



Administrators Reflect on Times Mayors Accidentally Called them “Mom,” at this Year’s AdminCon2017.

Full coverage inside.

Upcoming

New North Fall Gathering
November 23,
Prince Albert Travelodge

Financial & Strategic Planning
MLDP Module
November 24
Prince Albert Travelodge

Saskatchewan Association of
Northern Communities

**NEW
NORTH**

- STC Closure: 6 Months On
- Admin2017 Wrap-up
- Revenue Sharing
- From the Chair
- MLDP Module Stuff
- Hypnotic ballet of earthmoving equipment wreaks havoc

**Monthly Newsletter
September 2017**

Housing, Suicide & Cannabis on Fall Gathering Agenda

New North’s last Gathering until the next one is scheduled for November 23 at the Travelodge in Prince Albert, and is intended to spark conversation, and etch pathways forward, on a number of issues, including housing and suicide prevention.

The housing file has seen a few developments since New North’s Northern Housing Summit in 2013, including a renewed northern home ownership program, but progress has been slow on the whole, with government support for housing programs at the provincial and federal level drying up, and many communities losing interest, or perhaps faith, in their own capacity to make a significant difference in improving and renewing the northern housing stock. We think this Gathering is a good opportunity to check in on what some communities are doing to provide better housing opportunities for their residents.

The anniversary of the suicide crisis that gripped the north last October is upon us, but there is no good time to sit back and reflect on the ongoing trauma caused by suicide in the north as it carves its swathe through so many of our communities. The September gathering in Buffalo Narrows attests to the growing appetite for community members to take charge and build grass-roots momentum to

tackle the issue. We’ve invited the Embracing Life Committee to present an update on the good work they’ve doing in suicide prevention and intervention on the agency and government side.

The imminent legalization of cannabis to take place next Summer presents opportunities and challenges for the municipal sector, and more so in the north because of the high prevalence of addictions. We’ve invited SUMA along to join a panel of experts to help us understand the implications for northern communities.

Among the other invitees include Minister for Rural and Remote Health, Greg Ottenbreit, who will hopefully be able to join us to talk through the changes to the health regions just announced, and FSIN Chief Bobby Cameron.

As usual, if you have any ideas for agenda items, be sure to let us know ASAP.

MLDP Module to Follow Gathering

Building on the success of offering elected official training to coincide with the Gathering last November, New North is proud to host a Municipal Leadership Development Module on Financial and Strategic Planning, presented by former Mayor of Humboldt, Malcolm Eaton. The module is scheduled for the 24th. See over for more details.

NewNorth News & Updates

MLDP Module on Strategic & Financial Planning to Focus on Both November 24, Travelodge, Prince Albert. Cost: \$145 per head + Tax

There are two types of people in this world: those who thrive in the competitive high pressure, low-ceilinged environment of thought partners, mission statements, mandates, goal setting and process mapping of a strategic planning session. And normal people.

If there are such things as necessary evils, then strategic planning is probably not one of them—though we're willing to entertain any discussion—but it is necessary, especially now, and especially for the northern municipalities.

And to this end, the Municipal Leadership Development Program Module (MLDP) called Strategic and Financial Planning is coming to us, to northern municipal officials, elected and appointed, on November 24, the day after the New North Gathering.

If you've caught this module before—and most of you haven't—it's different now, with a new presenter, Malcolm Eaton, former mayor of Humboldt (and SUMA Board member).

Some northern communities have strategic plans. These are not your Official Community Plans (which we sometimes refer to as Occasional Community Plans, because we're naughty). OCPs are critical to developing and sustaining your communities, but they are only one piece of the puzzle. A strategic plan will set

your overall vision for your community for the next five years (or whatever timeframe), and will have been done in consultation with community members. It is the community's "highest level policy document." It is what guides you in your decision-making. It is your north star. It is potentially what will set you a part from your neighbours. Unless they do it too, in which case go back to beating them at hockey.

Malcolm Eaton is perfectly positioned to present a how-to on strategic planning. Humboldt's "culture-led" strategic plan created a benchmark for high-level municipal policy development. He has seen first hand how a good strategic plan can help a community get things done.

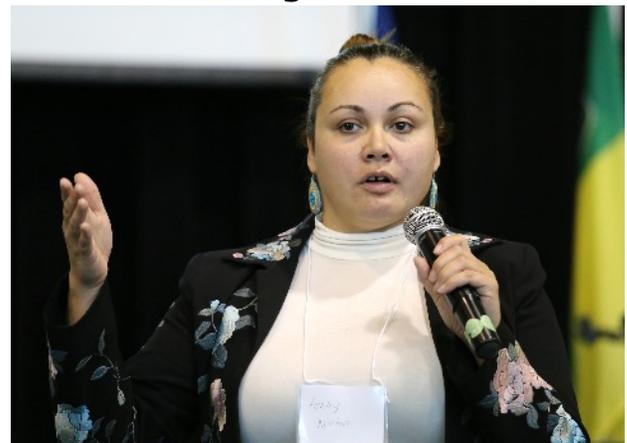
The MLDP module on Strategic and Financial Planning kicks off at 9am on Friday 24th of November, at the Prince Albert Travelodge. The cost is \$145 plus taxes. You register online for this, so go to www.mldp.ca to do that, as well as to see the agenda for the module. You can call us at New North if you need help, or contact Ashley Leugner, who works at SARM and administers this program, if you want more information (306-761-3931).

Space is limited to the first 30 people who register, so get yours in fast.

Northern Justice Symposium Set for May 2018

After an almost two-year break, the Northern Justice Symposium will make a return to the symposium circuit with planning now in progress to stage the marquee event on May 15-17, at the Art Hauser Centre in Prince Albert.

The NJS has always evolved with the times. And things are changing out there. The "conversation has changed," said Russ Merasty at 2016's NJS, and we see that reflected in how communities are now more than ever taking the lead in making change. The 2018 NJS will also strongly reflect the work communities are doing, across the province and across jurisdictions, to address the overrepresentation of indigenous people in the criminal justice system.



Ashley Norton from KY at the 2nd Ile a la Crosse Justice Symposium, on September 29.

From the New North Chair

BY BRUCE FIDLER, MAYOR OF CREIGHTON

Congratulations! Most of you new mayors and councillors are about to mark 12 months in office.

The returning ones will mark yet another year of deliberating on bylaws and making resolutions, thinking about mill rates and property assessments and budgets and worrying where the money will come from for anything.

After the first year of the new term in office, councils should, in my experience, already have a pretty firm grasp of what they want to achieve for their time in office. They will have a plan. Making long-term plans is a more difficult thing for northern municipalities to do, in my view, because we have fewer resources to fall back on if government cuts funding to us. It's harder for us to find predictable funding. The tax base in the north is tiny – for a similar population to Prince Albert, the northern residential taxable assessment is about five times smaller (\$1.5 billion vs \$300 million). We just don't have a tax base to turn to.

But make plans we must do. A good strategic plan tells your residents that you have vision, and that you know what you are doing, and you know where you are heading. You may not think you have the resources for your journey – but that is precisely the point: a good strategic plan will help you get the resources you need. Governments love to deal with communities that seem to have plan, strong leadership and community support. Look around you and tell me that's not true.

SUMA Announces They Have a New CEO

New North's sister association, SUMA, has a new CEO.

Jean-Marc Nadeau is set to take the reigns of that venerable association following the retirement of Laurent Mouget. Laurent served SUMA for 12 years, and left an indelible mark on the fortunes of municipalities in Saskatchewan, including those of us in the north.

And the same goes for New North. We have just gone through a strategic planning process. It's a part of our bylaws that we do it every five years, but with a mostly whole new board, it was pretty critical for us to zero in on a mission for the next three years, something we can say, after that time, yes, we did that: we achieved something.

Our focus at New North will continue to be building partnerships to increase our leverage, to make our voice louder, and to make sure the communities continue to support our efforts. We know we need to focus on results to do that. We'll have New North's strategic plan for you to look at at the November Gathering.

What results are you looking for in your community? To make your town a better place, for sure, but is there something in particular? A new subdivision maybe, or a commercial development. If you can't ask yourself that question and get a whole string of pretty focused answers, I'm telling you that you need to sit down and think about it a bit more. Being a northern elected official is a rough job; it's frustrating as all hell sometimes. We need a lot, and don't always get a lot of help. Same for our administrators and clerks, who need so much more support now than ever before. But let's plan for a brighter future, on our own, and collectively. I couldn't do this role if I didn't think I could make a difference, along with my council, to the lives of my residents. I'm guessing you think that way too.

Best of luck, my friends. ■

Jean-Marc hails from Manitoba, and according to SUMA's press release, spent 20 years as an RCMP member, before turning his hand to municipal government, working as the city manager for Portage La Prairie.

Jean-Marc comes to SUMA in challenging times for the municipal sector, and we look forward to working with him and the rest of the SUMA team in advancing our collective interests.

Administrators Conference

AdminCon2017: The Gentle Music of Foreheads Thudding into Melamine

Initially billed as an opportunity to network over lunch, and then because lunch wasn't being provided, an opportunity to see how fast people could get down to Boston Pizza and back, AdminCon2017 on September 14 brought together not quite every administrator and clerk from across the north, but enough to fill the conference room at the Prince Albert Holiday Inn Express, where attendees came to listen, discuss and pass notes to each other on a range of issues affecting northern municipal administrators, from the difficulties of dog control, enforcing bylaws and maintaining compliance with provincial legislation to the challenges of staying awake all afternoon after a pretty heavy lunch, which wasn't our fault because we didn't provide one.

Despite being employed in what is now being recognized as one of the most difficult and complex public administration jobs there is, northern administrators and clerks were nevertheless not spared from having to sit through almost 30 minutes of aimless wandering in search of a cogent thought from Executive Directors from New North and NMS respectively, and it was only when the floor was finally turned over to the cast of experts that the first intelligent and thoughtful discussion could take place, with Lillian Laprise from Stony Rapids and Dianne McCallum from Ile a la Crosse speaking about their experiences with contracting bylaw officers. The challenge of enforcing bylaws in the north is such that some communities are now or have already repealed many of their bylaws, because what's the use, but you can't get rid of all of them, especially when it comes to dog control. The bylaw enforcement discussion became, almost by natural distillation, a discussion about dog control, and it is here that Ile a la Crosse's experiment with enforcement seems to be paying off. Perhaps of all the things a bylaw officer could do it never occurred to those of us of the clog-headed species that public education sessions would be one of them, yet that is exactly what appears to be one of the roles of their bylaw officer, leading to a suggestion by Pinehouse's Martine Smith that to both remove the stigma attached to role of bylaw enforcer—making it difficult if not impossible to staff—and to recognize what should be the larger purpose of such a position, that bylaw enforcers could be called something else—Community Resource Officers, perhaps—whose main function would be education, but who also would have the full force of bylaw enforcement behind them. It's a brilliant idea, and well worth the \$30 we charged Martine to be there.

Then the Auditors Came In

You'd think there wouldn't be anything more likely to put the brakes on a lively and engaging discussion

than a couple of accountants and a Powerpoint presentation, but that wasn't the case, as Tanya Ferster and Betsy Chan from the local branch of MNP rolled an enchantment spell that carried the administrators and clerks through almost 90 minutes of pre-audit checklists and internal controls processes with not a single person thudding their forehead upon the tabletop.

In fact far from it, as the tone of the morning's presentations became increasingly weighty the more Betsy Chan's presentation probed the limited capacities of many northern municipalities to fully incorporate things like the "segregation of duties" into their internal controls, a principle whereby no one person in your office, or even within council, can do anything without the oversight or at least the knowledge of another—challenging for so many reasons, from not having enough competent staff around the place you can rely on, to council simply choosing to go rogue with the checkbook.

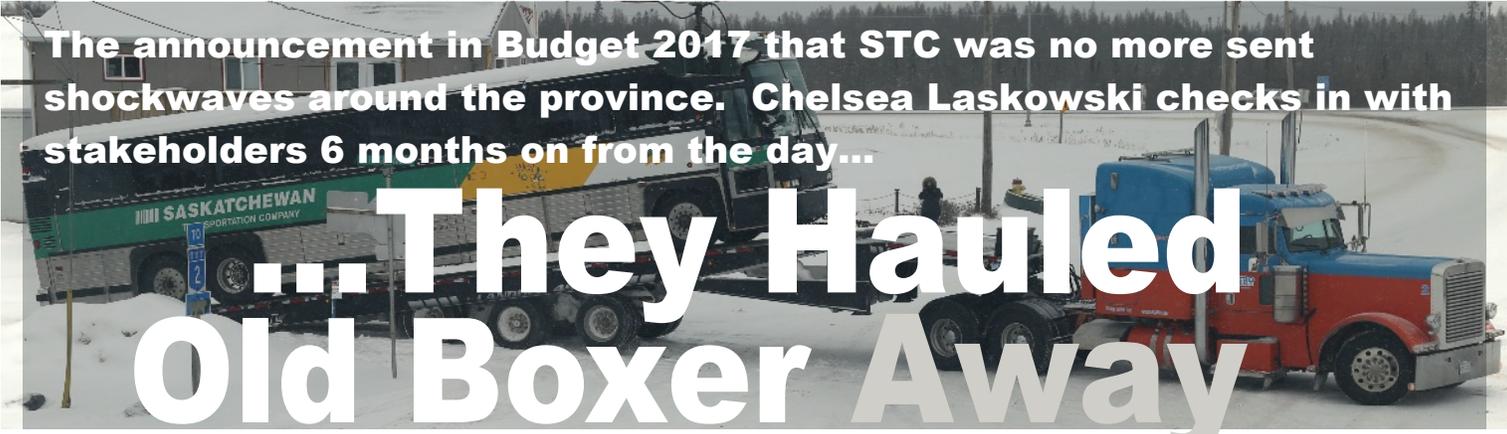
The Jerry Springer School of Dispute Resolution Couldn't Make it, But ...

After a presentation by SaskWater on their initiative called ROAM—essentially a program whereby SaskWater monitors your water plants via magic in Regina—it was time for the marquee presentation of the day, An Introduction to Dispute Resolution with the Ministry of Justice's Amanda Wilcox.

In just about every way dispute resolution is less about "you go girl" than it is about understanding the social or psychological underpinnings of conflict, and here Amanda excelled in illustrating the importance of seeing conflicts in broader contexts with instantly relatable stories from her own evidently tortured childhood growing up on a farm with younger siblings. One of the truly interesting observations of Amanda's was that the "sounding board" role that we can often play when we are listening to someone drone on about some issue they are having can be counter-productive if all we do is confirm them in their misguided convictions. As the four or five married men in the room dwelled on this thought—the duration of their stares into vacant space acting as a measurable indicators of the duration of their nuptials—everyone else got on with learning about identifying the factors contributing to dispute escalation. One of which, of course, is not listening, and an other being not showing enough interest in what someone is saying. I missed the third one.

At the end of the day we all learned something. Don't sit next to Henrietta, mainly.

Thank you to all our presenters and to Anna Robinson from Government Relations for organizing the afternoon



The announcement in Budget 2017 that STC was no more sent shockwaves around the province. Chelsea Laskowski checks in with stakeholders 6 months on from the day...

...They Hauled Old Boxer Away

It's been half a year since the province blindsided New North and bus travellers all over the province by announcing it would be shuttering the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. Between budget day on March 22 and now, some good has happened with provincial transit and some bad has happened. The good: there are two groups that have started the approval process to run bus/van routes in New North's communities. I'll tell you more about that later. First, let's get to the bad.

You may recall in March when New North called on its member communities to write letters to the minister responsible, Joe Hargrave, asking him to roll back the STC cut. There were protests. There were letters to the editor decrying how STC's demise would impact women fleeing domestic abuse, northerners, all remote and rural residents, those taking regular medical treatment, and Indigenous people in particular. But while a \$4.8 million budget cut to libraries was taken off the chopping block and grants-in-lieu changes were modified, the province forged ahead with its STC cut.

After fighting an ill-fated court challenge that argued the lack of advance notice of STC's sudden closure would leave many without critical transportation, the Sask Party pushed Saskatchewan ahead - willing or not - into life without STC. On May 31 there were some farewell waves for STC's final departures and a bizarre late night sit-in and protest on the last STC bus to land in Saskatoon; but other than that it was an anticlimactic end for a Crown bus service that existed for 70 years.

Hargrave and other government officials remained confident that private companies would be able to pick up where STC left off. He was right about there being private interest, as evidenced by a long list of people and companies that have applied for passenger service certification in recent months. The fleet of those applicants range from 14-passenger vans to 56-passenger charter buses.

So where's the bad in this? Well, the abruptness of the STC announcement left people and businesses scrambling to figure out how to live without something they had relied on for decades. There was no way, even in the best of circumstances, that the province could avoid there being a gap in bus service. And even when a service was eventually put in place for certain communities, there was no way it could mimic the continuity that STC provided for people who, until May 31, could buy a single ticket to travel from as far north as La Loche to as far south as Estevan. Margaret Smart at Cre8ive Communications ran the STC stop in La Ronge for several months, and personally used to regularly take STC for medical appointments rather than driving. She puts it bluntly, saying "it really needed to be here." When STC shut down, it took away people's sense of independence, she said. "How many time do you want to ask someone to do a favour for you and stuff? You want to be able to get on a bus and go when you want to." Others are considering moving south because it's become too inconvenient to travel, she said. On a recent return trip to La Ronge, Smart stopped in Weyakwin and ended up picking up a hitchhiker. She believes risks do increase when you're picking up a stranger, or when you're a hitchhiker getting picked up by a stranger. The same goes for people fleeing abuse. Smart used to be confident that once the RCMP got someone on the bus, they'd be safe. But now, that option is gone. Freight now takes at least a day longer and is much more expensive, she said, leaving people to turn to social media to offer people cash to haul items for them or just bite the bullet and pay the higher fees for the quickest courier available.

Despite the private companies that have come forward through the Highway Traffic Board (HTB) process, to date, none of the 10 companies that have since received bus/van operating authority intend to go any further north than Prince Albert. Without STC, the HTB has taken a step back from approving routes or rates, saying it is no longer

appropriate “in a competitive business environment.” This means they now just approve regions - not routes - and there are “no exclusive rights to routes,” resulting in zero routes north of Prince Albert and four different companies getting approved to run routes between Saskatoon and Regina (which were among STC’s only profitable routes). I spoke with HTB administrator Annette Cary and she said whenever a potential applicant calls her office she urges them to consider offering service in the north, but it’s out of the question to force anyone to offer routes in the north.

The lack of northern buses has left people who live along the old routes - which covered from Saskatoon up to La Loche, Prince Albert up to La Ronge, and Prince Albert up to Sandy Bay and Creighton - with no choice but to adapt. Health Canada, which covers the cost of travel to medical appointments for many northerners, used to send clients on STC for appointments but now it’s sending people by taxi. I’m not sure how much extra that is costing them, but it’s no doubt significant. Staff at La Loche’s old STC stop, P R Services, said people were upset when the news about STC’s closure first spread but notes that even before then, rates for bus travel had risen to a point where people were taking the bus less and less. The increased STC rates made it cheaper to find other modes of transport like carpooling, hitchhiking, chipping in for gas for rides, relying on family, or just driving. The P R employee expects that’s what people are doing now. Mayor Robert St. Pierre said the La Loche route was only added in 2007, and because it was such a recent thing it wasn’t utilized to its full potential. Meanwhile in Creighton, Coutts’ Convenience owner Tim Coutts said they used to have about six or so people regularly hop on STC’s bus, which ran four days a week. Coutts Convenience still acts as a bus stop for Greyhound, so people are able to make connections in Manitoba and head to Saskatchewan cities -- but it’s a long way around. As for freight, the overnight convenience of sending something on STC is long gone.

It’s safe to say the transition into life without STC has been anything but seamless for northerners. However, as mentioned up top, there is some potential good news on the way for passenger service in the north but I’ll warn you it’s not coming anytime soon.

The first comes from a public listing in The Saskatchewan Gazette on July 28, where Saskatoon-based Primco Dene operating as Lake City Coach, is applying for passenger certification. The proposal would see the company use 56-passenger buses to transport people three times a

week from Saskatoon up to La Loche, with stops in eight communities on the way including Green Lake, Beauval, and Ile-a-la-Crosse. Return trips would occur three times a week on the day after the arrival. Cary at the HTB said the board has approved this application but they still need Primco Dene to submit certain documents before being granted the actual operating authority. From Cary’s understanding the company had some issues pop up, and that will keep them from going ahead with receiving the authority to offer bus service until at least next year.

There is also a public notice in the Sept. 8 Gazette that Prince Albert-based 102030315 Saskatchewan Ltd., or KCTI, is applying for passenger certification. The plan would include offering a Prince Albert to La Ronge return service three days a week. The notice does not state what kind of vehicle would be used or how many passengers could be accommodated. Here too, Cary said things are on hold as the group has to get a few more ducks in a row before receiving operating authority. The group had limited previous business experience and wasn’t fully prepared for the next steps of setting up insurance and getting new license plates. While they can proceed at any time if they get all that done, Cary was unsure of any timeline for KCTI to move into actual operation.

So, this “good news” is more theoretical at the moment: It shows there’s interest in the north, but it doesn’t change the transportation situation for New North’s residents.

As for any other groups stepping up, Coutts has his doubts that it’s feasible. He says people in Creighton have contemplated starting up their own passenger service but the fact that you’d be starting from scratch with no existing system and would have to advertise for yourself is a big deterrent.

Coutts dealt with Greyhound and STC for decades, and says STC was a company that cared for its people - both staff and clients - whereas Greyhound is profit-focused. It will be worth keeping an eye out in the next year, to see whether any groups are willing or able to make a business case for further bus transport in the north. Especially so when there is no incentive in place to offer service in the north that adheres to the public service-focused mandate that STC once had.■

*Editor’s note: Boxer is the horse from the novel Animal Farm by George Orwell.

Revenue Sharing

A fter a **CAREFUL** and **CONSIDERED** Review of the Figures, We Can *Confirm* We Have **No** Idea *How* This **WORKS**

It is no consolation to municipal officials to know that, with this year's drop in revenue sharing for most communities in the north, and the likely fall again next year, the formula is working exactly how it is supposed to.

The Municipal Revenue Sharing Program which came into being following the election of the SaskParty in 2007 took its current form after the program review in 2011-12, and has delivered more than \$1 billion in operating grants to municipalities, with the north's collective total being about \$170 million since 2007-8, at an average of \$16 million a year. Last year the northern total was \$20 million, falling to \$19 million this year.

The rises and falls in revenue sharing from year to year are due to the fact that the pool is tied to provincial sales tax. Quite simply, the more the province collects in PST, the more the municipal sector gets. When PST falls—as it has done this year and last year—so does the pool.

But the link to PST has been a curse from the beginning, first for government and now for the municipal sector. The problem for government is that the lag-time between when the revenue sharing pool is calculated (it's based on the PST from two years ago) meant that they were paying out record amounts of revenue sharing even as the provincial budget was struggling, and this was very clearly the reasoning behind the noises Brad Wall had begun to make indicating he wanted revenue sharing “looked at” (or that he was hungry/bored/tired).

We are now seeing the curse of the PST-linkage for the municipal sector, as likely consecutive decreases in funding from government through the pool for municipal programs and services through is occurring during periods of population growth, with increasing demands being placed on cities, towns and villages for more housing and associated infrastructure.

Complicating everything this year was the census, with some communities, especially in the north, getting doubly-hit because of reported falling populations. The census-linkage of the

per capita piece of the northern revenue sharing formula shows its true weakness here, as the census is more likely to be unreliable in communities where the funding is needed the most: in “end of road” communities with large numbers of people living on government assistance. To add insult to injury, these communities have virtually no tax base to turn to.

There is Method in the Madness

If we look at the figures for the towns and villages in the north (table below), we can see potential for concern. Despite some pretty spectacular increases in revenue sharing over the last five years, especially between 2012 and 2013, the numbers are starting to regress to the mean; that is, they are starting to even out along a trend line of roughly 4% since 2011-12. If we assume, as we do, a hypothetical northern inflation rate of 3%, we could easily say that communities will, in real dollars, be worse off next year than they were in 2011-12. Some communities, of course, are already worse off, in real dollars, right now.

2018-19 Not Looking Good

We already know that revenue sharing is likely to fall in 2018-19, although by how much depends on whether government sticks to the current formula. Under this formula, the total municipal revenue sharing pool for 2018-19 will be around \$240 million based on the 1 point of PST formula currently in play. That's an \$18 million drop in the pool from 2017-18—a slightly larger decrease in dollar terms than from 2016-17 to 2017-18, but smaller in percentage terms.

The northern share of the pool is 7.456%. The northern pool for 2018-19 will be \$17.89 million, a \$400,000 drop from the current year's pool (and a hefty \$2.3 million drop from the \$20.2 million pool of 2016-17; they were heady days indeed).

2019-20 Might be Better, Might Not Be Better

A couple of things make the year after that a bit different, though. Firstly, as of this year, the

PST is now 6%, adding a budgeted \$240 million to the PST total. With the addition of the broadening of the PST to include insurance, construction, children’s clothing and so on, the total PST is budgeted to be close to \$2 billion.

If the municipal sector hangs on to its 1 point of PST, the revenue sharing pool would swell to well over \$300 million. Everything else being equal, the northern share would be around \$23-25 million.

Although reaching those lofty heights seems pretty hopeful, there may be cause for optimism. Firstly, by 2019 the new premier will be about to head into his or her first actual election as premier, and if a deal with the municipal sector hasn’t be done by then, there could be trouble. Both SUMA and SARM have significant political weight. It’ll be a question for them if they choose to throw it around.

Secondly, the urbans are starting to bleed pretty badly. The once-prophesised increase to Education Property Tax came to pass, and has made it more difficult for municipalities to offset falls in government-sourced revenue with their own property tax increases. It would make sense to strengthen revenue sharing in response. Thirdly, the municipal sector is now paying more PST because of the 1 point jump and the broadening of the PST base. Revenue sharing is a nifty way of dealing with the awkward faux pas of one government taxing another (see our handy sidebar). Remember, that’s why the provincial government doesn’t pay property taxes, but instead provides grants in lieu of taxes (GIL).

Revenue Sharing a Success Story Overall

Without question, the revenue sharing programs have been very successful. The

Community	2011-12	2017-18	% Change from 2011-12	% Change from 2016-17
Creighton	\$1,013,288	\$1,202,917	19	-6.15
La Ronge	\$1,193,816	\$1,701, 504	42	-4.90%
Air Ronge	\$764,264	\$949,982	24	-5.48%
Beauval	\$615,396	\$731,220	18	-6.75%
Buffalo Narrows	\$937,422	\$1,130,629	20	-9%
Cumberland House	\$765,264	\$879,126	14	-2.70%
Denare Beach	\$752,053	\$860,460	14	-2.13
Green Lake	\$470,000	\$568,700	21	-4.20%
Ile a la Crosse	\$1,005,955	\$1,200,369	19	-5.12%
La Loche	\$1,223,486	\$1,565,811	27	11%
Pelican Narrows	\$366,152	\$330,452	-10	-0.1
Pinehouse	\$697,781	\$888,835	27	0.20%
Sandy Bay	\$839,472	\$973,384	15	-11%
Increase/Decrease from 2016-17 to 17-18				-6.20%
Average Yearly Increase Since 2011-12			3.60%	

funding is more or less predictable, and it is unconditional. Arguably, if the associations made an error it was in insisting on the latter, because it has reduced the ability of the sector to tie falls in revenue sharing, or cut backs in other government sourced-revenue—to particular services in the public’s mind. Look at how the library sector rallied in response to cuts in library funding in the south, or how school divisions focussed the public’s attention on cuts they were making to programs for the most vulnerable kids.

But the popularity of the deal for the sector gave government some justification to take a bigger slice of property taxes and, in the south, GIL. When combined with an even greater propensity for government to “download” (that is, withdrawing from providing services or funding, requiring municipalities to jump in), this may be the time for the sector to come together to look for a higher revenue sharing base, a new plateau. The risk, of course, is a perpetuation of the cycle we are in now: a greater likelihood of government using revenue sharing as a justification to download more or to claw back funding. But politics is fun, so there’s that.■

If You're a Glass Half-Full Kind of Person, Income Statistics Might Suggest Things Are Getting Better

The raw numbers are pretty clear: incomes in the north have risen higher in the last decade than in Saskatchewan as a whole.

In 2005, northern Saskatchewan households, at least in our selected communities, earned 79% of the Saskatchewan median income. In 2015, that had risen to 89%.

While that is obviously not parity (100% would be parity), it's an improvement. You will notice from our table that some communities actually earn way higher than the Saskatchewan average.

There are fewer people in low-income households now than there were in 2005, and a smaller proportion of overall income is coming from government transfers than in 2005 as well.

Poverty rates are still higher in the north, of course, but poverty rates are decreasing. This is true of Saskatchewan as a whole.

The figures show that poverty rates have halved in Pinehouse, Denare Beach, La Loche, Green

Lake, Cumberland House, and even plummeted in Sandy Bay. In most of those communities the percentage of income coming from government transfers has also gone down.

But how valid are the figures? It's hard to say. A percentage increase in market income compared to government transfers could actually be from an increase in government salaries (most workers in the north are government employees) as compared to those on welfare or pensions, which increase the overall proportion of market income, but doesn't necessarily reflect higher levels of employment.

Improvements in median household incomes won't tell us much about income inequality either. In fact, massively high income inequality is a feature of northern communities. A typical income profile of a northern community shows about 10% of households at over \$100,000, but a huge bulge at below \$40,000, with not much in the middle.

Select Community	Median Household Income 2015	% of Income from Govt Transfers 2015	% of Low Income Households 2015	Median Household Income 2005	% of Income from Govt Transfers 2005	% Low income households 2005	% Increase Median Income 2005-2015
Air Ronge	120,000	7.5	5.9	63,000	7.5	6.3	90
Beauval	88,000	15.6	7.8	43,000	24	11	104
Buffalo Narrows	87,000	17.8	7.3	49,000	19.3	6	77
Pinehouse	74,000	19	7.1	41,000	28.3	14	80
Ile a la Crosse	71,000	19	6.3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
La Ronge	90,000	10	11.6	60,000	9.4	14.1	50
Creighton	105,000	11	2.9	75,000	10.4	6	40
Denare Beach	103,000	10	4.6	70,000	10.5	11.5	47
La Loche	48,000	41	7	29,000	40	14	65
Sandy Bay	42,000	38	13	20,000	44	46.4	110
Green Lake	63,000	28	6	28,000	34	14	125
Cumberland House	54,000	29	9	29,000	24	17.3	86
NSAD	57,000	21	11.6	35,000	28.2	18.2	62
Saskatchewan	93,000	10	6	58,000	10	14.4	60

FROM THE CEO It is sometimes far too easily done to dwell on our challenges than it is to think about how we can overcome them. After all, one requires work, and at times some pretty heavy introspection. And the other one just requires us to feel a little bit sorry for ourselves, which is not a lot of work, unless you call putting seventeen scoops of mint-chip ice cream into a bowl “work.” (Some of us do, of course.)

The solution-finding bit is hard, and seems a lot harder now than before. We all know the province is dead-broke-broke than broke. And, as we suggest in this month’s newsletter, the news will probably not get any better on revenue sharing, either, which will put pressure on municipal budgets.

But in a way it’s these challenges that makes what we do that much more interesting. There is money out there, we just need to work harder to get it. How many municipalities, for example, have a specialized grant-writing position—not many, but some of you do. Universities and other similar institutions have people who do nothing but write grants. It is an option we at New North are looking at, too, for the benefit of

everyone (but we need a grant to fund the position, of course).

Another interesting kind of opportunity has also presented itself with the SaskParty’s leadership race now in full swing. Perhaps against all normal logic, given the strong NDP bias here, some northern communities have decided to ask the leadership candidates—one of whom will be the next Premier—to pay them a visit. It’s a great idea, one I would never have thought of. In fact, amongst the promises we’re hearing the candidates making (rolling back the PST on insurance, firing many public servants) we’ve heard no mention of the north. The north, as my predecessor was fond of reminding people, is a part of the province, and a part that still needs a fair bit of support.

To find solutions in a systematic way you need a plan. This month we are heavily promoting the strategic and financial planning MLDP module, to be presented by Malcolm Eaton. There’s nothing like a good strategic planning session to make you feel a little bit more energized, and we think this session will be hugely beneficial to northern communities. It beats eating ice cream all day. Not really, but you know what I mean.

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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