



We Cropped Someone from this Photo
Find out why ... inside

Upcoming

Administrators Conference
 November 14 & 15, Coronet

New North Gathering
 November 28, Coronet

Saskatchewan Association of
 Northern Communities

**NEW
 NORTH**

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Monthly Newsletter
October 2019

Northern Riding Swept Up in “Blue Wave”

Northern Saskatchewan’s new federal representative is Gary Vidal, an accountant from Meadow Lake, and former mayor of that community, who now has the challenging task of representing a region that didn’t vote for him, on issues there is little Conservative interest in, and from within the ranks of a party whose sole preoccupation, for whatever time this government has, will be to act as an impediment to it getting anything done in the hope of making that time as short as possible.

Incumbent Georgina Jolibois, whose representation of the north in federal parliament was thought so good by her federal colleagues that they voted her Parliamentarian of the Year, fell thousands of votes short of Vidal, with Tammy Cook-Searson coming a short head back in third place, at the October 21 elections.

The result confirmed the fears of many on the progressive side of politics, with two high calibre progressive candidates effectively cancelling each other out as voter turn-out in the north returned to trend. It also confirms that the 2015 win by Jolibois was an outlier, in an outlier election.

Vidal led almost all night in the count, with Cook-Searson briefly moving ahead early doors, presumably as votes from her own communities in the La Ronge region were tallied. A big surge of votes mid-count saw Vidal going more than 4000 votes clear at one point—at this point, CBC declared him the winner—notwithstanding Jolibois then doing what she did last time by making a late run, presumably as polls came in from the outer communities where she and the NDP have good support, although

without replicating the result of last time, where she pipped Liberal candidate Lawrence Joseph with virtually the last booth of the night.

In an election that will be as unmemorable for most as it was uninspiring, the campaigns of each candidate in the northern riding went on more or less unnoticed by their respective leaders, at least publicly. The declining vote of the two progressive parties perhaps didn’t reflect the failure of the candidates as much as the failures of the parties and their platforms to resonate with northern voters.

On the other hand, the Conservative platform was ideally positioned to bring out the vote of Conservative-leaners, whipping up a populist wave that turned into a tsunami dislodging even Liberal stalwart and office fixture Ralph Goodale from his Regina seat.

Vidal’s tally of 10,816 would have won in any year; it was the most any candidate has ever gotten in this riding. The result for Vidal is even better when you consider that the People’s Party of Canada leached as many as 200 votes from the Conservatives. At the next election, which could be as soon as 18 months away if history is any guide, Conservatives will no doubt need to contend with a rising tide of western separatism, which while bad, isn’t half as diverting as the brain-stem separatism that seems to have infected this province of late. We’re joking, of course.

A full analysis of the result will be published in this newsletter after the poll tables are released and we’ve calmed down a bit.

NewNorth News & Updates

Northern Administrators Conference to Dwell on the Now-ness, This-ness, of Municipal Administration

Northern Administrators Conference, November 14 & 15, Coronet Hotel, PA

Northern municipal administrators do it tough working in one of the most challenging jobs in public administration in one of the most challenging environments to be a public administrator. Things are not about to get any easier as the province—among other things—brings in new eligibility requirements for municipal revenue sharing from next year, placing even more pressure on administrative staff who already have quite enough to deal with, thanks all the same.

The Northern Administrators Conference over November 14 and 15 at the Coronet in Prince Albert will, for a lack of a better way of describing it, be about the “this-ness” of being a municipal administrator, the things that make it a thing, starting with the things that administrators actually do, expressed in their own words, in the various facilitated HR sessions which will see administrators thinking about their job descriptions to see how well they match up with what they do, in the hope that the job they do and the job they think they do are roughly equivalent, and where they aren’t that they can at least live with that.

The value of these particular sessions, we think, will be in the sharing, as administrators compare notes about what they do and don’t do, and would like to do if they knew how or had the time. It is frequently remarked that being successful as a municipal administrator requires knowing a small amount about a lot of

things, and occasionally needing to know a lot of things about a small amount, which really boils down to knowing when you have to know something, knowing when you don’t have to know something, and knowing that there’s something you don’t know.

In some ways, the perfect administrators conference is simply 8 hours of people coming to gradual realizations. As such, the format of this conference, like the last one, will be largely facilitated small group discussions, except those sessions delivered by New North, which will largely be in the carpark.

As well, we will hear from Northern Municipal Services on the aforementioned eligibility requirements for NRS and anything else they have going, and representatives from the Management Board of the NMTA will talk about the range of new programs they have, which I could tell you about now but why ruin the anticipation?

The Northern Administrators Conference is a project of the NMTA Management Board, the Northern Administrators Association, and New North. Breakfast will be provided each day, and lunch on the first day, but not the second, for reasons that escape us but will probably turn out to be fairly controversial when they eventually become known.

Registrations have been sent out, but if you didn’t get one, contact New North via email at new.north@sasktel.net.

November New North Gathering to Be An Update-a-thon

New North Mayor and Councillor Gathering, November 28, Coronet Hotel, PA

Pushing the date of the Fall Gathering to late November means that this is closer to a Winter Gathering, but if everyone can get past that faux pas we can get right on to talking about what’s coming up in it.

First off, we have representatives from the Ministry of Environment coming along to explain what is going on with forest management in the north—by which we mean logging—which is becoming increasingly problematic as an issue as ever-larger swathes of forest get cleared and loaded onto trucks without so much as a by your leave.

As well we have a representative from the new Saskatchewan Safety and Emergency thing, which we can never quite remember the name of but you’ll know it when you see it, coming to talk about the merging of Emergency and Fire Services and Wildfire Management and how that’s all working out. We will also have an update on the wildfire mitigation program.

And as usual we will have New North and SUMA updates and lunch and probably some door prizes.

A completed agenda will be sent to communities as soon as it is ... completed.

New North Phones, Fax, Off the Hook

When New North decided to move to a new location in late September we didn’t expect it would take almost 2 months to get a phone line installed at our new digs.

If we’d known that we would’ve moved 2 months earlier, so that that 2 months would now be up, and we’d have our new phone line, and I wouldn’t have to be here writing about how we don’t have phones right now.

But, of course, we didn’t.

All this is to say that if anyone’s been trying to call us over the last month and haven’t been able to get through, you at least know why, and it’s not because we’ve just been sitting there watching the phone as it rings and rings.

At least not on this particular occasion.

From the New North Chair

BY BRUCE FIDLER, MAYOR OF CREIGHTON

The outcome of the federal election was not a surprise to a lot of people, as many people predicted a minority Liberal government. No matter how you feel about the result, in some ways re-electing an incumbent government makes it easier for everyone to get back to business fairly quickly, as pre-existing programs and funding, like the infrastructure program called the Investing in Canada Plan, will just continue on as intended. Although a lot of projects under this program were announced prior to the election, we expect that many more announcements will be made in the coming year, especially leading up to the provincial election next November.

Some of the capital project dollars we hope to see getting announced before too long include funding for regional solid waste systems in the north. But the new capital program also made room for municipalities to pitch for a range of projects, including for things like recreational and health facilities, through an expression of interest process. We haven't heard when the application process starts, but we think fairly soon.

But the election result also has us wondering what other impacts there might be in Saskatchewan, and especially in the north. Will people still feel like they have a voice in Ottawa? Will Saskatchewan simply disappear off the map? I hear people say: Is the north in danger of becoming the forgotten region, in a forgotten province? And what can do to make sure this doesn't happen?

I think this is a legitimate concern, but all the more reason for us to collectively step up our lobbying to make sure we are heard. And I mean this on both the provincial and federal stage.

SaskHousing Has Another Expression of Interest Window Open

The re-election of the federal Liberal government should mean that the National Housing Strategy, which they announced some time ago but appeared to make some aspects of its full implementation contingent on them winning the election, will now be fully implemented, although how northern residents benefit from any of its programs remains uncertain.

In the meantime, we have SaskHousing with one of its requests for Expressions of Interest (EOI) to build, renew or renovate rental units aimed at low income families. Usually the proponent is required to put up a third of the cost, the feds and province covering the rest, but this time around SHC are saying they "will fund the minimum amount that a successful project needs to achieve affordability and financial viability," which could be any amount.

Typically anyone seeking to submit an EOI needs to have done a housing needs assessment to demonstrate that the project they

And that's what we intend to do.

As we go into the last year of the current term of the New North Executive, you can expect to see quite a bit of a flurry of activity, as projects and strategies we have been working on for the last few years, in partnership with others such as the Northern Municipal Trust Account Management Board, finally start showing results. These include things like the Administrator Circuit Rider program and a regional support services program, which we will be hopefully piloting in the next few months.

There's some other very interesting initiatives around in the municipal world that will be getting off the ground fairly soon as well, including the Targeted Sector Support initiative, which New North has been working on alongside Government Relations, SUMA and SARM.

And at our Gathering in November we will have an update on development in the wildfire mitigation program, which many communities have expressed an interest in being a part of.

But with the sweet there occasionally comes the sour. At the Gathering in June we drew attention to the fact that GR will from next year be introducing eligibility requirements for revenue sharing (see page 5 of this newsletter). We don't like the idea of withholding revenue sharing, since we don't think it achieves anything. But we also think that all northern municipalities will meet the criteria given enough support, so hopefully any talk of withholding money will be moot.

Look out for us as we travel the north in the next few weeks, and if we don't see you then, we will hopefully see you at the Gathering on November 28.

have in mind is actually needed. SaskHousing does provide partial funding for proponents to do these assessments—which can be quite expensive, especially if you hire a consultant—through the Northern ECHO program. Communities interested in going down this path should get together with municipalities and other governments in their region to share the costs.

Within the northern municipal cohort only a small handful of communities have taken advantage of the SaskHousing offerings over the last decade, for any number of reasons. Quite often municipalities have been able to use their developed subdivision—facilitated through the NMTA's Northern Subdivision Program—as their share of the cost of the project.

To find out more about this program and others, go to Saskatchewan.ca and follow the links to housing, or email us.

New North Bookkeeping Course a Treat for Those Who Like Crunching Numbers While Eating Cheesecake, Which is Apparently Everyone



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, the year I discovered, and was forced to read aloud to the rest of the class, J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. Fortunately I hadn't discovered D.H. Lawrence yet.

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. Oh, and yeah, there's this nice photo by Shelley.

Registrations Open for SUMA 2020

Arguably, the only thing worse than Saskatoon in the first week of February is Regina in the first week of February, and at this SUMA Convention northern leaders will once again have an opportunity to test that theory, as SUMA hosts its 115th Annual Convention in, sigh, Regina.

The convention's theme this time around is "Building Sustainable Communities"—because why wouldn't you?—but that's all we know about it so far. An agenda will likely be available by the time you read this, so go check it out at www.suma.org. Given the theme, we'd guess that there'll be at least one session on the joys of regional co-operation. Much less likely will be a session on throwing in the towel.

Things to look out for this convention include the resolution session. It's always a blast anyway, but something tells us this one will have darker undertones than usual, given the fraught political climate in this province right now. SUMA vets the resolutions before hand so there's less esoteria on display than at, say, a SARM Convention, but you never really know what's going to bubble up from the floor, which is half the fun, the other half being mostly terrifying.

As well, we expect the premier's address to stoke a separatist agenda while also completely rejecting it, and will possibly include excerpts from his soon-to-be-published memoir, *Not Sad, Just Disappointed: Federalisme et Moe*.

Revenue Sharing

Upcoming Municipal Revenue Sharing Grant Declaration of Eligibility

BY The Ministry of Government Relations

In 2019, eligibility requirements for Municipal Revenue Sharing grants will be tested. The requirements are legislated responsibilities and intended to promote good governance. The Ministry of Government Relations (GR) will be using an online **Declaration of Eligibility** to know that municipalities have met all the requirements.

So what do you need to do now?

On November 15, 2019, GR will email all municipalities a link to complete an online Declaration of Eligibility by January 15, 2020.

GR is encouraging all municipalities to participate in this test to:

- ensure it is easy to use and functional for all municipalities.
- provide an opportunity for each municipality to confirm it meets each of the eligibility requirements.

NOTE: Municipal Revenue Sharing grant payments for 2020 will not be withheld based on the submission of the municipality's online declaration, unless a municipality has not submitted their Audited Financial Statement, as is existing ministry policy.

Future Declarations

Beginning November 2020, municipalities will be asked to complete an annual declaration. If municipalities do not meet all six requirements or do not submit their declarations before the closing date, their Municipal Revenue Sharing grant for 2021 may be withheld until all requirements are met.

If a municipality does not meet all of the Eligibility Requirements, it is their responsibility to take all required steps to meet each of the requirements and notify GR. Once GR is informed that a municipality meets all the requirements, its Municipal Revenue Sharing payment will be released.

Please be aware that a complete declaration requires a resolution of council confirming that the municipality meets all six Eligibility Requirements.

For more information

If you have any questions, call Advisory Services and Municipal Relations at 306-787-2680 or email GRCompliance@gov.sk.ca.

Northern Town of La Ronge Coughs Up for More Cops

The Town of La Ronge voted in October to hire three additional RMCP members, at their own expense, in order to beef up the police response in the community. Paying about 70% of the total (the share that the province would normally fork out for), La Ronge will be on the hook for around \$300,000 annually for the life of the agreement.

Policing Costs

Policing in smaller communities is the responsibility of the province, which contracts the service to the RCMP, splitting the cost 70:30 with the feds. Municipalities front some of it as well, but of the northern municipalities only Creighton and La Ronge contribute to policing costs (long story), at the rate of just under \$70 per capita. Pressure from the municipal sector a few years ago forced the province (themselves under pressure from the feds) to back down on introducing an 8% annual price-hike, but even with the relatively modest 2 or 3% annual increases, policing costs are starting to get a little ridiculous.

With the extra members, the Town of La Ronge will be paying well over \$500,000 annually for policing, at a per capita of about \$185. Residents of large cities can pay almost \$400 a head, but quite often experience better service levels than residents of small municipalities.

Northern Revenue Sharing: A Potential Source of Funding?

Northern municipalities receive revenue sharing according to the "four pillars" model, which is based on municipal expenditures related to general government, road maintenance, and the provision of water, wastewater and solid waste management. Additionally, northern municipalities receive a per capita amount, which is intended to cover-off all other expenses, such as fire protection, policing and what have you.

Could policing and protection be a "fifth pillar" all on its own? As with any proposal to add new pillars, the answer is generally "no." Any new pillar would eat into the existing per capita distribution (which is determined after the other calculations

are made), impacting the larger communities the most, since they get a proportionately larger share of the per capita distribution than smaller ones. Depending on how it's done, a fifth pillar—say, a community protection pillar—may actually result in larger communities like La Ronge getting *less* revenue sharing overall. Certainly, at best, no one would be better off. In any case, the idea of creating more pillars to fund services that municipalities shouldn't be burdened with the cost of to begin with is not likely to get widespread support in the north anytime soon.

Community Safety Officers: An Alternative Option?

For a number of years the province, and to a lesser extent, the feds, have encouraged municipalities to look into community protection workers, like CSOs or Special Constables, to fill some of the community policing gaps. CSOs are in the field in a handful of municipalities (Battlefords, for one), and on one or two First Nations.

While the province and the feds are willing to support municipalities going the CSO route by funding training spots, they have resolutely, and pointedly, stopped short of funding actual positions. There's a couple of reasons why. Firstly, the province would rather fund actual police positions; and secondly, governments don't want to be stuck with the potential OHAS liability. For the same reason, any community thinking of going down this path needs to think very carefully about how useful a CSO would really be, given the limitations of the role and the compounding legal risks for the municipality—especially those with serious crime rates. Ironically, the more serious a community's crime rate the more likely the leadership will want to explore policing options like CSOs. But they can never be a substitute for a properly trained police officer.

In these cases, communities may be better off lobbying for extra RCMP members, or if you have the cash, paying through the nose to obtain them.

Cannabis Retail Permits Soon Available to Anyone Crazy Enough to Want One, (But Not So Out of Their Minds that the Province Wouldn't Give them One)

All municipalities, no matter how big or small, will need to think about how or whether to accommodate cannabis retailing as a result of the province's decision to de-regulate it ...

The general opinion seems to be that the legalization of cannabis has been a bit of a bust. Few of the benefits, like cheaper and better quality weed, have flowed to consumers, and nor have governments been rolling in all that promised revenue; the provincial government here is betting on getting less than \$3 million in excise taxes for the year—and that's not even taking into account any share that municipalities may end up laying claim to. To put that number in perspective, \$3 million in revenue from alcohol would be an extremely bad week. The issues are many and varied, but most consumers simply want cheap, high quality weed, and find that the black market is still the best way to obtain it.

Saskatchewan's retailing system came under fire early on following the outcome of their lottery draws, which saw some proponents getting multiple permits, despite the extreme mathematical improbability of that happening. One proponent getting multiple permits is one thing; multiple proponents getting multiple permits is quite another.

And then there was the problem, at least for the province, of some Saskatchewan First Nations deciding they wanted to open a store despite not having a permit. Could the province stop them? And why would it anyway?

Finally, the provincial government put in place few restrictions on permit holders selling their permits to the highest bidder, which saw some permits changing hands for fairly large sums, and making those permit lottery winners very rich indeed—a bit like actual lottery winners.

All that is now water under the bridge. The announcement this month that, henceforth, SLGA will give cannabis retailing permits to pretty much anyone who can pass a basic reference check not only reduces the value of existing permits to zero, it also solves a huge number of problems for government at very little cost, including the First Nations jurisdictional issue, and with virtually no blowback, except from existing retailers, who are understandably, but misguidedly, furious. Claims

that the market needs to be protected from competition by limiting new entrants are a good try, though.

The reason this is such a smart, if belated, move is because it will have virtually no impact on the cannabis retail market in Saskatchewan as a whole, which is already teetering and likely to become consolidated in the hands of a couple of players over the next year or so, if it hasn't already, all the while reducing the province's regulatory burden to a scale proportionate to the size of the industry.

But the announcement will impact municipalities. Municipalities can use new and existing powers to limit or restrict cannabis outlets in their communities if they wish. Many municipalities, who'd shown little interest in updating bylaws or who've never had any internal discussions about how or whether to accommodate cannabis retailing, will now have to do that. Issues to consider will, of course, include zoning, and how much to charge for a business license.

While we'd expect lots of storefronts to open up in short order—which will require some municipal oversight, as with any business—we also expect them to close down just as quickly. Given the legal straight jacket the federal cannabis legislation created for retailers, the only people who should be getting into this business are those who can manufacture a pretty captive market (which could quite possibly be in the north), and anyone looking to lose many thousands of dollars (hopefully not in the north).

This move by the province, as unwelcome as it is by existing retailers, will have no impact on consumers, and even less impact on those of us who couldn't care less either way, while potentially opening the door to some adventurous northern communities to take control of the legal cannabis distribution in their neck of the woods, should anyone want to do that.

With the province having de-regulated the cannabis retail market, all eyes are now on what will happen to the tightly-controlled Doritos market.

“To Move South, or Go Without”

FASD: The “Too Hard” Issue, in the “Too Hard” North

By Chelsea Laskowski

A Saskatoon paediatrician who works with children from the north says setting up FASD diagnostic services for them is far easier than the follow-up steps.

That means a family with diagnosed FASD has only two options when they want supports for their child, said Dr. Susan Bobbitt: to move south, or to go without.

“It’s distressing,” she said.

It’s a reality that Daina Lapworth faces up in La Ronge. She is the Executive Director of a group called Children North that provides services to address the unmet needs of people with cognitive disabilities for northern Saskatchewan.

“We have had a lot of our families move out of the community because there’s just no resources here. Not for lack of people willing to do it. We could run a music therapy program and an arts therapy program out of our office. We have the capacity, but there’s just no funding for it,” she told New North in spring.

Since then, things have improved a bit. Lapworth said they now have a clinic at their office almost monthly with a psychologist and pediatrician who primarily diagnose FASD.

New North spoke with Bobbitt, Lapworth and other service providers about the FASD supports they offer. Overall, they paint a picture of far-away services, poor provincial funding models and difficulties retaining healthcare professionals, all of which stand in the way of improving the lives of families dealing with suspected FASD in the north.

Bobbitt is a developmental pediatrician with the Alvin Buckwold Child Development Program in Saskatoon, which is the nearest location for children from the north to get initial referrals for FASD diagnosis. She works with children who have all kinds of developmental delays, but dedicates a quarter of her clinical time exclusively to families of children with suspected or confirmed FASD.

People with FASD can struggle to speak, articulate their thoughts, move their body the way they want and can even be sensitive to the texture of foods and fabrics. Early intervention for FASD or any type of developmental delays is important, Bobbitt said,

because it can give people an idea of how to accommodate or work through their struggles. Bobbitt has a vision for children and families in the north to consistently access all kinds of FASD therapies, like speech, physical and occupational therapy, and behavioral interventions when needed.

Those types of therapies do exist in the region, but there are “significant waitlists” to get into a speech and language pathologist since there aren’t many specialists in the north, said Justin Galloway, interim team lead for mental health and addiction based out of La Ronge.

“Trying to connect northern families to more appropriate resources, that’s where we run into a very difficult situation because the north doesn’t have the same luxuries as down south,” he said.

It gets worse the more remote you get, Bobbitt said. The main problem, in her eyes, is that even if you train people to help with any developmental disorders in the north, it’s hard to retain them. But she’s optimistic.

“Trying to connect northern families to more appropriate resources, that’s where we run into a very difficult situation because the north doesn’t have the same luxuries as down south ...”

“We’ve really shifted our thinking to how can we train people to provide these services closer to home as opposed to expecting people to come to us in Saskatoon all the time. I think we’re still in our infancy of how are we going to do that but I think the fact that we’ve shifted our attention there is a good first step,” Bobbitt said.

It’s hard to find out how many people in the north have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), particularly because FASD diagnosis is complicated, and many doubt that a diagnosis will actually benefit them. But numbers from several programs that serve children with suspected FASD indicate that FASD is a serious matter in the region.

In the first five months of the year, there were 21 initial referrals from the north for children with suspected FASD. The total initial referrals in 2018 were 34. Twenty-five percent, or 16 people, on the current waitlist for FASD referrals come from what the program calls the “far north,” which used to be the Athabasca, Mamawetan and Keewatin health regions.

Beyond that, the La Ronge-based group called Children North that provides services to address the unmet needs of people with cognitive disabilities for northern Saskatchewan says 25 per cent of its clients have suspected or confirmed FASD. The money for those clients comes from the Cognitive Disability Strategy (CDS).

The Ministry of Social Services says there have been five increases for Children North’s CDS funding since 2011, and two more coming in the 2019-20 fiscal year. One in 2015

was a non-salary funding increase, there was an undated salary increase and three one-time funding top-ups “to address in-year operational pressures,” the ministry says. It did not share the value of those increases, but did say it’s approved an extra \$5,833 to address transportation costs in the programs and another salary increase for the 2019-20 fiscal year.

Within La Ronge, the CDS funding is contentious.

People that New North spoke to called it woefully inadequate. Since La Ronge is a tri-community area connected to the reserve, it’s not lost on people that federal Jordan’s Principle funding has opened up more funding for children with FASD than is available for people off-reserve who fall under provincial funding.

The federal government has announced several programs in the past year that are dedicated to Indigenous people living off-reserve and dealing with FASD. The first is \$1.1 million over three years for the National FASD Mentoring Project, dedicated to prevention information and awareness sessions all over Canada and being led by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute. The federal government announced just this fall that it was devoting \$978,000 to Indigenous people with fetal

alcohol spectrum disorder in Saskatchewan and Yukon who are going through the court system, to help them understand the legal processes.

When asked how big FASD is on the ministry’s radar is in the north, the Ministry of Health responded by email, saying that “there are FASD prevention programs both situated in the north and available to northern communities.” The

“**A**lberta is a shining light for many... for its government-led efforts and for the efforts of guardians and advocates in the FASD community. The province has multiple FASD-specific diagnostic clinics. Saskatchewan has none. When a supportive housing complex specifically for people with FASD opened in Edmonton in 2016, it was the first of its kind in Canada. Saskatchewan does not have any housing specifically for people with FASD.”

prevention programming is funded by the ministry and run by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute. The province also said the Northern Lights School Division gets extra support with Kids First North “to support additional caseload capacity targeted to pre-natal women who are at risk of consuming alcohol during pregnancy. The program offers home visits and the creation of individual/family support plans to help them identify goals and how to reach them.”

In pinpointing government support for individuals with FASD, the province pointed to \$500,000 it gave to Central Urban Métis Federation for FASD and other cognitive disabilities and its funding for the FASD Network of Saskatchewan to deliver programs. They included a family support program to help families access services that is located in Saskatoon and Regina, with some outreach to other communities. Two other programs, which the province contributed \$200,000 to, include “one-on-one counselling to strengthen vulnerable families with members who have FASD,” and coordinating “support and education at the provincial level, including providing training to new foster families.” The province provided a \$30,000 grant to the network this fiscal year.

The national picture

Looking back to the year 2000, Dr. Gerald Block, who does adult FASD psychological assessments in the north, said Saskatchewan was a leader in publishing scientific articles on FASD. Other provinces then came on board to approach the issue, Block said.

“It’s great that their politicians have been able to allocate significant resources but the significant resources haven’t happened in Saskatchewan,” he said.

Alberta is a shining light for many, including Block, for its government-led efforts and for the efforts of guardians and advocates in the FASD community. The province has multiple FASD-specific diagnostic clinics. Saskatchewan has none. When a supportive housing complex specifically for people with FASD opened in Edmonton in 2016, it was the first of its kind in Canada. Saskatchewan

does not have any housing specifically for people with FASD.

Individual programs all over the country show unique approaches to FASD. In Yellowknife, a pilot program called 4Y pairs mentors with youths who have FASD and are aging out of the child welfare system, to help prepare them for life on their own.

Vanessa Hrvatin, a journalist who wrote in-depth about FASD for The National Post earlier this year, said the eastern part of Canada seems to be further behind compared to the west. Alberta got its first strategy in the 2000s, Ontario got its first in 2016.

The province of Saskatchewan does fund FASD diagnosis for adults while Manitoba does not. A 2016 pilot project with the FASD Network of Saskatchewan gave a dedicated support worker to help 17 families dealing with FASD navigate the welfare and child protection systems. Thirty children were either kept out of foster care or returned to their homes.

Saskatchewan’s northern region is strained in many ways when it comes to FASD. Service providers say it’s tough to provide as much help as is needed. Bobbitt said the population in the north is exploding, and that means development delays of all types are increasing. FASD is just one of them, but it is a big one. The interviews New North did indicate that most service providers want people to get help for FASD when they are young, so they have a better chance of understanding and adapting to their struggles. The costs of not getting that help lie largely in the communities, and get a spotlight when people become criminally involved.

Ministry of Health’s FASD Prevention Activities

The Ministry of Health provides funding to the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute (SPI) for the FASD Prevention Program. The program focuses on increasing public and professional education and awareness, with the overall goal to decrease the prevalence of FASD in Saskatchewan.

Some of these FASD prevention activities include:

- Public awareness campaigns such as the “No thanks, I’m pregnant” and “This is Why I Support Her to Not Drink” campaigns.
- A series of 12 YouTube videos with Myles Himmelreich. Miles is an individual with FASD who now works as a motivational speaker and mentor, travelling internationally to speak at conferences and workshops.
- The Youth Action for Prevention (YAP) initiative focuses on engaging Saskatchewan youth in the prevention of FASD by collaboratively working with and supporting youth to develop resources and activities that increase knowledge about alcohol use and related harms, including production of Cope magazine.

From the CEO
MATT HELEY

According to a communication sent to its members by SUMA, the media has contacted municipalities requesting documents, ostensibly to find out how many have, or don't have, all their ducks in a row compliance-wise. Postmedia (which publishes the Star Phoenix and Leaderpost) sent emails to municipalities wanting copies of budgets, harassment policies, council codes of ethics, among others.

Evidently SUMA was contacted by some municipalities wondering if they needed to comply with this request.

Interestingly, the media also wanted a gender breakdown of councils.

As SUMA noted, there's nothing wrong with a member of the public requesting information. The municipalities Acts clearly outline which information is or should be in the public domain; most of the items requested are public documents.

SUMA's Steve Dribnenki did note that no one is obliged to reveal how many councillors are male or female, though.

Of course, we all know what's really coming: another hit job on the municipal sector, followed by some belly-aching about how there are too many municipalities, which everyone already knows but one one wants to do anything about, because at the end of the day it doesn't matter how many there are anyway.

Is it any coincidence that the media is making these requests at the same time as government is publicizing eligibility requirements for revenue sharing?

Possibly, and that possibility raises the question of how much public interest there will be in how well municipalities go with it. For the most part, municipalities will go OK, because the vast majority of them won't have any issues; at worst, they may need to pass a bylaw or two.

The fact that the bar for eligibility is set so low should tell you something about the willingness of government to intervene in the operations of municipalities. The higher the bar—for example, requiring satisfactory audits, the publishing of public accounts, actual asset management plans and annual reports, which are all pretty standard in some jurisdictions—the greater the pressure to intervene in the business of those who don't reach it.

It's why government is so intent on limiting the number of investigations and inquiries they undertake. Once you start pulling on that thread, there's no telling how long it will take for it to unspool.

This attitude might very well change over the next year or two, but it would take a tremendous amount of public pressure for that to happen. We know for sure that the media will be stoking the fires.

About New North ...

Since 1996 New North has been the voice of the municipalities of Northern Saskatchewan. Our goal, as defined by our mission statement, is to advocate, negotiate and initiate improvements in well-being of the residents of the Northern Saskatchewan Administration District. Organized on the basis of strength through unity, New North partners with all northern stakeholders, from government and non-government agencies, associations and First Nations, to enhance the quality of life, create opportunities and build better futures for the people of the north.

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