



Upcoming

New North
Annual General Meeting
June 22, 2017
Prince Albert Travelodge

Saskatchewan Association of
Northern Communities

**NEW
NORTH**

- News & Briefs
- ICNGD Closure
- Solar Power in the North
- NMTA funding solid waste feasibility
- AGM Preparation

**Monthly Newsletter
May 2017**

Minister Harpauer to Attend AGM

The Minister of Government Relations and Other Important Things, the Hon. Donna Harpauer, is expected to be “in attendance,” as they say, at New North’s Annual General Meeting, on June 22, at the Prince Albert Travelodge.

The minister will hopefully be joined by the Minister of Social Services, Hon. Tina Beaudry-Mellor.

We don’t have any other confirmations, but don’t be at all surprised if Minister of Environment Scott Moe shows up. Minister for Rural and Remote Health, Greg Ottenbreit, is also invited, but recent surgery will probably keep him away.

Some issues of concern which anyone is free to raise with Minister Harpauer might include:

- The havok being wreaked by the recent assessment process, especially with respect the seemingly massive over-valuation of lakeside properties in some communities (and no, I do not have a lakeside property);
- The timeliness of municipal revenue sharing notices;

- Education property tax arrears claw-backs: will that happen?

If the Minister of Social Services shows up, we expect some answers around:

- Funeral service costs (the province is cutting the amount they will subsidize funerals for low-income and social assistance recipients);
- What’s up with all the vacant Social Services positions in the north?
- Solutions to outrageous Saskpower bills for residents of social housing units converted to electric heating

Agenda Not Set in Stone, So Send in Ideas if You’ve Got Any

The agenda for New North’s AGM is fairly loose at this point, with our only “must do” agenda items at this point being the approval of last year’s AGM minutes, and the viewing of New North’s financial statements for 2016-17.

If there’s anything, anything at all, you’d like to see on the agenda, please let me know at matt.newnorth@sasktel.net, or just call the office.

NewNorth News & Updates

Get Your Resolutions in for the AGM

As always, communities have a chance to present resolutions for members to debate and vote on at New North's AGM, being held at the Prince Albert Travelodge on June 22.

Resolutions can be about anything at all. At the last AGM, we saw resolutions on inter-provincial electronic record sharing on the east-side, Nortep/Norpac funding, and mental health facilities in northern Saskatchewan. This year, we can expect to see resolutions around:

- A northern alcohol tax to fund addictions programs (see our March newsletter);
- The increase of alternative power solutions for northern Saskatchewan (this newsletter).

Resolutions are a very useful tool in New North's lobbying tool-kit. Every resolution is written up and sent to the appropriate ministry or agency responsible for that particular area.

Although you can bring a resolution forward on the day of the AGM, it's always a good idea to send it to us beforehand, just so we can include it as part of the AGM package.

Census: Don't Wait on Challenging it

Communities have until the end of the year to challenge their census numbers, but it is not a good idea to wait too long: what you have to be able to show Statscan is how many people you had in your community on census day, which was May 10, 2016. It's now June, 2017. You can probably see the problem here.

By now we all know the factors contributing to lower-than-expected census numbers, especially in communities with higher numbers of social assistance recipients and higher numbers of people in SaskHousing. In yet another one of those classic ironies, communities that need these kinds of numbers to be accurate are the ones who are least likely to have accurate numbers. For next time, we need to start thinking about what we can do, as a group, to ensure people understand that participating in the census has absolutely no privacy implications.

In the meantime, if you are not sure what to do about challenging your census, give us a call; we're more than happy to help you get in touch with the right people.

New North Solid Waste Survey

Doing the rounds right now is a survey from New North asking about solid waste management issues in your community. Although we're interested in a lot of things generally, we are particularly interested in the scrap tire situation in your community, and whether we need collectively to jump on someone about this. So far, though, going on the survey results we have, it doesn't sound like scrap tires is as big a deal as we thought. In actual fact, some communities don't accept tires at all; we didn't know that.

The survey is short – just 9 questions. If you want to see it, go to our website or give us a call and we'll send it to you.

Just a Reminder: New North's Bylaws are Online

Following some "helpful advice" at our last AGM, New North's bylaws can now be viewed on our website, at www.newnorthsask.org.

If you would like to see any changes made to our bylaws, you can submit them in the form of a resolution at the AGM, on June 22.

Opinion

ICNGD Closure a Blow to Advancing Northern Governance

But perhaps as worrying is the justification for ending it

By Matt Heley*

At the New North AGM in November, it was surprising to hear the number of elected officials who'd gone through the Nortep/Norpac program speaking about the value of the education to them and to their communities. It made us wonder how much of the "infrastructure" of northern governance is underpinned by the post-secondary education programs that we are currently losing.

We can now add the International Centre for Northern Governance and Development to this list. Having graduated more than 50 people since 2009, the program will cease in June, with six members of staff reportedly losing their jobs.

If anyone doubted the value of this program, you only had to read Chelsea Laskowski's reporting for MBC, which ran a three-part series with interviews of graduates and staff, to have your thoughts turned around. Through our own work with ICNGD over the last year or so we've encountered a willing and enthusiastic partner in pushing our "Northern Strategy" forward; work that will now probably not continue any longer.

In explaining why the government has cut the program's \$1.1 million annual funding, the Minister of Advanced Education, Bronwyn Eyre, said in a written statement that they "believe ... government funding is better directed to improving opportunities and accessibility for as many students as possible in our province, including in the North, as opposed to funding a selective, expensive program for a very limited number of students."

A similar explanation was used to justify the axing of Nortep/Norpac. In fact, we hear "selective" and "expensive" being used a lot nowadays to axe all kinds of programs, including STC.

There is a worrying logic in this kind of reasoning. For starters, it creates a kind of false equivalence where "selectivity" is equated with "privilege," even if the selectivity of the program itself may have come about as a result of a social or economic disadvantage which the program was trying to rectify.

You will also notice the importance in this type of argument of suggesting, quite explicitly in the

minister's case, that this *selectivity* is actually at the *expense* of others. That is to say, the argument is essentially that the "selectivity," and therefore the expense of the Nortep/Norpac or the ICNGD program affects the access of others to education.

This argument is troubling because of where it can logically take us: the removal of extra supports for people with disabilities or any type of social and economic disadvantage becomes easier (as is occurring in the United States), because such programs are, by their nature, selective, exclusive and expensive.

It is actually the first time we have noticed, at least in the last few years, anyone in government making statements implying that, firstly, the north is getting it too good, and secondly, that an education program is problematic because it only benefits a few.

But other than hardliners, it is difficult to see many people agreeing with either perception. Most people, we think, appreciate the barriers to education in the north, especially to higher levels of education. When you look at Chelsea's reporting (or the email list of ICNGD alumni), you see a pretty healthy cross-section of northerners represented, from all over. That many of these graduates are finding their way into public administration and leadership roles, popping up in municipal government and in senior government, or running a consultancy business, is not only extremely heartening, but is perhaps one of the most important steps that needs to happen for the north to grow. In a study, commissioned by the NMTA and carried out by none other than ICNGD researchers, we see it expressed, again and again, the importance of governance capacity as the essential foundation for economic and social development. It is why, in the very name of ICNGD, you see the connection being drawn between governance and development. You cannot have one without the other. Well, you can, if you want the north to be a "dependency" all its life. And in the end, that's all these decisions really do: they create the foundations for future and ongoing dependency.

***Views are those of the author**

Northern Municipal Trust Account Commits Funding to Feasibility Studies for Northern Regional Solid Waste Facilities

If you're a big fan of solid waste, feasibility studies, the NMTA and the making of commitments to things, then this headline will probably have piqued your interest.

At the last Mayor and Councillor Gathering in April, Keith Comstock, from Government Relations, made brief mention of a renewed focus by the NMTA on the solid waste management file. It can now be revealed that the NMTA is committing a fairly significant sum of money—\$500,000—to looking into the best way of regionalizing solid waste management systems in northern Saskatchewan, assuming it's even possible to do that.

A part of the play here is the potential money coming from INAC, who are looking to enter into partnerships with municipalities to locate and fund landfills for use by the municipality's First Nation neighbours. The benefit to the federal government of doing this is that they don't have to worry about regulating, or being in any way responsible, for overseeing landfills on reserve lands. It's pretty smart, and a win-win all round.

Of course, this is not the first time we've collectively tried to get the regional solid waste model going in the north. Back in 2009, New North, in partnership with Municipal Affairs and the Ministry of Environment, produced a feasibility study on northern regional landfills. It landed with a dull thud, partially because it's quite a big report, but mostly because it presented options that seemed completely unrealistic. The average cost of a regional solid waste disposal solution for some communities, including transport and up-front capital costs, came in as high as \$100 per person annually, depending on where you were. No one took it seriously.

But Things Have Changed Since Then

But, as we say, things have changed since then. Here are some things that have changed:

1. Revenue sharing is considerably higher now than in 2009, and includes a "landfill pillar" based on actual costs of delivering solid waste services (meaning that, if you moved to a more expensive regional solution, your "pillar allocation should also go up)
2. Capital costs may be off-set, if not completely eliminated, by federal contributions
3. Increased public awareness around the dangers of letting your lechate lechate its way into the

water table may be forcing the hand of municipal leaders

4. Greater public acceptance of tipping fees
5. The increasing enthusiasm of the Ministry of Environment for enforcing permits
6. The realization that not having a landfill to ever worry about ever again is actually pretty cool

The last point should not be taken too lightly. Although transfer stations can present problems of their own, they do not need permits, or trained operators to oversee them. You won't ever have to find tonnes of soil for cover every other day, and most importantly, you won't ever have to put aside \$40,000 a year over 20 years so you can replace your site when it gets too full. Not that you do that now. But if you did.

Some communities who've moved to a regional model are even finding that they are actually saving money by not having to maintain a giant, stinking, pile of trash anymore.

One-off and On-going Decommissioning Costs a Worry

If you decided to go headlong into a regional solution, what would that mean for your old landfill? That's a question we've never gotten, but we'll answer it anyway.

For starters, closing and decommissioning a landfill are not the same thing. Closing a landfill just means shutting the gate (if you had one), and not allowing the site to be used anymore. You'd probably have to go ahead and put those fires out, too.

Decommissioning, though, is another thing altogether. It means more or less returning the site back to how it was before we all went and ruined it with ... well, garbage. While closing a landfill may cost a few thousand dollars, decommissioning costs may run into the hundreds of thousands.

Post-closure, landfills can be subject to a site assessment to determine the impact of all that garbage on subsoil and water levels, which can involve boring holes and installing monitoring wells.

Both closing and decommissioning landfills have ongoing costs. It is perhaps these costs, probably would not be recoverable from INAC or other federal contributions, that could stand in the way of a regionalization concept taking hold in the north.

Municipal Sector Issues Around Legalization of Cannabis in Spotlight

With the federal government setting a date of July 1st, 2018, for the legalization of cannabis, concerns are growing both in the municipal sector and among provincial governments (and no doubt amongst other groups) that we may not actually be ready for it. Some of the issues that may be of concern to local governments include:

1. Whether the current fire and building codes are adequate to dealing with the potential increase in risk associated with production facilities
2. Whether municipalities have the professional capacity and expertise to conduct inspections on potential grow-op sites, and to identify risks
3. Whether municipalities are equipped with the bylaw enforcement capacity to deal with the consumption of cannabis in public spaces and other regulatory issues
4. Whether they will they get a slice of the revenue from provincial cannabis taxes

The answer to the first three questions, at least for us, is “mostly, no,” and the answer to the last question is a blank stare.

The provincial government is presently engaging with the sector to try to work out how everyone will move ahead on some of the regulatory issues posed by the federal government’s cannabis legislation; the general feeling seems to be that the Trudeau government has done a “drop and run” on this one.

Will your community allow the retailing of cannabis?

A question we have absolutely no feel on right now is whether northern communities will say “yes” to local cannabis retailing. The provincial government has already indicated that it doesn’t want to see cannabis sold in liquor stores, so there’s that. But how would your council react to a proposal for a cannabis retailer in downtown? Will some northern municipalities actually “ban” cannabis, in the same way they currently “ban” alcohol? And what if the government said municipalities could keep a portion of the revenue generated by taxes on cannabis sold in the community. Would that change your minds?

One of the Legal Tests of Municipal Liability for Dogs Bites was Right Here in the North

On a warm summer’s day in 1983, a 3 year old girl was skipping through the park in the Northern Village of Cumberland House when she was viciously attacked by a sled dog that had been tied to a tree by its owner. The girl’s ear was more or less torn off, and she had other injuries to her back and thigh.

The girl’s parents sued both the owner of the dog and the Local Community Authority, and were successful in obtaining a pay-out from the village of about \$50,000. While the liability of the owner is pretty clear cut—it was his dog, after all—what made the LCA liable?

It came down to a number of things. Firstly, the dog was tied up on land controlled by the LCA. Secondly, the LCA had been informed that there were dogs tied up there: a local Elder, who had experience with sled dogs, complained beforehand to the RCMP, the local resource officer and the LCA that dogs were tied up by the river. In her evidence, she said that she knew that sled dogs could be friendly, but they could also turn on “you and be very mean. You cannot trust a sled dog.”

Thirdly, the LCA had a policy of conducting what they called “pest control” (so-called because it left a

better impression in the community than “dog control”). The pest control policy was a bounty system, whereby a local member of council was paid \$7 for every dog he shot caught running at large. Only dogs tied up, and in someone’s yard, were spared. Even though council tried to use the defence that they didn’t actually have a dog control bylaw, the fact that the LCA had a policy of shooting dogs was enough to convince the court that they had taken on the responsibility of dog control, and were actively, if not enthusiastically, engaged in it.

In the end, the issue came down to the ordinary duty of care the local government owed to allow safe access to public areas without the threat of being injured by dogs that may be chained there. The LCA, in failing to act on the request by the Elder to do something about the dogs, lapsed in its duty of care, and was therefore liable to the harm inflicted by the dog on the little girl. The principle here is really no different to a local government’s duty of care in other situations. For instance, if a local government knows that kids are playing on a malfunctioning slide located in a public park they can be liable for the harm resulting from the slide’s failure to elicit the requisite giddy screams of delight.

Challenge Your Census Now, or Forever Hold Your Peace (or until the next one)

The initial roll-out of 2016 census figures was so all over the shop for northern Saskatchewan that it's difficult to know whether to take any of the census program's subsequent releases all that seriously. This month we have age, sex, and dwelling types. In September we will see a variety of other releases, including income and sports jackets. We're looking forward to that one.

For the north as a whole, the census count came in at about 37,000 people. Immediately we know this can't be right, since health enrolments for roughly the same coverage area are about 2,000 more than that. As we mentioned a few newsletters ago, it is virtually impossible to correlate the health region figures with population centres in most cases, because the health regions code enrolments to postal code, not to place of residence (and in the case of First Nations, to the First Nation they belong to, not the actual community). Internally, of course, the health regions do have everyone's street addresses, so they could in theory give us that data if they ever truly cared about us. In the meantime, the best we can really do in making the comparison between census data and health region enrolments is to get the big picture overview.

With all that in mind, is there anything of interest in the latest age/sex census numbers? You may have noticed that the media focused on how, for the first time, there are more seniors in Canada than there are kids until 14. There's obviously two things going on here: people are living older (which is great), and people are having less kids. What's apparently not so great about a stagnant birth rate is that, eventually, these kids will bear a disproportionately, and increasingly, greater responsibility for funding the retirements and healthcare of their grandparents. An influx of immigrants—and the more kids they have the better—could certainly help swing the balance back a bit, don't you think?

Saskatchewan, though, bucks the trend, as does northern Saskatchewan in particular, where the percentage of kids under 14 is still much higher than adults over 65: the percentage of the northern population under 14 is about 31%, while seniors over 65 make up just 6% (Saskatchewan's 65+ population is above 16%).

There are lots of factors contributing to the disparity. Firstly, northerners rate poorly when

it comes to the social determinants of health (poverty, poor diet, higher incidences of smoking, drinking, etc), meaning people here die younger. Northerners also have lots of babies: some communities as small as 1000 people can have as many 10% of the population aged under one (the average is about 4%). The north doesn't experience a great deal of in-migration, either. Virtually all of the north's population growth, such as it is, comes from live births. In Saskatchewan as a whole, on the other hand, population increases have mainly come from in-migration.

The proportion of the northern population under the age of 14 has been falling for a number of years, after peaking about the time of the 2011 census. You might recall, at that time, quite a lot of coverage of the north's "population explosion." In fact, the population of the north had been growing exponentially for more than 30 years, up by 34% from 1981 to 2006. This was made somewhat more newsworthy when compared to most of the rest of the province, where populations had been declining virtually everywhere except Regina, Saskatoon and Meadow Lake.

In the last decade, this trend has reversed: the north's population has grown by about 10% since 2006, but the percentage of population aged 14 and younger has declined from 37% to its current 31%. The north is slowly ageing (perhaps because of improvements in the social determinants of health) and the province as a whole is getting younger.

Challenging the Census

You have until December 31 to get Statscan to change your official census numbers. Some communities are taking the extraordinary measure of actually doing recounts themselves, paying someone a "bounty" for each person they get on their list. Smaller communities don't really need to go that far. A simple list of names may be all that's required.

So far that we know, only one northern community at this point has successfully challenged their census. Weyakwin, which came in at 49 on census day, now has their other 50 or so people back. That, or the aliens just decided they didn't want them anymore.

If you need help navigating the Byzantine labyrinth of the federal government on this one, just give us a call.

Province Recommends Emergency Preparedness Kit Designed by Red Green

Just in time for the flood and fire seasons, the federal and provincial government both marked Emergency Preparedness Week this month, with the province in particular receiving some interesting Facebook commentary from people asking if the government could be more specific about what “emergency” they were planning, and whether they were actually laying the groundwork for a future disaster, such as newer and harsher provincial budget.

Provincially, the Ministry of Government Relations is responsible for emergency management, and their press release featured a photo, presumably taken in a government breakroom (two microwaves and a Keurig; it’s amazing how the other half live), of the kinds items an emergency preparedness kit might have in it. The items included:

- Tin food
- Tin opener
- A teddy bear that some kid is at this very moment desperately looking for
- A torch
- Batteries that are clearly the wrong size for the torch
- Personal toiletries
- Thick wad of cash
- And, of course, duct tape

These are only suggested items, and we expect that if we asked a group of northerners what their top items would be you’d get some fairly individual lists (homemade elk jerky would probably feature heavily). The point of an emergency preparedness kit is that you have it already made up in advance of something unexpected happening. Additionally, you don’t go making a kit, and then raiding it for items that you’ve momentarily run out of (like thick wads of cash and duct tape). We suspect that, in most cases, you’ll need to periodically update the teddy bear to reflect your child’s current obsessions.

All jokes aside, emergency preparedness kits are pretty useful, at least for us: one of the things we noticed about our own behaviour preceding the evacuation of 2015 was how difficult it was to think of the things we needed to take (it just so happened that we had already packed for vacation; and besides, my wife, being the person she is, had been planning for this since before but possibly also a result of our marriage, in 1998). So, if you are the sort of person who finds themselves, when confronted with any kind of crisis, flailing on the spot like a deranged marionette, an emergency preparedness kit is probably for you.

New North Infographic Series

Essential Items in any Emergency Preparedness Kit

- Iphone Charger
- Copy of Joseph Conrad’s *Nostromo*
- DVD set of *Breaking Bad*
- Car keys, several spare sets of car keys
- The Children
- More car keys
- Emergency Commissioner, Duane McKay



New North recommends including Commissioner Duane McKay in your emergency preparedness kit this summer.

Go Solar, or Go Home

By CHELSEA LASKOWSKI

In May, the Northern Village of Green Lake heralded the arrival and installation of 96 solar panels on the roof of its community hall, spurring plenty of jokes about how the community is going “green.” (For the record, this article’s author took no part in this practice, because she is not a fan of puns.)

The panels will be used to convert the sun’s rays into up to 31.5kW of juice to feed back into the provincial power grid through what’s called the SaskPower “net metering program.” SaskPower’s website says the program allows you to “generate your own electricity and get credit for the unused portion from your power utility,” and is open to any solar (and other approved renewable energy) projects that have up to 100kW of generating capacity.

Green Lake Mayor Ric Richardson says the community stands to save up to \$7,000 annually on the centre’s SaskPower bill, essentially covering the cost of powering the community hall and arena.

He says Green Lake was drawn into the idea of finding a renewable energy solution, and solar presented the best opportunity in terms of logistics and cost. There aren’t a lot of moving parts, maintenance costs

are low, and additionally, more solar panels can be added in the future if the community chooses to expand the project.

There are a number of financial incentives for communities to try solar, not the least of which is SaskPower’s automatic one-time rebate that covers 20 per cent of eligible costs up to \$20,000 for approved projects that utilize the net metering program.

In Green Lake’s case, the community offset the solar panel project’s total cost of \$138,000 with grants, rebates and funding from many sources: \$20,000 from the SaskPower rebate, \$55,487 from the Canada 150 Fund, and a grant from BullFrog Power.

With that in mind, as well as the fact that these solar panels have a 25-year warranty, Richardson said “we should be able to pay off the system within seven or eight years and then enjoy free power after that for at least another 17 or 18 years.”

Richardson is proud of what Green Lake has done, but he’ll readily point out it’s nothing new. He’ll point to solar heavyweights Germany and Switzerland with their massive projects, but also the less-plentiful but often powerful projects that are scattered all over the province. For example, two schools on Hatchet Lake Denesuline First Nation – in Fond du Lac and in Wollaston Lake – have solar panels on their roofs, each with about double the generating capacity of Green Lake’s. Jai Roberts, renewable energy project manager with First Nations

Power Authority, says solar farms and other large-scale ventures in Canada tend to straddle the border between Canada and the United States. This ties into studies that generally find the further south you go in Canada, the better the solar intensity.

Overall, SaskPower paints a less-than-rosy view of “solar intensity” in the graph provided, with the province’s far north offering about 52 less W/m² than the far south – which amounts to about a third less solar potential. However, numbers from Natural Resources Canada show there are exceptions, too. For example, Green Lake’s solar potential is similar to Endeavor’s, a village that is hundreds of kilometres south. Northern municipalities like Pinehouse, Dorintosh, and Cole Bay have only slightly lower solar potential than a number of areas in the south.

Regardless of the fact that other areas – like Estevan – have much higher solar potential, Roberts and Richardson are able to make a strong case for northern solar projects. As previously mentioned, solar is a cost-effective way of reducing your power bills. Roberts often tells First Nations that their power bills nearly double every 11 years, which opens their eyes to the long-term savings of solar. The hardest part is the initial cost, but there are plenty of ways to mitigate expenses through grants like Green Lake has done.

Like all technology, Roberts says solar panels will continue to get more efficient over the years but are already inexpensive across the board – whether used for

residential power or for solar farming. The big breakthrough that the industry has yet to make is in battery storage. Roberts says it’ll be a “game changer” once developers find an affordable way to hold a charge with solar batteries, and at that point communities can start looking at fuelling their own power rather than pumping it back into the grid. This is likely an appealing concept to northern communities, where things often come to a standstill during multi-day SaskPower outages.

Solar Power: Facts & Figures

Estimate Average Power

Consumption per household: 10,000 kw/year

Average daily kilowatt per hour (per square meter) potential for select communities:

Cumberland House: 3.54 kwh/m²

Denare Beach: 3.46 kwh/m²

Creighton: 3.45 kwh/m²

Sandy Bay: 3.43 kwh/m²

La Ronge: 3.52 kw/m²

Timber Bay: 3.71 kwh/m²

Green Lake: 3.73 kwh/m²

Turnor Lake: 3.55 kwh/m²

Buffalo Narrows: 3.59 kwh/m²

La Loche: 3.53 kwh/m²

Stony Rapids: 3.46 kwh/m²

Rosetown: 3.86 kw/m²

At 20% efficiency, square meters of panels required to generate 10,000 kw/hr per year (approx. capital cost at \$1,000 m²):

Cumberland House: 38.75 m² (\$38,750)

Denare Beach: 39.68 m² (\$39,680)

Creighton: 39.84 m² (\$39,840)

Timber Bay: 37 m² (\$37,000)

Saskpower Rebates: 20% of installed cost (up to \$20,000 total installed cost).

Saskpower Net Metering Program: Electricity can be “sold” back to the grid during times of excess solar production, which is used to reduce your bill

Time of year you’d produce most solar power: Feb-April (I know, right!)

FROM THE CEO BY Matt Heley

Nothing puts you in a better mood than waking up and finding your car had been broken into overnight. Unless,

of course, it's the second or third time that month it's happened. You can't beat that.

Apparently, when kids go through your car looking for spare change and anything they can easily fence, that's called "car shopping."

No one, if they're smart, locks their car doors anymore—we don't. But what about our homes? You can't just leave them unlocked. At least three garages have been broken into on my street this month.

The perception of crime always runs ahead of the reality of crime. This, of course, is especially true if you've been a victim of crime. But the perception of crime, and the actuality of it, pretty much match up in the north. Mostly, crime here is small-time in nature. "Mischief," which is just another name for damaging property, blows out the crime stats.

There are lots of thefts and robbery, but muggings are relatively rare. First degree murder convictions are also pretty rare. First degree murder is pre-meditated murder, as is attempted murder. Most murder convictions are second degree, meaning they were not planned; they just happened, in the spur of the moment. Generally, these murders are alcohol-related. Surprisingly, drug-related convictions are not as high as in the south. You'd think, given how

ruined communities are with drugs, that convictions would match their prevalence. Not so. There is a sense that gang activity is increasing. Car thefts, home invasions and assaults are often gang-related. The concern is that this activity is not just gang-on-gang anymore, it is starting to impact the broader community.

There are few things that are greater threats to the growth and sustainability of northern communities than crime. It is one of the reasons we've always tried to support local grass-roots initiatives and community-led crime reduction efforts. The rebuilding of La Loche after the shooting is an example of a community taking back their right to feel safe. And there are others.

Like anything else, there is no one pressure point. While we complain about a lack of economic opportunities, we also need to realize that many of these crimes are committed by youth, still in school. Some of it comes down to parenting and role-modeling.

If we want to reduce crime, we have to work along on every axis. The criminal justice system won't solve this problem. Nor will the provincial government, as much as want them to.

Communities that are getting ahead of this are forming their own committees, getting partners on side, and rolling up their sleeves. When you see that happening, you see a community that hasn't given in.

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.

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