



16th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning

Report on Transition Matters

Chair: Mrs. Jane Groenewegen

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Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning
Assemblée législative
Comité permanent des priorités et de la planification

August 25, 2011

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning is pleased to provide its Report on Transition Matters and commends it to the House.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jane Groenewegen". The signature is written in black ink and has a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jane Groenewegen, MLA
Chairperson

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRIORITIES AND PLANNING

REPORT ON TRANSITION MATTERS

INTRODUCTION

As the 16th Legislative Assembly draws to a close, the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning continues to monitor several ongoing issues and initiatives with government-wide implications. The Committee wishes to take the opportunity, through this transition report, to highlight areas we believe will require the continued attention of our successor committee in the 17th Assembly.

BACKGROUND

The Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning includes all eleven Regular Members of the Legislative Assembly. The Committee's role is to:

1. Review issues which have government-wide implications including the overview of the budget and fiscal framework;
2. Review Government of the Northwest Territories reports on financial and performance results and program and policy evaluations to ensure anticipated outcomes are being achieved and accountability is maximized;
3. Coordinate Sessional business scheduling and planning in cooperation with appropriate Ministerial representatives;
4. Coordinate Committee public consultation efforts with respect to budget and fiscal matters;
5. Coordinate Committee strategic planning efforts;
6. Monitor and evaluate Ministerial performance issues;
7. Consider the budgets and financial management of any boards and agencies that are outside the responsibility of any Standing Committee; and
8. Consider any other matter referred by the House.

TRANSITION ISSUES

Housing

The sheer number of formal motions initiated by Committee Members recommending changes to public housing programs speaks to the crisis that is ongoing in many NWT communities and that we hear about daily from constituents. It is well known that housing issues have far-reaching impacts across government in areas such as health, education, justice and economic development, and housing therefore needs to be a top priority for government. In

our efforts to find fair solutions to the difficulties our constituents face, Committee Members advanced several proposals, including a number of possible changes to the rent scale:

- An income exemption for newly employed public housing tenants for their first 6 months of employment, and immediate efforts to encourage pursuit of homeownership¹;
- Reduction of the maximum rental rate to 25% of assessed gross income²;
- Changes to program guidelines to provide responsible and meaningful flexibility, and to allow for transition periods, such as gradual rent increases³;
- A regional analysis and policy changes to establish a significantly lower maximum rent schedule⁴;
- Reintroduction of a home maintenance and repair program for seniors⁵; and
- Establishment of specific maximum rents for communities with no real private market as follows: \$600 per month for 1-bedroom units, \$800 per month for 2-bedroom units, \$1,000 per month for 3-bedroom unities, and \$1,200 per month for 4 or 5 bedroom units⁶.

While the Government did not implement any of these recommendations, it has indicated that rent scales will be considered within the Shelter Policy Review, scheduled for completion in 2012. We urge the incoming Government to bring forward changes early in the life of the 17th Assembly.

Devolution

The Devolution Agreement-in-Principle, signed in January 2011, has created divisions among the people of the Northwest Territories that we hope can be repaired during the term of the next Assembly. We urge the incoming Government to move quickly to establish a process for negotiating devolution that is fully inclusive of all Aboriginal groups.

Decentralization

While there have long been concerns about the concentration of public service positions in the capital, this issue is becoming more pressing with the signing of

¹ **Motion 24-16(3) Income Exemption for Newly-Employed Public Housing Tenants.** Carried on June 4, 2009.

² **Motion 19-16(5) Reduction of NWT Housing Corporation Maximum Rental Rate.** Carried on October 28, 2010.

³ **Motion 21-16(5) Flexible Transition Period for Rent Adjustments.** Carried on October 28, 2010.

⁴ **Motion 24-16(5) Lower Maximum Rents for Public Housing.** Carried on November 3, 2010.

⁵ **Motion 28-16(5) Seniors' Home Repair Program.** Carried on February 24, 2011.

⁶ **Motion 2-16(6) Optional Rent Scale in Public Housing.** Carried on March 10, 2011.

the devolution agreement-in-principle and the possible transfer of hundreds more positions to the GNWT. The Committee believes the Government should incorporate opportunities to decentralize its operations into its future human resource planning. Decentralization not only has the benefit of moving jobs and associated economic growth to communities which badly need them, but in some cases will also allow the Government and its employees to benefit from lower office space and housing costs.

Regulations

Most proposed Bills undergo public review by a Standing Committee, with the possibility of extensive hearings where public interest warrants. However, many important matters of concern to the public are addressed in regulations, which typically are approved by a Minister or the Cabinet without the involvement of Regular Members. The *Act to Amend the Territorial Parks Act* and *Northwest Territories Heritage Fund Act* are examples of Bills that leave substantial matters to regulations. The 17th Assembly may wish to consider instituting processes for standing committee review of such regulations.

Program Review Office

In the early days of the 16th Assembly, a Program Review Office was established within the Department of the Executive. This substantial investment has not lived up to the Committee's expectations, and we would encourage our successor Committee to request an update on the Office's activities early in the life of the new Assembly.

Other Formal Motions Making Recommendations to Government

In addition to the formal motions making recommendations to Government referenced above, Committee Members initiated several more which the Government has not acted upon to our satisfaction. Although some of these matters fall under the mandate of other Standing Committees, we list the recommendations here for convenience:

Education Recommendations

- Reinstatement of student financial assistance scholarships⁷
- Provide students doing upgrading with access to student financial assistance⁸
- Reinstatement and fund a veterinary student placement at the University of Saskatchewan with a return of service agreement attached to the funding⁹

⁷ **Motion 22-16(3) Student Financial Assistance Scholarship Program.** Carried June 4, 2009.

⁸ **Motion 25-16(5) Expanding Student Financial Assistance Program.** Carried November 4, 2010.

⁹ **Motion 33-16(5) Supporting Veterinary Education.** Carried February 10, 2011.

- Provide funding to small high schools for a minimum of three teachers¹⁰
- Develop a certification program for elders to teach in schools in time for the start of the 2011/12 school year¹¹
- Reinstate sunsetting funding for school healthy eating and nutrition programs¹²
- Increase student financial assistance living allowances by 27% and link future increases to the Consumer Price Index¹³

Environment, Lands and Resources Recommendations

- Eliminate handling fees for collection of milk containers under the NWT Beverage Container Program¹⁴
- Implementation of a tiered vehicle registration system which bases fees on the fuel economy rating of vehicles¹⁵
- Consideration of a low carbon fuel standard that decreases or eliminates GNWT reliance on unconventional higher carbon oil by the end of the 16th Assembly, and establishment of guidelines for the use of life cycle analyses that evaluate greenhouse gas emissions from production of fuels imported by the GNWT¹⁶
- Immediate commencement of a public consultation process, in partnership with the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning, on the shape of a northern management regime for land and resources, with proposed implementation of the regime to be included in transition documents and planning for the 17th Assembly¹⁷

Health and Social Services Recommendations

- Establishment of a Milk Subsidy Program for all children aged one to twelve in any NWT community where milk costs are ten per cent or higher than those in Yellowknife¹⁸
- Establishment of a multidisciplinary team to provide assessment and diagnosis services for adults who may have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and enhancement of programs and supports for individuals and families living with FASD¹⁹

¹⁰ **Motion 34-16(5) Small High School Funding Formula.** Carried February 14, 2011.

¹¹ **Motion 40-16(5) Elders Teaching in Schools.** Carried on March 3, 2011.

¹² **Motion 1-16(6) Healthy Eating/Nutrition Programs.** Carried March 10, 2011.

¹³ **Motion 6-16(6) Increase to Student Financial Assistance Living Allowances.** Carried on May 18, 2011.

¹⁴ **Motion 1-16(5) Elimination of Handling Fees for the Collection**

Motion 24-16(2) Tiered Vehicle Registration System. Carried October 21, 2008.

¹⁶ **Motion 16-16(3) Low Carbon Fuel Standard.** Carried on March 9, 2009.

¹⁷ **Motion 27-16(5) Northern Management Regime for Land and Resources.** Carried on November 4, 2010.

¹⁸ **Motion 26-16(2) NWT Milk Subsidy Program.** Carried October 21, 2008.

¹⁹ **Motion 2-16(5) Adult Diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.** Carried on March 3, 2010.

- Identification of various options for establishing a mobile alcohol and drug treatment program that can be delivered on the land, and a report back to the 17th Assembly on this initiative within the first six months of its term.²⁰

Other Recommendations

- Initiate a public process to discuss board reform²¹
- Development of a measuring tool to verify the percentage of the GNWT workforce with a disability, and ensure that percentage is maintained or increased to 5% within 5 years²²
- Comprehensive review of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* with introduction of a Bill within the first two years of the 17th Assembly's term²³

In addition to the above recommendations to the Government of the Northwest Territories, Committee Members initiated motions with recommendations directed at the federal government for the following matters which have not yet been resolved: removal of the GST for certain goods and services north of 60, the reinstatement of federal funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and a successor strategy for the sunseting Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program.²⁴

CONCLUSION

This concludes the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning Report on Transition Matters. We wish the Members and Committees of the 17th Assembly the utmost success in their service to the people of the Northwest Territories.

²⁰ **Motion 5-16(6) Establishment of Mobile Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program.** Carried on May 16, 2011.

²¹ **Motion 11-16(3) Board Reform Direction.** Carried on February 18, 2009.

²² **Motion 39-16(5) Employment of Persons with Disabilities.** Carried on February 24, 2011.

²³ **Motion 8-16(6) Review of Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act.** Carried May 18, 2011.

²⁴ **Motion 18-16(3) Removal of GST for Certain Goods and Services North of 60.** Carried on March 12, 2009; **Motion 10-16(5) Reinstatement of Federal Funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.** Carried on May 20, 2010; **Motion 35-16(5) Successor Strategy for the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnerships Program.** Carried on February 18, 2011.

