

# Vote Growth

Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce  
Territorial Election Platform 2019

## **Platform:**

Vote Growth is the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce's 2019 Territorial Election platform. Through engaging with our membership of almost 400 local businesses, we've identified five key issues and proposed solutions that we believe will strengthen the Yellowknife business community and contribute to long-term prosperity.

The 5 key issues are:

1. Liquor Licensing & Regulations;
2. Fibre Redundancy;
3. Community Government Underfunding;
4. Post-Secondary Transformation (Yellowknife-Based University); and,
5. Land availability.

We believe that the key to Yellowknife's prosperity is growth – increasing our population and attracting more business and investment to Yellowknife. This theme is woven throughout each of the key issues we've identified.

The commitments that each candidate makes during this territorial campaign are critically important for Yellowknife businesses. That is why we're asking all candidates in Yellowknife ridings to answer one, straightforward question for each of the key issues we've identified:

**If elected, will you commit to following through on the recommendations set forth in Vote Growth?  
Why or why not?**

Vote Growth will be shared with all candidates by 5:00pm on Friday, September 6<sup>th</sup> and responses from candidates will be posted on our website within one business day of being received.

[www.ykchamber.com/vote-growth](http://www.ykchamber.com/vote-growth)



## Issue #1 – Creating A More Reasonable Business Environment for The Sale of Alcohol in Yellowknife:

The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce has heard from our membership that the *NWT Liquor Act* and *NWT Liquor Regulations* create unnecessary burdens and restrict revenue generating opportunities for local businesses and organizations. We have identified five key alcohol-related issues, along with potential solutions that will create a more reasonable business environment for the sale of alcohol in Yellowknife.

### The Issues:

1. Minors are not permitted in Class A (liquor-primary) establishments for the purpose of family dining;
2. Businesses and organizations struggle to obtain liquor licenses, and have cited experiences with subjective interpretation and a lack of clarity as to whether a liquor license will even be issued;
3. Serving staff are required to have server training, but information on course availability is very limited;
4. The uptown liquor shop, where businesses are required to purchase their product, is often unable to fill orders and cannot guarantee product availability for businesses; and,
5. There is no formal appeal process for those who disagree with the NWT Liquor Licensing Board's decisions.

Want to learn more about these issues? Visit our website to review our full policy paper:  
[www.ykchamber.com/liquor-licensing-and-regulations](http://www.ykchamber.com/liquor-licensing-and-regulations)

### Our Recommendations:

That the GNWT:

1. Amend the *NWT Liquor Regulations* to allow minors to enter Class A (liquor primary) establishments, when accompanied by a parent or guardian, until 8:00pm for the purposes of family dining;
1. Review all informational documents, such as the Handbooks and Application Requirement checklists, to ensure information is specific and detailed;
2. Conduct a review of the NWT Liquor Licensing Board to determine the most common reasons that liquor license applications are denied and to propose legislative, regulatory, and/or administrative solutions;
3. Update their website to include information about the Certificate Alcohol Server program, including course availability and training options;
4. Implement a service standard, so businesses can expect a response to inquiries within 5 business days;
5. Implement a server training program similar to other jurisdictions, with self-study materials and an online test, by March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020;
6. Work with the liquor shop to implement a documented process that guarantees orders will be filled on time and in full by March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020;
7. Pass savings from closing the liquor distribution warehouse (approx. \$300,000<sup>1</sup>) onto businesses and consumers through product price reductions;
8. Establish an appeal process for businesses who disagree with the NWT Liquor Licensing Board's decisions.

### Issue #2 – Fibre Redundancy:

Northwestel has only one fibre line to provide services to Yellowknife. When that fibre line is damaged – by vandalism, forest fires, construction, etc. – there are lengthy service disruptions. For example, in July 2019 a severed fibre line, caused by vandalism, caused a 10-hour outage that impacted long distance calls, cell phones, TV and internet services<sup>i</sup>. In August 2019, a second act of vandalism resulted in a 7-hour outage impacting cable home phone, internet and TV services<sup>ii</sup>.

This is an important issue for Yellowknife businesses – we live in a digital age where businesses rely on internet access to process payments, to access internal cloud-based databases, and to communicate with clients and suppliers. The recent outage caused one local law firm to lose approximately 100 billable hours, while another small business reported substantial logistical challenges as a result of not being able to connect with contractors who were running late.

While many retail and food-service businesses managed to stay open and operate “cash only” – some reported that their daily sales were less than half of their average and in some cases didn’t cover the cost of staff and overhead. Furthermore, several businesses have reported that the ‘tap’ feature on their credit card processing terminal has not worked since the outage.

We estimate that a 1-day outage results in a GDP loss of \$4.75 million. This is based on the NWT’s 2018 GDP of \$4.954 billion<sup>iv</sup> and the assumption that 35% of the NWT’s GDP comes from Yellowknife (\$1.733 billion).

### Our Recommendations:

That the GNWT:

1. Work with Northwestel to fund and build redundant fibre into Yellowknife by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021;
2. Specifically, that the GNWT invest \$1.5m in the 2020 budget to make the project shovel ready, and;
3. Work with Northwestel to pursue federal funding to cover the estimated \$20m to build the fibre line.

### Issue #3 – Community Government Underfunding:

Across the NWT, community governments are being underfunded by MACA by almost \$40 million annually, including \$11 million to the City of Yellowknife<sup>1</sup>. Community governments rely on MACA funding to provide core services like water supply, sewage, garbage disposal, recycling, roads, sidewalks, and recreational programming, to name a few.

Municipal infrastructure is essential to increasing the economic capacity of the Northwest Territories and chronic underfunding is placing a financial burden on Yellowknife and other communities, while constraining future development. This directly contributes to the cost of living and quality of life in Yellowknife, as the City must generate infrastructure revenue through increased property taxes and user fees.

Want to learn more? Read the 'Communities Matter' report prepared by the NWT Association of Communities:

<http://www.nwtac.com/your-community-matters/>

Want to see the work we've done so far on this issue? Visit:

[www.ykchamber.com/community-underfunding](http://www.ykchamber.com/community-underfunding)

### Our Recommendations:

That the GNWT:

1. Develop an implementation plan to close the underfunding gap over the term of the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly;
2. Increase the overall amount of funding provided to community governments, based on demonstrated need in the 2020 budget;
3. Modernize the community government funding formulas, based on recommendations from the 2014 funding review undertaken by MACA with support from the NWTAC; and,
4. Commit to indexing community funding.

#### Issue #4 - Post-Secondary Transformation:

In May 2018, the GNWT released the Aurora College Foundational Review<sup>vi</sup>. The report recommends that Aurora College be transformed into a polytechnic university with a main campus to be built in Yellowknife (page 6).

The report states that the main campus must be built in Yellowknife to ensure that executive leadership is close to students, employers, industry and stakeholders. In addition, the report states that “modern day students and millennials perceive the student experience to be equally as important as the content of the programming. This means not only that students will be looking for practicum places and part-time employment to financially support their studies, but in addition, that a social experience outside of study hours is available. All prerequisites for success that are not available in Fort Smith” (page 6-7).

In January 2019, the City of Yellowknife released the University Feasibility and Benefits Study<sup>vii</sup>, which found that:

- post-secondary transformation is required to support and grow the labour market in Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories;
- a polytechnic university is the best approach as it allows for academic upgrading, college trades programming and higher-level education; and,
- as the capital city, Yellowknife has the unique conditions required for a polytechnic university to succeed.

During our 2019 annual membership survey, we asked our membership if they support a University in Yellowknife. 74.5% of respondents agreed that a University would be a positive addition to the City of Yellowknife, while 14.5% disagreed. The remaining 11% were not sure how they felt or did not provide feedback.

Based on the results of the commissioned studies and engagement with our membership, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce’s formal position on post-secondary transformation is:

- We support the transition of Aurora College to a polytechnic institution;
- We believe the main campus and head office should be based in Yellowknife;
- We believe that the focus should be on a bricks-and-mortar institution;
- We believe that there are opportunities for the Fort Smith and Inuvik campuses to offer specialized programming;
- We believe that legislation should be in place to support other public and private institutions.

#### Our Recommendations:

That the GNWT:

1. Commit to transforming Aurora College into a polytechnic institution with the main campus and head office based in Yellowknife.

## Issue #5 – Transfer of Commissioners Land to The City of Yellowknife

In our 2018 membership survey, 10.77% of survey respondents identified access to commercial land as one of the most important issues facing their business. There is not a lot the City of Yellowknife can do to address these concerns, as within the land that the City has tenure for, only 1% is vacant land available for residential or commercial development.

The current system requires the City of Yellowknife to make land applications for every new parcel of land, in addition to the Community Plan and Area Development Plans which require Ministerial approval. This process is incredibly slow and inefficient and is preventing investment, business growth, job creation and access to affordable housing in Yellowknife.

Want to see the results of our annual membership surveys? Visit:  
<https://ykchamber.com/annual-membership-surveys>

### Our Recommendations:

That the GNWT:

1. Transfer all lands in the municipal boundary, under the administration and control of the Commissioner of the NWT, to the City of Yellowknife.

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<sup>i</sup> CBC. (2019). *Bar Owners Sees Steep Jump in Prices after N.W.T. Gov't Changes Liquor Distribution*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/liquor-distribution-change-yellowknife-beer-prices-rise-1.5083662>

<sup>ii</sup> CBC. (2019). *RCMP investigating Yellowknife internet outage, believes it's 'senseless vandalism'*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/northwestel-weekend-telecommunications-outage-1.5214367>

<sup>iii</sup> Cabin Radio. (2019). *It's Vandalism, Again. Police Investigate New Internet Outage*. Retrieved from: <https://cabinradio.ca/19341/news/yellowknife/its-vandalism-again-police-investigate-new-internet-outage/>

<sup>iv</sup> NWT Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *Gross Domestic Product*. Retrieved from: <https://www.statsnwt.ca/economy/gdp/>

<sup>v</sup> NWT Association of Communities. (n.d.). *Communities Matter*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nwtac.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Community-Funding-Report-2015.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> *Aurora College Foundational Review*. (2018). Retrieved from: [https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/aurora\\_college\\_foundational\\_review\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/aurora_college_foundational_review_report_0.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> *University Feasibility and Benefits Study*. (2019). Retrieved from: [https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Current\\_Committees\\_of\\_Council/University-Post-Secondary-Advisory-Committee/DOCS-544362-v1-Yellowknife\\_University\\_Feasibility\\_and\\_Benefits\\_Study\\_January\\_2019.pdf](https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Current_Committees_of_Council/University-Post-Secondary-Advisory-Committee/DOCS-544362-v1-Yellowknife_University_Feasibility_and_Benefits_Study_January_2019.pdf)