



October 11, 2018

**Dear Members and Allies;**

The NWT Disabilities Council Strives to educate, advocate and support persons with disabilities, their families, and communities. This is done to advance our vision that: *all individuals living with disability have equal access to full citizenship, as guaranteed under the Charter of Freedoms, toward the achievement of a self-determined, fulfilling and meaningful life.*

To this end, the NWT Disabilities Council has been carefully engaged in the current City of Yellowknife elections and pre-council activity as it pertains to accessibility and inclusion specifically. We have done this in previous election processes as well. Our goal is to provide information to enable informed choices and encourage the political mobilization of this disability community as an important avenue to advance our rights and citizenship.

**Why is this an important issue and how does this affect me as a resident or a business?**

Approximately 14% of the population lives with a disability. In Yellowknife, this is almost 3000 people. On average, a person living with a disability, directly and indirectly, impacts 9 other people. Whether you are an individual or business this is a significant number of people that are concerned with accessibility and inclusive communities.

According to Forbes, (May 2012), Businesses that have workforces made up of people with diverse abilities have increased and sustained patronage and better reflect the community they serve. "Contrary to sustained beliefs costs of accommodations are minimal and the benefits far outweigh the average cost of less than \$500.00... through retaining valuable employees, improving productivity and morale, reducing workers' compensation and training costs, and improving company diversity" (DuPaul University study, "Exploring the Bottom Line: A Study of the Costs and Benefits of Workers with Disabilities").

Tourism is a significant issue in every candidate's platform "The entire tourism system is defined by five elements: a traveller-generating region, a destination region, a transit region, a travel and tourism industry as well as the external environment." the six "A's",

which are regarded as essential for analysing tourism destinations are amenities, attractions, ancillary services, activities, available tourism packages and **accessibility** (Buhalis, 2000). In a recent cross-Canada survey, over **50%** of Canadians consider accessibility a significant factor when choosing their travel destination.

Retaining current residents, building new community capacity and promoting population growth, are all dependent on a fundamental incorporation of accessibility and direct address of social and cultural issues through meaningful consultation and collaboration (Integrated Community Sustainability Planning - A Background Paper; Organized by Prime Minister's External Advisory on Cities and Communities September 21-23, 2005). Furthermore, to establish a growing, creative, and vibrant community, accessibility must be a pillar in all areas of focus including: accessible and affordable housing, transportation and activities from social to political. Municipal governments play a critical leadership role in achieving these goals from the planning and policy stage to the development and implementation. This is evident in the recent Accessibility Audit for the City of Yellowknife. Whether you are a permanent resident or a tourist the ability to access the city and its properties and facilities is fundamental. The Accessibility Audit clearly illustrates core deficiencies that make most of the City of Yellowknife inaccessible to many. Considering that demographics, both in Yellowknife and across the globe, show significant growth in the aging population access has become equally as significant when people consider where to travel, settle down or retire. That said, accessibility is as much a consideration for youth and young families as diversity and inclusion of all groups to all activities is a core value in rating preferable communities in which to reside and work. (Census Profile, Government of Canada Census 2016)

Vibrant and sustainable communities are innovative, accessible and inclusive. Understanding this, let's look at the candidates.

## **Candidates for Mayor**

### **Mr. Adrian Bell**

From the beginning, Adrian Bell has sought out consultation with the NWT Disabilities Council. He requested to meet with me (Executive Director) to discuss the accessibility audit, homelessness, social issues and his platform. This meeting took place at a mutually agreeable location and Mr. Bell indicated he did not have a fixed headquarters to allow him to meet people where they were comfortable and accommodated. Mr. Bell had clearly read the full audit and was able to show a formidable understanding of the issues. As well, and most refreshing, was Mr. Bell's accountability for previous shortcomings of City Council in recognizing the significance in inaccessibility and a desire to move forward, with a collaboration of community partners with knowledge and experience, in the process of addressing these recommendations. As a result of this meeting, Mr. Bell came to speak to the Disabilities Council's AGM and approximately 70 people heard him speak to his commitment to accessibility and diverse communities. Even though he had a Mayoral debate that evening, he

remained to address questions from the audience, with special attention to a concern expressed regarding transportation and impact. His response showed knowledge and empathy.

Historically, Mr. Bell as a City Councilor during his terms Mr. Bell has been responsive to the Council engagement and sought clarification on issues and rendered comment with rationale.

During the debates I was able to ask a single question, from the floor, to all candidates which was: *Based on the importance from tourism to recruitment of workers and retention of citizens and building sustainable communities, how, with reference specifically to the Accessibility Audit released by the City of Yellowknife, would you address the inaccessibility of the City of Yellowknife's facilities and properties?*

Mr. Bell responded with a solid knowledge of the audit and specific references and impact. He went into an expansive explanation of the City of Yellowknife's record on accessibility and the impact of the audit on his own perceptions. He also indicated that he would work with community partners and experts as YK Council moved ahead to action.

Mr. Bell also gave specific and immediate practical and socially responsible actionable projects for addressing the social issues of homelessness. He has also published, through social media, specific emphasis on accessibility in this platform.

Mr. Bell has continued to engage with the Council to ask about on-going concerns and issues of relevance.

## **Ms. Rebecca Alty**

Ms. Alty has neither reached out to nor engaged with the NWT Disabilities Council. There have been concerns raised in regard to having an inaccessible headquarters for her campaign office. Ms. Alty addressed this through offering to meet people at alternate locations, which is somewhat concerning as it creates a dual system of access.

Historically, Ms. Alty, during her tenure as City Councilor, has not been responsive to inquiries or issues from the Disabilities Council except for one occasion in order to clarify a comment made at a City Council meeting.

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In response, Ms. Alty acknowledged the audit; however, she did not reference any specifics from the audit. Ms. Alty did say there was a plan to implement so that is what she would use.

Regarding homelessness, Ms. Alty refers to the 10-year plan on Homelessness by the City of Yellowknife and current programs.

## **Mr. Bob Stewart**

Mr. Stewart has neither reached out to nor engaged with the NWT Disabilities Council has not.

There is no reference that Mr. Stewart has served on City Council.

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Mr. Stewart did not appear to have any knowledge of the accessibility audit and his response was that accessibility is important and made specific reference to building ramps as a way.

Regarding homeless Mr. Stewart refers to the reallocation of current funding to create a building, with all services, located outside the downtown area.

## **Mr. Jerald Sibbeston**

Mr. Sibbeston reached out to me at the NWT Disabilities Council and we met. During this discussion, he stated that he was aware of the Yellowknife Accessibility Audit, but that he had not read either the full or abbreviated document. Mr. Sibbeston stated that he was interested in issues of accessibility and was animated and vocal in his displeasure with the seriousness of the issues; however, Mr. Sibbeston then spent time explaining his frustration with Council and giving his platform and describing how his campaign was evolving. Although sincere in his concern, Mr. Sibbeston's responses for address were primarily disjointed and unachievable which I expressed concern for at the time.

Subsequent to this, Mr. Sibbeston posted a recount of the meeting on social media, his Facebook, wherein there were inaccuracies to which I posted a formal response.

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*released by the City of Yellowknife, would you address the inaccessibility of the City of Yellowknife's facilities and properties?*

Mr. Sibbeston responded by referencing the actions of the current City Council and by directly referencing the Disabilities Council with a focus on the new planning of the new pool facility in Yellowknife. He did make reference to the audit but did not seem to have an increased knowledge of it even after our meeting.

Regarding homelessness, Mr. Sibbeston refers to setting up a unit outside of Yellowknife by Bristol Pit to administer a managed alcohol program and offer a place where people can stay. Mr. Sibbeston made a point that he is the only candidate to have visited the Sobering Centre and posted selfies with people accessing the shelter on his Facebook page. The NWT Disabilities Council had no knowledge or affiliation with this action.

## **Candidates for Council**

There is no specific information to attribute to any candidate for City Councilor regarding accessibility. The debates, due to the sheer number of participants and questions asked, rendered no additional relevant information.

### **However the following is presented as anecdotal information for consideration;**

**Mark Bogan** (for full transparency purposes; Mark is an employee of the Disabilities Council)  
Mr. Bogan discussed that social issues as important to him with a focus on homelessness. He is considered an ally to people with disabilities and their families.

### **Julian Morse**

During his tenure on City Council, Mr. Morse consistently engaged and was responsive with the NWT Disabilities Council extensively in discussion and writing. On several occasions he championed accessibility and openly asked questions and supported initiatives toward advancing inclusion and increasing accessibility. He is aware and knowledgeable regarding the audit. He is considered an ally for accessibility and people with disabilities and their families.

### **Shawna Morgan**

During her tenure on City Council, Ms. Morgan engaged both in person and in writing with the NWT Disabilities Council. She asked questioned and championed accessibility and inclusion. She is considered to be an ally to people with disabilities and their families.

**Above all the Council encourages all people to vote. If you or someone you know is having difficulty with registering to vote or needs assistance in accessing a polling station, please contact our office for assistance.**

**We present this information to assist in people making informed choices on issues that matter. In order to move toward a vibrant and sustainable community, diversity and quality of life are equally important and impactful as diversity in business and economy. In fact one cannot exist without the other.**

**ON OCTOBER 15th, PLEASE VOTE SMART!**

**Contact Information:**

**Visit our website: [www.nwtcd.net](http://www.nwtcd.net) or email: [admin@nwtcd.net](mailto:admin@nwtcd.net) or call us: 873-8230.**