



Changes afoot in provincial and federal housing programs could be good, could be nothing.

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### Upcoming

#### New North Gathering

November 16, Prince  
Albert Coronet

Saskatchewan Association of  
Northern Communities

# NEW NORTH

#### This month ..

- Cameco fall out
- Housing to get look at
- Province sets municipal election date
- Gathering/Admin Conference agendas done
- New North truck dragged kicking and screaming into car wash

## Monthly Newsletter October 2018

## Province Sets Stage for ElectionMania 2020

Ending months of speculation, the provincial government has finally decided that the municipal elections in 2020 will only be moved slightly, from late October to November in that year, instead of back a year to 2021, in order to avoid conflicting with the provincial election, which will now be October 26, unless something changes.

The new date for municipal election of November 9 more or less lines up with that suggested by SUMA and SARM.

Because northern municipalities were always able to set their election dates from anywhere between September and October, the clash with the provincial election was never really an issue for the north. It is expected that northern municipalities will still be able to go to their elections anywhere from September to November, for the same reason they were able to do that before, although we still haven't a clue what that reason is.

The issue of the municipal, school board and provincial election date clash has been quietly brewing away for almost two years, following the previous federal government's moving of their election to the Fall of 2015, which meant that the province had to move their one to April of 2016 which, when filtered back through *The Election Act*, meant that the next provincial poll after that would fall in the Fall of 2020.

The province's setting of municipal elections only a few weeks after the provincial poll means that the province has pretty much dismissed the concerns of Chief Electoral

Officer, Dr Michael Boda, whose April 2017 special report suggested that allowing for the provincial/municipal elections at the more or less same approximate time would lead to people getting the two sets of elections mixed up. This is an important thing to consider because there are differences in voter eligibility rules, differences in voter registrations procedures, differences in acceptable identification documents required to be shown before a ballot is issued, and so on, between the two elections.

Although the provincial elections will already be done by about two weeks by the time the municipal elections come round, there will still be some administrative and procedural overlap, not to mention the fact that election campaigns of municipal candidates, which can last from anywhere between four years and the Sunday afternoon in the week of the poll, will overlap with those of provincial candidates.

Additionally, candidates will have to make a decision as to whether they want to run municipally or provincially, since they won't be able to run in both this time around. It has been suggested in the media that this works in the SaskParty's favour, and was therefore done strategically, as the NDP has a history of being stacked with former municipal councillors. We think that is a bit of stretch.

Other dates on interest in October include St. Crispin's Day, which is October 25. That is also the day of the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, won by the English, that more or less settled the Hundred Year's War with the French. ■

# NewNorth News & Updates

## Ministers of Highways, Government Relations, to Bookend Gathering

The agenda for the November 16 New North Gathering at the Prince Albert Coronet is now more or less set, with the Minister of Highways Lori Carr coming along at 9am, and the Minister of Government Relations, Warren Kaeding, closing the show with the completion of his appearance at around 4pm.

In the middle, we have Deputy Ombudsman James Turner, whose presentation, “The Ombudsman’s Role in Reviewing Council Member Conflicts of Interest,” will lift the lid on the Ombudsman’s role in reviewing council member conflicts of interest.

Shawn Tallmadge from the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety will deliver a presentation on what obligations municipalities, as employers, have with respect to dealing with employee harassment.

The Water Security Agency will also be along to help elected officials understand what their legal responsibilities for their waterworks operations are. Many elected officials perhaps don’t realize that, ultimately, it is they who would be held responsible for any illness caused by poor water quality, and that perhaps, given this situation, they might want to ensure they fully understand those waterworks reports that are put in front of them by the administrator.

We will also have other speakers coming in too, as well as some time for open discussion.

Lunch will be baked ham—what else?—and dessert is yet to be determined. I repeat, dessert is TBD. If you have any input you’d like to make on the dessert situation, let us know ASAP. ■

## AdminCon 2018: November 22, Coronet

The formation of the Northern Administrators Association will be a key topic of conversation at this November’s Fall Administrators Conference, at the Coronet on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The formation of a NAA, NAAS, or NSAA—depending on where we want the “S” to go (or even if we need one)—has been on the table for almost a decade, following the 2010 Administrative Needs Assessment that identified a need for a self-managed northern administrators group to provide peer support, the development of northern-facing technical tools and resources, and an occasional shoulder to cry on.

The association is fully backed by New North and will have the full weight of the Northern Municipal Trust Account Management Board behind it.

Among the many initiatives we expect the Administrators Association to take a leading role in will

be the new Administrative Circuit Rider program, the creation of online resources as well as the organization of annual conferences and get togethers, like AdminCon2018. Hopefully they’ll also come up with a better name for it.

Also on the agenda for the Fall conference is SAMA CEO Irwin Blank, who will talk about all things SAMA and answer all those questions we have about assessments. Steve Dribnenki from SUMA will be along to talk to administrators about developments in and the current state of conflict of interest law for elected officials, and Government Relations will be there to consult on *The Northern Municipalities Act* amendments.

The afternoon will see the ED’s from New North and Northern Municipal Services do their thing where they talk airlessly for a while and then go outside for a quick cigarette and say “That went well!” ■

## New North Executive Assistant Goes Out for Cigarettes, Never Comes Back

We made that up, of course. But New North’s long-time EA Sunshyne Charles has left New North—for a while, anyway—to look after her new children.

Stepping in for the next 12 months is Shelley Isbister. Shelley was one of New North’s summer students, working alongside the Embracing Life Committee under the guidance of Jim Andrews from Government

Relations, to produce videos showcasing the many great cultural and other activities that happened in the north over the summer.

We were so impressed with Shelley we gave her a job.

Shelley has Type 3 Firefighter training, is interested in carpentry and wants eventually to become an elementary school teacher. ■



# From the New North Chair

BY BRUCE FIDLER, MAYOR OF CREIGHTON

The rural elections reminded me this week that we are at the mid-way point of our current term in municipal office.

It's a good time to reflect on what we've achieved in the last two years, and think about what we'd like to achieve in the next two.

As we all know, there were a lot of new people elected to local councils in 2016. Back then, we said, "We know you have a lot to do, but don't try to go too fast; don't bite off more than you can chew!"

Back when municipal terms were only three years, you could forgive people for being in a hurry.

But four years is a long time, especially in municipal politics. Burn-out is a real thing. By year three of a term many people are already looking for the exit. It should be the other way around: by year three, you should be feeling that you finally know what you are doing.

The importance of knowing where you should be in any planning process is why we

advocated councils having in place strategic plans by the end of the first year in their new term.

But if you haven't got a strategic plan, or any plan, that you're following, it's not too late to put one together. It's just that your timeline is now two years, instead of four.

The key to a strategic plan is setting realistic, achievable goals. You also need to have short-term and long-term goals.

You have to have a vision—a sort of north star—that guides you, which you can sum up in a single sentence. Something like: "Our North Star is for everyone in our community to come together in wellness and unity."

Your short-term objectives should be the low-hanging fruit—remove graffiti from the recreation centre, for example—which ramp up in ambition the longer you stretch them out (beautify downtown, re-paving around the school, etc).

Just the other day I was forwarded a one-page overview of

a northern municipality's vision for their community.

The plan came out of sessions that the council held with other leaders and champions in the community.

It had on there some things the community had already been working on, and which were nearing completion. The community had been moving ahead without a written-down strategy, proving you may not need to have one. But what I think the community leaders were realizing is that it's not a bad idea to put a frame around what you are doing. In my view, the reason for this partly psychological: there's no better feeling than, literally, crossing an achievement off a list, and saying "done!" A strategic plan helps you organize your goals, but just as importantly, it helps you remember what you've accomplished.

And believe me, this is very helpful come re-election time! ■

## November Hath Local Government Week

An initiative by SUMA and SARM is that November 12 to 16 be officially proclaimed by the province as Local Government Week.

This is a brand new thing here, but not uncommon everywhere else. Typically, municipalities would be organizing their own activities—school trips, promotions, municipal office walk-throughs, boat tours of the sewage lagoon, that kind of thing—to raise awareness of all the things local governments do for which that they probably don't get sufficient recognition.

Local Government Week is a great idea and we hope to see it develop into a regular thing and take on a life of its own at some point, as there's a lot to celebrate about the role of

the village office and those that staff them in maintaining the well-being of the community.

In most communities we go to, the village office is not just the administrative heartbeat of the community, it is also the hub of a great deal of non-municipal related activity. It often runs the post-office, SGI, and houses a whole bunch on ancillary stuff (culture and recreation officers, for example). And where do residents go to when they are having trouble paying their power bill, or getting stick from the local housing authority? People often see the local municipal office as way in to navigating government systems that are less and less likely to have a local presence, and to be locally responsive.

All that is worth celebrating, or at least acknowledging. ■

# Around the Traps

## Roads Continue to be Big Issue in the North, Especially This Time of Year

Almost every conversation with the leaders of smaller northern municipalities starts with a simple question: who maintains your roads?

The answers can vary: sometimes it's the municipality, sometimes it's the nearby Band, sometimes it's Highways. Sometimes—and this is alarmingly common—it's no one.

The north's small communities are challenged not just by remoteness, but by their dependence on others to deliver basic and critical services. Whether it's road maintenance, water and sewer, fire protection, or just somewhere to buy fresh food, they often have to look outside to help them get by.

It is not surprising to hear leaders of these communities talking about how they'd like to take control of as much of the service delivery as possible. Increasingly, they are also thinking about the potential benefits of investing in capital equipment that could enable them to supply services to other communities in their region—at a cost. Strapped for own-source revenue, communities are eyeing all capital investments through the lens of income generation. The reason they need money is simple: small communities need funding for new housing, especially for seniors, and for recreation facilities, and seeing very little coming from outside, they are forced to go after it themselves. Although a number of small northern municipalities neighbour larger First Nations (and many residents are members of



**New North Chair Bruce (left), Administrator Holly and Councillor Joyce is joined by Mayor Joyce, all from Jans Bay, except Bruce, who is from Creighton, in the Jans Bay council chambers in late October.**

both), for one reason or another, they tend not to share amenities.

Many small northern communities have also experienced barriers to accessing capital programs, such as the federal government's Gas Tax Program, as well as the Northern Capital Grants program, although funding streams, such as those provided through the Clarence Campeau Development Fund, have been able to step up.

By sheer luck, the growth in northern municipal revenue sharing in 2011-16 gave small communities breathing space to build new facilities, like the beautifully-maintained community hall in St. George's Hill, and some communities have savings, but the last few years have been a struggle. Generally speaking, each small community is one small bad investment away from being broke, which puts a lot of pressure on leaders to get things right. ■

## MRS Talks Break Down as Govt Refuses to Bow to SARM's Demand for Inclusion of Peavey Mart Gift Cards

We're joking, of course. In fact, so lacking in the basic elements of drama has the recent municipal revenue consultations been that ludicrously inapposite headlines is really all that we can muster in response to what looks likely as the eventual outcome of consultations where everyone, including government, more or less agrees that the program works well, is appropriately funded, and where few major changes need to take place, other than, as we've strenuously maintained in the face of

utter silence, that a change of name occur to something that carries the story of the program's own creation.

We expect that an announcement about the new program will be made anytime between now and the provincial budget, which we believe is March 20. Likely, if it's good news, we will see something made public at SUMA Convention. If it's bad news, we'll see something made public at SUMA Convention. ■

## **The Local Government Election Act Amendments are in the Legislature**

As part from setting the next municipal elections for the 9<sup>th</sup> of November (see front page), amendments to *The Local Government Election Act* currently going through the legislature will also require candidates for municipal elections to submit their public disclosure statements alongside all their other nomination material as a condition of eligibility.

The inclusion of this is because it is felt that some municipal elected officials are not currently abiding by the legislated requirement to submit public disclosure statements, a requirement which came into effect in 2015.

We certainly heard from some newly elected that they didn't know about the requirement for public disclosure statements before the 2016 elections, and were a little caught out by it when they got elected.

This way, everyone will know what the requirement is before they put their names forward.

Failure to have all the paperwork in order when filing nominations to stand for election is grounds for disqualification.

Other amendments to the legislation include folding *The Controverted Municipal Election Act* into the LGEA. ■

## **Sask NDP Unveils First Piece of Climate Change Plan**

“Dream no little Dreams” was on the overhead projector as NDP leader Ryan Meili dropped the first of what we assume is many more hints to come as to the direction of the “climate policy” the party intends to take into the 2020 provincial election.

The focus of the announcement was “clean energy transition,” and the nub of it is a program whereby homeowners, businesses, farmers, municipalities, First Nations and such will be able to access a fund to get an energy assessment and then finance for a clean energy installation or the retrofitting of homes, businesses, and factories and such to make them more energy efficient.

The announcement was short on details, but the main points are:

- Investments are not tied to any particular technology; you can go solar, wind, geothermal, or whatever. The type of installation you choose would be based on the best fit, as determined by the assessment
- Excess power would be fed back to the grid and bought by SaskPower. No mention as to whether there would be a cap on this

- The cost of the technology would be repaid by an “assessment” on the power bill that would not exceed the savings through usage reduction or net metering
- The fund would be a “revolving fund” and therefore self-sustaining. There were no details about how the initial seed money would be arrived at, but Meili speculated that government could use some kind of “green energy savings bond” (ie, government-backed debt) to finance the program.

### **“Renew” is the New You**

Of course, there's nothing new in the proposal; anyone who's gotten natural gas anytime in the last few years essentially got a loan from SaskEnergy that they are paying off through their gas bill. Indeed, you can already get financing for a solar installation on a plan that's paid off through the savings on your power bill. The cost of the loan is built into the payment plan.

The key difference with the “Renew” policy is that, firstly, the “risk” is being assumed by government, rather than the consumer (which also brings the cost down); and secondly, the hint that large-scale, community-based projects could lead to a net-income revenue stream for a proponent. ■

## **SaskPower Opens up Applications for Power Generation Partner Program**

SaskPower has announced a new program to allow customers of SaskPower to develop electricity generation projects which they can then sell power back to the grid.

The PGPP is accepting up to 10 megawatts of renewable generation, from sources like solar, and 25MW of carbon neutral non-renewable generation, from things like flare gas, each year, for the next two, or maybe three years, depending on the demand.

Maximum project size for those in the renewable stream is 1MW. Applications are being accepted from November 15 to November 30.

Proponents are responsible for their project costs, which could be quite considerable. For example, apart from buying your solar panels or what-have-you, you will also need to pay a interconnection fee of \$170,000, and on-going interconnection cost of 1.25% of the total interconnection fee.

Revenue for your project comes from selling your electricity back to SaskPower at \$108.22 per MWh, with a .06% price increase every year.

SaskPower has an information sheet available that goes into more details, which is available on their website at [www.saskpower.com](http://www.saskpower.com). ■

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# Cameco Cuts Become Permanent this Month

BY Chelsea Laskowski

Cameco severance packages are rolling in across Saskatchewan — and especially the north — this month as permanent layoffs become official.

The 500 permanent layoffs hit in November as a result of indefinite shutdowns at McArthur River mine and Key Lake mill. It's impossible to know whether the shutdown will last a year, two, five or more.

So what's the impact on some of the northern municipalities where Cameco pulls its workers from?

## **Pinehouse: 'It's hurting'**

Long before the November cuts were announced, the uranium market in the past year or so made pretty clear that dark days were ahead for Cameco, said Pinehouse Mayor Mike Natomagan.

It's not just Cameco employees, though. Pinehouse Business North was a contractor with Cameco for labour services, environmental cleanups and earth moving. Those jobs were among the first to go about a year ago, Natomagan said.

That's beyond the temporary layoffs that took effect in January; they included 75 per cent pay up until the end of October. Before that, came the Rabbit Lake mine closure.

As of November, there are about 50 people from Pinehouse whose incomes are coming from severance packages rather than steady work. Some were long-time employees — 20-plus years — who are now coming to terms with this major life disruption.

Natomagan said without the top-ups employees were getting, he's worried looking ahead to next year.

"We're so reliant on the industry in our area," he said. "It's gonna hurt everybody, it's gonna hurt our industry, it's gonna hurt our economy. And it's hurting."

Overall, morale is down. People in the north are known for helping out their extended family and aren't used to saving for retirement are being advised to tighten their belts, Natomagan said. Cameco is offering up professionals to give financial guidance for its former employees to bank their severances over time.

Community investment dollars that come into Pinehouse through its collaboration agreement with Cameco are dependent on the company's poundage per year production, Natomagan said.

Those dollars going down means less money to put into housing and training.

He said Cameco should have given more back to the north when the "good times were rolling," especially

since the company will be drawing from the region once again once uranium prices rise.

## **Stony Rapids**

Stony Rapids Mayor Mervin McDonald is one of the few Cameco employees who's been kept on during the care and maintenance period at Rabbit Lake mine.

"It's quiet now, you got the whole gym to yourself," McDonald said.

It's tough to see people with decades-long careers now out of the job, he said. Cameco CEO Tim Gitzel addressed that topic back in July when he announced the permanent layoffs.

"We regret the impact we had on our workers and their families but we have to sustain this company long-term. We have to look at the viability. The market's just not there," Gitzel said in the *Prince Albert Daily Herald*.

McDonald said he has confidence in Cameco to get things back up and going once the world market demands it.

"It's like everyday, 'what's Cameco going to do?' But they're the ones with the money... They're businesspeople and they know how to manage their business," he said.

But he acknowledges that not everybody in Stony Rapids feels that way: most of the money that comes to the far north community comes in the forms of wages at Cameco and Orano (the only Cameco mine still operating is its Cigar Lake partnership with Orano, a company that the French government has majority shares in) or through donations from the two companies.

While Cameco has helped build infrastructure in other areas, McDonald said that's not the case in Stony Rapids. Its donations come in through grant applications through Cameco's trust funds, things like providing money for carnivals and community events.

Stony Rapids doesn't retain that many people to work in the mines though, McDonald said, nor does it have any contract workers like Pinehouse does. Many families move south so their children can live with them while going to school rather than having to send them off to board elsewhere.

The Cameco connections are strong for McDonald, though. He noted there's a doctor in Stony who used to be a radiation technician at Cameco back in the day. ■

## Cameco Swings to Profit

It's hardly great news for recently laid-off Cameco workers to hear that the reason their former employer's has turned to profit is because they no longer work there.

That was implied in Cameco CEO Tim Gitzel's comments to investors following the release of Cameco's third quarter results, which showed the uranium giant in the black for the first time in ages.

"Our results and the updates to our outlook reflect the impact of our decision to extend the shutdown at McArthur River/Key Lake, and the tax case ruling that was unequivocally in our favour," Gitzel said.

"As a result of the updates to our outlook, we expect a strong finish in the fourth quarter," he added.

Gitzel also said that the uranium market is "showing a marked improvement compared to a year ago," but thought that they weren't out of the woods yet. Perhaps the biggest caveat in the CEO's cautiously optimistic outlook was his remark that there

"continues to be a lack of acceptable long-term contracting opportunities."

Pretty much the only reason Cameco has been able to weather the current downturn is because of the strength of their long-term contracts, which results in their realized prices being significantly higher than the spot prices.

Right now, spot prices and long-term prices are more or less at the same level, and recent big rises in spot prices are not carrying through to long-term prices as you might expect, suggesting that buyers still feel there is going to be continued weakness in prices for some time to come.

For what it's worth, Cameco is reporting adjusted net earnings of \$15 million for the quarter.

Cameco has also had some good news in their transfer pricing dispute with the CRA, with the Tax Court ruling "unequivocally" in their favour. The CRA has appealed the decision. ■

## New Potential Policing and Community Protection Initiatives of Great Interest to Northern Municipalities

Although the RCMP has been telling us for years that "we can't police ourselves out of this," the province appears to be focused on precisely that, with a number of initiatives (aimed perhaps more toward their rural constituents than the north) looking at finding ways of putting more boots on the ground.

For some, this is just a classic reappearance of a "law and order agenda" that conservative-leaning governments eventually turn to when things get a bit tighter electorally, but the approach is piquing the interest of northern leaders, many of whom feel that, alongside anything else we might try to do, it's never a bad idea to have better and more effective policing resources around, rather than less and fewer.

The province, doubling down on their commitment last budget to creating a new squad of supertroopers by pulling into active policing anyone who carries a gun and looks sharp in a uniform, announced via the recent throne speech that they are thinking of enabling rural municipalities to join together to create their own regional policing services. The announcement was short on details, and even the SARM President, Ray Orb, seemed caught off guard, but northern leaders are also looking at this and wondering what elements may be pulled out and applied to northern municipalities, where one the main complaints directed at the RCMP is that it isn't as responsive to community needs as it could be.

The other initiative that has caught the eye of northern leaders is the training and appointment to active duty of eight peacekeepers in Pelican Narrows. The peacekeepers have been drawn from the community, trained up and given the job of patrolling the community, alerting the RCMP to anything untoward, responding to domestic violence calls and shepherding youth home if they're out after curfew. The peacekeepers are additionally being trained as CSOs, or Community Support Officers, and will be armed with handcuffs and batons, and have the authority to enforce *The Traffic Safety Act*.

The training for each officer came to about \$6,500, and the province provided the money for that, while the First Nation is responsible for paying their salaries.

The CSO idea has yet to really take off in the north, mainly because no one really has the money to employ more outside staff, but also because it's been hard to say what impact a pared down reserve force of barely-adequately trained, albeit sharply uniformed, community people would really have in supporting the RCMP. The thinking is that perhaps it is better to simply have more RCMP. The Pelican Narrows pilot will be watched very carefully by northern leaders to see if there's any lessons they can draw from it, which is doubtless the province's intention by partly funding it. ■

## Is there a Plan, and What is It?

**“Saskatchewan is experiencing unprecedented economic and population growth that is expected to continue for years to come.” (Minister of Social Services June Draudie, 2011).**

Three more years, to be precise. If we lived in the world of classical Greek mythology, that amount of hubris wouldn't go unpunished. But we shouldn't complain: the belief that growth would last forever got us a good municipal revenue sharing deal, the SAID program (\$250 million), and a new stadium. Go Riders!

Draudie's remarks were in the province's housing strategy, A Strong Foundation, from around about then. The housing strategy followed four or so years of growth in provincial revenues, as well as strong population growth, particularly in the major cities, and mainly from immigration. The government's narrative was geared around how to keep up with all this growth.

It was a nice problem to have. Then, the province addressed the need for a housing strategy by having a housing strategy. Looking back, it's an open question how much of their housing strategy was really a response to what was happening around them, and how much was simply a rationalization for what they would have done no matter the social or economic pressures bearing upon the housing file. For the SaskParty's housing policies—not unlike those of other provinces—are really dictated by two things: what the federal government does; and what the market does.

Although we've seen changes to housing policies in the last few years, especially around social housing, there's very little to suggest the province has much of a vision of what they'd like the housing file to look like, with one exception: they'd very much like not to be a big part of it.

This is not surprising, and you can hardly blame them. The reason the province is so looking forward to the federal government's new housing program, which is mostly already announced, is because there's lots of potential for the province to fully assume its desired role as a cipher of funding, rather than as a provider of it.

### Homeownership

Here's an interesting statistic: Saskatchewan's rate of home ownership is 72%, higher than the Canadian average of 68%. Alberta is also at about 72%. BC and Ontario are below 70%.

Although home ownership in northern Saskatchewan is no where near that, it's higher than most people think, at about 58% overall among the larger communities. A handful of “market communities” account for most of the home ownership (about 80% in Creighton and Denare

Beach, for instance), but it's not uncommon to see high rates of homeownership in even the smallest hamlets.

Most northerners would like to see government promoting more homeownership opportunities. This is imagined as a variation of SaskHousing's old rent-to-own program, or some kind of subsidized forgivable loan for new builds, with a “sweat equity” piece. Both have been tried before, and have contributed to higher rates of home ownership in the north than would have occurred otherwise.

SaskHousing is currently selling up to 50 of their units in non-market communities. The units are sold at appraised value, and tenants need to secure a down payment and a mortgage just like anyone else. So far, in almost two years, SaskHousing has managed to sell only half a dozen of the 50 units. While interest in the program is high, tenants are struggling to come up with the financing. Leaders are complaining that the valuations are too high, and tenants seem to agree.

### Non-Government Social Housing Development

There hasn't been a house built in northern Saskatchewan fully backed by government funding since the 1990s.

Nowadays, most housing programs are co-funded by municipalities or their development corporations, and by far, the most successful housing programs in the north in recent years have been targeted at increasing the stock of rental units, not homeownership. Most new rental developments are multi-unit, to make the most of the limited lots available. Typically, the provincial and federal governments put in about two thirds of the funding, with the final third coming from the proponent. In many cases, as in La Loche, the community's contribution is the land itself. In this, community's have made clever use of the Northern Municipal Trust Account's Subdivision Development Program. The program lends the community the up-front cost of a subdivision development, the value of which is used as an “in-kind” contribution to secure government funding to build the units. The community pays back the cost of the subdivision to the NMTA over five years—often through a “hold-back” of their annual revenue sharing. The community gets land and a rental unit geared to below-market rents.

Unfortunately, these programs have not been widely accessed, with really only Ile a la Crosse, Pinehouse and La Loche seeing many new units built. Most small communities that still have housing needs haven't been able to figure out how to get on board. Housing programs



# Housing

used by these communities have added greatly to employment and provided training opportunities for locals, but the benefits have not spread to other localities.

Another factor affecting the repair and renewal of housing stock in northern municipalities is the high number of housing developments going on in neighbouring First Nations, which is pulling demand away from the municipalities. One of the reasons cited for high rates of overcrowding, homelessness, and couch surfing in northern communities is that families are waiting in crowded homes for reserve housing to open up which, for whatever reason, they prefer to the social housing in the provincial system.

## Repairs of Existing Stock

One of the big problem facing northern housing is the age and condition of much of the housing stock, rented or owned. The golden age of housing construction—off reserve—was between 1960 and 1980, meaning that most houses are between 50 and 60 years old. That may not sound old in housing years, but this is the north. A harsh and unforgiving climate takes its toll, and meeting the costs of maintenance and upkeep for those on fixed incomes is a challenge.

This is particularly the case in the northern hamlets, where about three quarters of all the housing was built between 1960 and 1980. More than 50% of their housing stock is need of major repairs, up to 75% in some places. The hamlets tend to have relatively high rates of home ownership, and a higher rate of people getting by on fixed and low incomes struggling to keep up with those costs of repairs.

## The RRAP – Homeowner Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program

Given the strong need for a repairs program in the north you'd think that there'd be a repairs program in the north.

A number of programs have arisen over the years to help renters and home owners to maintain their dwellings, but right now there is very little on offer.

The RRAP was a successful program run by the province that, at its height, pumped about \$4 million into repairs and upgrades in northern homes.

Other programs over the years have included The Accelerated Homeowner Repair Option, which provided funding to clients of the Rural and Native Housing Program (under which a number of northern units were built back in the day) a mortgage discount and cost-matching for repairs to ensure their homes met energy efficiency, health and safety standards. The RNH program later became the Remote Housing Program.

## Clean Slate

If you could design a series of housing programs that addressed housing needs across the housing spectrum, what would they look like?

SaskHousing is currently fishing for Expressions of Interest for the rental development program, but they are also looking for feedback more generally on some of the housing challenges in your communities, particularly those related to affordable housing.

Anything backed by evidence is particularly useful here, and that is why SaskHousing also offers funding through the ECHO program for communities to put together their own housing needs assessments. SaskHousing will provide up to \$5,000 for communities with fewer than 2,500 people (50% cost-matched, meaning you need your own \$5,000), or \$20,000 cost-matched for communities who come together to put together a regional needs assessment.

For more information about the EOI, the feedback form, and the ECHO program, give us a call at New North, or go to [www.saskatchewan.ca](http://www.saskatchewan.ca) and navigate through until you get to the "housing" pages. ■

**Figure 1: Northern Housing Snapshot, Select Communities. Source: Census Canada, 2016**

	Houses	Number Owned	Number Rented	% Built Between 1960-1980	% Built in Last 10 Years	% in need of major repairs
Air Ronge	400	285	115	35	19	10
Beauval	175	110	70	20	0	14
Cumberland House	210	125	85	61	0	30
Buffalo Narrows	400	245	150	46	9	14
Ile a la Crosse	395	235	165	44	6	20
La Loche	655	225	430	24	22	23
Pinehouse	265	110	165	20	17	18
Green Lake	175	105	80	51	6	11
Sandy Bay	165	50	105	45	6	42
Creighton	580	475	110	29	8	12
Denare Beach	290	245	25	37	9	17
La Ronge	975	525	450	47	13	12
Sask				37	16	8

From the CEO  
**MATT HELEY**

**T**he legalization of cannabis happened and for most people it's

now forgotten about. Sometimes we wonder how things might've gone had the federal government simply decided that, on the day after next, cannabis will be now be available in Walmart or the local liquor store, end of story. In addition, you can now pick up a cannabis plant at Home Depot or your local nursery and take it home and set it alongside the Japanese peace lilies in your kitchen window so you can watch it wither and die just like everything else you've ever put there.

Of course, that didn't happen. Instead, we had a process that was both drawn out, and yet somehow not drawn out enough. Because the feds devolved a lot of the law-making to the provinces, we have a patchwork of rules and regulations that bear no consistency from one province to the next. Yet we also have a political environment in which, despite the provincially driven free-for-all, the feds are seen to have

behaved overbearingly and without properly consulting anyone, least of all the provinces.

The whole thing is a mess precisely because that's exactly how the provinces wanted it to play out.

Locally, the roll out has been relatively smooth, but at other times has made no sense at all. We had a carefully curated permit-process that made no consideration for local conditions or what communities even really wanted. The permit-draw came under fire for being rigged when it was known multiple proponents got more than one permit, which should have been extremely improbable mathematically, although as it turns out, not impossible.

Now we find that successful permit holders are able to sell their permits for whatever price the market bears, which could be an awful lot of money. All the permit holders had to do was make some movement toward opening a storefront, then wait for legalization day. You couldn't have a more literal outcome of a lottery process in which someone got a

permit. They literally *did* win the lottery.

The biggest problem we have with all this, though, is the weirdly contradictory situation of a product that is now legal, but not easily or readily available, undermining the supposed public health benefits of being legal while creating the conditions for the new, more lethal and destructive drug to take hold.

Making cannabis readily and easily available to undermine the black market was one of the fed's priorities in legalization, and one of the fears they had about the provinces and municipalities taking a too heavy hand in restricting the supply of recreational cannabis.

What we are hearing from the communities is now that cannabis is technically legal, cheaper and easier to get, the black market is switching to a different product: meth. So not only do we have a shortage of legal cannabis, we also have a potential opening for meth and similar drugs to take hold because that's where the supply chain has switched to. ■

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

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