in Cree. It is a circuit court, sitting in the communities of Pelican Narrows, Sandy Bay, Whitefish First Nation and Ahtahkakoop First Nation. Cree is the language used in sentencing, although legal arguments can take place in English. The defendant can address the court in Cree or English.

We've had Judge Morin as a special keynote speaker at a number of our Northern Justice Symposiums. He is funny, compassionate and engaging. It's probably impossible to calculate the impact he has had as a presiding judge on the lives of those who appear before him. He sentences people to jail—a difficult job, in any circumstance—but he is a

strong believer in community-based sentences. It was on this topic that he last spoke to delegates at a Northern Justice Symposium. Not everyone likes CSOs, alternative measures and non-custodial sentences. But as a judge he practices what he preaches.

In some ways, he performatively embodies the dual notion of justice that another of our keynote speakers, Dr Ken Coates, spoke on back in 2016. Coates is one of the few speakers at this symposium over the years who, before coming along, sat back and thought about what that word “justice” really means. He said there are two general ways we can think about justice. Firstly, there is that broader historical and social meaning of justice, where we look for the redress of the historic wrongs wrought by colonialism and the subjugation of the indigenous population in this country. And then there is the more particular sense of justice which we associate with the administrative apparatus of the criminal justice system. Recent events in this province have shown what has always been there, and the fact that these two separate notions are in reality, and in practice, indivisible. ■

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 Administrative 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 Robert St.Pierre (Deputy Chair)
Mayor Gord Stomp (Treasurer)
Mayor Mike Natomagan
Councillor Keith Laprise

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
207 La Ronge Avenue
La Ronge, Sk

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