

*This month...*

## Is There Still Time to Get on the Brown Oxfords and Navy Suit Train?

Find out inside.

### Upcoming

Waterworks, April 10 & 11,  
Coronet

New North Gathering, April 26,  
Coronet

Saskatchewan Association of  
Northern Communities

**NEW  
NORTH**

This month ..

- What's coming ...
- New MRS Deal Unveiled
- Targeted Sector Support: What's it all about?
- Event Review

**Monthly Newsletter**  
**February 2019**

## Spring Event Season Brought Forward in Hope That Spring Will Immediately Follow

We don't know why this is always such a busy time of year, event-wise. It may have something to do with year-end jitters, the desperate need to spend the last remaining budgeted dollars, or the releasing of pent-up energy every September (when these things are planned) following a summer spent in idleness and somnolence.

Whatever it is, we promise not to do it again. In the meantime, here are some of the things we are looking forward to being a part of in the next few months ...

- **March 25 to 27: "Empowering Our Communities" (Coronet)**
- **March 25 to 27: "Embracing Life Through Cultural Healing" Youth Conference (Plaza 88)**
- **April 10 and 11: New North Waterworks (Coronet)**
- **April 25: Northern Administrators Conference Coronet)**
- **April 26: Northern Mayor and Councillor Gathering (Coronet)**

The Mayor and Councillor Gathering will feature a 2½ hour workshop on the roles and responsibilities of elected officials and administrators, which we should be able to get down to 2 hours with good behaviour.

The agenda for the Administrators Conference the day before will be designed around the formation of the new Northern Administrators Association.

You'll find more information about each of these events spread out in the pages that follow. Or just go to our website at [www.newnorthsask.org](http://www.newnorthsask.org) where we have links to the registrations, agendas and maybe some photos or something.

Also of passing interest in the next few weeks is the provincial budget. Government says it will be a balanced budget. Some are saying that all this means is that they have come up with a new definition of "balanced," which is fine as long as we all get to use it, too. Will a "balanced diet" henceforth consist of consuming helpings of profiterole at the same rate as bowls of kale? Let's hope so. We're counting on you, government!

Whatever happens, New North will be there to see it, hear it, smell it and possibly also eat it. ■

# NewNorth News & Updates

## No News Yet on Wildfire Mitigation Funding

If you were at the New North Gathering in November you would have heard about the proposal that the Ministry of Environment's Wildfire Management Branch has put forward, on behalf of New North and other stakeholders, to the federal Disaster Mitigation Fund to get dollars for wildfire mitigation work in and around the northern municipalities.

The mitigation work would consist of tree thinning and clearing to enhance the preparedness of northern communities and to help them withstand a catastrophic wildfire incursion.

Tree thinning has shown to have a dramatic impact on reducing the extent of structural losses during wildfires, as we saw in 2015 north of La Ronge, where cabins at the resort subdivision of Wadin Bay were almost all

spared, while those around them weren't, because of a firesmart project only weeks before.

Well, we have no news on the funding yet; we are hoping that will we know one way or another by the end of April. With luck, we will know by April 26<sup>th</sup>, so that we can share it with members at the New North Gathering.

Leaders have rightfully identified that the funding—which could amount to as much as \$6 million over nine years—will put a lot of community members to work. We are also looking at teaming up with some training centres so that locals can get whatever training they need to participate.

Keep an eye out for any updates! ■

## Empowering Our Communities: March 25-27, Prince Albert Coronet

“Empowering Our Communities” is the name we give to the training and education workshops aimed at building the capacity of Community Consultative Groups, Community Police Boards, and other volunteer-based community justice committees that go under a host of different names in the north.

The most recent “Empowering” event in 2017 was the springboard for the Northern Justice Symposium last year, among other community-led events, which showcased the

kinds of things community-driven initiatives are capable of delivering in reducing crime, enhancing community safety, and improving the effectiveness of policing.

The March 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> event will once again be about getting CPBs, CCGs and others to share their stories, but we'll also be focusing on some of the new challenges that communities are facing, including the growing presence of gangs, the threat of opioids, and the increase in incidences of violent crime.

2019 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original signing of the Community Policing Framework Agreement between the RCMP, the provincial government, and New North on behalf of the northern communities. The framework agreement was the first of its kind, and introduced a number of key principles that continue to underpin the co-operative relationship between the RCMP and the northern communities today. ■

## “There is a Line in the Sand”

### The Roles and Responsibilities of Municipal Officials Workshop *with Laurent Mougeot*

New North Spring Gathering, April 26, Coronet  
**9am to 12pm**

This interactive session will offer an opportunity to clarify the roles of elected officials, their responsibilities and why they must not interfere with operational matters.

The session will also offer a quick scan of the many acts and regulations which apply to local governments and will highlight the importance of due diligence and informed leadership based on the solid advice from your administration.

## From the New North Chair

BY BRUCE FIDLER, MAYOR OF CREIGHTON

We noticed an article in one of the city newspapers that said that Cameco's labour force had halved since 2011.

Cameco now has about 600 employees in the north, with almost all of those at Cigar Lake. Orano has about 300 employees at McLean Lake, and 139 in Saskatoon.

These numbers don't tell us the true story. Along with Cameco employees who have been laid off, many more have lost their jobs in the firms that provide contracted services, like cleaning and catering, to the mine sites.

Overall, it's not a pretty picture. In some northern communities, mine job losses have made half the labour force unemployed in one single stroke. Unemployment rates in some communities, almost over night, have gone from 20% to 60%. That's *unemployment* rates.

If you have a community where 180 people had jobs, and now 90 or so of them have joined the ranks of the unemployed, what kind of impact do you think that has on a community?

We all recall when Premier Wall said, and I quote: "Do you know what the best program for First Nation and Metis people in Saskatchewan is not a program at all—it's Cameco."

Mr Wall later defended his comments. He said:

"If those who are misinterpreting my remarks as anything but a results-based comparison between

government programs and real private sector jobs want us to return to the failed practices of the past, then they will not like the approach of our government.

"Our government believes that a strong economy and good-paying employment opportunities are the most desirable outcomes for everyone in Saskatchewan, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ... we are going to continue with our growth plan whose aim it is to replace government programs with high quality jobs every chance we get."

Well, you won't find many people who disagree with that. But it doesn't mean government doesn't have a role in actual job-creation, and it doesn't mean that the people of the north shouldn't have a big say in how that should happen.

It's easy for us to now say that "we told you so," that putting all our eggs in one basket was not a sustainable plan.

But I'm sorry to say that we can't see much in the way of discussions with government happening about how we are going to address this sudden, and possibly permanent, reduction in northern employment opportunities.

Right now, I can tell you northern leaders are laser-focused on economic development. That shouldn't surprise anyone. But we are not the only ones who should be going at that in force. ■

## First Northern Cannabis Outlet Opening Soon

Residents of the La Ronge area would have noticed that the place they used go do their banking at will soon be the place they'll be able to purchase a range of cannabis products at, as the transformation of the old CIBC into northern Saskatchewan's first retail cannabis outlet nears completion.

The opening of the store is set for sometime later this month.

The roll-out of legal cannabis retailing in Saskatchewan hasn't exactly gone as swimmingly as anticipated as stores across the province struggle to maintain a ready supply of product, with consumers responding by deciding it's easier

and cheaper to continue buying it from wherever they got it from before legalization.

Likewise in the north, the RCMP is noticing that the illegal sale of cannabis isn't really decreasing. The opening of the new store in La Ronge is not likely to change that unless the global legal supply increases and prices come down. That's economics 101.

The RCMP are also noticing a rise in the incidences of impairment. However, it's not known if this is because they are now better trained to identify impairment, or whether incidences of impaired driving are really going up as a consequence of legalization. At the end of the day, it probably doesn't matter which it is. ■



# Premier Announces New Revenue Sharing Deal

If you slipped out briefly to make a call, or slipped briefly into unconsciousness, it would've been easy to miss the Premier's announcement during his address to delegates at SUMA Convention in early February that the new five-year revenue sharing deal with municipalities is now official and will take effect as of this year.

Details were scant, but it appears that the municipal revenue sharing (MRS) pool will be \$251 million this year, rising to \$269 million next year. That's a jump from the \$241 million last year.

The Minister of Government Relations, Warren Kaeding, added a few more tidbits in his address the next day, including that the new pool would have a \$1.5 million "carve-off" for "targeted sector support" (see over). Although it was not a part of the announcement, another \$1.5 million is expected to be carved off for rural roads. If we also include the chunk taken off the top for the Ombudsman's office, the total distributed to municipalities is closer to \$247 million this year—

which is obviously more than \$241 million, but still.

In an added twist—which is not really a twist because we fully expected it—municipalities will, as of *next* year, need to meet certain conditions to get their share.

These conditions will include submitting annual audited financial statements and something to do with Morris dancing, probably.

The announcement comes after an almost year-long review of a program that has since 2007 delivered billions in funding to municipalities in Saskatchewan.

Further information about how the actual pool is broken down percentage-wise will be made available when the provincial budget is laid out on March 20<sup>th</sup>.

Why information about the pool allocations is not being widely circulated along with the headline figure is anyone's guess, but it can only be because it somehow contains bad news.

Or good news.

The northern municipalities took a 7.456% share of the pool in the last revenue sharing deal, which came to anything from \$18 million to more than \$20 million annually, depending on how big the big pool was.

Until the percentage allocations are made known, we still don't know if this new deal is as good or as bad or the same as the last one.

The \$251 million in the new pool is calculated by taking .75%—or three quarters of a point—of the PST. PST revenue has risen to more than \$2 billion since the government decided to add 1 point, and expanded the range of things it could be applied to, including construction.

The fact that municipalities will have the same—or an actually lower—dollar share—of PST despite being negatively impacted by the PST on construction and other things appears not to have been addressed in the new deal. Municipalities will no doubt continue to lobby for the full 1 point of PST they enjoyed before, so look out in five years. ■

## Balanced Budget Foretold

The province's determination to achieve a balanced budget has at the base of it a brilliant mind-bender. On one hand, government is raising taxes, cutting expenditures and doing their best to suppress public service wages. On the other, they are pursuing an expansionary fiscal stance by loading up on public sector debt.

The effect of this is that they are being both contractionary and expansionary at the same time, which makes it really difficult for their political opponents to pin them down. If they are accused of pursuing an economically-irresponsible program of fiscal tightening they can point to their expansionary capital program. If they are accused of uncontrollable spending they can point to their record on cutting expenditures.

The other mind-bending thing government did in the last budget is hide the extent of their deficit by including the Pension Accrual Adjustment as part of their expenses for the first time—which cut its deficit projection from \$750 million to \$365 million.

Since the government is anticipating a balanced budget this year, we can only assume that the PAA is going to be in the positive this time around as well. It also means—if they are going to continue to include this line item in their budget projections—that government will ultimately have to find the dollars to compensate for the movement in the PAA if and when the PAA turns negative (which it was back in 2015-16). They are, in effect, running their own little accounting-based Ponzi scheme.

The most interesting thing about this is that it forces us to ask an uncomfortable question: that is, if this budget is achieving what they are calling balance through an accounting trick, isn't that better than trying to achieve it through cutting the equivalent dollars from provincial programs and services?

Perhaps only an extreme partisan would see that as anything other than a rhetorical question.

The budget is out March 20. ■

## What Will be in the Cross-Hairs of “Targeted Sector Support” ?

As part of the new revenue sharing deal, government has earmarked \$1.5 million to get taken “off the top” for what they are calling “Targeted Sector Support.”

The municipal associations generally liked the Ministry of Government Relations’ suggestion when it was first raised during the MRS discussions last year. The money is proposed as an investment in initiatives that support “good governance, capacity building and regional planning,” and will be co-managed by the municipal associations and anyone else with a stake in it and an appetite for danger.

This is the first time, as far as we know, that revenue sharing has been used like this. A few years back government mandated that about \$250,000 a year be lopped off MRS and sent to the Ombudsman’s office so they can do their investigations and such, but apart from that, we can’t think of any other time this has been done.

Exactly what kind of initiatives will be rolled out is to be determined. This is not “transformational change” kind of money, and the “intuitional inertia” that is apparently a defining feature of local government in Saskatchewan seems safe, but that doesn’t mean we won’t see something interesting coming along.

### Amalgamations

Saskatchewan is a big place with lots of small communities. It’s one of the charms of the place that every copse has raised a steepled church and every june grass-covered mound has engendered a village or hamlet. But having all those little places yield challenging governance issues.

It’s been official SaskParty policy since 2007 that municipal amalgamations are a no-go area, but if municipalities want to go ahead and consolidate their governance and administrative functions, no one is going to try to stand in their way, least of all government.

Voluntary amalgamations, dissolutions and devolutions are becoming more and more common in Canada as local governments, particularly in economically-depressed regions like Nova Scotia and parts of Alberta and this weird carpeted area near the fridge, realize they just don’t have it in them to go it alone anymore, and Saskatchewan is getting ripe for that, too. What help do municipalities need if they decide to go down this lonely path?

Old dogs will recall that the last time a serious effort was made to soft pedal amalgamations the municipalities revolted. Government offered small grants to municipalities for them to look into consolidating services, but very few took them up on it. Even at a notional level, with no obligations, and nothing to

lose or gain, municipalities didn’t seem interested. We think there will be more interest now, but who can say.

### Regional Co-Operation

Many municipalities already share services and facilitates like parks and mooses when available, but what are the opportunities for the greater regional co-ordination and co-management of programs, services, and infrastructure, especially involving nearby First Nations? There are many models of inter-municipal governance that have yet to be seriously explored, and which don’t require anyone to devolve or amalgamate to make work. For instance, the provisions to create Municipal Service Districts are the loneliest of lonely legislative provisions because literally no one looks at them, let alone takes them to heart. There’s a growing percentage of the population who believe that the world is flat (just watched a doco about it); you’d think there’d be at least one group in the province we could convince to buy into municipal service districts.

### The North

Regional co-operation and collaboration amongst northern governments (municipal, Métis and First Nation) has been going on for years, but new opportunities are always coming up, perhaps more in the economic development sphere than anywhere else. Communities are interested in sharing bylaw enforcement (ie, dog catching) and there may be some interest in sharing peacekeepers or CSOs if that ever becomes possible. More ambitious regional co-operation models have been mooted in the past, mostly revolving around the co-managing of a municipal regional support agency that has planners, administrators, bookkeepers and such working out of a single office, sharing a Keurig and making a mess of the kitchenette. It’s completely unworkable and so an absolutely ideal solution. We are, incidentally, probably looking to do this.

### The Virtual Space

20 years ago when so much of the activity around regional co-operation and re-organization was going on the Internet was something you only read about on the Internet, if you were lucky enough to have it. Now everyone has it and it’s created new spaces and new ways of engaging and collaborating that we’ve yet to really actively explore. Imagine how administrative capacity could be enhanced by building on the principles of the sharing economy to extract additional value from the community of practice and peer networks emerging in the north. Think of the possibilities of retrofitting some of the activities of administrators with a modular architecture that enables common tasks to be remotely parcelled out via an App ... ■

## Assistant Deputy Minister Announces Retirement; Meetings to Get 20% Longer

It’s rare that we’d feature the retirement of an Assistant Deputy Minister as an item in a newsletter. But it’s rare that you have a retirement of someone so eminent.

After 40 years in the public service, Keith Comstock–Keith–is moving out of the shadow of whomever was occupying the spotlight that he himself had orchestrated that they be in to dedicate more time to his wife, kids and grand kids, and perhaps to teach part-time somewhere and do what everyone else does when they retire: not actually retire.

Keith was a staunch and influential supporter of the north in his different roles in government. He will always be known for his sharp humour and pitch-perfect fake Irish (Scottish?) accent.

For those who worked with him closely and regularly, what will likely be missed was his ongoing commitment to making every meeting briefer and punchier than it had any right being.

To say we will miss Keith at our New North Gatherings, and hearing him on the other end of a conference call, is an understatement. And, actually, his understatement is another thing we’ll miss. ■

## Municipal Officials Gather to Talk about Thing They Have in Common

The sultry weather didn't prevent dozens of northern municipal leaders from making the long trip down to Saskatoon for SUMA's annual Convention, early February.

Although predictions were for minus 40 with the wind chill, everyone was surprised to find that, at least in their imaginations, the weather had turned sub-tropical, with hot and dusty on-shore breezes in the morning, turning south-easterly in the afternoon to offer gentle relief to those lounging on the decks of their Queenslanders watching the sun succumb to the shimmering horizon.

Alas, since the convention mostly took place in the real world, leaders instead seemed generally pretty happy to wander through the tradeshow, duck into the odd education session, check out The Bay, and then mooch around until the hospitality things started, to do more mooching.

While events of this size can often cultivate a sub-textual agenda all their own, there wasn't much in the way of thematic by-play to distract from the actual agenda this year, unless you count the deal with the moose.

The Premier's address was not particularly memorable. It was competently delivered, fell within the 30 minutes allotted, and could've been delivered to any audience anywhere, as long as that anywhere was Saskatchewan, and that audience had already bought-in to the anti-carbon tax, pro-pipeline agenda. What the SaskParty will do when Trudeau is no longer around is anyone's guess.

The Leader of the Opposition's address, delivered for the first time by Ryan Meili, was also strangely partisan. We wonder what's up with that?

The Minister of Government Relations, Warren Kaeding, had just 15 minutes to talk about revenue sharing and something else, less time than the moose got. What we were able to gather is that there's a moose in

Norway bigger than the one that's somewhere here.

But seriously, have you ever wondered why the minister responsible for the very thing that was bringing everyone together in the first place isn't given more time to talk about that thing? We have.

### Resolutions

The resolutions session was mostly free of hoofed ruminant mammals sadly, and surprisingly, when you think of the possibilities.

Perhaps here, though, there was a surprise, and a slight disappointment for us, to see the local resolution get the thumbs down, especially since a more or less identical resolution got support.

We are, of course, talking about the Town of La Ronge's resolution to tax alcohol at an additional 5%, and have that 5% going back to the municipality where it came from. If you zoom out a bit, all the resolution is saying is that municipalities should have a cut of the revenue that alcohol brings in because they have costs associated with the impact of alcohol, too, which, to our simple mind, is virtually the same rationale for municipalities wanting a cut of cannabis revenue—the resolution pertaining to which was supported.

For the record, we don't think municipalities should get either (long story), but at least be consistent.

### Education Sessions

The only education session we caught was the "City of Humboldt's Experience"—a 90 minute session with the city's mayor and CAO—where they spoke of their experiences during the



The Premier, Scott Moe, looked to the left, then later to the right, as he delivered his address to delegates at SUMA Convention.

aftermath of the tragic accident that claimed so many lives a short year ago. There's perhaps not much about this story that hasn't been told, and you got the strong impression that folks there are ready to move on, and would very much like to. The session was really about how a small group of community leaders, ill-equipped and unprepared, were tasked to deal with the truly unimaginable. Not simply the tragedy itself, but the arrival in their small community of the "event," the transformation of a local happening into a global media happening. The term "media wrangling" came up again and again, which suggested that that was not just something that took up an inordinate amount of mental energy to deal with at that time, it continues to do so now.

SUMA very helpfully records all their education sessions, and puts the recordings up on their Youtube channel. If you can somehow muster the discipline to not spend 90 minutes watching the cat videos featured on the front page and immediately type "SUMA Convention" into the search area, you will eventually find them. ■

From the CEO  
**MATT HELEY**

**T**he government has told us what the new revenue sharing deal is, and it was mostly greeted with a shrug.

This year the dollars will be slightly more than last year, and next year they'll be quite a bit more than this year.

The 2020 revenue sharing pool is still lower than the 2016 pool, which, during an election year, was \$271 million (and it had no carve outs). Is it a coincidence that the next highest ever, of \$269 million, will also come in an election year? Maybe.

If we have one bit of advice for whoever does the budgeting at your place, it's this: don't spend your new money all at once. The reason we say this is because of the likelihood that the northern pool is going to get diluted significantly over the next few years as the impact of falling Northern Municipal Trust Account revenues (because of Cameco shutting

mine sites) works its way through the NMTA's water and sewer program.

The NMTA uses the revenue it gets from the property taxes remitted by Cameco to help northern municipalities—many of whom are stone cold broke—to get major water and sewer infrastructure projects done. The NMTA's accumulated surplus also enables communities to pay off their share of the projects over five or so years. In the south, municipalities have to pay their share up front (they usually borrow it).

In 2014, when northern revenue sharing was \$19 million (ie, \$1 million more than now), the NMTA Management Board asked communities if they'd be willing to forgo 5% of their revenue sharing so that the NMTA's pool could be topped up. The northern municipalities said yes. We lobbied to have that removed last year because of falling NRS (and it was), but there is a strong likelihood that a similar carve off will have to occur in the next few years to keep

the current arrangements going. The difference is that the carve off will now need to be twice as much (because of Cameco), to basically achieve the same outcome.

And all of this without even considering the new tiers of projects that municipalities may need to find money for (ie, regional landfills), beyond the stuff they'd really like to be spending capital money on (graders, residential subdivisions).

Northern revenue sharing almost doubled over 6 years between 2007 and 2013-14. Over the long-haul since 2007, the average yearly increase has been about 8%. Some of that increase was to make up for huge declines over the previous period, as northern municipalities fell further and further behind their southern counterparts in their capacity to maintain and renew critical infrastructure. A lot of the new investment is because of those years of atrophy. We hope not to see repeated the failures of the past. ■

## 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.

### New North Executive

Mayor Bruce Fidler (Chair)  
Mayor Robert St.Pierre (Deputy Chair)  
Mayor Gord Stomp (Treasurer)  
Mayor Mike Natomagan  
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