



## Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce

### 2024 Advocacy Priorities

The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce (YK Chamber) supports and informs our city's business community to shape dialogue and identify issues of concern to member businesses. The YK Chamber also engages elected officials at all levels of government to ensure business interests are heard.

#### List of Priorities:

Labour Shortages

Aurora College Transformation Project

Visitors Services and Tourism

Downtown Revitalization

Emergency Preparedness and Continuity Planning

Resource Sector

Airport Revolving Fund and Airport Revitalization

Service Standards at the City of Yellowknife

## Labour Shortages

In the Northwest Territories (NWT), labour shortages have emerged as a pressing, if not the most pressing concern for businesses. The issue is complex and far-reaching and thus we will focus our advocacy on two issues related to labour shortages: housing/land and immigration.

### Housing and land availability

Yellowknife is grappling with a housing shortage, a situation complicated by limited construction capacity and high construction costs in the north. In the face of rising demand, the availability of affordable and suitable housing options has become a critical issue. In Yellowknife, the lack of land availability on which to build new housing is exacerbating the problem.

#### Land availability

Yellowknife needs more land brought to market to support development. The lack of land on which to develop has led to stagnated growth.

- The GNWT should expedite the transfer of all lands within the municipal boundary, under the administration and control of the Commissioner of the NWT, to the City of Yellowknife.
- If there are reasons why a wholesale transfer of land cannot happen within a reasonable timeframe, the City needs to pursue partial transfers in the interim.
- The City of Yellowknife needs to move more quickly to bring lands already under its control to market.

#### Long term housing strategy at the municipal level

A lack of land availability has led to the contraction of the home-building sector.

- The City should adopt a long-term land development approach, giving home builders the confidence in future land supply that they require to put down roots in Yellowknife and to invest in building their businesses.
- Support strategies to bolster skilled trades in the construction industry.

## Immigration

Foreign workers and immigrants are a critical source of workers and entrepreneurs for our economy. In early 2023, the Yellowknife Chamber formed an immigration sub-committee with

the dual mandate of education and advocacy. Through this committee the YK Chamber has advocated for improved immigration programs that work within the northern context.

#### Increase immigration


- The language requirement (management English level mandated) is out of touch with reality, business should be able to determine the required level of language fluency – the government should not regulate this.
- An equivalent to the Seasonal Agricultural Workers program is needed for the tourism industry (also largely seasonal employment) or a program similar to the Agri-Food Pilot that is a northern program designed to address the labor needs of Canada's north. This could provide yet another pathway to permanent residence.

#### Address retention

- Fast track high-skilled certifications for new immigrants (red seal, mechanics etc.).
- Advertise/emphasize education benefits to living in the north (money for college/university). Is there a way to backdate this for immigrants?
- IRCC settlement services ought to be available for all new arrivals to Canada not just Permanent Residents.

## Aurora College Transformation project

The YK Chamber maintains that the transformation of Aurora College into a Polytechnic institution is one of Yellowknife's biggest and most achievable economic diversification projects. We have always been pro-transition and pro-job-creation-in-the-post-secondary-education sector and will keep abreast of conversations occurring at the municipal and territorial levels to ensure the project moves forward to realize its full potential including:

- Labour force skills development
  - Advancement of the knowledge economy
  - Business incubation
  - Economic development through academic research and infrastructure spending
  - Attraction of national and global talent
  - Retention of local students
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## Visitors Services and Tourism

Tourism contributes to the revenue of the NWT in several ways, both directly and indirectly through direct spending, taxes and fees, and job creation.

- The municipal government should enact a hotel levy as soon as possible although more work is required around how Air B&Bs/short term rentals will fit into the picture.
- The municipal and territorial government need to address issues of safety for both residents and visitors including expanding the Municipal Enforcement Division's policing powers, increasing visibility of uniformed patrols, and further funding for the street outreach program.
- The Yellowknife Visitor Centre should be a hub for visitors, an attractive place to visit in a highly visible and accessible area. A governance model is needed as soon as possible to pave the way for a third party to take over its running. We also continue to ask questions about the effectiveness and advantages of its current location.

## Downtown revitalization

A vibrant and safe downtown is an asset to the entire City of Yellowknife, attracting visitors and people moving to our city to build their careers, start a family or enjoy the quality of life we can offer. We need to ensure all residents and visitors feel secure and welcome in downtown Yellowknife.

- The YK Chamber will engage in downtown business-specific advocacy including the creation of a Business Improvement Association Committee which will focus on beautification, promotion, and capital improvements.
- Safety issues need to be addressed (reference point number two under the Visitors and Tourism advocacy).

## Emergency Preparedness and continuity planning

Emergency preparedness and continuity planning are essential in Yellowknife to mitigate the risks associated with its geographic isolation and increasing environmental challenges. By proactively identifying hazards, developing response strategies, and building community resilience, Yellowknife can enhance its ability to protect lives, property, and the environment during emergencies and maintain essential services and functions in the face of adversity.

- The YK Chamber will be an active participant in lessons learned-gathering exercises to ensure that experience of the business community is included in after-action assessments, including but not limited to:

- How industry contributed to fire breaks and other activities based in Yellowknife prior to and during the evacuation. The processes that were fruitful ought to be formalized within the emergency plan,
- How were businesses deemed essential, is there a standing list, how might a business be included on this list?

## Resource sector

The Resource sector in the NWT plays a crucial role in both the economy and the cultural landscape of the region. Beyond economic benefits, mining in the NWT has provided employment opportunities, particularly for Indigenous communities, and has contributed to infrastructure development, capacity building, and government revenues. “Despite its long history, the future for mining in the NWT is unclear. In less than 10 years, it is conceivable that all three diamond mines will be closed (Diavik in 2026, Gahcho Kué by 2030, Ekati by 2028”<sup>1</sup>.

- The Territorial government needs to develop a strategy to address what comes next for the NWT in terms of the resource sector.
- The YK Chamber will work with other chambers to advocate for an effective regulatory regime which ensures a responsible resource sector that positively contributes to the socio-economic needs of Yellowknife and its residents while protecting the environment and residents.
- Continued support for large infrastructure investments in the territory to allow for more resource exploration.
- Remediation jobs and money ought to be kept in the north. Challenges experienced by northern businesses when bidding on associated projects/jobs ought to be addressed while supporting northern businesses in the development of the competencies required to do the work.

## Airport Revolving Fund and Airport revitalization

Yellowknife's airport presents a host of economic opportunities that stem from its strategic location in the heart of Canada's North. The airport, as a critical transportation hub, facilitates not only passenger travel but also the movement of goods and resources, supporting various sectors like mining, natural resource exploration, and tourism.

- We will continue to push for accountability and oversight to ensure the airport improvement fee is put towards capital improvements (as was the stated purpose of this fund) and not just used to support operations and maintenance.

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<sup>1</sup> [Eyes Wide Open \(Executive Summary Oct 31 2023\) short version \(miningnorth.com\)](#)



## Service Standards at the City of Yellowknife

The City of Yellowknife ought to encourage development by implementing policies and practices that streamline processes, reduce bureaucracy, and promote efficiency while maintaining necessary regulations and safeguards.

- Yellowknife City Council should direct administration to prioritize establishing service standards that are relevant to the business community (ex. development permits, business licensing) to ensure timelines promote growth and development and do not contribute to delays.