

RIDING REPORT WHITEHORSE CENTRE

SUMMER 2011

YOUR VOICE IN THE COMMUNITY AND LEGISLATURE



Liz Hanson

Leader and MLA Whitehorse Centre

I am the NDP critic for:

- Economic Development
- Environment
- Executive Council Office
- Finance
- French Language Services
- Health and Social Services
- Public Service Commission
- Tourism and Culture
- Women's Directorate
- Youth Directorate

Housing Shortage Must Be Addressed

The lack of safe, healthy and affordable housing is one of the most important issues facing Yukon today.

The rental vacancy rate in Whitehorse is near zero. The waiting lists for social housing are long, and growing longer by the day. Rents and house prices have soared sky high. And land availability for housing is failing to keep pace with the demand.

In the midst of a housing crisis things will only get worse as our economy attracts more people to Yukon looking for work in mining and other sectors of our economy.

The Yukon New Democratic Party proposes to address this problem systematically and conscientiously and to make affordable and adequate housing a reality in the territory. We recommend allocating the needed resources and working in collaboration with all the other partners to reduce the housing deficit.

We want to see Yukon Housing Corporation returned to its proper role and expanding and renovating its stock of social and other housing.

Studies show it costs more money to provide government services to the homeless than it does to those who are housed, even when the costs of providing affordable housing are included.

They also show that housing deprivation during childhood and adulthood contributed to severe or moderate ill health at age 33, and an increased likelihood of experiencing infectious disease, especially respiratory diseases, which equal high health care costs.

Addressing the shortage of safe, affordable and adequate housing in Yukon communities must involve all levels of government, as well as the private sector and non-government organizations, if we are serious about closing the gaps in our housing needs.

The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition's Housing Task Force has identified the need for "collaborative approaches, improved communication, public awareness, leadership and specific action across the housing spectrum: emergency shelter, transitional housing, housing with long-term supports, rental housing and affordable home ownership."

Yukon New Democrats recognize that housing is a human right, and safe, secure and affordable housing should be available to all citizens. Together we have the ability to solve the housing crisis.

By risking innovation and trying some of the solutions used in other jurisdictions, we believe it is possible to find more solutions, provide more homes and realize less costs to our health care and justice systems.



Yukon needs a comprehensive housing strategy.

Public Forum

The NDP caucus is hosting a public discussion on May 25 on the findings of the Task Force on Acutely Intoxicated Persons at Risk. Dr. Bruce Beaton and Chief James Allen, co-authors of the task force's report, will provide their personal views on their findings and invite you to share your views on how the report can be implemented.

The task force was established by the Minister of Health as part of the response to the in-custody death of Raymond Silverfox.

An underlying theme from the task force report is that the least we should expect from those responsible for the care of these individuals, when they are not able to care for themselves, is to treat them with compassion, respect and dignity.

The issues raised by Dr. Beaton and Chief Allen strike at some of the core assumptions we make about the most vulnerable people in our community. The report is thought-provoking. It offers some real alternatives to the current costly and ineffective means of responding to acutely intoxicated persons at risk.

Dr. Beaton and Chief Allen looked at how other Canadian communities respond to the acutely intoxicated; their report incorporates recommendations based on the evidence-based research and experience elsewhere.

Among other things, the task force recommended building a new sobering centre and medical detox in the downtown core, changing the Yukon Liquor Act, building a permanent shelter and supported housing.

It also urged the government to implement their recommendations as a way to alleviate the staffing and physical resource crisis in the emergency department at Whitehorse General Hospital, where chronic alcoholics picked up on our streets by the RCMP are taken today.

To date, the government's response to the task force's report has been disappointing. The decision to eliminate the RCMP 'drunk tank', and replacing it with a secure assessment centre at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, actually runs counter to what Dr. Beaton and Chief Allen recommended.

Liz Hanson
MLA, Whitehorse Centre

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Whitehorse MLA Liz Hanson invites all to a
PUBLIC FORUM on the Task Force on Acutely Intoxicated Persons at Risk
with Dr. Bruce Beaton and Chief James Allen
Wednesday, May 25 at 7:00pm at L'AFY Centre (302 Strickland) Info: 393-7050

WE'RE WORKING FOR YOU

Growing the Mining Industry in Yukon - A School for Mining

The Yukon New Democratic Party believes that there is more that can be done to support the growth of a progressive mining industry in Yukon.

And there is a need to review the current royalty and revenue regimes to ensure that Yukon can continue to support both the massive public infrastructure investments, the roads, the bridges and access to power that numerous active mining developments will require and the population growth that will be a result of increased economic activity.

These same revenue streams can be directed to other needed infrastructure as well. Investing in a plan to develop a school of mines and mining technology is an investment the Yukon New Democratic Party supports.

Many of the mining jobs here today are going to people who live outside the territory. They are 'commuting' from their homes in Alberta, British Columbia and elsewhere in Canada to exploration camps and mine sites in the territory. In the not too distant future, these workers could be coming from as far away as China. These workers, for the most part, pay taxes and spend their paycheques in other regions, rather than here in Yukon.

We need to do more now to reduce this loss to our economic future.

We need to do more now to provide Yukoners with training and educational opportunities.

There are a hundred and twenty distinct job titles in the mining field and Yukoners could be filling many more of these positions than they do today.

Low-flying Helicopters A Dangerous Nuisance

If you find the helicopters practicing training and certification flights over the downtown core for three months every spring disruptive, and even dangerous, I would like to hear from you.

During the spring sitting of the Legislative Assembly, I tried to raise this issue with the minister of Community Services; his response was dismissive, suggesting that any change to current practice would mean moving or closing Erik Nielsen International Airport. This is not a common-sense approach to a reasonable request for action by Yukon citizens.

I think Minister Archie Lang needs to take this issue more seriously, because these low-level flights occur seven days a week, from early mornings to early in the evenings. An unintended consequence of the current mining exploration boom is an increase in helicopter firms. I was asked by Whitehorse Centre residents to explore alternatives to flights off the clay cliffs over the downtown area; as the city looks at higher density, including building taller buildings near the escarpment, this issue will need to be addressed.

The helicopters create noise and fumes. But they also pose a potential public safety issue as the training occurs over homes, busy streets, schools, businesses and parks. Many people living in this riding would like to see them curtailed, or even stopped.

At the very least, the minister should meet with the helicopter companies operating out the airport to see whether these flights can be done somewhere else or limited to weekdays and normal working hours.

Modernizing the Free Entry Mining System - Updating the Quartz Mining Act

Mineral staking near populated areas is becoming more and more common across Yukon.

Increased mining exploration and mining activity in Yukon has re-emphasized the need to modernize the free-entry system, found within the *Quartz Mining Act* and *Placer Mining Act*, and dating back to the early 1900s.

The free-entry system has created the conflict that exists between those people living on Dawson City's Dome Road and a placer mining operation.

The free-entry system fails to measure the impact of claims staked along sections of our world-class Mount McIntyre ski trails.

This year, the residents of Golden Horn and Spruce Hill country-residential subdivisions learned that a junior mineral exploration company staked 56 mineral claims on the southern fringe of Whitehorse. Most of the claims are within city limits but 24 reach further south into Golden Horn.

"How many more land use conflicts is the minister of Energy, Mines and Resources prepared to tolerate before we look at changing the free-entry approach to something a little more suited to modern times?" NDP leader Liz Hanson asked in the Legislative Assembly.

The *Quartz Mining Act* allows any company, or any person over the age of 18, to stake a mineral claim on private and public lands. This grants the right to access the property, and prospect and mine for minerals within that claim. The exceptions are very few, and include protected areas, farms and under residences, leaving about 80 per cent of the territory open to staking.



Mining has a long and rich history in Yukon.

The principle behind the free entry system is that mining is the first and best use of land, above all other values and purposes. Governments, whether territorial or municipal, have little or no power to refuse a claim.

There is no requirement for prior consultation, or compensation, when acquiring mineral rights. Nowhere in this process is there a point where the public can question or review the staking. This antiquated system undermines modern planning processes.

It creates unnecessary friction and anxiety and leads to conflicts that could easily be avoided if the legislation was changed to reflect more modern ideas of mineral staking.

Mining companies need certainty.

Yukoners need certainty.

The Yukon New Democratic Party believes modernizing the *Quartz Mining Act* and *Placer Mining Act* will provide the certainty that's needed to support Yukon's long-term interest in a sustainable economic future.