

New North



Saskatchewan Association
of Northern Communities

Annual Report
2017-18



From the Chair, Bruce Fidler

A key objective of New North this year was to find, and highlight, success on a range of issues and initiatives. Success can come in many forms, and it's never, ever guaranteed. But it's not enough to be successful in an area; you also have to be able to show it. This can also be challenging sometimes. Looking over this year, we can see where progress has been made, and some successes achieved, but we know that there is a lot to be done, and we know that sometimes you won't see the results of the work overnight. You can wait two or three years for an outcome to be achieved. That can be frustrating, but when the rewards come, it's great to be around to see it.

I think we just need to look at where the northern communities are moving forward on landfills to see where progress is being made. Ten years ago I don't think a lot of us thought we'd see major infrastructure dollars going into landfills, so to speak. Landfills are the last place anyone wants to put money, but here we are, looking at communities thinking now about how they can use solid waste as a economic development tool.

Looking ahead, a big area of concern of ours is the increasing amount of stress being placed on municipal administrators, partly because of growing regulations. This is happening across the province. At New North, we've set a strategic goal of advocating for, and providing, more supports for administrative staff. A part of this is helping mayors and councillors become better acquainted with their roles, knowing what they should be doing, and what they maybe should not be doing. We've started down this path because there is nothing more important to the growth and sustainability of northern communities than having a rock solid administration. With that in mind, I'm really looking forward to the launching of the Northern Administrators association this year (which we think will have a different name) to help administrators find peer support.

I hope you will accept our 2017-18 Annual Report. It's been a busy year, and very difficult one, given everyone's fiscal restraints. But even so, we're moving forward, and hope to have you as company along for the journey. ■

From the CEO, Matt Heley

Reflected in the pages of this Annual Report is our attempt at New North to keep up with both the creativity and imagination, as well as the challenges, of the northern municipalities of Saskatchewan. It's not an easy ride given our, and the province's, limited resources. The last four years of austerity are starting to bite, with coming on three years of falling revenue sharing placing increasing strain on communities across the north, and indeed, across the province.

But this is where things get interesting. It's the easiest thing in the world to look like economic geniuses when the dollars are rolling in. The plunging of resource prices and the slow recovery are impacting the north especially hard right now, but it's also worth noting that some people are seeing this as an opportunity. Although we hope mining comes back stronger than ever, we know that in the meantime there will be skilled workers looking for opportunities to retrain. This will certainly help alleviate skilled worker shortages in the municipal sector, providing the much needed human resource capacity for economic development entities to begin radically branching out, potentially boosting owned source revenues to go back into providing community services.

As well, federal and provincial governments are recognizing that natural resource-dependent regions like northern Saskatchewan require meaningful infrastructure investments to help diversify the economy. Educational institutions can adapt by providing a more diverse range of courses, as well, to cater to an increasing focus on the service and culture industries.

The diversification of the northern economy will strengthen northern municipal capacity, and improve the sustainability of the northern communities. We see this happening right now across the north. We see renewable energy on a growth path, and the north as the perfect place for governments to be making such investments, given our unique energy challenges.

In all this we see part of New North's role as supporting and strengthening the capacity of communities to invest in and direct their own destinies. We hope that this effort on our part, at least in some small way, is reflected in these pages. ■

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 staff of two: Chief Executive Officer, Matt Heley, and Executive Assistant, Sunshyne Charles.

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 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

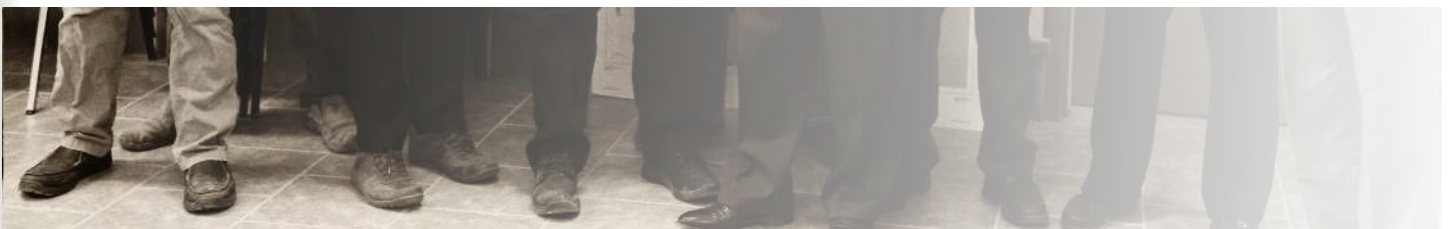
New North – SANC Services Inc. (Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities) is organized to:

- 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

The strategic direction for New North for the years 2018-220 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

New North Vertical Slice, 2017-18

In pursuit of some of our key objectives this year, New North ...

- Ran two workshops focusing on building capacity in financial literacy for municipal administrators
- Put together a plan for the creation of a northern administrations association, to be initiated in 2018
- Surveyed communities and came up with a plan to tackle scrap tire collections in northern communities, to be rolled-out in 2017-18
- Advocated for the alignment of the federal Gas Tax Program with the needs and capacities of northern municipalities
- Advocated for the review, enhancement and immediate renewal of the Northern Capital Grants Program
- Advocated for the establishment of a green energy revolving fund
- Worked closely with our thought partners, Urban Systems, to submit 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
- Advocated for the suspension of the 5% hold-back from municipal revenue sharing to help alleviate cash-flow issues in many northern municipalities
- Advocated that government take a common-sense, multi-evidence approach to determining population numbers for the purpose of assigning grants, rather than relying on raw census figures
- Provided practical, hands-on support and advice to elected officials and administrators on a range of issues, including cannabis legalization
- Advocated for the retention of the Population Health unit in the north in the amalgamation of the provincial health regions
- Delivered more than \$40,000 in funding to support community justice 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 12 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
- Hosted the Financial Management and Strategic Planning MLDP module, which had one of the highest registrations of any module since the program begun
- Opened 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
- Advocated for the enhancement of northern revenue sharing in 2017 MRS pools review to recognize the increasing challenges northern communities are facing, particularly with respect the crisis facing youth
- Surveyed communities to establish a base-line of need, services and supports available to tackle dog control
- Continued to positioned northern revenue sharing as a driver of northern economic development
- And much, much more ...

2017-18: 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 issues that kept our attention through the year.

Northern Revenue Sharing

2017-18 was the review year of revenue sharing pools allocation. New North was included for the first time as an active participant in the review process. New North argued that revenue sharing played an important role in the improvement in key indicators in the north, including incomes and employment, but that northern communities need additional support to provide services that cater to the needs of youth. New North identified that northern municipalities underspend in a number of areas over which northern municipalities have responsibility as compared municipalities in the south, and that these areas could be the target of attention in the revenue sharing allocations.

The fall in revenue to its current level of \$18 million represents a considerable challenge to northern communities. If we take the northern revenue sharing formula at face value, the \$18 million northern pool says to northern municipalities that they must rely on their very limited owned-sourced revenues to:

- Fund recreation and cultural activities, provide parks and other community services
- Fund fire protection, policing or bylaw enforcement
- Pay for capital expenditures
- Cover any staff salary increases
- Invest in long-term planning and development

Suspension of the 5% Hold-Back

In 2014, the northern leaders came together in support of an annual 5% hold back from revenue sharing to

support the NMTA's Northern Water and Sewer Program. The consensus reached by the northern leaders was bold and far-sighted. By providing the additional capacity to the NMTA's program, the percentage share of a community's contribution to their water and sewer projects could be capped at around 8%.

This year, in light of falling revenue sharing dollars and the cash-flow crises of a number of communities, New North requested that the hold-back be reviewed to see if it was still affordable.

The suspension of the 5% hold-back meant that almost \$1 million a year was released back into the revenue sharing pool for communities to spend on their daily operations.

Gas Tax Fund: Meeting the Needs of the North?

The federal government's Gas Tax Fund is one of the most accessible capital funding programs ever made available, delivering around \$60 per capita to every municipality in the province to provide for road upgrades and construction, bridge repairs, solid waste management, recreational facilities, and so on.

In the north, where things are more complicated, the GTF is not widely accessed, with less than half of northern communities participating or compliant with the program.

This means that money allocated to northern communities is either going unspent, going unaccounted for, or going missing.

New North requested that the government look into how the GTF is administered in the north to see if it could better be aligned with the capacities of the communities. Three options were presented, including New North becoming an accountable partner for GTF expenditures in the north where communities request it.



Cannabis Legalization

Although we remain somewhat on the fence about cannabis legalization, it is a reality that we need to get used to. Our early consultations and efforts on legalization involved understanding the benefits and risks, particularly the effect on public safety, of making weed much more publicly and easily available. Our focus on the public health impacts, in particular on youth, lead much of our research and drove many of the kinds of questions we asked about cannabis legalization.

As it became clearer as to how the province was going to roll-out the sale of cannabis, our focus switched to what municipalities needed to do to prepare, and what involvement they themselves might have in selling cannabis. ■

Capacity Building Northern Administrators Conference

AdminCon, September 2017

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

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

Then the Auditors Came In

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the end of the day we all learned something. ■

Capacity Building Northern Water Operator Training and Certification

Big Men Wearing Camo and Hats Inside? Must be a New North Waterworks Conference



For quite a number of years, New North has taken the responsibility of providing training and certification to northern water operators. Typically, New North will oversee the mandatory certification of 60 operators a year. One of the outcomes of this long-term commitment by New North is that water quality in northern Saskatchewan is as good as anywhere in the province—if not better, as the north's raw product is pure rainwater.

With the Spring water-mains explosion season in full swing, water operators from across the province, but mainly from the north, gathered at the Travelodge in Prince Albert for another couple of days of fine food, fine conversation and the temporary shirking of responsibility at the annual New North Waterworks Conference and Tradeshow, April 11-12, 2017.

Punctuated from time to time by the highly individualized ringtones of cell phones which had their owners jumping out of their seats and striding toward the exit uttering in hushed and insistent tones words to the effect of “get Allan [to] handle it,” operators sat through presentations from the Water Security Agency, the Operator Certification Board, and ATAP, on from among other things, the responsibilities of

permittees, the new operator certification requirements, and the basics of control box diagnostics, the main of theme of which seemed to be don't screw around with something you don't understand.

What are the roles and responsibilities of waterworks permit holders?

Just like with landfills, the permit holders of the local water and sewer works is the municipality. This means mayor and council are ultimately responsible for the care, maintenance and safe operation of the most important, and most expensive, piece of infrastructure in the community.

The Water Security Agency presentation, by Kerry Desjarlais and Barry Wright, broke down exactly what you'd be held accountable for in the case of something going wrong. Not covered were the good places to hide in that eventuality.

Where do water standards come from?

Another question people often have—we are told—is where the standards for waterworks come from anyway. Turns out, the standards come from Northern America. Figures.

New educational and training requirements for people who operate waterworks

There are about 1260 active certified operators in the province, with that number growing every year. That's reassuring, given how important having trained people in charge of the water supply is. With that said, the training and qualifications needed to become an operator can be a challenge, especially in the north, where graduation rates are low.

From now on, most new operators working in the kinds of systems in operation in the north will need Grade 12 or equivalent to become certified. It used to be the case that operators could substitute experience for education; that will no longer be the case. Kelly Neuert from the Operator Certification Board noted that some communities may need to help their budding operators through a grade 12 program if they want them to become certified.

As always, a big thank-you to Kerry and the team at the WSA for helping us put the program together for 2017's waterworks. If you want to see photos of the event, or links to the powerpoints, just go to our website, www.newnorthsask.org. ■

Capacity Building New North Scholarship

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

The recipients were: Donny Favel, from Ile a la Crosse, Amy Lafreniere-Wasacase also from Ile a la Crosse, and Kyla Duroucher from Dillon.

Each received \$750 toward expenses related to post-secondary study. Recipients are using the money to help them complete their LGAs, and one has ambitions to be a nurse.

The New North Scholarship began back in 2013, and has so far awarded almost \$15,000 in scholarships to students enrolled in courses as diverse as Nursing, Law, Local Government Administration, and the Arts.

While the scholarship is not based on a student's academic performance necessarily, to receive the award students do need to show in their application that they are aspiring to be future leaders in their communities and have a commitment to northern Saskatchewan. ■

Mayor Honoured for Service

Mayor of Air Ronge Gord Stomp was honoured for his more than 20 years of service as Chair of the Northern Municipal Trust Account Management Board with a special ceremony at the New North Gathering in June 2017.

In presenting Mayor Stomp with the award, the Minister of Government Relations, Donna

Harpauer, spoke of Gord's diligent oversight of the management board, which oversees a number of important programs in the service of developing northern municipal capacity, including the Northern Water and Sewer Program, the Northern Capital Grants Program, the northern subdivision program, and many others. ■



MLDP Module a Hit with Northern Leaders

Former Mayor of Humboldt Malcolm Eaton's Strategic and Financial Planning session, a module delivered as part of the Municipal Leadership Development Program, was heavily over-subscribed, with a little more than 30 places for the more than 50 northern leaders who'd wanted to go to hear about "planning to plan," held in the wake of the New North Gathering in November. About a dozen northern communities

were represented, and judging by the level of conversation and the rapt attention of the attendees, the session went down very well. Hopefully communities will be a little bit better armed as they move ahead with their own long-term-planning and budgeting, and of course we look forward to seeing 12 identical strategic plans, all for the City of Humboldt for some reason, in 2018. ■



New North Gatherings

New North Mayor and Councillor Gathering, November 23, 2017



It was a packed house and another record attendance at the Travelodge for a New North meeting as participants from every northern municipality hunkered down for a day of fidgeting with lanyards and pointing out things at the final event for 2017.

Following introductions by New North Chair Bruce Fidler, and an update from SUMA Regional Director Bobby Woods, Moliehi Khaketla, Chief Medical Officer with MCRHR's Population Health Unit led a panel focusing on the upcoming cannabis legalization.

"Our Canadian youth have the highest percentage of cannabis use in the developed world and our youth are very susceptible to more serious adverse health effects including dependency and drug-related psychiatric effects," she said.

The average age of first using marijuana is 15, which Khaketla said is concerning because the effects of cannabis are more harmful on young people as their brains still develop into late adolescence. For that reason, the province's Children's Advocate and others recommend restricting cannabis consumption until the age of 25. While cannabis legalization is coming from the feds, panellist Steve Dribnenki, a SUMA senior policy advisor, notes

that municipal and provincial governments have a lot of leeway on how to approach cannabis. For example, the province is in charge of deciding the legal age for people to consume cannabis and currently is gearing towards the age of 19.

There are, Khaketla said, some protective factors to protect youth from developing problematic drug use. This includes families who discourage substance use but are open to helping if their child does, healthy peer groups, involvement in extracurriculars, and healthy coping mechanisms. Unfortunately, it's not looking like the province will include a tax that directly provides municipalities with funds to mitigate and respond to the unhealthy effects of marijuana. She notes that education campaigns like the province's push to stop impaired driving are the most likely, and as "one-offs" they don't get consistent annual funding.

From a public health perspective, the idea with weed legalization is to find a "sweet spot" where the restrictions on access are not so prohibitive that they encourage bootlegging but are not so loose that companies focused solely on

profit are given free rein, Khaketla said. Dribnenki noted that Saskatchewan has made it clear it will be following a private marijuana system. This would be comparable to how the province is now treating liquor. Dribnenki encouraged municipalities to look into their bylaws because they do



have the power to control where cannabis consumption and production are permitted (through zoning bylaws). They also can control public health bylaws for smoking and workplace safety for municipal employees. For example, for someone who drives for a living, Khaketla said the current

recommendation is it's generally safe to drive 4-6 hours after consuming marijuana.

In his keynote address following lunch, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Chief Bobby Cameron came seeking unity and support from New North communities as it forges ahead with a strategy aimed at "creating hope and opportunity for our youth." He said he wants to change the conversation from the negative connotations of youth suicide, and he invited those present to provide input on the strategy. Cameron's address led to a stirring presentation from the Embracing Life Committee. Member Ashley Norton had been working in the south until she moved back to the north-west to work as a regional suicide prevention worker with the Keewatin Yatthe Health Region. What she found when she moved back, was a lack of holistic supports. Now, she has initiated suicide protocol in the region and sees doctors developing a working committee on self harm where they stop normalizing suicide and start looking at how it could be prevented in each instance. From the perspective of someone who grew up in Buffalo Narrows and now works out of La Loche, she said it's time to bring back youth programming that used to work in the past. For example, she was part of a youth mayor and council and wants to see things like that in place on a consistent basis.

The panel on northern housing showed impressive examples of what is available to municipalities when it comes to developing, buying, and even constructing their own housing stock. SaskHousing representatives noted there are some positive funding announcements in store after the federal government said it will invest more than \$30 billion over the next 11 years through a newly-unveiled National Housing Strategy.

Doug Gailey of Methy Construction in La Loche said that La Loche is running out of places to build new units, with only nine available serviced lots to build new housing



on. It costs between \$30-\$35,000 to connect them to services. That cost falls on the municipality, and even with the advantages provided by the no-interest northern subdivision loans, it's a struggle to repay them within the five years. La Loche councillor Keith Shewchuk was highly critical of the northern home-ownership program, in which 50 SaskHousing units are available for sale at an independently assessed price that has averaged a cost around \$89,000 to date. Sask Housing's director of housing authorities and northern services, Roger Parenteau, said only seven of those have sold since the program started in 2015 and the program ends in January of next year.

"To be very frank, I would have liked to see a lot more sold than the seven that we've sold to date," Parenteau said.

Shewchuk said the homeownership program is not suitable for the north because of the high cost of living, limited access to banking, and difficulty many people have obtaining mortgages.

The New North meeting ended with a spirited discussion with Greg Ottenbreit, the Minister Responsible for Rural and Remote

Health. Peter Durocher, a former EMS ambulance driver, shared his painful story of short-staffing in a region where he was driving ambulance in up to 14 communities. He was frequently getting calls to respond to more than one life-threatening situation at the same time.

"The decision I have to make is who is going to live and it eats on me and it ate me pretty badly where it got to the point where I couldn't handle it anymore," he said.

Ottenbreit, as he did throughout much of the Q&A period, made an optimistic comment on how the new Saskatchewan Health Authority, could improve services and resource use across the province.

Gerald Roy called the new authority that's replacing all regional health authorities a "mega-superboard" and remained skeptical that the successes of the old regions will remain a focus. Ottenbreit promised follow-up on many of the questions he was posed, and said improved communication between front-line providers and his ministry needs to be a part of the new health authority. ■

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.

We met a number of times with the ministers of Government Relations, Larry Doke and now Warren Kaeding. For each, the message was the same: administrators need support; the Gas Tax Fund doesn’t work for the north; Northern Capital Grants program needs to be immediately renewed upon the current program’s completion in September 2018, and northern revenue sharing needs to be enhanced to support the full range of activities northern municipal governments engage in.

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



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. ■

New North Northern Justice Symposium



Although staged in the Spring of 2018, much of the planning for New North's 13th Annual Northern Justice Symposium took place in the 2017-18 year.

This year's event was the best attended ever, with most of the close to 300 registrants staying all the way through, from the keynote address by Senator Lillian Dyck to the final day youth panel wrap-up.

The focus of this year's event was community success stories, but these stories wouldn't even have existed if not for the community champions and grassroots-level

organizers who dedicate their time and passion to improving the well-being and safety of their residents. To mark the achievements of some of these champions, the justice symposium incorporates the Northern Excellence Awards, honouring the outstanding contributions of the many unsung heroes we are lucky to call friends, colleagues and fellow citizens.

The Youth of the Year award went to Hannah Anderson-Ross from Green Lake, while Beauval won Community of the Year for their BRIC (Beavual Rebuilding its Community). The Elder of the

Year was Pauline Fontaine from La Loche, and La Loche's Lucy Guetre won Citizen of the Year. In a packed and highly contested field of many worthy contenders, Alphonse Noey, originally from Fond du Lac, won the RCMP Member of the Year.

To see all the presentations and highlights of the 13th Annual New North Northern Justice Symposium, navigate to New North's Youtube Channel by typing "New North Justice Symposium" in the search box.■

Community Safety, Police Boards Continue to Show Resilience and Value

For the better part of 15 years, New North has been proud to be associated with the initiation, growth and consolidation of Community Police and Safety Boards throughout the north.

Although communities can call them anything they want (Community Justice Committee/Police Boards/Safety Boards), their purpose is to provide a way to leverage community volunteerism and to mobilize agency support for local justice and policing initiatives.

With additional guidance and support by the Ministries of Justice and Policing and Corrections, these local groups have a broad mandate, from liaising with the community detachment to improve RCMP's communications and engagement, to spear-heading initiatives around lateral and domestic violence, raising awareness for a particular

cause, organizing neighbour watch, putting on BBQs and soup and bannock nights, and providing policy advice and input into mayor and council decisions around community well-being and safety.

There are more than a dozen such groups operating throughout the north. Some are thriving, some need more support.

New North was very pleased this to be able to provide funding for many members of the northern groups to come visit with us and take in the Northern Justice Symposium this year, as well as to provide free registration to the event. This year, we hope to continue our commitment to these volunteer groups by offering funding and grant-writing support to help them to truly make a difference to their communities ■

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. Currently sent out electronically, there are plans afoot to begin physical distribution to a wider audience this year.

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

combined with a colourful, engaging and expressive style, Chelsea has added a new dimension to the newsletter over the last 12 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

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.



working in northern local government.

The content of the newsletter is produced specifically for the newsletter, and this year it took on a new flavour with the addition to the New North team of freelance journalist Chelsea Laskowski.

Chelsea’s experience working on northern-related stories with MBC made her a perfect fit for us. Bringing a deep appreciation of northern issues

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.

One significant addition to New North's web presence this year will be the Administrators Resource Bank, an online repository and "one-stop shop" that will bring together all material related to municipal administration and governance. The site will contain all the information you'd expect (legislation, regulations, policies, bylaw examples, etc), but is also designed partly to be a peer-networking and educational tool, a platform for administrators to upload their resources for their fellow administrators to use and learn from. ■

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. ■

New North Looking Ahead to 2018-19

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

- Gain member support for New North's proposal to Natural Resource Canada for green energy assessments and northern energy plans
- 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
- Create a set of shared interests and objectives with First Nation organizations and work strategically toward achieving them