

Backgrounder

Report Outlines Opportunities for new NWT Economic Strategy

Background

The need for a strategy to diversify and strengthen the NWT economy was recognized by the 17th Legislative Assembly in its vision: Believing in People and Building on the Strength of Northerners.

In the spirit of collaboration embraced by its Members, work to prepare this strategy – the NWT Economic Opportunities Strategy – began in November 2012 under the direction of the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment and guided by a partnered Governance Committee comprised of the NWT Chamber of Commerce, the Northern Aboriginal Business Association, the NWT Association of Communities, Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and the GNWT's Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

An independent four-member Economic Opportunities Advisory Panel was tasked with engaging NWT residents, the private sector, governments and other key stakeholders in a series of discussions on the economy. Over 100 specific invitations and opportunities were provided to NWT residents and organizations to meet and speak with Panel Members

Public Engagements

Between December 2012 and February 2013 the Advisory Panel held over 80 public forums and meetings in all regions of the NWT. They encouraged residents to speak frankly about barriers and challenges but, most importantly, asked for their suggestions about economic opportunities.

The participation of the NWT Association of Communities enabled representatives from outlying communities to travel to meetings in regional centres and to contribute to an overall understanding of economic circumstances and opportunities throughout the NWT.

Input was also received on-line (website and social media) and in separate written submissions. (A summary record of all of these meetings is available: www.NWTOpportunities.com.)

The Panel engagements were supported by a significant communications campaign incorporating both traditional and social media sources.

Advisory Panel's Report

The Advisory Panel's Report is: a reporting of what people had to say; it includes informed observations based on the perspectives and expertise of individual Panel members; and provides recommendations to guide the drafting of the final Economic Opportunities Strategy

The Advisory Panel's Report compiles and presents the results of the Panel's engagements and discussions under five broad themes:

- Renewable Resources and Small Business
- Non Renewable Resources
- Our Most Important Resource: People
- Infrastructure
- Government Programs and Support

Following each theme, recommendations are provided. In total, there are 90 recommendations.

Development of Economic Opportunities Strategy

The process of drafting the final EOS has now begun under the guidance of the EOS Governance Committee. In its presentation to the Committee, the EOS Advisory Panel highlighted five key "overarching" messages for the Governance Committee as it develops its Strategy:

- People are essential – the NWT cannot grow its economy with a stagnant population. Similarly, community wellness will be reflected in a healthy economy;
- The NWT's potential, as it is represented in renewable and non-renewable resources, is largely unrealized – as are its people;
- Economic incentives must begin with local entrepreneurs and community based businesses that provide sustainability and growth in community economies;
- Economic opportunities and development must be considered and measured according to the benefits provided to the NWT and its people; and
- The NWT's dependence on southern resources and people is not conducive to the economic health of the NWT. NWT Residents were unified in their desire to realize more effective uses for northern resources like power, wood pellets, farm produce, fish – and especially people.

It is anticipated that the NWT Economic Opportunities Strategy will be drafted by the early August and delivered to the Minister of ITI this fall for tabling during the Legislative Assembly's October sitting.

EOS Advisory Panel – Biographies

Joseph L. Handley (Chair)

Mr. Handley joined the Government of the NWT in 1985 and served as Deputy Minister in a wide number of portfolios including: Education; Renewable Resources; the NWT Housing Corporation; Transportation; and Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development. In 1999, he was elected to the NWT Legislative Assembly and became Minister of Finance, Chair of the Financial Management Board, Minister Responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board, Minister of Transportation, and Minister Responsible for the NWT Power Corporation. In 2003, Mr. Handley was re-elected to the Legislative Assembly and became Premier until he retired from territorial politics in 2007.

Gordon Van Tighem

Born in Calgary, Alberta, Mr. Van Tighem is a graduate of the University of Manitoba. He moved to Yellowknife from Edmonton in 1992 with his family to work in a senior position at a bank. In October 2000, Mr. Van Tighem was elected Mayor for Yellowknife and held this position until his retirement in 2012.

Heather Bourassa

Ms. Bourassa was born and raised in the NWT. The family business, Arctic Circle Enterprises Ltd., was formed in 1998 and received its first contract in 2000. Besides working as a full-time co-owner of the company, Ms. Bourassa also takes part in many community boards. She has served as a Director of the Yamoga Land Corporation for five years and President for one year. Ms. Bourassa also held a position as Director of North-Wright Airways, and mostly recently as the Chair for the Sahtu Land Use Planning Board.

Rory Campbell

Mr. Campbell began his career in the Alberta government as a Cabinet Committee Secretary in the Premier's office in 1979. Over the next three decades, he held progressive leadership roles in a wide range of Alberta Ministries, before becoming Alberta's Deputy Minister of Economic Development in 2003, and Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food in 2006. Mr. Campbell retired from the Government of Alberta in 2008.