

Progress Statement On The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation

Mr. Speaker, our entry into this Legislative Assembly just over a year ago seems a distant memory. Back then, having been a Minister for less than a couple of months, the learning curve was daunting and there were many things I needed to learn. The perception of how long ago those times were is reinforced even more by how much work we have done since then. Not only did I spend days, evenings and weekends reading binder after binder, I have expanded my housing knowledge the honest way, by travelling throughout our territory, into our rural and remote communities and talking with the people we represent. These visits allowed me the opportunity to hear first-hand the struggles people face in their attempt to obtain, retain, and maintain housing within their home communities.

We set a path for ourselves with the drafting of our mandate last year, and housing is a large part in realizing our mandate. The housing actions that we have implemented support all our priorities, but specifically Cost of Living and Community Safety and Wellness.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to provide you a progress report on housing activities over the past year.

In terms of homelessness supports, there have been many projects that have been initiated including the homeless forum to solicit needs and solutions in Yellowknife, which provided stakeholder-defined solutions to guide the road map action group lead by the City of Yellowknife. We provided support for the Housing First project operated by the Yellowknife Women's Society and the renovation of shelters to include semi-independent singles units. We are also converting vacant units into three four-plexes in communities to house singles and providing maintenance funding to support these units. We have

developed a housing survey and delivered it across the territory to solicit feedback into potential solutions. To date we have nearly 1200 replies. The housing survey will be used to identify areas of concern and to guide the revision of all our homelessness programming as part of the strategic program renewal the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation is conducting. We will be looking for ways to amend our policies and programming with the ultimate goal of ensuring residents have access to programs and supports to help them enter the housing market; and/or retain their housing units.

In terms of subsidized rental housing, investment continued to be made in the renovation and repair of the public housing stock. The modernization of our units especially through energy-efficient technologies, supports the overall sustainability of this important social infrastructure totaling over two thousand four hundred units. The replacement of old units with high energy consumption with multi-unit buildings that feature energy-efficient technologies such as photovoltaic solar panels, pellet boilers, and solar hot water heaters also helps to improve the sustainability of public housing and lower the cost of living for people.

The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation's homeownership repair programs support hundreds of projects a year from preventative maintenance, such as furnace servicing and water tank cleaning to emergency repair, energy-efficiency renovations, and renovations to improve accessibility. It is anticipated that the housing program renewal will explore ways to improve access to homeowners for support including repair and renovation services for seniors.

The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation implemented an enhanced communications and promotions campaign to raise greater awareness in seniors of the types of support and programming available to them. The most effective tool was direct marketing through visits to each community in the fall of 2016. As Members know, providing support so people can remain in their homes as long as possible assists in helping our seniors "Age in Place" and is a key priority in supporting Community Safety and Wellness.

Another action on this priority is the development of seniors' independent housing nineplexes that are targeted to seniors with low-to-modest income. These facilities are designed for independent living, but also have common areas to promote programming and socialization. These units are critical contributions to the social infrastructure for communities, enabling Elders to remain in their home communities where they have the support of their friends and families.

We also continued to make progress in disposing of surplus units with 55 units disposed of to-date and with full expectation that the 2016-2017 target of 89 units: 34 disposed through sales and 55 through demolition will be reached. Recognizing that these units hold residual value and may be of interest to individuals or local organizations, units for disposal are now listed on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation website. The disposal of these surplus units will free up land and resources that can be reinvested into housing supports. The demolition of surplus units will also provide an opportunity to train people regarding the removal of hazardous material so that we can hire local people and create employment in small communities.

Mr. Speaker, energy efficiency is important to the sustainability and longevity of our housing programs. Given our high cost of utilities, and our cold environment, we are building to a higher standard than southern jurisdictions. As such, the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation has been leading the way, using energy efficient building practices and piloting alternative energy sources. All of our new construction meets or exceeds the high-energy efficiency standard of EnerGuide 80. This year we have invested \$850 thousand dollars in energy efficient projects including solar, insulation and other energy upgrades on multi-unit public housing buildings. For fiscal year 2017-2018 our Capital Plan includes \$4.8 million dollars in investments in energy efficient components and upgrades.

We also partnered with the Arctic Energy Alliance in supporting their LED lighting project, and the upcoming fiscal year will see us investing \$200 thousand to continue to support the LED initiative for its public housing units. These actions will help reduce CO2 emissions and associated fuel costs for both existing housing units and future construction projects.

Having accessible, timely and responsive property management services is important to our residents who access our rental programs. I am pleased to report that this year; we have opened new Local Housing Organizations in the communities of Fort Liard, Gameti and Whati. Residents can now go down the street in these communities and talk with a housing manager, get counselled one-on-one on housing finances, or speak to their maintenance officer about issues they might have.

Mr. Speaker, over the past year, I have learned a lot about the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation's programs and policies and the impact these have for residents. All the while, housing programs and services have continued to be delivered with our overarching mandate ever-present and informing our actions. Once the information from our engagement survey is all in and has been analyzed, I will be moving aggressively to revise and/or develop policy and program responses to address identified needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.