

Yellowknife Community Plan Update - Why It Matters and Why Your Voice Is Needed

The City of Yellowknife is currently undertaking a comprehensive update of its Community Plan. The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce has participated in the public engagement portion, and we do not feel the direction we've seen accurately reflects the conversations we were a part of.

We are therefore asking our members and concerned residents to get involved by signing our petition, to add their voices to ours and make clear our expectations for the new Community Plan

What is a Community Plan?

Under the Community Planning and Development Act, the Government of the Northwest Territories requires all municipal governments to prepare a formal Community Plan. The Act defines a Community Plan as a document that "provides a policy framework to guide the physical development of a municipality, having regard to sustainability, the environment, and the economic, social and cultural development of the community."

Community Plans must be updated at least every eight years. Each new plan is to be informed by extensive public and stakeholder consultation.

Can Community Plans be Changed After they are Adopted?

A new Community Plan takes effect by being adopted as a bylaw by City Council. Theoretically, like all bylaws, Community Plans can be amended should the need arise. But in practice, Yellowknife City Hall and Council have been reluctant to amend them.

One reason often cited is that Community Plans involve extensive public engagement during their creation, and the same level of engagement is not typically repeated in the case of amendments.

In our view, this rigid approach ignores the true purpose of a Community Plan, which is to act as a policy framework, not a detailed workplan of exactly what will be developed and when. But regardless of our view, recognizing City Hall's rigid approach, the Chamber consider it critically important that Council gets the Plan right in the first place.

If action is not taken now, the city risks adopting another problematic plan, one that may remain in place for up to eight years without a meaningful opportunity for change.



How Have Things Gone Wrong in the Past?

The principal failing of the last two Community Plans is that they have not identified numerous enough and large enough swaths of land to meet demand for new housing in Yellowknife.

Over the past fifteen years, the City of Yellowknife has frequently experienced periods where the city has been “sold out” of land. This has contributed to:

- Ongoing housing shortages
- Increased difficulty for employers recruiting and retaining staff
- Increased reliance on “fly-in, fly-out” employment, which leads to dollars earned in Yellowknife bypassing our local economy.
- Reduced options for families seeking to upsize or seniors seeking to downsize
- Increased competition for re-sale homes and unsustainable home price inflation

The City’s lack of developable land has also made it impossible to sustain a local home-building sector. In order to put down roots in Yellowknife, home builders not only need land on which to build today, they need certainty about the pace of more land being brought to market tomorrow, and for years to come. When the local homebuilding sector shuts down, as has happened in Yellowknife, property owners seeking to build are forced to rely on southern builders and in some cases southern subcontractors.

In effect, our last two Community Plans have failed to adequately ensure the economic and social development objectives they were intended to advance – two of the most important requirements of a Community Plan.

The Underlying Cause of the Problem

The City of Yellowknife’s practice of selling out of land and failing to bring new land to market is not necessarily accidental or the result of poor planning. The current Community Plan, adopted in 2020, includes statements of values and principles that not only make it acceptable to sell out of land, they portray selling out of land as strategically valuable. In the interests of shaping Yellowknife into a more densely-built city, the 2020 Community Plan made it very clear that new, “greenfield” areas would not be opened up for development until vacant land within the build environment had been adequately developed (see Planning and Development Objectives 1 and 2 on [page 94](#)).



While the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce understands the benefits of ensuring that development happens in a compact manner, it disagrees that this objective should be pursued to the exclusion of all other forms of development. The reality is that most homeowners desire a mix of housing options, which cannot be provided adequately through intensification and infill.

In the 2000s, Yellowknife adhered to a more balanced set of “Smart Growth” principles, which aimed to ensure that 50% of growth was accommodated through infill, while the other 50% was the result of greenfield development. These two forms of development were not intended to be sequenced on after the other - with greenfield development being pursued only after infill had been completed – they were to be pursued simultaneously. The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce urges City Council to return to this more balanced approach to Smart Growth development.

Why it is Important for Folks to Sign our Petition

The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce has been involved in the public engagement portion of the Community Plan update from the very start, and we have seen signs that the new plan will very much follow the same problematic direction, with the same principles and values, as the 2020 Community Plan.

We have done our best to object to this, and to share the perspectives of the business community, but we do not feel that our voice has been adequately considered. We recently met with City Hall officials to express our concerns, and they made it clear to us that the vision for the new Community Plan is not yet set in stone – they invited us to gather more feedback from our members to ensure that our views are adequately considered.

Our Specific Requests of City Hall and City Council:

1. Build and Maintain a Multi-Year Land Inventory

Given the long lead times required to bring land to market, the City should work proactively to build up and maintain an inventory of developable land sufficient to meet at least three years of anticipated demand. This approach would allow for adjustments if demand shifts and would prevent reactive land management.

This buffer of available land has been missing for the last fifteen years and has resulted in the City being constantly behind the eight ball. We would like to see this new approach specifically detailed in the Community Plan



2. Set Clear Housing Targets

The Community Plan should identify specific targets for the number and types of housing units to be delivered in both infill and greenfield areas.

3. Commit to a Balanced Growth Model

The Plan should formally adopt a target of approximately 50% greenfield and 50% infill development to meet projected housing demand and for it to be simultaneous.

4. Plan Beyond the Eight-Year Cycle

Although Community Plans are reviewed every eight years, responsible planning requires a longer-term perspective. As part of the public engagement process for the new Plan, residents have been asked to describe their hopes for Yellowknife over the next 25 years. The Community Plan should provide guidance aligned with that same long-term horizon, outlining how and where the City intends to grow and evolve well beyond the initial eight-year cycle.

A Plan That Supports Growth and Stability

A Community Plan is not merely a planning document. It is an economic framework that shapes housing availability, investment certainty, and long-term community stability.

Now is the time to ensure the new Plan reflects the realities facing Yellowknife today and the aspirations we share for tomorrow.

We encourage you to sign the petition and help ensure our community's future is built on balanced, proactive, and responsible planning.

To sign the petition and share your feedback, please visit our page [here](#).

