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Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities

NEW | NORTH

Newsletter, June-July 2015

September New North Meeting

With Minister Reiter confirmed as attending, and with the likely presence of the Minister of Environment Hon. Herb Cox as well as Commissioner of Emergency and Fire Safety Duane McKay, the September 10 New North Mayor and Councillor Meeting will be the first post-summer shot the northern elected, as a group, will get at it laying it all out the table.

Although officials from wildfire management have been regular guests at New North meetings over the years, and the wildfire file is scarcely if ever off the agenda anyway, recent events have only highlighted the continuing importance of responsive and responsible provincial government policies around wildfires to northern people.

Northern Health Conference

In other goings on, registrations for the Northern Health Conference on September 16 & 17 in Prince Albert are now open. Go to our website newnorthsask.org for registration details. The event is fully supported by the health regions, who are kindly providing financial and logistical support. Dr Ken Coates from the U of S is a keynote speaker. Government is supplying a minister.

Financial & Administrative Service

Our financial and administrative service is open for business. All we need from communities is a resolution authorizing us to send our contractors in to help your staff get your books into shape. Contact us at the office if you are interested.

Communities Getting a Fire Break, so to Speak

Related to the above, if you missed it, those communities who are yet to get their financial houses in order for this year have been given more time to submit their audits and other paperwork to continue receiving Gas Tax Funding. The government is doing this because of, you know, the fires.

More Northern Communities to Have Opportunity to Binge-Watch Netflix– I Mean, be More “Productive”–After Broadband Announcement

The federal government has said in a press release that they intend to hook more northern communities into the broadband network over the next two years.

The communities getting the benefit of increased “productivity” through higher Internet speeds include Bear Creek, Black Lake, Brabant Lake, Dillon, Canoe Narrows, Clearwater River Dene Nation, Dore Lake, Far, Fond du Lac, Grandmother's Bay, Jans Bay, Missinipe, Patuanak, Red Earth, Shoal Lake, Sled Lake, Southend, Stanley Mission, St. George's Hill, Stony Rapids, Sucker River, Turnor Lake, Wadin Bay, Wahpeton, Waterhen Lake and Wollaston Lake.

The total cost of the upgrades is about \$7.5 million. The work will be done by Sasktel.

All affected communities are set to be more, um, “productive” by 2017.

Issues in Brief

Wildfire Management

As a primer for upcoming discussions on provincial wildfire management, we thought we might offer a quick overview of some the issues in wildfire management and emergency response, government's likely or stated positions, and our commentary.

20 km Limit The 20 kilometre full-response zone has come under frequent criticism over the years. Indeed, the Saskatchewan Party, when in opposition, wanted it changed way back in 2006. The Ministry of Environment says that the limit is really fairly arbitrary, in the sense that the way they respond to a fire, both within that zone and outside, is dependent on a number of modifiers, such as the nature of the fire, the values at risk, weather, and the resources available to deal with it. In the recent event, Wildfire Management came under criticism for its “watch and wait” approach even when fires were within the full-response zone, and even though their own policy suggests that their disposition should be toward “full extinguishment”.

“Let it Burn” Similar to above. From the wildfire management perspective, the north is made up three zones. Full-response (within 20 km of a settlement or high value asset), modified response zone, and a “let it burn” zone, which is the far northern parts of the province. The Ministry of Environment does not like the term “let it burn,” and will deny that it is their policy. However, the ministry also defends the environmental benefits of allowing mother nature to run its course (unless life or high value assets are threatened). The ministry, adopting best practices in wildfire and environmental management, says that years of full-response to all fires in the north have actually led to the creation of the powder-keg we have now.

Firefighting Budget The Ministry of Environment's firefighting budget is set annually based on a ten-year revolving average. The political opposition has criticized the small budget, but the fact is that it is more than likely an outcome of the relatively quiet fire seasons over the last decade rather than cut backs as such. Logically, based on this year's expenditures, next year's firefighting budget should be significantly higher.

The reason for only allocating a small amount to firefighting is because once money is allocated, it cannot be unallocated until the end of the year. So, if the ministry budgeted \$100 million, and only used \$60 million, that would be \$40 million not being used for schools, hospitals, roads, municipalities, or whatever during that year.

“High Value Assets” Trappers have complained for years that the province's definition of high valued assets does not include trap lines. The province regards high value assets as, obviously, communities and industry. Natural resources that are high value include timber and mining. However, trappers might have a point that their industry is unfairly discriminated against, given the sometimes-paltry economic returns of the timber industry over the years.

Type 3 Training Take-up and Crew Numbers Type 3 crews are used for mop-up and other operations in support of Type 1 and 2 crews. Over the years the number of members in a Type 3 crew has shrunk to five. The ministry has said that the reason for the smaller crew sizes is because of the declining interest from northerners in Type 3 training. However, given recent events, we are likely to see some changes around this file, perhaps in crew numbers but also in a greater use of Type 3 crews in mitigation activities.

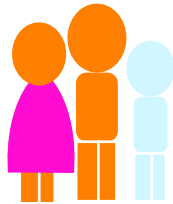
Cost-Recovery for Wildfires Although not specifically linked to the recent events, northern municipalities' capacity to respond to and mitigate wildfires originating inside municipal boundaries is still an outstanding issue. Government's position is that cost-recovery is on a case-by-case basis, and can take into account a municipality's financial ability to pay, but we would like to see something stronger. A formal agreement for government to share responsibilities is required.

Emergency Response Risk management strategies for wildfire management are clearly angled toward the preservation of life and property, which is as it should be. However, the way the federal and provincial roles and responsibilities are split mean that it is actually in the interests of the provinces to evacuate people rather than deal with the fire threat. The problem with the federal disaster program is that the provinces cannot access federal funding through the plan to fight fires. Additionally, a federal audit of the program has criticized the program for not providing enough money for prevention and mitigation activities.

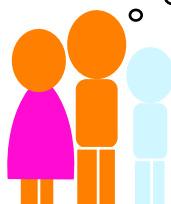
Automated Fire Detection Systems (camera towers) See story next page.

Meanwhile, on the lighter side ...

Wildfire Emergency *by the numbers*



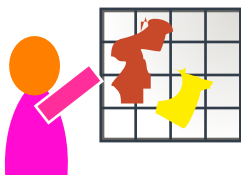
Evacuees
13,000



Evacuees convinced
they left the gas on
13,000



Wallets left on
bedside tables
4,561



Times Map
Pointed at
2,641



Average length of
facial hair growth
2.4mm



Average seconds
between Facebook
refreshes
29.2

Automated Fire Towers Debate Re-ignites, So Let's Take a Look

Despite opposition from the NDP, unions and some northerners, cameras replaced humans in fires towers across northern Saskatchewan two years ago, putting 38 seasonal workers out of work.

Government argued that, while money was also a factor, the main reason for replacing manned towers was for occupational health and safety reasons. Of course, could simply improve the safety of the towers, but it seemed that the best solution was to take the humans out of the towers altogether. Minister of Environment, Ken Cheveldayoff, gave the impression he was doing the fire spotters a favour by making them unemployed.

Opponents objected to the plan for a number of reasons. Firstly, they said that camera-based detection systems are not as effective as human ones. The passage they often cited was this one from an Australian study of three camera systems tested in 2010:

All the camera systems tested were able to observe and locate fires during both day and night. However, detection by the camera systems was slower and less reliable than by a trained human observer. At present, it is not possible to rely on cameras as a sole primary detection method and they not suitable replacement for staffed fire towers ("Evaluation of three fire detection systems, Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, August 2010).

Secondly, opponents argued that cost-savings may not materialize either, as a camera system would need maintenance. As well, blind-spots in automated detection systems often need to be supplemented by other methods of surveillance—like air spotters. Additionally, the areas where the supposed cost-savings would occur were ephemeral (like travel costs for spotters to and from the towers and use of cars). The unions argued the real reason for eliminating the manned towers was to help the ministry keep government's stated political promise of reducing the size of the public sector.



Government pointed out that the US state of Oregon successfully uses cameras, and the Saskatchewan system would be similar to theirs (Oregon uses the Forest Watch system—one of the systems tested by the Australians). But Oregon also uses manned towers, with about half of their 106 towers staffed (some of Oregon's towers are on industry land). In fact, the Department of Forestry said in 2011, perhaps with the Australian test in mind, that automated systems could never fully replace humans in the towers. Automated systems certainly have their place, of course. In some instances, cameras can augment manned towers or be used in situations so remote that speed of detection is less of an issue. Logically, if Saskatchewan were really following Oregon's lead, we'd have a mix of staffed and automated towers.

Government installed the system in the latter part of the fire season in 2013—raising the ire of some because it meant the towers were in no way operational in August that year (Nipawan Journal, Sept 4, 2013). After the recent event, Minister Reiter reportedly said that the cameras were valuable because they could be operational in situations where a spotter may have already been evacuated (Canadian Press, July 21, 2015). Given that the point of the spotters is early detection of fires at a distance not when they are right below the tower itself (which in some cases, would put the fire inside the community), this seems like an odd argument from government—until you remember that occupational health and safety was a key driver of the automated system.

Nevertheless, one impression we have now is that we have a camera-based detection system which may or may not be as good as the manned system in detecting fires, and may or may not be as cost-effective as the one it replaced, but which at least won't insist on being helicopter-lifted when fires start licking at the bottom of the tower.

AGM 2014 2015

The New North Annual General Meeting early June was well attended despite the wildfires keeping a few people in their communities.

In addition to our financial statements, New North CEO Al Loke presented the CEO's report for 2014-15, otherwise known as the New North Annual Report.

New North Chair Georgina Jolibois spoke in her opening address of the challenges of navigating a year filled with uncertainty, especially around revenue sharing and funding for northern water and sewer projects.

Fortunately, in both cases, the uncertainty has turned to less uncertainty.

The Chair also remarked on the progress made in developing good relationships with First Nation communities in the north.

Ms Jolibois also spoke about the need for the Ministry of Environment to continue their support for fire suppression in municipal boundaries, a topic on the minds of many people during the day.

SUMA Director and Mayor of Creighton Bruce Fidler updated members on SUMA's activities relating to the north, including activity on roads, recycling and conflict of interest.

Mayor & Councillor Gathering: Housing

In the Mayor and Councillor Gathering that followed the AGM, members heard Saskatchewan Housing's Roger Parenteau announce the plan to sell 100 units of social housing to northerners. 50 units will be sold to current tenants, and another 50 units in chronically-vacant communities will also be up for grabs. The proceeds of the sales will be made available to communities for housing construction (*see story page 7*).

Ministry of Environment

The ministry updated communities on changes made in the new *Wildfire Act*. With a hot summer predicted, the communities expressed continuing concern regarding the ministry's attitude to fire suppression costs in communities.

Although we have an unofficial policy of writing-off costs for fire-fighting, municipalities in the north would still like to see something in writing.

New North's long-standing position is that fire-fighting should be a dual responsibility, similar to how the RMs and the ministry operate in the burn permit areas.



Gerald Roy and Duane Favel check for typos in the New North Annual Report at the AGM in June.

Transfer Stations

Greenland Waste, based out of Prince Albert (not Greenland, as previously hoped), made a pitch for communities to consider the value of switching to transfer stations to fulfil their solid waste management needs.

New North Financial and Administration Capacity Building

Northern elected were also formally introduced to New North's program aimed at helping communities with their compliance under the *Northern Municipalities Act* with financial reporting.



With Great SaskPower Comes Great Sasksponsibility

How do you get compensation when the power goes out?

Here's how!

At the New North AGM Bruce from La Loche asked New North to look into how you go about getting compensation from Saskpower for damage to equipment caused by a power outage, brown out, black out and even a purple out if you're into that sort of thing.

Although Saskpower does not like to publicize this, we managed to obtain information on the steps you need to take to put in a claim. One thing you have to remember—and we can't emphasize this enough—is that you need to have one foot off the ground and be holding a dill pickle in your left hand *at all times* during this procedure. Good luck, and report back any success you have (we mentioned the pickle, right?)

Steps to Getting Compensation For damage from Outages

Who to Call? Dial Customer Service on 1-888-757-6937

Then What? Tell them you want compensation for damage caused by outage/brown-out etc.

What do they do? They create a damage claim.

What information do they need? They will need the following:

- Date, time of the incident/outage that caused the damage
- Weather conditions at the time, and so on
- Names of witnesses who can verify the incident/damage
- Details of damaged and whether property damaged is covered by insurance
- Information related specifically to how the incident/outage caused the damage

Once all this information is collected, Saskpower send the claim to the appropriate district to verify it and to see if the incident/damage meets their criteria for coverage.

SaskHousing Sell-Off to Raise Cash

But not everyone is pleased by the decision to set market prices for non-market housing.

After hinting for some time that they might be interested in selling some social housing units, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has officially announced that this is exactly what they intend to do. Based off recommendations from the Northern Advisory Committee, government has agreed to sell units in order to spur homeownership in the north as well create a pool of funds to build new social housing.

The announcement was made by Roger Parenteau at the New North Mayor and Councillor Gathering June 10.

The sell-offs will come in two forms:

1. Sale of units to current occupiers in high-demand communities.
2. Sale of chronically-vacant units in low-demand communities.

If all goes well, the sale of units should increase the level of northern homeownership by up to 4 percentage points.

The Money Trail

The innovative, and most exciting, part of Saskatchewan Housing's announcement is the part about what happens to the money that is raised. You would think that when a government sells an asset, it keeps the proceeds, right? Well not this time.

The proceeds from the sale of the units will go back into a grant pool accessible to northern municipalities to build their own housing stock. Grants from the pool will be handed out on an application basis, and that is where Housing Needs Assessments come into it.

Housing Needs Assessments

The basis of a community's successful application to the pool will be their Housing Needs Assessments Plan, which are also part of the provincial government's Encouraging Community Housing Options (ECHO) program. The expansion of the ECHO to the north was announced back in January.

A Housing Needs Assessment is your community's stab at figuring out your housing needs and priorities.

After doing your Housing Needs Assessment, you might figure out that:

1. Your biggest need—and therefore greatest priority—is units for Elders
2. You have a shortage of units for single mothers; or
3. You have a shortage of units across all categories

Sale Price?

The biggest question is clearly the sale price. Prices are being set at between \$70,000 and \$150,000, depending on factors such as location, condition of the unit, and so on. While those prices may seem high, consider that as the sale price reduces, we see a net decrease in the number of people having access to new housing. So, if an average sale price of \$70,000 a unit, leveraged to other grants, leads to the construction of 300 new housing units, then an average price of \$60,000 would see a reduction to 280 units. At the bottom of the scale, an average sale price of \$20,000 sees just 60 new units built. If Saskatchewan Housing sold a unit for \$20,000 which a buyer might have been quite willing and happy to pay \$100,000 for, well, who is the loser there? The municipalities are losers, because they have lost \$80,000 from the pool. But the biggest losers are the people in most need of housing in your communities. That \$80,000 could have been the difference between building units for 5 Elders and building units for 4 Elders. Multiply that by 70 or so house sales and you can see where this plan is coming from.

Opinion Homeownership Options for Northerners Needed to Promote Greater Permanent Wealth

Although wealth opportunities for northerners have increased in recent years because of greater access to high-income jobs, northerners rate of home-ownership is still troubling and seemingly intractable.

Many of the statistics we have about housing in the north are not particularly useful, mainly because they are so out of date. However, using the statistics we have, and adding a bit here and there, we come up with the following:

- There are about 5600 private dwellings in the north.
- About 1200 of those 5600 have the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation (SHC) as their owner.
- The number of privately owned dwellings is about 2800, giving us a rate of private homeownership of about 50% or so. Across the province the rate of homeownership is about 70%.

The low rate of private homeownership is thought to be because of the low income levels of northerners. But this wasn't always the reason. In fact, up until the last few decades, homeownership was the norm, and it's not because everyone was richer back then; quite the opposite.

When Métis families began moving into what we now call the municipalities of northern Saskatchewan in the 1950s, a housing crisis emerged. Although homeownership was prevalent, the problem was one of housing adequacy, not affordability. Pushed by northern leaders and northern officials, government created a series of home-building programs over the next two decades that became the basis of homeownership today. These programs were largely adaptations of federal homeownership programs aimed at low-income earners. In one program that ran from 1974-78, if you had a block of cleared land, a small down-payment, and family income of less than \$10,000 a year (about \$60,000 today), you were eligible for a home-construction loan that capped repayments at 25% of your income over an amortization period of 15 years—with the federal and provincial government picking up the rest. That program had a total cost of \$25 million—that's about \$150 million in today's dollars. Homeowners, paying an average of \$2,000 a year, would have contributed about 75% of that cost.

These programs were not without their problems. In an assessment of home-owner construction programs undertaken by the Northern Municipal Council in the 1970s, it was found that 30% of the privately built homes—which were built to high standards dictated by

Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC)—needed major repairs. A number of these homes, built only a few years before, had already been abandoned. By contrast, the Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS) houses, built over the same period and rented to department employees, were all in good shape because they were maintained at public expense.

Assessments of these homeownership programs during the 1980s also often pointed to the government's failure to match the program to the specific cultural and environmental needs of the north and its people. Some homeowners racked up large municipal tax arrears.

However, it is clear from other data that the programs were enormously successful. From the 1960s until the 1980s, the number of privately owned homes increased only slightly (because people swapped their old fibre-board huts for new ones), but the real benefit was the improved conditions of housing. Although building houses in the grid style was not popular, it did make it easier to connect houses to basic water and sewerage infrastructure that went alongside housing development. Overall, the benefits were staggeringly good. Child mortality rates plummeted. The rates of communicable disease dived as did bacterial infections and rates of enteric illness (tummy bugs).

Although the programs resulted in increased homeownership, with the many non-financial benefits that can bring, homeowners were mostly financially better off as well. With payments capped at 25% of a modest income (up to \$7,000 a year), and factoring taxes and maintenance, homeowners after a 15 year amortization period could have netted a rate of return of about 6% annually, an increase in their net wealth of about \$1700 per year (the average across the province was about 3%).

Of course, it needs to be noted that this increase in wealth is mostly due to the provincial and federal governments picking up the tab of the full cost of owning the property. The homeownership programs were not really—or not simply—about homeownership. They were also about income distribution—a poverty reduction strategy by any other name. For example, the short-lived DNS version of the homeownership program in the 1970s and early 1980s was facilitated through the agency of *The Northern Saskatchewan Economic*

Development Act. Homeownership grants came under the Housing Regulations attached to that Act. Although the *Act* was maintained through the 1980s, the parts of it that enabled the Housing Regulations were scrapped in 1982.

Today, we stand at a crossroads on northern homeownership. The income-distribution aims of homeownership programs have long disappeared along with the programs themselves. The net increase in the number of privately-built new houses—outside of the market communities—is zero. As older houses crumble, reaching their use-by date, few houses are being built to replace them. The result is a net decrease in the value of property as a private capital asset and plummeting tax collections.

By contrast, we have seen a phenomenal increase in the net value of capital assets held by the government in the north. As homeownership programs retreated they were replaced by publicly-funded programs aimed at increasing the number of rental units. In many cases, the annual number of publicly-built units in the north grew while the number of privately-built units declined markedly.

It would be easy to say that rental properties were required to fulfill the needs in that particular part of the housing spectrum, given the large demographic changes and the failure of the northern economy to provide adequate jobs (or as one political commentator crassly said at the time, kids stopped dying). It would also be easy to say that rentals give you better bang for the buck.

The second point is arguable. In 2008, each of SHC's rental units cost an average of \$9,000 a year to maintain—that included repairs, utilities and taxes. The Crown contributed about \$4,000 of that, with the tenant picking up the rest, or about \$350 a month.

In fact, SHC ownership programs at that time were more or less built on the idea that for around the same net outlay, a renter of a SHC home could actually be its owner. Homeownership could realistically be achieved on an income derived entirely from transfers from government (for example, social assistance).

But two things happened to change all this. Firstly, the number of families who fit the eligibility criteria fell, as their incomes were either too high or their needs didn't suit the parameters of the programs. The second thing that happened is more fundamental: a shift in government sentiment.

The best way to see this shift is by looking at the attitudes of government to housing on First Nations—who arguably face similar if not worse housing issues than the provincial north.

On-reserve market-based housing faces two challenges—access to credit and low incomes. To overcome these challenges and the additional challenge of owning land on-reserve, government provides a ministerial guarantee on any finance obtained by band council (or individuals). The twist is that in the event of a default, the government has the ability to claw-back the bad debt from the First Nation through their grant stream.

In other words, the property itself is essentially value-less from the point of view of financiers and government. Financiers, through the government, have access to cold hard cash and carry no risk in what can only be described as a very sweet deal. (No wonder banks are lining up to lend!)

How is this different from provincial northern Saskatchewan? Well, it isn't. Northerners face bad credit, low incomes as well as a low value placed on northern property. What we don't have is access to guarantees.

We can quite clearly see what this change of government sentiment is, and it is at least two-fold: aversion to risk; and secondly, an aversion to providing homeownership as a public good through tax dollars.

With mining contributing about \$80 million annually in incomes to northern families, the big question is how we can turn those incomes into permanent private wealth? We all know that "economic leakage" is an enormous impediment to northern economic growth. While the mining industry talks up the amount of capital its operations bring north, what we don't see happening is that capital staying here, creating a permanent store of wealth for generations to come.

It is entirely appropriate for the municipal sector to play a significant role here, not just in plot development, but in other ways too. Certainly, senior levels of government need to play a more significant role. Left to the market to work out, we are in danger of seeing an opportunity for a generation of permanent wealth-creation go begging.

Disclaimer: opinion pieces are not necessarily reflections of New North's official position on any particular issue.

In Depth

Provincial Disability Strategy Released in June

The provincial government's just-released disability strategy, which they are calling "People before Systems: Transforming the Experience of Disability in Saskatchewan," is 56 pages of mission statements, paradigm shifts, passionate recommendations and "thinking outside the box." The one thing it isn't—at least not yet—is a provincial government disability strategy.

The title indicates the changing way that disability is being thought about nowadays. In this new way of thinking, disability is not something a person *has*, it is something they *experience*, since even people with an identical medically-defined disability (say, autism) can experience their disabilities differently. A person's disability, from this way of thinking, is created by their interaction with the physical and social environment. Therefore, when thinking about disability policies we need to focus our attention on the physical and social environment to reduce the negative impacts of a disability on an individual, if not eliminate the "experience" of the disability altogether.

As well, the strategy also recognizes that "we are all people who experience disability," insofar as carers, friends or relatives of a person experiencing a disability can also be the ones, in a sense, who experience the effects of that disability. Disability policies therefore also need to focus on those people—family, friends, and so on—who provide care and assistance.

The idea that a disability is something people *experience*, rather than something they *have*, is called the "social model of disability," and it is part of the modern way of thinking about disabilities. In the past, the main way of thinking about disability was the so-called medical model of disability, which relied on medical diagnoses to decide if a person was disabled or not.

While this model is still there, the modern model of disability focuses mainly on the way society is not set-up to accommodate disabilities. A disability, in this way of thinking, is actually created by a mismatch between a person's abilities and their environment. So, for example, if a wheel-chair bound person comes across no more impediments or obstacles in their day-to-day lives than someone who is not in a wheelchair (because the environment is set-up to allow wheelchair access, etc), then by definition they are not disabled because they have not experienced the effects of what, in a medical diagnosis, would be called a disability.

For some categories of disability that way of thinking works really well.

The strategy before us, "People Before Systems," maintains that "transforming the experience of disability" can be achieved across four main "drivers." The drivers of the strategy are:

1. Creating person-centred services
2. Focusing on the impact of disability
3. Promoting and protecting human rights
4. The idea that accessibility and inclusion benefit us all

So, in the first driver—creating people-centred services—we see recommendations such as allowing people to transfer their service coverage from one health region to another when they move; the promotion of individualized funding and self-directed funding for services; improving the accountability of programs providing services; and reviewing jurisdictional

eligibility criteria to ensure First Nation citizens have equal access to disability supports; and many others.

The recommendations that concern the municipal sector most will be those relating to community inclusion, or Creating Accessible Communities. The focus here is on ensuring that “disability experiences” are minimized in the provision of sport, culture and recreational services and other activities. Accessible communities are those where people can easily get around no matter their level of ability.

While all these recommendations are good, they are not to be confused with actual government policy or policy direction. Although “People before Systems: Transforming the Experience of Disability in Saskatchewan” has the government logo on it, and is available on the government website—and presumably government knows about it—it remains to be seen how much will filter into government thinking around disability—and by thinking, we mean funding, of course. And if there is one thing this “strategy” is short on it is ideas for funding disability supports (for example, a tax-based universal disability “insurance”).

“Saskatchewan people experiencing disability face significant difficulties in being included in society and treated as equal citizens. People experiencing disability have lower levels of participation in education, training and employment. They also have limited access to goods, services and facilities; greater experiences of discrimination; poorer health; and higher rates of poverty and abuse.”

“People Before Systems: Transforming the Experience of Disability in Saskatchewan”

The strategy also has some odd blind spots. For example, while emphasizing the human rights issues around inclusiveness, equality of access and the ability of people with disabilities to enjoy the same rights and freedoms as everyone else, the strategy seems unaware that it is precisely those institutions in Canada that ensure those rights and freedoms for people with disabilities (that is, the Charter of Rights, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, etc) that also place a limit on the lengths that governments, business and other institutions have to go to ensure those rights and freedoms are protected. If you have a son or daughter with a disability you will know that schools only have to accommodate that disability if the school has the resources to do it without incurring “undue hardship.” The same goes for housing, employment and so on and so forth.

In other words, a certain level of “disability” is built not only into our social and physical environment; it is also built into our legal institutions.

The Provincial Disability Strategy, “People Before Systems,” can be found at:

<http://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/have-your-say/saskatchewan-disability-strategy>

Upcoming New North Events

New North Mayor & Councillor Gathering

September 10, Prince Albert Inn

Northern Health Conference

September 16 & 17, Ches Leech Lounge, Prince Albert

From the CEO, Al Loke

Looking out my window I can see life returning to normal. Trucks move up and down the street, people are walking to and from the reserve, the dogs are packing near the fire hydrant, and children are playing in the street.

It's hard to believe things got back to normal so quickly.

I believe everyone just wants to get on with life like it was before, and it looks like everyone is.

But without ignoring the tremendous work of volunteers, government and other personnel in dealing so well with the fire and the evacuations, it would be irresponsible for us as an association of northern communities, and as individual municipalities, to not acknowledge what could have been done better.

It is easy to be critical in hindsight, but only an open and honest appraisal—of policies and of practices—will be enough in the coming months.

One thing we have learned from events like this is that they are “political events” almost as much as they are natural events. We heard a lot about “mother nature” eventually sorting the fires out. Mother nature continues to do that.

But now we need to hear about the other side—the political side, the government side. The politicians who got themselves in the media pointing at maps got the coverage they needed. It was a public opportunity to show concern.

That opportunity now needs to be extended to an analysis of policies and practices. Government has said that they want to be inclusive in their review process, which will mean municipalities will have a chance to speak. We obviously welcome that.

New North Executive

Mayor Georgina Jolibois (**Chair**)

Councillor Al Sayn (**Vice Chair**)

Mayor Gordon Stomp (**Treasurer**)

Mayor Val Deschambeault

(**East Side Rep**)

Mayor Duane Favel (**Member at Large**)

New North Staff

Al Loke – CEO

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 & Communication

306 425 5505; email:
matt.newnorth@sasktel.net

New North —SANC Services Inc

Phone: 306 425 5505

Fax: 306 425 5506

207 La Ronge Avenue

La Ronge, Sk

Newsletter Submission Policy

Please submit all articles, questions and complaints to matt.newnorth@sasktel.net.

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 (NSAD) of Saskatchewan.