



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

July 8, 2025

The Honorable Caroline Wawzonek
Minister of Finance
Government of the Northwest Territories
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Dear Minister Wawzonek,

RE: Budget Submission – Supporting the Transfer of Commissioner’s Land to the City of Yellowknife

The City of Yellowknife appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Government of the Northwest Territories’ (GNWT) budget planning process. As the capital city and economic and security hub of the territory, Yellowknife plays a critical role in advancing territorial priorities, including housing, infrastructure, and economic growth. When Yellowknife is vibrant and growing sustainably the territory grows too. As has been discussed often for many years, a primary enabler of growth and opportunity is the timely and efficient transfer of Commissioner’s Land to the City of Yellowknife. In the language of the moment nationally, the slow process to transfer land could be seen as an internal trade barrier as it is a government-imposed limitation on the potential for growth of our city and territory.

We submit the following budget priorities to support critical and necessary sustainable growth of Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories in budget 2026:

1. Resource Allocation within the Department of Environment and Climate Change (ECC)

The Department of ECC plays a central role in facilitating land transfers. However, real or at least perceived current capacity constraints have delayed progress for the transfer of land. We recommend:

- **Increased staffing and technical resources** within ECC to expedite the land administration, planning, and transfer processes. This may include dedicated project management support to coordinate interdepartmental and intergovernmental efforts related to land transfer in Yellowknife. As the capital city with nearly 50% of the territorial population, land scarcity is a critical barrier to economic growth in our city and territory.

- **Development of performance and service level standards and systems** to facilitate transfers within 2 years.

These investments are meant to accelerate the transfer of land needed for housing, economic development, and municipal infrastructure. These recommendations, though coming from the City of Yellowknife, will have benefits for all communities across the NWT who are also limited in their housing and economic development by the current speed of land transfers. Additional resources focused on Yellowknife will make existing resources available to improve speeds in other parts of the NWT. These recommendations would also show an active rather than status-quo response to NWTAC Resolution 2025-05 (Appendix A).

2. Surveying support through financial or regulatory measures under the *Land Titles Act* and any other pertinent legislation or regulations

Surveying is a critical step in the land transfer process. However, the cost and complexity of surveys often delay or prevent land from being brought to market. We propose:

- **Financial support to municipalities for land surveying**, through an initial allocation of funds that allows a larger number of land transfers, if not bulk transfers.
- **Potential amendments to the *Land Titles Act* and related legislation** to simplify surveying requirements and move land to municipal governments faster, while ensuring that surveying happens before municipal land disposal. Amendments that echo the transfer requirements for land to transfer from the Government of Canada to the GNWT may be a guide for a path forward while continuing to require surveying before municipal disposal.

These proposals would remove the financial barriers that slow and limit the amount of land that can be transferred to municipalities, as municipalities do not have the financial capacity to meet the current regulatory surveying requirements for large land transfers.

If the GNWT is serious about working with municipalities to transfer land, then these surveying barriers created by GNWT legislation and regulation must be overcome. The City of Yellowknife recommends working the Northwest Territories Association of Communities (NWTAC) to develop and review potential legislative changes or financial solutions.

If the GNWT also has an alternate proposal(s) to address the critical issue of delays and uncertainty in land transfers the City of Yellowknife will happily work with the GNWT to find a path forward. What is clear is that the status-quo is not working.



3. Joint Advocacy and Financial Support for Strategic Infrastructure

Yellowknife's infrastructure supports not only Yellowknife residents but also broader territorial and national interests. Specifically, we highlight the need for:

- **Joint advocacy to the federal government** for funding of key infrastructure projects that are in the best interest of Yellowknife, Indigenous Governments and Land Owners, and the Northwest Territories as a whole, including those aligned with the Arctic Security Corridor.
- **Direct new GNWT investment** in municipal infrastructure that supports economic development, climate resilience, and national security objectives. Potential opportunities are joint federal, territorial and municipal financing for expanded water and sewer services.

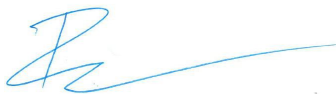
Strategic investments in Yellowknife's infrastructure enhances Canada's Arctic presence; supports Indigenous reconciliation by welcoming private investment from Indigenous development corporations and employing Indigenous peoples; and unlocks broader economic opportunities across the territory.

Conclusion

The City of Yellowknife is committed to working collaboratively with the GNWT to advance shared priorities. The transfer of Commissioner's Land is a foundational step toward enabling housing, economic development, and infrastructure renewal. We urge the GNWT to reflect these priorities in its next budget and look forward to continued partnership for the prosperity of all Northerners.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ben Hendriksen
Mayor of Yellowknife

CC: Hon. Premier R.J. Simpson
Hon. Jay Macdonald, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Hon. Vince McKay, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs
Hon. Caitlin Cleveland, Minister of Industry, Investment and Tourism
Sara Brown, CEO, NWT Associations of Communities
Stephen Van Dine, City Manager, City of Yellowknife

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Resolution			GNWT Department	GNWT Response
No	Title	Text		
2025-5	Land is Vital for Municipalities to Grow their Communities and Taxbase	<p>WHEREAS access to land is vital for municipalities to grow their communities and taxbase;</p> <p>AND WHEREAS the Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Environment and Climate Change administers Commissioners Land and the land transfer process to municipalities;</p> <p>AND WHEREAS municipalities understand and support any required duty to consult with affected Indigenous communities under section 35, of the Constitution Act of Canada, federal and territorial legislation implementing the United National Declaration of the Right of Indigenous Peoples as well as all modern and historic treaties in the territory.</p> <p>THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the NWTAS urge the Government of the Northwest Territories undertake on a priority bases, the work necessary to undertake legislative analysis, options development, and engagement with NWTAS and its members to amend all relevant legislation to expedite the timely, legitimate, and practical transfer of Commissioners land to willing municipalities; and</p> <p>BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED best efforts be made by the Government of the Northwest Territories to complete this work, including legislative changes, within the life of the 20th Legislative Assembly.</p>	ECC/MACA/FIN	<p>Supporting community governments with acquiring land requires support governments with acquiring land requires support from multiple GNWT departments.</p> <p>MACA supports community governments to review their land management governance tools, including community plan bylaws, zoning bylaws and land administration bylaws, to support their identification of land needs and land acquisition.</p> <p>Community governments that have identified land requirements for future growth areas, such as housing or new community public infrastructure, as part of their community plans, are applying to ECC for land tenure and transfer.</p> <p>In the 19th Assembly, ECC developed and shared its Process Guide and information on the bulk land transfer process with all tax-based community governments, as well as the Northwest Territories Association of Communities. ECC continues to make itself available to meet with community governments interested in initiating this process. Survey requirements, community zoning and bylaw development, as well as consultation are necessary steps to make sure there are appropriate legal authorities, governance, and administration systems and practices in place to acquire and dispose of land, and for the land to be legally registered under the name of the community. These requirements work to provide legal clarity associated with legal transfers of land to municipalities and prevent administrative issues for municipal governments, such as land disputes, titles issues, mortgage difficulties, etc.</p>