



Proposal for New Northern Bus Service for West Side Met with Enthusiasm from Northern Leaders at New North AGM.

See inside for more.

Upcoming

New North Gathering

November 16, Prince Albert Coronet

Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities

NEW NORTH

This month ..

- Conflict of Interest
- The Election Snafu
- AGM Wrap
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- Revenue Sharing Review Update
- Northern Tree Vacationing in Costa Rica Meets Someone

Monthly Newsletter Summer 2018

Feds Launch What They are Calling “Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy”

The federal government’s long-awaited housing strategy was met with scepticism when it was finally announced last Fall, mainly because most of the meat wouldn’t be dished out until after the next election.

The federal government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, announced this month and which is contained in a document called Opportunity for All, is being criticised as setting a new low for vapid policy announcements, being a compendium of promises and commitments without any actual money or programs, other than those already announced (such as the housing strategy, the new Canada child benefit that started a few years ago, the increase in childcare funding in the last budget, and so on).

The strategy aims to reduce poverty in Canada from 12% to

10% by 2020, then to 6% by 2030. All that is assuming the Liberal government stays in power for that long, of course.

Perhaps the only point worthy of note in the new strategy is that the federal government has decided they will henceforth have an actual definition of poverty, which they are calling “Canada’s Official Line” of poverty, to measure their progress against.

Conventionally, measures of poverty have included statistical formulas based on income levels, such as the Low-Income Measure, and Low-Income Cut-offs.

Now, Canadian households will be considered to be in poverty if they don’t have enough money to “afford a specific basket of goods and services that allows them to meet their basic needs and achieve a modest standard of living in their community.”

This new “poverty line” is thought to be better than the others because it is an “absolute” measure of poverty, rather than a relative measure. Incomes can go up or down, but income measures won’t tell you if families are doing better or worse because they don’t take into account movements in the cost of living, while the new “Official Line” of poverty will do just that.

Despite criticisms that the federal announcement doesn’t go far enough, it is more than anyone else is doing right now.

Saskatchewan released a poverty reduction strategy under then Social Services Minister Donna Harpauer back in 2016, but little has been heard about it since.

By conventional measures, northern Saskatchewan, by census division, has the second highest levels of poverty in Canada. ■

NewNorth News & Updates

New North Fall Gathering to Help Officials Stay Out of Trouble

November 16, 2018: Coronet Hotel

New North's Fall and Spring Gatherings (the latter to be in April) will have a focus on governance.

The Ombudsman's reports following investigations into conflicts of interest and other things municipal continue to intrigue us, so kicking off the Fall Gathering will be a presentation by someone from the Ombudsman's office to apprise us of what they are seeing, and more importantly, what officials need to do to ensure they don't accidentally get themselves into a conflict of interest situation.

As well, we have invited Labour Relations and Workplace Safety to talk about what elected officials can do to help create safe and harassment-free environments for municipal employees.

Municipal work environments have come into focus in recent months following the tragic suicide of a grader operator in a rural municipality, which was attributed by the WCB to "interpersonal incidents" (ie, bullying) experienced by the employee while working at the RM (the RM rejected the findings, by the way). While every workplace has to have a policy concerning harassment, opinions can vary as to what constitutes harassment—and who a policy even applies to.

In the case above, the harassment experienced by the grader operator was alleged to have been perpetuated by elected officials, who are technically not employers. Outside of what might be covered by a council code of ethics, workplace legislation doesn't capture the conduct of elected officials in the same way it might capture that of actual employers or fellow employees.

In other items, Kerry Desjarlais from the Water Security Agency will be surprised to learn she is being tasked with going over what exactly elected officials are responsible for when it comes to waterworks (in short, everything).

In addition to all that, we are looking forward to having updates on *The Northern Municipalities Act* consultations currently being waged by the Ministry of Government Relations.

Also on the agenda is a session looking at internal controls and financial management.

And perhaps, you never know, maybe the Minister himself will drop by.

Don't forget: although we have a packed agenda right now, please feel free to send us any other things you'd like to see get an airing on the day. ■

New North AGM Wrap-Up

The New North Annual General Meeting, held back in June, is the occasion to furnish members and stakeholders with an account of the activities of the association for the financial year 2017-18, as well as a full reckoning of how much it all cost and where the money came from.

All this is available on the New North website, www.newnorthsask.org.

The New North AGM was also, as it always is, an occasion for some lively and pointed discussion. Northern leaders once again raised concerns not only about the lack of addiction treatment centres available for northerners, who not only have to travel way down south for treatment, but are spending many months on waiting lists to even get seen.

Northern leaders also continue to express frustration that the benefits of resource extraction are not making it back to communities. Mayor of Green Lake Ric Richardson noted that as many as 400 logging trucks a day rumble through his community, but questioned

how much of the economic value those trucks represent is seen by northern people. "Resource revenue sharing formula doesn't reflect that it's our resources being taken out," he said. He reiterated that we need to be "forceful in negotiations" to obtain an "honest and reflective" revenue sharing program for the north.

Mayor of Cumberland House Kelvin McKay called for the establishment of more northern economic development entities to ensure that the benefits of the money spent on contracts for gravel crushing and highways work stays in the north.

In other news from the day, northern leaders welcomed a delegation from Primco Dene, the development arm of Cold Lake First Nations in Alberta, who came to share their plan to launch a bus line serving the west side communities along highway 155, through to Prince Albert and Saskatoon.

We will have more information about how that plan is moving along fairly soon. ■

From the New North Chair

BY BRUCE FIDLER, MAYOR OF CREIGHTON

With Fall closing in fast, many of us looking forward to the very brief few weeks when the leaves turn that joyous golden-yellow and red ... before causing a mess on the front lawn!

But Fall is also when the real business of trying to get things done starts up again. As Chair of New North, I can see that we have a busy few months ahead of us. Firstly, we will be advocating for a solution to the problem raised by the Beauval resolution (see below), meeting with the Minister of the Environment and opening up dialogue once again on the issue of suppression cost claw-backs.

As well, we are looking forward to hearing the options presented by government for the new revenue sharing formula. We will also be monitoring very closely the fall-out from Cameco's shuttering of

Key Lake and McArthur River. Apart from the impact on northern families, government revenues will also take a big hit (payroll taxes, lease fees, royalties, etc), and this could impact northern municipalities directly as well.

We're also very interested in seeing how cannabis legalization goes over, especially for municipalities. I know many people have expressed concern about how workplaces will deal with drug testing and the possibility of more people coming to work impaired. The best way to deal with it is to have policies in place that employees understand and agree with. If you haven't got a policy in place now, you need to probably act on that fairly soon.

Bruce

Beauval's Resolution Calls for Common Sense on Environment's Fire Suppression Costs Claw-back Policy

The Ministry of Environment's claw-back policy for wildfire suppression for fires originating within municipal boundaries has been a sore point for northern communities for years.

As if to illustrate, the Mayor of the Northern Village of Beauval, Nick Daigneault, put forward a resolution at the New North AGM in June to "seek clarity and a rationale about the provincial government fire protection policy within northern Saskatchewan municipal boundaries," and for the province to work with communities to come up with a "new progressive and inclusive policy which will be more reflective of northern capacity, capability, and fiscal reality relating to fire risk, planning, and protection."

For years, the ministry didn't actually seek repayment of fire suppression costs. This changed following a provincial auditor's report that noticed the oversight, and told the ministry they needed to get back to doing claw-backs.

It wasn't just the north that was affected by this change of heart: the rural municipalities as well are subject to suppression repayments (and they think the north isn't).

During the early part of this decade the municipal associations and the ministry put their heads together to come up with a way to deal with the province's legislated mandate to get reimbursement for fire suppression costs, and the municipalities' unwillingness, or lack of capacity, to pay those costs.

One solution put forward was for municipalities to take out insurance against suppression costs. Unfortunately, the premiums were too prohibitive, and that option fell off the table.

Because the legislation allows the minister some leeway to reduce the costs based on "hardship," one solution pro-

posed for the north was that any repayment would be capped at a proportion of a municipalities' tax collections (at about 6 mills). This became unofficial policy for a time, but it was never really set in stone.

In 2012-3, the issue reached boiling point when a number of northern municipalities refused to repay the province for suppression. A part of the reason was because of Environment's decision to act unilaterally (that is, didn't first consult the municipal leadership) in suppressing fires within municipal boundaries. Although the ministry has the right to do that, it was considered overreach. The final insult arrived when the bills came in.

At that time, the ministry was also trying to gain support for their new *Wildfire Act*, but was receiving pushback, especially from SARM, because the new Act was seeking to abolish the ministry's responsibility for wildfire management within 5km of the boundaries of a provincial forest on rural municipal land—essentially, the treeline that runs onto a municipality. SARM's argument was that rural municipalities don't have the equipment or expertise to fight forest fires. The province backed down, and to this day have legal responsibility to act on fires in the forest fringe on rural municipal land.

You can see why northern communities were furious with what they believe to be a double standard. If the same policy was applied in the north, virtually no northern municipality—because they all exist within the boreal forest—would have the responsibility for wildfire suppression.

As it stands, the treed northern municipalities are treated the same as a prairie rural municipality. However, the treed rural municipalities are treated differently again. For us, the solution is simple: pretend that the northern municipalities are just rural municipalities with lots of trees in them. ■

Ombudsman's Office Continues to Educate on Conflict of Interest

Since the 2015 recommendations by Conflict of Interest Commissioner Ron Barclay following the inquiry into the RM of Sherwood, and the consequent amendments to the municipalities Acts later that year, we've seen a noticeable upswing in the level of interest and attentiveness to conduct that might bring officials, and others, into jeopardy with the respect the legislation's conflict of interest provisions.

Especially in small communities, conflicts of interest, within a situationally- and locally-determined threshold of tolerance, are often overlooked by residents because—well, what are you going to do? When the mayor is also the grader driver and is married to the administrator, and everyone on council goes to the same Christmas parties because they're all somehow related, if not in consanguinity then in shared ownership of a stud bull or bitcoin farm, certain allowances are sometimes made.

Yet, it is perhaps for this very reason that elected officials in smaller communities need to have a better understanding of the finer points of how the conflict of interest rules apply in law. It is no excuse to say "these are just how things are done" anymore. If a member of the public, or a fellow elected official, wants to take a councillor to task over a matter relating to a conflict of interest, the leeway provided by the law can actually be quite narrow. "Local conditions" simply don't apply, and there's no such thing as a hometown advantage.

What may have been for generations acceptable—or at least, tolerated, conduct—is perhaps now more likely than ever before to come under scrutiny. A part of this is because of the new role of the Ombudsman in investigating the conduct of municipal officials. And even though the Ombudsman's office only makes recommendations, those recommendations can have the force of steel (quite apart from anything

else, the minister can remove an official based on a report's findings).

Arguably, the biggest takeaway from Barclay's investigation into the RM of Sherwood was his evisceration of the Reeve's "letter of the law" defence. You might recall in that instance the Reeve said he hadn't done anything wrong because when council was pondering issues relating to his property deals, he followed the steps set out in the legislation, declaring a conflict and excusing himself from the "formal" decision-making process.

However, Barclay found that the Reeve did everything he could "behind the scenes" to influence council's position in his favour, which included some overbearing behaviour directed at the administrator. What Barclay identified in this case was that, even if we accepted that the "letter of the law" had been followed, the "spirit of the law" had been flaunted. This is because the legislated provisions relating to conflict of interest are not, in any literal sense, the last word. "Common law" principles relating to bias, undue influence and so on—not to mention anything that might fall under the criminal code, including corrupt practices—stand above and beyond the legislation as unspoken principles informing ethical standards for public officials. Some of the amendments to the municipalities Acts in the wake of the Barclay inquiry were intended to bridge this gap in statute and common law.

A recent investigation by the Ombudsman adds further to our understanding of how far the common law principles extend beyond the literal words of the legislation, in this case relating to how glibly we interpret the legislation's own specific defining limits on who is considered "family" with respect to conflicts of interest.

The dispute at the centre of the investigation is fairly straight forward. A rate-payer complained that three council members of the RM of Beaver River were in a conflict of interest because they participated in council's

decisions to "check for gravel" on a parcel of Crown land leased by one of the council members, and in another, a parcel leased by the father and brother of two other council members. It's the latter conflict that is the most interesting for us.

If you're familiar with the conflict of interest sections of the legislation you may be scratching your head right now. Although the father and brother of the councillors are relatives, they are not "family" as defined by the Act, which draws a line at "spouse and dependent children of a member of council." (In the northern Act, that is in section 159).

While the Ombudsman found that the councillors did not contravene *The Municipalities Act* in this strict sense, they still fell foul of the common law principles related to conflict of interest. The test here is what would a "reasonable person" think. The Ombudsman writes:

We found that a reasonably informed person would think, in all the circumstances, there was a real likelihood that council member #2 – X's son, and council member #3 – X's brother, would not be able to take part in the council's decision about how to deal with the potential for gravel on land leased by X, in an unbiased manner. Both council members ought to have known that there was an opportunity to further X's private interests by each of them taking part in the council's decision. Therefore, they were each in a conflict of interest and should have taken steps to deal with the conflict.

In other words, if someone told you the facts of this situation, regardless of what the legislation says, would you think there was a potential conflict of interest here? Most of us *probably* would think there *probably* was. At the end of the day, those "probablys"

are what really matters. When you're dealing with grey areas and complete certainty is not achievable, the law goes with the balance of probabilities (or "likelihood," which is the word used in the passage above).

An interesting coda to this investigation is that even though the Ombudsman found there was a conflict of interest, the finding was not accompanied by the usual recommendation that the councillors had disqualified themselves: "We found that these council members were not fully aware that the conflict of interest rules set out in the ... *Act* applied to situations like these. Nor did they fully understand the RM's own *Procedures Bylaw* ... Their response to our draft report confirmed this."

A secondary coda relates to the municipality's response to the investigation. Despite the finding *not* coming with a recommendation to disqualify anyone, the council went ahead and refused to accept the recommendations anyway, and perhaps the entirety of the substance of the investigation and report, feeling that they hadn't done anything wrong.

For the rest of us, the report's findings should be taken very seriously. Quite often, when a resident or fellow councillor raises a conflict of interest complaint it is not because they are armed with a full and comprehensive understanding of the law. Quite the contrary. It can be triggered by a "gut

feel," a sense that something is just not right. A sense that something is just "not fair."

The saving grace, of course, is that if the Ombudsman, or anyone else, uses a "reasonable person" test to determine if a contravention has occurred, there's nothing at all stopping us from subjecting our own behaviour to this very same test. You can't forget what the legislation technically says. At the same time, you have to know that it cannot possibly be comprehensive. As the Ombudsman writes: "There may be situations where a council member may still have an obligation to declare that he or she has a conflict of interest in a matter before council, even if it does not fall strictly under the definition of a conflict of interest in the [municipalities Acts]. Council members still have to follow common law rules about avoiding conflicts of interest."

That is the meaning of this important, yet hitherto utterly obscure, section in *The Northern Municipalities Act*: "Nothing in this Part [that is, the part related to conflict of interest] is to be interpreted as affecting any other rights given by, or application of other requirements, duties or responsibilities imposed by, any other Act or law in relation to the matters covered by this Part."

It's as clear as mud, of course. Luckily, the Ombudsman's office is there to help us understand what this stuff really means. ■

Ministry of Govt. Relations Orders an "Inspection" of a Municipality

In a move that he said was "very rare," the Minister of Government Relations, Warren Kaeding, has ordered an "inspection" of the RM of McKillop, located just north of Regina.

The last inspection (followed by an inquiry) ordered by a Minister of Government Relations was in 2014, into the RM of Sherwood (see previous page).

The inspection is a reminder that government has broad powers to look into the affairs of any municipality and investigate the conduct of officials, although, as the minister indicated, they seldom use them in such a dramatic fashion.

In *The Northern Municipalities Act*, the minister's powers are outlined in Part XIV (page 242).

They can also order a financial audit of the municipality, and any entities associated with it (including economic development corporations and the like), and can compel you to hand over all books and records associated with the management of the municipality and related entities.

Interestingly, the minister, apparently, can also compel banks and financial institutions "carrying on business in Saskatchewan" to "furnish" the minister with the bank statements of any municipality or entity connected to it.

In the case of McKillop, it appears from media reporting that government is acting on complaints by residents, perhaps led by the local ratepayers association, who have been calling, among other things, for a forensic audit of the municipality.

Petitions by Residents "Not Acted On"

Although the Reeve of the RM has said he "actually welcome[s]" the inspection," he noted that a forensic financial audit was not within the "purview" of the inspector.

Interestingly, one of the ongoing issues ratepayers have with the RM is that their petitions to council have not been "acted on." As we all know, as long as a petition meets the requirements in the legislation, council is compelled to act on a petition brought forward by residents.

It so happens that one of the petitions concerned financial audits and, according to reporting, the Reeve said negotiations broke down over the audit's scope.

The inspection will apparently conclude on September 15. There doesn't seem to be any requirement for the results of the inspection to be made public, but you'd think, given the level of public interest, the government would have to do that.

Inspection vs Inquiry

You might recall that the "inspection" into the RM of Sherwood in 2014 then led to an "inquiry." The difference between an inspection and inquiry has to do with the scope of the investigation. An inspection relates to matters connected to the "management, administration or operation of a municipality." As noted by Ron Barclay in the Sherwood "inspection," an inspection did not let him look into the conduct of any specific member of council. Rather, the inspection addressed the "broader function of the RM, its procedures and processes, and its actions through its council."

By contrast, an inquiry can specifically look at the conduct of individual members of council and municipal employees.

In the Sherwood case, Barclay concluded at some point during the inspection that an inquiry was needed—in other words, he felt that he needed an expanded authority to look into the conduct of individuals (members of council, as it so happened). The minister, Jim Reiter, provided him with that authority under the Act, and so the inspection and inquiry in the RM went on concurrently.

Presently, in the RM of McKillop, it is only an inspection, with limited scope. However, at any time the minister could order they go a bit deeper and wider. ■

First Round of Municipal Revenue Sharing Consultations Conclude with Lower-Than-Forecast Body Count

Typically, a municipal revenue sharing review would begin with everyone checking their irons at the door, but this time round things have been different—and deliberately so.

As you will recall, government initiated a review of municipal revenue sharing (MRS) following years of the former premier, Brad Wall, expressing misgivings that the program was working out too well for the municipal sector. Even with that, there were a number of reasons, some historic, some emerging, that required a review of the program of sorts. Firstly, the MRS “pool” was based on 1 point of the PST (from two years earlier). When this formula first began, PST was about \$900 million, which made the MRS pool about \$180 million. Over the next 7 years, PST ballooned to \$1.3 billion—a 44% increase (recent declines brought the overall yearly average to the more reasonable 3% over the 10 years of the program). With the PST having moved to 6% and its base expanded, the PST is now budgeted at about \$2 billion. A \$300 million a year MRS pool was too much of a bite, so the linkage fell apart right then and there.

For all intents and purposes, the former MRS formula was dead, or at least in a state of extreme repose, when the Minister of Government Relations announced earlier this year that the “pool” would be frozen at current levels for two years—until the next formula can be put in place. The new formula is likely to come into effect in an election year, which some municipal officials are taking as a hint that the new deal might be better than the last one, particularly for the populous cities.

The MRS discussions that began back in May set off with government asserting a handful of new-ish principles they’d like to see incorporated into any MRS deal. As you might expect, “free for all,”

“disorganized frenzy,” “government-sponsored gravy train,” or “like high schoolers at an open-bar” aren’t coming up in many backgrounders we’ve seen. Instead, they’ve gone with “sustainable,” “evidence-based,” “accountable,” “transparent,” and any number of other such synonyms that are the opposite, antonyms, if you will, of what we’d like the program to look like.

We’re joking, of course. In point of fact, everyone is pretty much on the same page, at least on the face of it, when it comes to establishing the core principles of revenue sharing. When you drill down, no one wants a program that is not sustainable, or that doesn’t seem to be addressing anyone’s funding needs.

The end-game should be to come up with a program that addresses not just the municipal fiscal gap, but one that addresses other long-term needs and priorities as well. Another government in another time and place might have used this review to push amalgamations. But this being here and now, the kinds of things that might be tied to a new MRS deal are a bit more boring, like regional co-operation and capacity building (perhaps an administrator internship program?). As well, government seems to be expressing a desire to see measurable outcomes for the money the province is providing. This is relatively easy to do for capital funding—where we can talk about how many bridges were repaired or constructed or water treatment plants built or replaced. How this conversation goes for operational funding, we’re not sure.

Because the current review is about stripping it down and potentially doing a whole new rebuild, everything about the current MRS program is being looked at. This includes both the “quantum” (ie, the amount the government budgets for revenue sharing), as well as the

formula used to calculate that on a yearly basis. As we know, back when this program began, stakeholders agreed that a PST-linked formula seemed to offer the best of both worlds: an amount that reflected the approximate funding needs of the sector, yet somehow also reflected the province’s capacity to pay for it. Of course, this latter became a rod for the government’s back: because the payout was based on the PST from two years prior, an increasingly broke province was faced with a situation of setting aside record revenue sharing in years when their own revenues were cratering (2016 being the classic year; the only saving grace for government was that it was an election year).

Still, people like the idea of linking the size of the MRS to the economy in some way, and we suspect just about everyone feels that the PST-linked formula is the way to go. Other options might include linking the pool to Real GDP, total government revenues, fuel taxes or our favourite, liquor taxes. Another option is to link it to the basket of taxes known as “all other taxes” in the public accounts—fuel, alcohol, tobacco, etc. Because these are mostly “sin” taxes, the municipal sector would be incentivised to lobby for increased taxes on smoking and drinking, leaving us all mostly wonderfully conflicted. Other jurisdictions have simply thrown another point onto the PST and passed that through to municipalities, but that’s not likely to happen here.

The reason the consultations are moving along so amicably right now is because no one fundamentally disagrees on any of the overarching principles being proposed by government. Things will get more interesting the closer we get to seeing the spreadsheets coming out. ■

StatsCan's Northern Crime Stats a Mixed Bag, as Usual

StatsCan's latest crimes statistics show that the incidence of crime in northern communities is flattening, if not edging up slightly. After years of noticeable declines, the crime rate, across the north and Saskatchewan generally, is neither dramatically rising nor falling.

In Saskatchewan as a whole, the incident rate per 100,000 people stood at 12,784, up from 12,544 in 2013. That's a 4.5% decrease since last year, after a couple of years of increases.

The statistics released by StatScan do need to be thoroughly parsed, however.

Although the statistics show increases in some locations and across different categories, we can never really be sure if this is because crime is going up, or because policing is just getting more effective.

In some cases, a dramatic increase in incidences can be the result of police deciding to target that particular offence. And, conversely, where incidences are falling, is it because police are simply not targeting it? Across Saskatchewan, rates of impaired driving have declined fairly significantly in the last five years: 4,800 were charged in 2013, versus 3,258 in 2017. Are we driving impaired less often, or have the police services given up policing it?

Crime rates vary quite a lot across the north, and some communities do seem to be experiencing an overall increase. However, another problem with taking the crime statistics at face value is that the figures reflect the activities of a detachment that may be serving multiple communities, so it's difficult to pinpoint where the offences are really occurring from these figures.

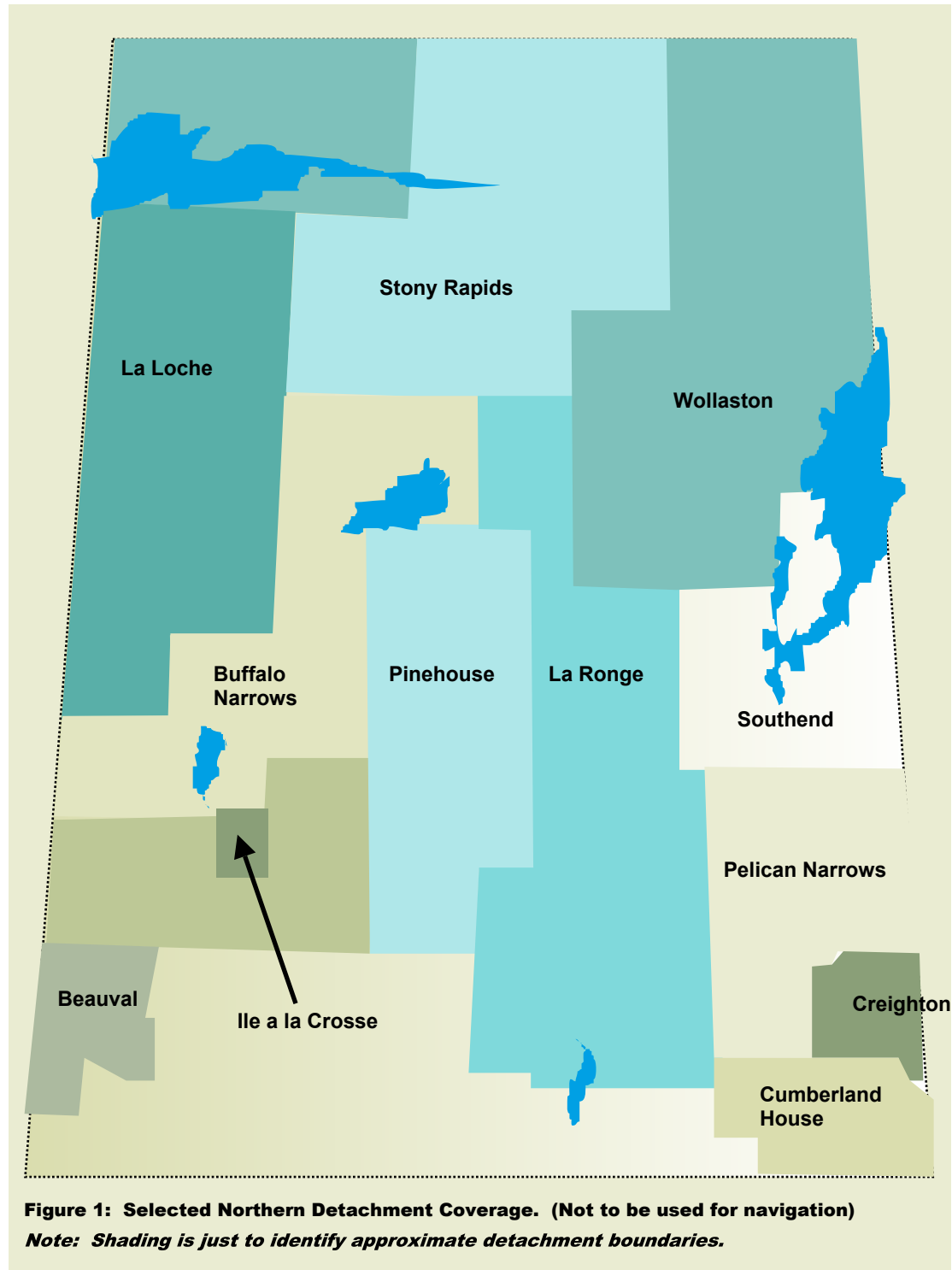
With all that in mind, what are the crime stats telling us? A particularly worrying trend is the increase in the use of weapons, and especially, the instances where a weapon is used in an assault causing bodily harm. This is trending up in Saskatchewan and across a number of northern communities. Overall, "weapons violations" in Saskatchewan have almost doubled in five years.

Interestingly, despite anecdotal evidence of a dramatic increase in opioid use, especially meth, charges for possession, trafficking and distribution do not seem to be greatly increasing in northern Saskatchewan.

However, province-wide it is a different story: meth possession offences are on the increase, as are the number of charges for trafficking. When it comes to meth production, Saskatchewan can safely claim to be a laggard compared to the other provinces. Only one person—one—has been charged with meth production since 2013 (and that was last year).

And since we've been talking about cannabis a lot lately, we can say that possession offences in the north add virtually nothing to the crime stats overall. Either no one is lighting up—which is bad news for the cannabis business—or no one cares if they do. We'd bet on the latter. (And even if we take into account that crime stats will sometimes only record the most severe of offences when there are multiple offences in a incident, the cannabis possession number is still very low).

On the lighter side, StatsCan's data dump has opened our eyes to a range of activities that we didn't know were illegal.



For example, few people would know that it is an offence to "utter threats to an animal." Because that actual offence is "utter offence to property of animal"—and about 20 to 30 people every year get charged with that—we can't be sure how often helpful animals are being threatened. We'd hope none.

It is also an offence to "trap causing bodily harm"—so no booby traps around your house, people. No one has been charged with that in the last five years, so either no one actually does that, or everyone who does do that has been getting away with it.

And one that Donald Trump should be aware of: it is an offence to intimate a journalist.

Other offences that made us sit up and go "hmmm" quietly to ourselves include voyeurism, "failing to appear" (magicians: take note), and moirder. ■

Figure 2: Selected Northern Detachments: Number of Incidents, 2013 v 2017

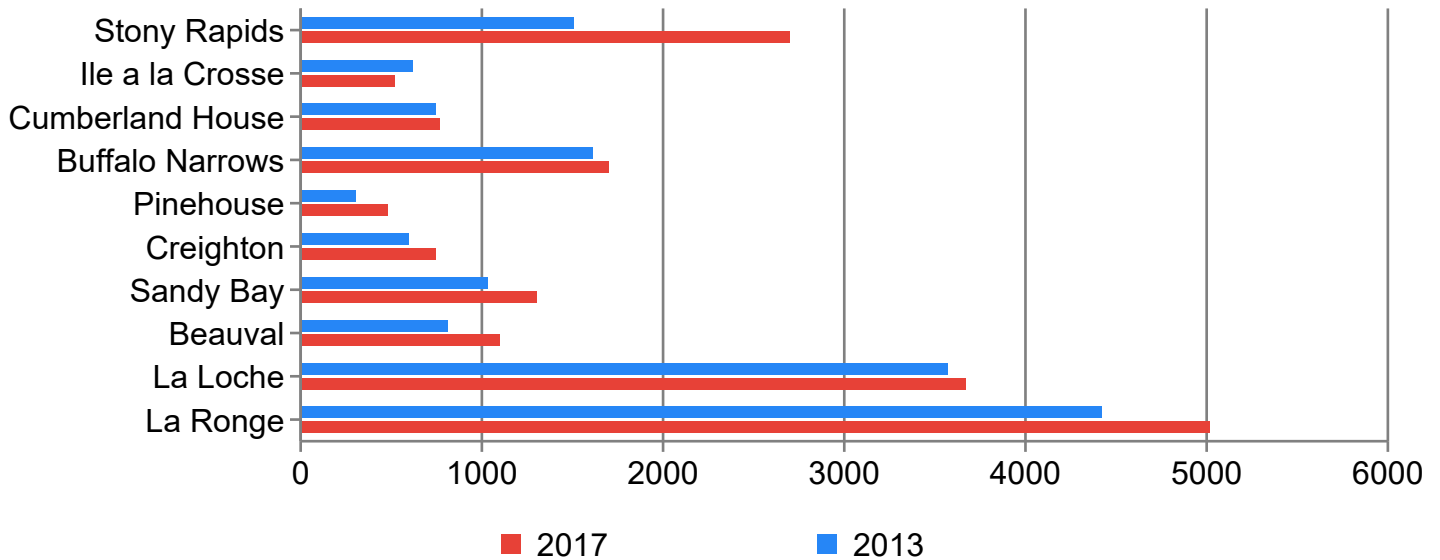


Figure 3: Selected Detachments: Incidences per 100,000 population, 2013 vs 2017

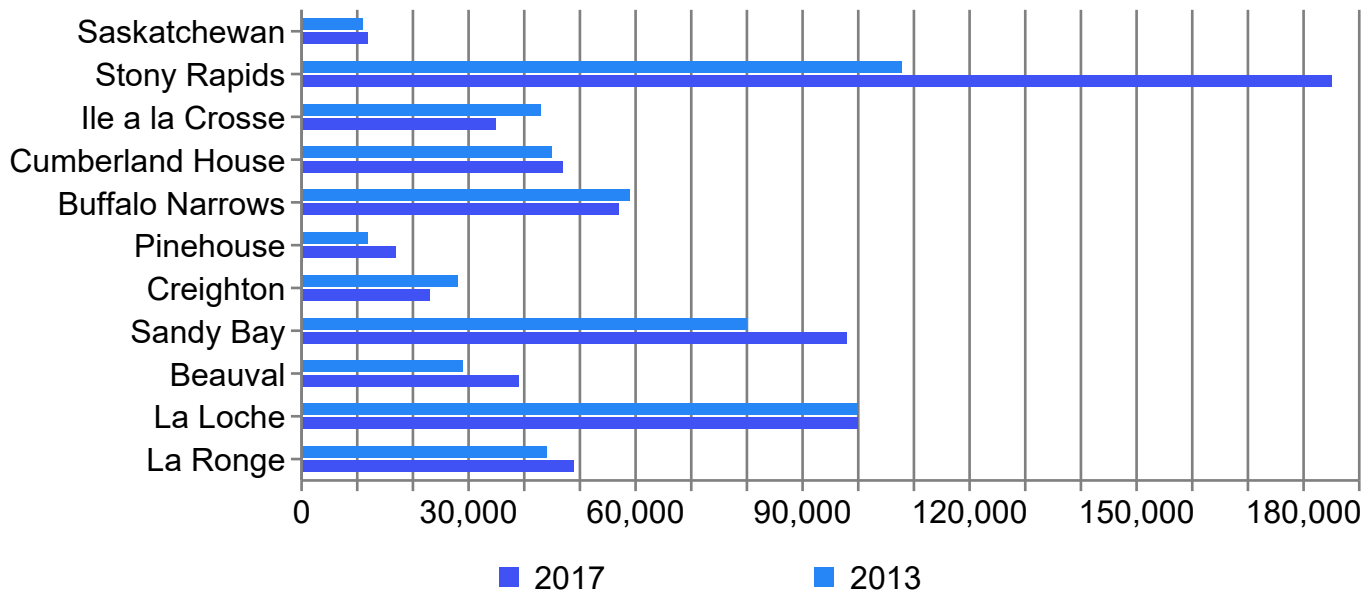


Figure 4: Selected Detachments: Number of Incidences by Violation, 2013 vs 2017

Selected Detachment	2013: Impaired Driving	2017: Impaired Driving	2013: Drug Violations	2017: Drug Violations	2013: Violent Crime	2017: Violent Crime	2013: Property Crime	2017: Property Crime
La Ronge	235	333	73	65	840	1079	2174	2449
La Loche	85	239	56	67	644	856	1727	1748
Beauval	40	72	51	37	171	285	277	429
Sandy Bay	9	35	22	11	258	260	442	721
Creighton	32	24	43	3	116	139	218	323
Pinehouse	6	45	11	60	75	106	152	213
Buffalo Narrows	118	62	63	54	344	509	678	741
Cumberland House	21	28	22	5	202	234	349	334
Ile a la Crosse	30	57	34	14	168	139	206	186
Stony Rapids	34	87	42	19	277	494	695	1412

This Election Date Clash is Getting Serious ...

One of the first things the newly-elected SaskParty did following their election in 2007 was pass legislation fixing election dates to the first Monday in November, every four years from 2007. To give them some flexibility, the legislation allowed for elections to be held in April to avoid a clash with a federal election.

(Curiously, according to the news release, the government also chose that occasion to announce the elimination of expiry dates on gift cards. You really couldn't buy a bad news day back then.)

The government has mostly dutifully observed the fixed date legislation—the next election was in November 2011, as required, then in April 2016 because of the federal election in 2015. However, the legislation is not tying them anything. If the premier wanted, he could ask the Lieutenant Governor to dissolve the Legislative Assembly at any time, forcing an election. Opposition Leader Ryan Mieli has suggested the premier actually do that.

All this is background to the issue that government and the municipal sector are dealing with right now—and, in fact, have been dealing with for the last few years.

You see, if the government continues to observe the fixed election date legislation, the next provincial election will overlap with municipal elections, which are

scheduled for October 2020. This problem hasn't arisen much before (1999 and 2003 being the exceptions), and wouldn't have if not for the change of election date to April 2016, as mentioned before.

In any event, the province and the municipalities are on the same schedule now, which is never a



good thing, and will be forever unless someone blinks. In earlier consultations, it was proposed that maybe the municipal elections could be pushed back to later in November. This was not an acceptable solution to anyone.

Another option now on the table is to push the municipal elections back to 2021—taking them off the collision course with the province, but making this term a one-off five year marathon. For those of us who think four years is a year too long, five years seems ... just really long.

We're not sure how this issue will be resolved; no one seems to be willing to give ground, and then there's the wildcard of the premier deciding to go early anyway. How furious would the sector be if they agreed to a five year sloggathon for

this term (which requires legislative change, presumably locking them into it), and the government went and undercut them with an early call? I don't know if you could measure that.

In April 2017, the Chief Electoral Officer, Dr Michael Boda, released a discussion paper on this very issue where, after consultations with stakeholders, he identified some of key issues of a municipal/provincial election overlap—most of which we could guess at with barely any thought: confusion about which candidates are running in which election; voter fatigue, leading to

poor turnout at either election; too many concurrent conflicting messages getting all messed up; the fact that advanced voting for one would actually be occurring on the actual election day of another, and so on and so forth.

Dr Boda confidently asserted that we still had plenty of time to find a solution. He proposed three options:

1. Move all municipal elections to the Spring (April) in any year
2. Move all provincial elections to the Spring (April) in any year (and leaving the municipal elections to the Fall)
3. Amend the provincial legislation to enable a one-off moving of the provincial election to the Spring of 2021, which would then on make 2021 the base year for provincial elections.

Dr Boda's recommended option was option 3 ... moving the provincial elections to April 2021. Presumably, the province rejected that idea, and so here we are. ■

From the CEO

BY MATT HELEY

A few years ago, when New North was first approached about the problem of provincial and municipal elections clashing in 2020, our carefully considered response was: "So?"

There were three reasons we were a little indifferent about this: firstly, it was a long way off, and you couldn't discount an early provincial election (and there is still time for that). Secondly, northern municipal elections can be as early as September, so northern municipalities could opt to go sooner to avoid a clash if they wanted to. The third reason I'll get to in a minute.

This issue has blown up in the last few weeks, owing to the province's latest suggestion that the municipal elections could perhaps be moved to 2021.

The municipal sector has generally responded with "yeah, nah," with Mayor of Saskatoon, Charlie Clarke, saying: "I got elected on a four-year mandate. That was what the citizens expect."

Leaving aside whether that's really true, the appeal to the public interest contains a political reality: any elected official who

publicly supports extending the municipal term by a year will inevitably be seen as acting in self-interest, regardless of what their motive is or what the public really thinks. There is really no reason an elected official would put themselves in that position, which is why Clarke went on to emphasize his lack of agency here, saying that municipalities were at the "mercy of the province" on this question.

In this light, some people are thinking that the province's suggestion to move the municipal elections to 2021 was either trickery, or a little naive.

For our part, the only way we would support a move to 2021 is if the province pays for the resultant by-elections. To us this condition seems sensible: if municipalities are going to accommodate the province, it should be the province having to bear, and explain, the additional cost to taxpayers, not municipal officials.

In any event, unless the province decides to unilaterally impose the move, it looks like 2021 is off the table.

To us, this is no matter. Getting back to our third reason why a clash in 2020 wouldn't overly bother us: having municipal and provincial elections at

about the same time would actually be kind of neat.

Putting aside how election officials will handle it (and they are saying it's impossible) concurrent municipal-provincial campaigns could have the effect of elevating municipal issues firmly onto the provincial stage. Inevitably, provincial politicians would need to be reflexively responding to the racket they'd be hearing on the municipal side. The argument that issues would become confusedly intertwined and cross-fed naively supposes that that doesn't already happen. When was the last time anyone said an election campaign was too heavy on substance, or provided an opportunity to talk about issues in a mature and thoughtful way? No one, ever.

And the argument that two elections within a few days of each other would lead to a lower turn-out in the latter election (as it stands now, the provincial one) because of "election fatigue" really just throws the onus back on politicians to give people a reason to get out and vote. If our political environment is really so fragile to be upset by a couple of elections in a row, it's not "election fatigue" that we should be worried about. ■

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.

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