

New North

2019-20
Annual Report

Saskatchewan Association
of Northern Communities



From the Chair, Bruce Fidler

It seems that we begin our reflection on the year we've just had by discussing our challenges and how we went about meeting those challenges. When I look over the year I can see we have made a lot of progress in terms of achieving what we set out to do in our strategic plan, which the Executive established in 2017. This is especially true when we consider the progress in helping solve some of the long-term administrative and governance challenges of the northern communities, which have such a big impact on the ability of our leaders and our communities to forge ahead with making life better for northern residents.

While we acknowledge that progress, it's impossible for us to ignore the challenges that are being presented by the COVID 19 pandemic that threaten to bring all our carefully laid plans crashing down as we all struggle to make sense of how to live in a post-COVID world.

What are our new priorities going to be and how do we fit our already-made plans into those priorities? That's the question a lot of us are asking.

We can all agree that the number one priority is to keep residents safe. But in many cases that's where the agreement ends. For example, some residents will demand periodic closures of roads to protect communities, and others will say that that infringes on their freedoms of movement. There will be ongoing debates about sizes of gatherings and the need for the closures of certain venues like bars, and when should those bans be put in place. Getting these setting right will be difficult for leaders and, speaking as a leader myself, I can anticipate my job getting a little bit tougher now.

We anticipate lots of discussion about the role of different authorities such as health and social services, and the role of the different levels of government, in dealing with some of the long-standing issues around housing, education, policing and so on, which contribute to the impact of COVID 19 being that much more severe in the north.

From the CEO, Matt Heley

The year 2020 was a year of tremendous progress for New North. It was a year when we were finally able to put into action so many of the initiatives we'd spent the last couple of years carefully putting together. In these pages you will see some examples of those initiatives, and over the next many years, the fruits of them.

The progress wouldn't have been possible without the determined leadership, and the strong and singular direction provided by the New North Executive. We and our partners, including the management board of the Northern Municipal Trust Account and the newly formed Northern Administrators Association, as well as Northern Municipal Services, among many others, mutually benefit from the trust and assurance that grows within a shared and determined vision of how we want the north to look next year, and over the many years to come.

It goes without saying that these kinds of relationships will be key to us collectively getting through, and thriving, while we confront the reality of living in a COVID 19 world. I say "thriving" because we need to continue to focus on the best and most optimal outcomes regardless of the circumstances, simply because this is how it has always been done in the north. It's our view that northern communities have always done better in a crisis because of their natural resilience. The capacity of northern communities to meet a challenge and come out better for having overcome the challenge is there for anyone to see. This one will be no different.

So, our year ahead will look different to how we thought it would look even a few months ago. Some of the "roads not taken" will, in fact, be taken, as we pivot toward focusing on community safety, emergency planning, revisiting revenue sharing to ensure it is adequate, and putting more and more pressure on all levels of government to improve housing, educational opportunities and social supports to help communities and residents help themselves and to thrive. There has never been any

CONTENTS

CHAIR & CEO REPORTS **INSIDE PAGE**

ABOUT NEWNORTH **PAGE 4**

NEWNORTH STRATEGIC DIRECTION **PAGE 5**

NEWNORTH VERTICAL SLICE **PAGE 6**

NEWNORTH ISSUES IN FOCUS **PAGE 7**

BUILDING ADMINISTRATIVE

CAPACITY **PAGE 8**

NEWNORTH WATERWORKS **PAGE 9**

ADVOCATING FOR NORTHERN

INTERESTS **PAGE 10**

NORTHERN JUSTICE SYMPOSIUM **PAGE 12**

NEWNORTH GATHERINGS **PAGE 15, 16 & 17**

THE ROAD AHEAD **PAGE 18**

ABOUT NEW NORTH

NEW NORTH—SANC SERVICES INC is a non-profit organization, based in La Ronge, dedicated to serving the interests of the 35 municipalities of northern Saskatchewan. New North's governance is supplied by a Board of Directors (the "Executive"), which is elected from among the Mayors and Councillors of the 35 municipalities. New North has a small core staff of two, Chief Executive Officer, Matt Heley, and Executive Assistant, Shelley Isbister, who carry out of the strategic vision of the Executive by engaging in proposal development, project management and coordination, communications, the provision of direct support to municipalities, as well as administering the organization.

New North Executive



Chair, Bruce Fidler,
Mayor of Creighton

Vice Chair,
Robert St. Pierre,
Mayor of La Loche

Keith Laprise,
Councillor of Stony
Rapids

Mike Natomagan,
Mayor of Pinehouse

Gord Stomp,
Treasurer, Mayor of
Air Ronge

New North Staff

Matt Heley, Chief Executive Officer
Shelley Isbister, Executive Assistant

New North Communities

New North's communities are the 35 municipalities of northern Saskatchewan. They are: The Northern Villages of Green Lake, Beauval, Buffalo Narrows, Pinehouse, La Loche, Ile a la Crosse, Denare Beach, Cumberland House, Sandy Bay, Pelican Narrows and Air Ronge; the Northern Hamlets of Dore Lake, Cole Bay, St. George's Hill, Michel Village, Turnor Lake, Timber Bay, Black Point, Weyakwin, Jans Bay and Patuanak; the Northern Towns of Creighton and La Ronge; and the Northern Settlements of Sled Lake, Bear Creek, Brabant Lake, Camsell Portage, Garson Lake, Descharme Lake, Missinipe, South End, Stanley Mission, Uranium City and Wollaston Lake.

New North Mission Statement

New North – SANC Services Inc. (Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities) is organized to:

- Advocate the issues and concerns on behalf of the Northern Communities within the Northern Saskatchewan Administrative District (NSAD) of Saskatchewan;
- Organize and co-ordinate capacity building, training and development activities for the municipal governments and organizations; and
- Build and maintain strategic relationships.

Advocacy includes identifying the issues of importance to northerners and northern municipalities and communicating with other governments and organizations to inform them of the issues and ways to resolve them. It includes acting and speaking on behalf of northern municipalities in meetings and activities set up by governments to discuss issues that affect the northern people and municipalities.

Capacity Building is about improving the knowledge, skills and abilities of northerners and northern municipalities. It includes governance, management, and community economic development. There is a need to raise the capacity to some minimum level and to look at structural means of building capacity for the municipal governments of small communities.

Strategic Relationships are constructive relationships, partnerships and cooperative arrangements with other organizations and governments to promote the interests of northerners or to achieve mutual benefits.

NEW NORTH STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2017-2020

The strategic direction for New North for the years 2018-2020 was set by the New North Executive at a strategic planning session in September, 2017. Building on the overall mandate and purpose of the association as set out in our mission statement, the Executive identified five main themes that were used to chart the strategic priorities of New North for next two to three years.

Advocacy	<p>The interests of northern communities are identified</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocacy represents the collective interests of northern communities• Advocacy is driven by credible and effective practices
Partnerships	<p>Increase impact through strong partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnerships are purposeful and provide strategic benefit• Partnerships are nurtured and effectively managed
Municipal Capacity	<p>Governance and administrative capacity growth in northern communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New North as facilitator, coordinator and program advocate• Primary focus of supporting success of administrators
Facilitation	<p>Increased collaboration amongst northern communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New North as catalyst with insight, process and information
Organizational Health	<p>A strong and stable organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policies and procedures advancing governance and management excellence

NewNorthVerticalSlice

In pursuit of some of our key objectives this year, we ...

- Built consensus, obtained funding and launched a range of initiatives to address northern administrative and governance issues faced by northern municipalities, including a regional administration support initiative
- Facilitated multiple workshops with the aim of bringing together northern administrators and elected officials to build financial literacy capacity
- Worked with key stakeholders such as the Northern Municipal Trust Account Management Board and Northern Municipal Services to initiate the creation of the Northern Saskatchewan Administrators association, which came officially into being in April 2019
- Surveyed communities and came up with a plan to help northern water operators achieve certification
- Advocated for the review, enhancement and immediate renewal of the Northern Capital Grants Program
- Advocated for the establishment of a green energy revolving fund as well as pursued a range of opportunities to locate funding to support northern communities to explore alternative energy, including submitting funding proposals to Natural Resources Canada Green Energy Capacity Building Stream
- Certified 60 water operators from across the north at our annual New North waterworks
- Provided practical, hands-on support and advice to elected officials and administrators on a range of issues, including cannabis legalization
- Delivered more than \$60,000 in funding to support community justice, suicide prevention and intervention, and community safety initiatives in the north
- Provided forums for the northern elected to exchange ideas, interact with senior government, learn from each other, and advocate for their own interests
- Produced more than 100,000 words in written communication to New North members, government and stakeholders in monthly editions of the New North monthly newsletter, which had a year over year growth in subscribers of more than 400%
- Advocated for the retention, in its current form, of the provincial rental housing supplement
- Continued dialogue with U of S researchers to come up with sustainable, community-driven initiatives for dog control
- Continued to maintain strong, purposeful dialogue with our key strategic partners SUMA and SARM
- Worked with fellow stakeholders to devise and oversee the creation of the Targeted Sector Support Initiative, which will see up to \$1.5 million distributed annual to municipalities to encourage regional co-operation and build governance and administrative capacity at the municipal level
- Brought together stakeholders from across the province and across jurisdiction to once again successfully host the Northern Justice Symposium, which continues to be the only event of its kind in the province in delivering a unique, inclusive and purposeful opportunities for meaningful dialogue on a range of northern community justice and community wellness initiatives
- Continued to assert a northern presence in dialogues and discussions with the provincial government on a wide-range of policy areas, including legislative reforms
- And much, much more ...

Issues in Focus

New North lobbied on dozens of issues this year, as we do every year, across multiple ministries. Each issue requires research, consultation and lots and lots of meetings. Below are a few of the things that kept our attention through the year ...

Building Northern Administrative Capacity

For years northern municipalities have struggled with the challenges of administrative capacity, and as part of New North's three-year strategic plan, the Executive has made finding long-term and sustainable solutions to northern administrative capacity a key objective.

The launch of the Northern Administrators Association in collaboration with by the NMTA Management Board is the first of many initiatives we'll be embarking on over the next few years to help northern administrators overcome their capacity gaps. The NSAA has gotten off to a roaring start with a number of conferences and other initiatives, including the launch of a website containing a wide range of northern-specific and curated material aimed at helping northern administrators in their day to day jobs.

Other initiatives include the Northern Administrator Circuit Rider program and New North's Regional Administrator Support pilot project, which is set to begin in Fall 2020.

In addition to these new supports, New North initiated a program we are calling "From the Ground Up," which is a new approach to training and supporting administrative and other municipal staff. The program kicked off with a bookkeeping workshop (see over), attended by almost two dozen northern admin staff.

Wildfire Mitigation Funding

Northerners have demanded funding to secure their communities against a wildfire incursion for years, and finally, with a federal government announcement in April 2019, that will happen. New North communities will have access to more than \$6 million in funding to undertake mitigation and other activities within their boundaries, with the provincial government undertaking similar work on adjacent Crown land. Communities will have full control over how, when and where the clearing will occur, with the goal that most of the work will be completed within the first two years. Communities get to decide what to do with the lumber and, of course, local labour will be utilized in the work. Training programs will be

devised to ensure locals have the certification required to undertake the work.

Supporting Northern Governance and Leadership Development

This year was the first year of what will be a multi-year and ongoing focus of New North in providing enhanced training and learning opportunities for northern leaders in a whole range of subject areas, which will include education not just in the principles of governance, but economic and business development as well as social development. Over the last few years we've tried to ensure that leaders get value for their time and money by hosting MLDP modules alongside our Gatherings, and in April, we brought Laurent Mougeot onboard to facilitate the first of many high level governance training workshops.

Supporting Community Policing and Justice Initiatives and Suicide Prevention

This year featured two events to help communities share some of the great community-driven success stories related to community policing. The Northern Justice Symposium in 2020 and the Empowering our Communities in March 2019 showcased and highlighted the great work of local community and volunteer groups aimed at building community resiliency, prevent crime and build better relationship with authorities.

In March as well, we saw the first major youth conference initiative by the Embracing Life Committee, and New North continues to support this initiative by providing secretariat and administrative support including the distribution of thousands of dollars for grass-roots and green-shoot community-based projects.

Green Energy

Despite the province's change of direction on this issue, New North continued this year to advocate and pursue opportunities to bring funding to northern communities keen to explore the uses of alternative energies.

Capacity Building Northern Administrators Conference

Northern Administrators Association Conference

Coronet, November 14-15, 2019

The Northern Administrators Association was formed by northern administrators to address some of the capacity challenges of being a northern administrator, one of which, if this conference was anything to go by, is knowing what it is anyone is supposed to be doing.

So it would seem appropriate that this first NSAA conference, held in November, had as one of its major activities the putting down on paper all the things northern administrators are doing in their jobs, which would seem like a fairly individual affair until you look at the statistics and come to the realization that a great deal of what northern municipal administrators and clerks have historically done in their jobs, perhaps even on a daily basis, is

look for other jobs. This year alone the turnover is at about 15%; since the last election, it's been greater than 50%. Since 2008, more than 120 people have occupied a position of administrator, assistant administrator or clerk in the northern municipalities. Some communities have had 3 or 4 CAOs since 2016 alone. Presently, fewer than a quarter of the northern municipalities have certified administrators.

There are indications the NSAA is working to support administrators and clerks already, if feedback from participants is anything to go on.



This fledgling association has the strong backing of New North and the NMTA Management Board—which sponsored the event .



Capacity Building New North Scholarship

The New North Executive was once again pleased to award New North Public Administration and Leadership Scholarships this year.

The New North Public Administration and Leadership Scholarship has assisted more than a dozen northern students advance in their tertiary studies by providing financial support to purchase books, pay for tuition, housing, and other costs related to their education.

Successful applicants are chosen based on their commitment to playing a leadership role in advancing the growth and development of northern Saskatchewan.

This year's successful applicants included Donny Favel from Ile a la Crosse. Recipients of the award have been undertaking studies across a diverse field, including administration, health, education, the law and now environmental studies.

ADMINISTRATORS BOOKKEEPING COURSE SEPTEMBER 2019



There are certain things in life that no amount of experience or focused preparation can adequately prepare you for. Long-haul flights, nineteenth-century Russian novels, the Friday night of a long-weekend in Vegas, having teenagers.

So where do we place a bookkeeping course?

Actually, it turns out that all our fears about people falling asleep at their desks, or worse, hurling those desks across the room in a fit of pique, may have been somewhat overstated, the result perhaps of our recollection of Accounting in Grade Eleven. So I don't know what to say about this other than the course evaluations seemed to suggest participants learned something and got a lot out of it, which is the main thing, and we'll be doing something similar again soon, which is the other main thing.

The more than a dozen attendees from communities across the north spent five full days at the Coronet Hotel in Prince Albert learning the basics of

bookkeeping, financial management and how to understand financial statements, among many other interesting things, all in a convivial classroom setting presided over one of the most experienced bookkeeping instructors in the province. Attendees came away with a certificate from Sask. Polytechnic (Regina), and very big smiles on their faces, as can be seen in the photo above by Shelley.

New North will host a reprise of this course as soon as rules around gatherings allows for it. We are also planning to expand this concept to cover a broader range of financial management learning objectives, with the idea being that administrators and support staff from every municipality will be able to undertake a beginners, intermediate and advanced program, depending on where they are, to properly and fully cater to the diverse learning needs of northern administrators and clerks.

Altercation Breaks Out Over Correct Pronunciation of “Algae” at New North Waterworks. Again.

April 2019

Very few people will know the name John Snow—unless you watch Game of Thrones, in which case you’d be thinking of a different John Snow (one whose name is also spelled differently). The John Snow I am talking about is a guy who lived in 19th London and is regarded as the father of water treatment. It’s one of the minor tragedies of the modern age that John Snow’s contribution to water and wastewater treatment isn’t commemorated with some kind of annual jar testing ritual and his portrait isn’t on display in every water and sewer works, unlike that of the Son of Lyanna Stark, the late Prince of Dragonstone, which, of course, is.

Anyway, John Snow is the person who, using some ingenious research methods and without consulting Google even once because it didn’t exist then, discovered that cholera—which was on one of its periodic death-bringsings through the inner-city neighbourhoods of London, England at the time—was not contracted through the air, as was commonly thought, but through the water people were collecting from the neighbourhood well. In point of fact, the contents of the well was as much water as it was effluent, but the locals thought it was OK because at least it wasn’t *entirely* effluent, and even if it was, drinking that couldn’t kill you. Except, of course, it was. No one believed John Snow when he told them drinking water from contaminated wells was killing them. We think he could have convinced them with a really simple experiment: get them to drink a glass of contaminated water. If they survived the night—or at least retained most of their lower intestine in the correct position—then he could happily concede he was wrong. But he wasn’t.

All of this, of course, is just a drawn-out way of leading into why we go to extraordinary lengths to make sure the water we drink is kept very separate from the water that smells kind of funny, and why treating the latter before it finds its way into the former, via a surface water body or drip drip dripping into an aquifer, is so vitally important. Cholera is one heck of a way to go.

A fact that everyone finds surprising when they hear it is that wastewater, or sewage, is actually over 99% pure water. It’s the less than 1% of it—the solids—that creates the problem. Solids come in two shapes: suspended solids are the ones you can see. Dissolved solids have joined the

liquid and are now a part of it, and, like sugar mixed in with hot coffee, change the character of the liquid, usually making it worse, unless it’s a Timmy’s, which was worse to begin with.

The New North Waterworks Workshop in Prince Albert over April 10 and 11 was full of these types of facts, ones you could insert into any dinner party conversation and send everyone into thoughtful silence. One thing we found particularly interesting was the discussion on bacteria in the Enviroway CEU session led by Vishal Behari.

We commonly think of bacteria as a bad thing that can kill you. Which it can certainly be. But bacteria is really just another kind of organism, with no inherent good or bad qualities, that likes to eat things and reproduce, just like we do, go to weddings and poison everyone, which ... we don’t.

But bacteria’s most fearful quality—how rapidly it eats, destroys and reproduces—can also be harnessed to do good. Devouring all the bad stuff in wastewater, for example, is one thing that bacteria can do. In fact, bacteria, properly motivated, can eat just about anything. Single-use plastic bags, for instance, are a scourge on the environment because nothing can break them down. But plastic bags that are made of something bacteria likes to eat would solve the problem overnight. Not literally, of course: that would be scary.

The other CEU session, on Lagoon Operation and Maintenance, was led by Josh Buniak from ATAP. This, too, was extremely well received, as most northern communities use lagoons to treat their wastewater. If you’re ever out at your lagoon you can check in on the “health” of the micro-organic processes going on by observing the colour of the pond. If it’s a clear dark green, it’s good. If it’s brown, you’ve got a low oxygen problem, which could mean that toxic substances are getting in. A blackish green means there is blue-green algae in it, and grey means there is algae in it, but the algae is dead. Red or pink means it has sulphur bacteria in it, and bright flames shooting into the night sky means you’re probably looking at the landfill.

Once again, we thank our sponsors for financially supporting the event, and the WSA’s Kerry Desjarlais for her expertise, guidance and high energy levels throughout. ■

New North Advocating for Northern Interests

A primary mandate of New North is to advocate for northern municipal, social and economic interests.

We regularly meet with cabinet ministers and senior government officials, as well as strategic partners, to put our point of view across assertively yet respectfully.

Effective lobbying requires strategy, research and tact, and embarrassing government is rarely going to achieve anything. Sometimes facts are not enough, but it is always a good idea to come prepared with a solution. Quite often, government knows less about issue than we do, so being prepared is the key to making any headway.

This year, as always, New North met a number of times with the ministers of Government Relations, Rural and Remote Health, Social Services and others.

On the health side, we continue to press for a fair distribution of mental health funding to the north. Additionally, with the move to a single health authority, we are concerned not just about how service levels will be maintained for northern residents, but how transparently the authority will be reporting to northern people on service levels and health expenditures. For this reason, we have been advocating for a northern health advisory council, among other things, to give northerners a way of “talking back” to government on health care.

On the social services and housing side, we continue to be alarmed by the housing authority’s replacement of propane or oil furnaces with the far more costly-to-operate electric furnaces, which is propelling energy prices to skyhigh levels for many northern social housing tenants. As well, we continue to lobby for SaskHousing to consider a forgivable loan for tenants to put a deposit down on a mortgage so they can purchase their units.

The Executive met a number of times with the Minister of Government Relations Warren Kaeding and later Lori Carr. At each, the message was the same: administrators need support; the Gas Tax Fund doesn’t work for the north; Northern Capital Grants program renewal, and northern revenue sharing

needs to be enhanced to support the full range of activities northern municipal governments engage in.

These are just some of the issues we lobbied on this year. In the coming year, we will continue to focus our efforts and attention on social and economic issues with the aim of improving the lives and well being of northern residents.

The New North Executive sat down with the Minister of Environment Dustin Duncan and Minister of Government

Relations Lori Carr, early February, to raise concerns about forest management, lease fee increases for commercial and recreational sites located on crown land (see below for the subsequent announcement), and eligibility requirements for municipal revenue sharing, which we believe the communities are not ready for yet.

Concerns about the how the ministry issues logging permits came through in the recent Mayor and Councillor Gathering in November, where communities wondered if their feedback was getting passed along to ministry officials, or whether the consultation process was really just for show. One way of “closing the loop” would be if the community was provided all the information that the ministry received during the consultation process.

The Executive also questioned the roll out and logic of lease fee increases for sites located on crown land, as well as the process for turning commercial or recreational leases into TRU leases.

New North Executive & Staff Committee Representation

- Police Advisory Committee
- Gas Tax Oversight Steering Committee
- Solid Waste Advisory Team
- Northern Justice Committee
- Gas Tax Communication Committee
- Northern Housing Advisory Committee
- Taskforce on Policing
- ... and many others

New North Northern Justice Symposium

What started out, almost 20 years ago, as a kind of companion piece to efforts to smooth relations between the communities, government and the RCMP, through the creation of Community Police Boards and the Framework Agreement for Community Policing, has taken on a life of its own.

Northern Justice Symposium remains one of the few, if only, events of its kind to bring communities from across the province, from across jurisdictions, under one roof to discuss common problems, with a focused and contemporary agenda where the key point of contention is the massive and disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on northern and indigenous people in this province. In an environment where issues of crime and punishment are increasingly polarizing, where the solutions getting thrown into the political arena seem increasingly designed to divide people rather than actually solve problems, we look to education and the transfer of experience and knowledge to redress the balance. Anyone

NORTHERN JUSTICE SYMPOSIUM

March 3-5, 2020

who says there is an easy path is kidding themselves and trying to kid you. No one is going to say that the NJS has been able to shape the political discourse around crime. But it would be our hope that if there is any shaping to be done it would be done by the people in that room.

Everyone at these events wants to showcase their initiative, get support for their thing. We are as always happy to give them that stage, and it's the biggest one yet, at the Saskatoon Inn.

This year's event was the usual mix of government, agency, community and RCMP presentations. Emceed by Duane Favel and Nick Daigneault, the event kicked off with Treaty Commissioner Mary Culbertson speaking about reconciliation in Saskatchewan, and then into stride, and on point, with a

session outlining a strategy to deal with the over-representation of indigenous people in the criminal justice system.

In amongst some community-focused presentations, including by Nick Daigneault from Beauval, we have a motivational session

by Pinehouse's Regan Mispona Ratt, who also happens to be U of S student Union President.

A topic getting coverage for the first time at this event is human trafficking, and there are two presentations dedicated to a discussion of crystal meth.

Cadmus Delorme, Chief of Cowessesse First Nation, was a hit at the last symposium, and is back to deliver closing remarks, now with two more years as Chief under his belt.

Northern Excellence Awards

A highlight of the event for many will be the Northern Excellence Awards

The awards will once again recognize the contributions of northern people in the categories of Elder of the Year, Youth of the Year, RCMP Member of the Year, and Citizen of the Year.

Communications & Research

Upcoming

Saskatchewan Association of
Northern Communities

**NEW
NORTH**

Monthly Newsletter

The New North newsletter, published monthly, continues to be the main way we communicate to members and stakeholders. Although written mainly with the northern municipal official in mind, the newsletter is an attempt to engage a broad audience on issues that affect northerners generally, as well those working in northern local government.

The content of the newsletter is produced specifically for the newsletter. This year was the second where we saw immensely valuable contributions by seasoned journalist Chelsea Laskowski to the northern conversation. Chelsea's experience working on northern-related stories with MBC made her a perfect fit for us. Bringing a deep appreciation of northern issues combined with a colourful, engaging and expressive style, Chelsea has added a new dimension to the newsletter over the last 18 months. She has a keen and finely tuned sense of justice and focuses on the fundamental human impacts of government policies. Her "Around the Traps" articles are a great way for us to learn about what communities are up to. Taking the time to interview three or four northern elected each month, Chelsea, with her journalistic background and strong ear for a story, knows how to get the most interesting angles, producing work of extreme readability and of great public interest.

Research and Issues Backgrounding

As well as on-the-scene journalism, Chelsea has added considerably to our capacity to "background" issues with her tenacious ferreting and strong desire to get at the heart of any issue. Her briefing notes have formed the basis of some of our most critical advocacy efforts this year, including, and especially, related to housing.

Research in Municipal and Northern Issues

In a post-fact, post-truth world, it is more crucial than ever that we continue to focus on producing fact-based and evidence-based research. This is what we continued to strive to do throughout the year, producing in-house research on a number of northern issues, including, but not limited to:

- Northern municipal revenue sharing
- Northern housing needs
- The evolution and scope of the "municipal purposes" mandate for northern municipalities
- The relationship between census counts and health reporting counts
- The potential for northern solar energy production
- The extent of the scrap tire stockpile in the north, and the development of strategies for how to deal with it
- Supports for cognitive disabilities and mental health

Projects Going Forward

This year, our research focus will move to social issues, and in particular, disability supports. We are very concerned with how FASD is being ignored in northern Saskatchewan, with no specific program targeting supports for some of our most vulnerable individuals and families.

In support of stronger participation in northern municipal governance and generate public awareness of what northern municipalities do, we will be launching a research project to look into public attitudes toward municipal government in the north. As well, we want to explore the barriers that might be in the way of more women running for municipal office.

We will also be launching a northern economic development research project, and are actively seeking a way to bring northern Saskatchewan into the federal government's Arctic Strategy, which we think will be a way of unlocking more federal funding for the northern communities.

Expanding Our Social Media Presence

Social media is playing an increasingly important role in influencing how people think and respond to what is going on around them. As a truly open and public forum, social media, like Facebook and Twitter (just to name two popular platforms), is revolutionizing both how people get their information, but also what they do with it.

New North's public communications and advocacy work this year will be greatly enhanced by an energetic focus on social media as a platform for the exchange of information, generation of new ideas and strategies, and informing our members, stakeholders and the public at large of our initiatives and our role in the north.

The reach, and power, of social media was brought home to us at our first real attempt to use the platform for widespread engagement, with the broadcasting over Facebook of the Northern Justice Symposium. At its peak, the symposium was being

watched by more than 3500 people (in addition to the 300 in the room)—and that was without any prior advertising. The videos are still up on our Facebook page, and continue to garner hits.

With the expansion of WIFI, cell phone reach and broadband internet, northerners are far more connected to each other, and the rest of the online world, than ever before. It is a revolution in communication and networking that we are planning to plunge headlong into in the coming year.

New North Web Presence

There was a time when having a website was an extra appendage to other more important forms of communication and public engagement. That is no longer the case. As people increasingly spend their lives online, the web is now often the primary way the public and stakeholders interact with a company or entity.

New North's web presence has undergone evolutionary changes over the last few years. However, as the importance of web presence continues to grow, with higher expectations for greater functionality and professional-looking design, New North will this year undertake a major overhaul of our website. ■

Media and Public Relations

The media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion, and at New North, we regularly engage with media outlets in a variety of ways to get our messages across.

A primary role for New North is to position northern interests front and centre in the public mind, and media relations are a key component of that. Our media relations strategy involves:

- Issuing press releases to draw the media's, and the public's attention, to our issues and concerns
- Providing formal and informal "backgrounding" to the media so those covering northern interests have a better understanding of the complexities and nuances of the how issues are affecting us
- Monitor media reporting to ensure fair and accurate coverage of northern issues
- Drawing the media's attention to community events, activities and community success stories that may otherwise have gone uncovered

- Making ourselves available to the media to provide comments and a point of view on issues affecting northerners

As well interacting directly with the media, New North also helps northern communities with their own media and public relations engagement exercises, providing research, backgrounding and "talking points" to help our members communicate their message more effectively.

New North's role as a nexus point in many strategic partnerships enables us to bring people together, and to point people in the right direction when they want to know who to talk to get something done. New North this year worked with a number of outside entities, including educational institutions, businesses, and of course government, on a consultative basis, to help link strategic partners together, and some of these partnerships will soon be bearing fruit. We look forward to continuing our role in helping people connect with other people, and with our new focus on facilitation this year, playing a much more active role as a catalyst and an agent for key strategic alliances. ■

Northern Administrators & Elected Officials Gather

Northern Administrators Conference & Mayor and Councillor Gathering: April 25 & 26

It's easy to exaggerate the significance of an event, but the Northern Administrators Conference on April 25 could very well be one of those days we look back on and say, "It all started there."

What the "it" turns out to be is up to the northern administrators and clerks, but what we'd like to say is that that was the day when the Northern Administrators Association took its first steps as a self-identifying organization, with a name, mandate, membership and probably a cool logo.

The administrators association wasn't the only thing on the agenda. Brittany from the tax arrears management (ie, collection) firm TAXervice led a discussion on tax enforcement, which included an overview of the service her company provides to help municipalities to do that.

Discussion throughout the conference touched on some of the initiatives of the Northern Municipal Trust Account Management Board, and New North, aimed at building administrative capacity. The association is one of these, but others include the Administrative Circuit Rider program and the creation of a resource bank—a website, essentially—providing a virtual space for administrators to share information, learn from each other and help each other locate things, as well as bringing together and supplementing all the vast volumes of information already out there.

Round-table discussions facilitated by the administrator members of the NMTA

Management Board were about getting a sense of where everyone was at in their jobs, and to help the Management Board get a better understanding of the many challenges administrators are facing.

The Gathering

Laurent Mougeot, former CEO of SUMA, was the keynote presenter at the Mayor and Councillor Gathering on April 26. For almost 3 hours, Laurent held the participants spellbound in his "There is a Line in the Sand: Roles and Responsibilities" workshop. At the end of the day, Laurent told the audience that if you're an elected official and you're wondering where that "line" is, all you need to remember is the acronym NIFO (apparently coined by Malcolm Eaton), which stands for: Noses In, Fingers Out.

Also on the agenda was a fascinating discussion about greenhouses and grow tunnels, which featured Ile a la Crosse Mayor Duane Favel, and Councillor Allan Bishoff from Cumberland House. We also had a Highways update from Highways.

As well, Allan Laird from the Ministry of Government Relations took everyone through the latest revision of the draft NMA amendments (see earlier), and finally, Larry Fremont from Wildfire Management came along to give an update on the next steps following the announcement that wildfire mitigation funding will soon be available to northern municipalities.

New North Gatherings

New North Mayor and Councillor Gathering

November 28, 2019

The provincial government's latest Plan for Growth, released in November, had little of interest in it for most northerners, with the possible exception of the plan to double to size of the annual cut in northern forests, which was a surprise to everyone, including the ministry responsible for it.

In reality, the doubling of the cut would actually just reach the current allowable limit which, if that could be done, it'd be done already, so perhaps there's nothing in this plan at all. In any case, it wouldn't be a bad idea for the province—as the regulator of the industry—to ask the communities how they feel about that from time to time, because we get the impression they don't feel that great about it.

So it was that Aaron Kuchirka from the Ministry of Environment's Forestry Management division came to the Gathering on November 28 to go over the responsibilities of the ministry with respect to regulation, and to hear everyone's complaints about how poorly the system seems to be working.

The critical point seems to be that industry players are responsible for consulting with impacted communities and then taking that feedback back to the regulator—the ministry—which, partly on the strength of it, issues the permits to log. The flaw in this process seem so obvious it's hard to believe there isn't more to it, but, in a province where something as critical as pipeline safety is industry-regulated ... well, who knows. In any case, New North will meet with the Minister Responsible in the next few months to get some clarity here.

In other presentations, Marlo Pritchard, President of the newish Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency, spoke to the merger between Wildfire Management and EMFS and which has, among other

things, now more or less provided the SPPA—formed a few years ago to house Sask911—a reason for its continued existence.

The merger has happened quickly and with little consultation happening with outside stakeholders, which is unforgivable given the significance of both the former entities to the safety and well-being of northern residents.

One issue with the merger is what will now happen with the province's wildfire cost-recovery policy. Marlo Pritchard mentioned that it is on his desk for review, and that something will be forthcoming that they hope will be fair to everyone.

New North has advocated, and continues to advocate, that provincial fire services and northern municipalities have a shared responsibility to respond to fires in these communities.

One option getting thrown around is for the SPSA to actually implement the mandate of the former EMFS to assist the northern municipalities to build their capacity to respond to fires. Then again, if EMFS didn't do it before there's probably no reason to think the new entity, with the same mandate, will do it now.

Larry Fremont, also from SPPA (formerly of Environment) gave an update on where the wildfire mitigation program is at, and came with the very pleasing news that proponents (that is, communities) would be able to "sole source" the contracting for the work. We hope to see the first mitigation projects underway in northern municipalities fairly soon, and most of them done by the end of 2021.

Earlier in the day New North was very privileged to have Sean McEachern deliver a two hour workshop to the elected called "Improving Council Decisions."



New North Gatherings

New North Mayor and Councillor Gathering

June, 2019

The New North Annual General Meeting in late June was the latest we've ever held it—except when held in an election year.

Considering that the affair was competing with graduations, community-wide events, graduations that are effectively community-wide events, Christmas in June type things, other AGMs, and whatever was on TV, the turn-out was still pretty good, and the

northern leaders were in typically fine fettle as the lively and pointed discussion illustrated.

After the formalities of the CEO's report (boring) and the presentation of the financial statements (incomprehensible), the meat of the meeting was finally gotten at and chewed over as leaders gathered at the mics to bring forth some of their concerns. This is the part we at New North value most, as the issues raised at Gatherings effectively determines our strategic direction.

Issues continuing to rise to the top include drugs and addictions and high crime rates, dog control, climate change and fish management as well as forest management.

The latter issue is becoming increasingly prominent. The success of the forestry industry in northern Saskatchewan has always been patchy, to say the least, but it is the growing and highly visible bald patches hacked out of the boreal forest along roadways across the north and barely concealed by a thin veneer of snags that has northern leaders and residents wondering where it's all going to end, and what will left when it does.

While recent media attention has once again highlighted northern concerns, leaders at Gatherings have been raising the alarm for the last couple of years, particularly in the context of the damage that logging trucks are doing to already chopped-up roads, and the few economic and other benefits seemingly coming back to northern communities from forestry activity. Overall, we think it's about time government came along to explain what's going on here, and hopefully the occasion for that will be our next Gathering.

Moving on from the discussion, Malcolm Eaton delivered an extremely well-received dissertation on leadership. He made a number of key points about leadership that are worth thinking about. For starters, when we think of leadership, we tend to think it means getting out in front of the pack and ... leading. Actually, Malcolm observed that, in practice, leadership can mean a lot more than that. Sometimes the best leaders "lead from behind"—that is, they step aside to let others take over. He made the same point about the role of council in the community. Sometimes a council's job is simply

to be a cheerleader for another group. He illustrated this point with an anecdote about a local resident who wanted to see council do something about the state of a kids' playground.

Council's response was to "empower" the resident to do something about it herself—and she did. Empowering residents to take some responsibility for a community project is a brilliant way to build a sense of ownership. Perhaps the foremost principle of community

development is that the development has to be done by the community—the process is as important as the outcome. Council can facilitate community development by making "space" for others to step into, and then go nuts in.

After a lunch of ham probably, northern leaders were greeted with a phalanx of folk from Government Relations and Finance to present on the Education Property Tax system (EPT). This was a presentation we had requested—and government was good enough to follow through on—and we think it served its purpose. One of the issues with EPT is that "being in good standing" with it will be an eligibility requirement of municipal revenue sharing come next year. Not only are the elected now aware of this fact, they are also now aware of what "good standing" is, and how to be in it. At least we hope so.

Then followed a quick update on the Northern Alcohol Strategy with Joan Johnson and Andrea Cowan from Community Safety and Well-Being, who spoke about Hubs. If you're interested in getting a hub going, let us know and we will pass your information along.

The final session was an hour with the RCMP, and you know what that means: jargon incomprehensible to most civies (normal people) and more acronyms than an emergency room scene in a medical drama. Actually it was pretty fascinating stuff, and centred on the role of the CRT (Crime Reduction Team) as delivered by a SME (subject matter expert) who mentioned that in one bust they discovered some SKS rounds (same bullets used in an AK-47) which suggests that there were SPNW (some pretty nasty weapons) out on the street which could RMOU (really mess someone up). Turns out some gangs use acronyms quite a bit too, which kind of figures, given the business they're in. For instance, we didn't realize that the tag that Terror Squad uses—TMHS—means "Till My Heart Stops," which actually sounds pretty poetic when preceded by "I will Love You ...". The other one they use, TMCS, makes no sense. It means Till My Casket Stops. Till My Caskets Stops what? Rolling down a hill?

Lacking closure on this point we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

The Road Ahead ... 2021 and Beyond

Working Toward a Northern Strategic Vision

- Create a new policy strategy for the northern communities to address the social, economic, cultural and political needs that encompasses the whole of the north
- Develop a cooperative framework for northern leaders to identify key priority areas
- Work with the provincial and federal government and other stakeholders to have northern Saskatchewan considered as part of other northern jurisdictional program initiatives (ie, the federal government's "Arctic Strategy")

Northern Housing

The federal government's new National Housing Strategy represents an opportunity to shape national housing policies and funding to improve northern housing availability and housing adequacy. We will:

- Undertake fact-based research to ascertain state and condition of northern housing stock
- Advocate for more funding for the repair and renewal of units and to improvements in the adequacy of northern housing
- Advocate for funding for improvements in the energy efficiency of northern housing

In addition, we will:

- Continue to lobby SaskHousing to create home-ownership options for social housing units
- Continue to monitor the consistency of housing authorities in their application of housing policies to residents across the north

Meaningful Improvements to Northern Highways

Infrastructure

- Work with the existing stakeholders to identify their role in pursuing northern highway improvements
- Lobby the provincial government to shift focus to highway upgrades and capital investment to support local economic development

Working toward a provincial budget submission for 2019-20

- Consult with communities and other stakeholders to assess gaps/needs and wants with respect to identified priority areas
- Locate the needs/gaps within the context of a broader northern economic and social development strategy
- Quantify, and present to the provincial government, how this might be reflected in budget priorities

Green Energy & Solar Initiatives and Climate Change

Mitigation

- Continue to lobby for a solar energy revolving fund to be set up within the NMTA
- Lobby the provincial and federal government to provide funding and other opportunities for northern communities to prepare and respond to climate change

Health Advocacy

- Establish representation of northern municipal leaders on Health authority consultative committee
- Continue to lobby for a northern-specific mental health strategy
- Re-focus attention on FSAD and initiatives to support affected individuals and families, including lobbying for supports for diagnoses

Small Community Recycling Initiatives

- Acquire funding to undertake a thorough investigation of potential avenues for small community recycling initiatives in the north

Administrative/Governance capacity building

Defining the parameters of administration and governance support program will be a priority of New North this year.

Initiatives will include:

- Support for building an administrative peer network
- Lobbying for an administrator intern program
- Orienting the New North scholarship to fields related directly to municipal administration
- Lobby funding partners to support the Administrative Circuit Rider initiative
- Make progress toward completing the Administrators Resource bank
- Support the uptake of MLDP enrolments by offering the courses as part of New North Gatherings
- Focus a portion of New North Gatherings on governance training
- Working with partners to prepare for new asset management requirements to ensure northern municipal compliance with the federal Gas Tax Fund and other federal and provincial funding programs

Build strategic relationships with stakeholders and increasing net value from strategic partnerships

New North has limited capacity, so continuing to work on and build new relationship is always a priority. This year we will focus on turning relationships into outcomes, by:

- Continuing to engage with our members to ensure that we are representing them appropriately, focus on getting our message out to them about what we are trying to do, and to reflect their interests in our newsletter and other communications
- Continuing to work with Northern Municipal Services to understand their capacity issues and priorities, as well as to establish shared interests and ways we can work together to achieve them
- Establishing key points in common with the NMTA Management Board to amplify our collective messaging
- Identify key issues, project, programs and priority areas where we can leverage our maturing relationship with SUMA and SARM.
- Create a set of shared interests and objectives with First Nation organizations and work strategically toward achieving them