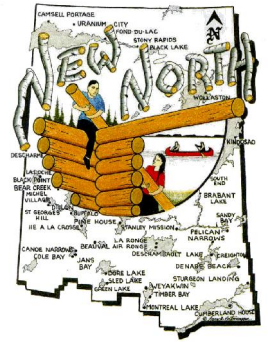


New North

Newsletter



2015 SUMA Convention Coverage

The event that traditionally marks the coldest week of the year—otherwise known as the SUMA Convention—went off without incident.

As usual, there was an excellent turnout from municipalities across the province, with barely a seat left for President Debra Button's opening address—a barrage aimed at the provincial government on the maintenance of the current revenue sharing deal.

Part of the value of SUMA for municipal elected leaders is a chance to meet with ministers and other government officials, which can happen in both formal and informal settings. For instance, joining New North's Chair, Georgina Jolibois and CEO Al Loke at their Banquet table was Minister for Highways and Infrastructure, Hon. Nancy Heppner. Banquet delegates enjoyed a meal of chicken served with potatoes.

At the more formal level, the Hon. Jim Reiter, the Minister for Government Relations, and Minister of Environment Hon. Scott Moe, met with the New North Executive on the Tuesday. Duane Favel spoke to the ministers about rules that work against northern economic development. One of the rules inhibiting northern development corporations successfully bidding for capital works projects results in "economic leakage" of as much as five to \$10 million a year. Other issues brought up during the meeting included landfill funding and compliance.

Another highlight for the New North Executive was the evening spent with the SUMA Board, at SUMA's expense, of course. SUMA Directors expressed their continued support for the current level of the northern municipalities' share of provincial revenue sharing, which per person is about two-times greater than that of the southern

urban municipalities.

The meal consisted of tender pork wrapped in bacon. Board members indicated they had never seen pork wrapped in pork before.

The Northern Regional Meeting saw Creighton Mayor and SUMA Director Bruce Fidler and SUMA Policy Director Sean McEearn briefing northern delegates on SUMA's activities on behalf of members, including the SUMA Board Resolution sup-

February 2015



Premier Hon. Brad Wall flanked by the Minister for Highways, Hon. Nancy Heppner, with Hon. Jim Reiter seated next to her. *Not Pictured: the Bears*

porting the Northern Roads Strategy.

The so-called "Bear Pit"—the traditional final day "mauling" of government ministers at the hands of municipal officials—was less exciting than that description sounds. We did, however, get some good shots of Premier Wall and noticed his odd quirk of resting his chin on his folded arms to speak into the microphone.

As a final note, we'd like to acknowledge the recognition at the President's Banquet of Mayor Bruce Fidler's 20 years' service as a public official.

SUMA Delegates Fail for 110th Consecutive Year to Move Convention to Vegas, and Other Highlights from the Resolutions Session

The number of resolutions up for debate at this year's SUMA Resolution Session was the smallest it's been for ages. We're not sure if this means anything—it could be the result of 3rd year malaise setting in, or just a random slump. Anyway, as usual most resolutions went through on the nod. Here are some highlights of the debates.

Revenue Sharing

A resolution that was not included in the package was from the SUMA Board, and was proposed by President Button. The resolution called for the municipalities to unanimously support the current revenue sharing deal. They did so.

Northern Road Maintenance

Another SUMA Board resolution called for the provincial government to fully implement the Northern Road Strategy, and to make investments to improve northern highways year on year.

Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women

Although we didn't think it possible, this proposal had some delegates speaking against it, concerned that an inquiry would be a waste of taxpayers' money.

Most speakers to this motion, however, were concerned that an inquiry was not action enough. The motion passed as expected.

Golf Carts Continue to Divide Delegates

A resolutions session wouldn't be complete without a heated debate on golf carts. The community of Kamsack had proposed that SGI give power to municipalities to pass by-laws enabling the expanded use of golf carts.

While opposition to this proposal came from delegates imagining a dystopian hell populated by the ceaseless whirring of these battery-powered death machines, the resolution nevertheless passed, albeit on a standing count, presumably because you can't have enough videos on Youtube of golf carts toppling over and spilling their human contents onto verdant pastures and immaculately manicured goat tracks.

Of course, SGI is extremely unlikely to give municipalities any such power, and will prefer golf carts remain on golf courses where they can do the most damage.

Other resolutions to pass ...

The one about bicycle helmet safety ...

The one about tax incentives for municipal bonds ...

The one about getting the province to support asset management ...



At the "Bear Pit" session delegates had just 1 minute 30 seconds to explain themselves. This speaker (pictured centre left) had delegates holding their breath as the clock ticked down to zero.

Northern Waterworks Workshop Moved to Prince Albert

Administrators please note: the Waterworks Workshops, which have always been in La Ronge, will now be in Prince Albert, from April 22nd to 23rd.

The venue is the Prince Albert Inn.

Operators will be able to receive 1.0 CEU as always. Exams will still take place in Prince Albert on the 24th of April.

The cost will be \$40 for northern municipal employees, and \$150 for everyone else, including First Nations employees. The reason for the disparity in cost is because northern municipal employees are subsidized through their municipalities' contributions to the Northern Municipal Trust Account.

We have sent out notices and registrations to communities, but if you didn't get one, please call the New North office pronto.

Cameco/Areva Improving Miners' Health

The most recent CVMPP study, which was commissioned to look into the impacts and usefulness of the uranium industry's health and wellness programs, has shown that the mining industry has some benefits for the health and well-being of mining employees and their families.

The report indicates that the health services at the mine sites are well utilized—often because local communities lack adequate coverage—that miners eat better on site than they do at home, stay physically fitter because of the availability of on-site fitness equipment, and often take the culture of safety they pickup onsite back to their home communities.

However, the report also indicates that the mines are failing to deal with the number one health issue for mining employees—smoking.

Despite smoking cessation programs onsite, the rate of smoking among miners is about the same as the rest of the northern population. Some respondents reported that working at the mine actually led them to relapse into smoking.

Mayor Jolibois Aiming for the Parliament

In keeping with a northern tradition, another Mayor has announced their desire to seek nomination for higher political office.

New North Chair and La Loche Mayor Georgina Jolibois has officially declared she is seeking nomination as the NDP candidate for the federal northern riding in the upcoming election, which will probably be in the fall.

We will probably know before the end of March if she is the successful NDP nominee.



Premier Wall (right) posing for a photo with New North Chair Georgina Jolibois (pictured left).

Premier Wall thanked Mayor Jolibois for her leadership.

Conflicts of Interest and other Catastrophes:

What Can we Learn from the RM of Sherwood Park?

Last month, the Ministry of Government Relations (GR) released the report of the Inquiry into the RM of Sherwood Park. Should we care?

Sherwood Park is the rural municipality around the City of Regina. The RM came up with the plan to turn a huge patch of farmland into a residential development. The development would be called Wascana Village.

The problem is that about 456 acres of that land was owned by the Reeve of the RM, Kevin Eberle. Obvious conflict of interest, right?

When the government of Saskatchewan became aware of some of the community's concerns about the development, they decided to launch an inquiry. The Inquiry was called by the Minister of GR, Jim Reiter and was led by Justice Barclay. Initially, the Inquiry's mandate was just to look at the broader issues of the council's handling of the development. In its preliminary report, the Inquiry found that the RM appeared to be jumping into the development with little or no thought for how it would impact either the City of Regina or residents of the RM. In fact, the RM did virtually no due diligence on the project or the developer, and had no idea whether the increased tax base would be enough to support the increase in demand on the RM's services (ie, sewer, water, etc). Naturally, the City opposed the development, and the provincial government repeatedly knocked back the RM's Official Community Plan, as well as the developer's Concept Plan, for their failure to address key issues such as how water would be supplied to residents, what would road access look like, where would kids go to school, and so on.

During the initial part of the Inquiry, Justice Barclay began to become suspicious of the activities of one particular councillor, the Reeve Eberle, who even on the face of it had a great deal to gain from this development going ahead. Justice Barclay sought an expanded mandate from the minister to look into the Reeve's activities, and to determine whether the Reeve had done anything untoward in his capacity as a public official in relation to the development.

In fact, the council and the Reeve had already anticipated the conflict of interest issue, and had sought legal opinions as to what role, if any, the Reeve would be able to play in the planning or promoting of the development—given that he had so much to gain from it.

The Reeve, and the solicitors who advised him, relied on sections of *The Municipalities Act* relating to conflict of interest. Essentially, according to a strict reading of the act, councillors are required to excuse themselves from any decision of council that they or their family might financially benefit from. The council interpreted this to mean that anytime the council made a decision about the development, the Reeve would take himself out of the room. The RM's minutes reflect that the Reeve never voted on anything related to the development.

The problem, however, is that the Inquiry found that, while the Reeve quite rightly took himself out of the decision-making process at the chamber level, he was nevertheless quite busy behind the scenes, smoothing the path for the adoption by council and approval by government of the OCP, directing the planners and administration staff to find a water source for the development, and, at different points, telling the Administrator, Rachel Kunz, to delete emails and falsify minutes that showed just how heavily involved in promoting the development he actually was. The question for the Inquiry became whether this kind "backroom" activity placed the Reeve in a conflict of interest.

The Inquiry found that it did. The significance of this finding is the following:

Public officials cannot rely on a narrow interpretation of the conflict of interest provisions in the *Municipalities Act*. Indeed, the Inquiry has recommended that the various municipalities' acts be changed so that a councillor not only has to declare an interest, but the *details* of the interest as well. In the present case, no one on council knew that the Reeve stood to gain up to \$60m on the successful development of Wascana Village, nor that his contracts with the developers had clauses that kicked in with the development's successful overcoming of various obstacles, such as the approval of the OCP by government. Indeed, most of the RM councillors agreed at the Inquiry that their appreciation of the Reeve's involvement in the council's deliberations around the development would have changed substantially had they known how much he personally had to gain.

Justice Barclay also recommended that councils adopt a Code of Ethics, and that the province consider employing a Conflict of Interest Ombudsman.

The problem, of course, is that in most cases conflicts of interest are self-declared. In other words, residents are relying on the honesty of their councillors to declare their interest for these provisions to have any effect. Secondly, if a council (and the Administrator) decides to collude in a conflict of interest, who would ever know? Indeed, none of the measures recommended by Justice Barclay would have mattered in the present case, since the council of the RM of Sherwood—with the exception of the one who resigned—still don't think anyone did anything wrong, even now. It took a \$1.5 million Inquiry to uncover the malfeasance in that RM by the Reeve. The council maintains that no malfeasance occurred.

So what can we learn from this debacle? For starters: the Minister of Government Relations has the power to remove a mayor or councillor. If you didn't know that, you do now. However, before the government can do that, they have to have an Inquiry.

Secondly, we know that acknowledgements of conflict of interest need to be to the spirit as well as to the letter of the law. There is no point declaring an interest publicly, but then acting in private as if there isn't a problem.

And as a final note: Rachel Kunz, the woman whose integrity and dedication to her profession sunk the Reeve, used to be Administrator of the NV of Air Ronge.

Sask. Chamber of Commerce Report into Far Nth. Saskatchewan

Released in December was the Northern Business Taskforce Recommendations for "current and future issues and opportunities in Saskatchewan's remote northern areas."

Among the recommendations include:

- lowering electricity rates to southern provincial levels
- Increase road budgets as well as build an all-weather road to Wollaston
- Ensure educational opportunities are comparable to the south
- Improve relations between crown corporations and provincial ministries
- Ensure comparable access to internet bandwidth and cellular access
- The Premier and ministers should visit the remote northern communities

The Northern Business Task Force is a group of business people and entrepreneurs with "expertise in dealing with social and economic issues in the north."

The report can be found on the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce website.

Upcoming New North Events

Waterworks Workshops for Water Operators

April 22nd-23rd, Prince Albert Inn

Northern Health Conference

September 2015, Ches Leach Lounge (Art Hauser Centre), Prince Albert

From the CEO, Al Loke

In case we needed another reminder, the provincial government is sending municipalities notices telling them what they need to do to be eligible for the Federal Gas Tax Fund.

Mostly, the Terms and Conditions (T&C) of the fund require that municipalities have up-to-date financial statements.

If municipalities fail to send their recent years' financial statements to government, they will not only lose eligibility for gas tax funding, but they will also need to pay back money that has already been granted to them.

The rate of non-compliance with the T&C of the Gas Tax in Saskatchewan is fairly small. The government's annual report on the federal-provincial Gas Tax transfer puts the number of non-compliant municipalities who had to be removed from the program at just 18. However, those 18 communities saw more than \$440,000 held back. In other words, the residents of 18 municipalities in Saskatchewan missed out on getting vital funding for municipal projects, which may have included an upgrade to a road, landfill, or water and sewer system. How many communities missed out on getting an updated heating system installed in their community hall because of financial non-compliance?

The fact is, poor financial management by municipalities is costing everyone money. We know the government is not going to back off on their compliance requirements. We don't want them to. It's time municipalities got the support they need to step up to the plate.

New North Executive

Chair: Mayor Georgina Jolibois
· West

Board Members:

Councillor Al Sayn (Vice Chair) ·
Far North

Mayor Gordon Stomp, Village of
Air Ronge - Central region

Mayor Val Deschambeault ·
Eastern Region

Duane Favel · Member at Large

New North Staff

Al Loke - **Chief Executive Officer:**
306 425 5505; cell 425 8800; **email:**

ceo.new.north@sasktel.net

Sunshyne Charles - **Executive
Assistant**

306 425 5505; **email:**

new.north@sasktel.net

Matt Heley - **Research and**

Communication 306 425 1262;

email: matt.newnorth@sasktel.net

New North —SANC
Services Inc

Mail Address: P.O.
Box 1018

Phone: 306 425 5505 La Ronge, SK, S0J 1L0

Fax: 306 425 5506

207 La Ronge Avenue

La Ronge, Sk

www.newnorthsask.ca

New North Mission Statement

New North - SANC Services Inc. (Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities) through strength in unity is organized to advocate, negotiate and initiate, improvements for the interests and concerns to the Local, Provincial and Federal Governments to enhance the quality of life for Northern people within the Northern Administration District (NAD) of Saskatchewan.