



March 29, 2016

Dear Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories:

Re: Ingredients of a Sustainable Community

Late in 2015, as a member of the Council of Canadians, Alternatives North, and Ecology North, I was invited to organize and facilitate a public event on sustainable communities in the North. Subsequently, an “Ingredients of a Sustainable Community Roundtable” was held on January 21, 2016, at the Prince of Wales Northern Visitors Centre. Presenters included the Executive Director of the NWT Association of Communities, the Mayor of Yellowknife, representatives from Yellowknife Community Gardens Collective, Ecology North, and the NWT Biomass Energy Association. The event was a volunteer effort, and I know attendees from the public greatly appreciated the informed presentations, and the opportunity to offer their insights and perspectives.

Roundtable presenters and audience members made a number of recommendations and suggestions and hoped that these would be shared with decision makers. This letter summarizes these thoughts in the hope that you will: 1) consider them in your deliberations on best actions for building sustainable northern communities, and 2) share and promote them with others, as appropriate. It would be appropriate for you to consider these points in your budget deliberations.

Roundtable participants recognized that not every community across our vast territory and cultures is 'at the same place,' so actions and priorities will vary - one size does not fill all. They also acknowledged that communities must lead and be supported in efforts to respond to social, economic, and environmental needs for true sustainability to be achieved. Some also recommended that the 'triple bottom line' should be expanded to include a fourth element – culture and art. Two other themes were: 1) actions must respond to the challenging context of our rapidly changing climate; and 2) the action of localizing community economies - where basic needs will be largely met from local and primarily renewable resources as opposed to from imports from afar - serves the triple/quadruple bottom line well and strengthens wellness, identity, and self-sufficiency.

In the list of recommendations and suggestions, you can see that Roundtable participants' ideas are grounded in an understanding that every action must respond to bottom line requirements outlined above. Finally, participants were not solely focused on what should be done; they fully acknowledged the importance of process, planning (the how), and governance in achieving community sustainability. Ideas offered are listed below.

Governance and Planning

- The City of Yellowknife has applied a triple bottom line lens to its budget process but social sustainability remains a weak pillar and requires a renewed focus. This is a lesson for all governments.
- Systems approaches work (e.g., to developing a local food system) but local people must own and control the system.
- NWT communities are underfunded by 40%. Funding arrangements must change so that communities can build capacity and plan for the longer-term.
- Each community needs a sustainability plan but funding is needed to continue developing and implementing these plans.
- To develop an energy plan, energy use data are needed. However, in the NWT, there is no legal requirement for fuel suppliers to produce sales data (as is now required in California, for example) so it can be difficult to ascertain the baseline data needed for energy planning.
- Due to legislative gaps, municipalities are constrained in that they cannot provide incentives to improve sustainability. For example, the current Community Towns and Villages Act does not allow municipalities to finance local improvements on residential properties (e.g., that are tied to the property and paid back through property tax).
- Mentors can be a valuable resource for stimulating needed behavioural changes to make our communities sustainable.
- Initially, planning for community sustainability should focus on meeting the basic need for housing, food, energy, water, health, education, social networks, and happiness. Local economic development will naturally arise from this approach.
- Recommendations and insights from the book *Happy City* <http://www.charlesmontgomery.ca/> should be considered by all northerners.

Economic

- Public programs and policies need to be shifted so they support localized economies that use renewable energies, local food systems, and local labour and expertise.
- The GNWT's agricultural strategy needs to build on community gardening efforts that are taking place in every NWT community and Northern Farm Training Institute's work as well as support community champions.

- For every \$1 spent on diesel oil, about \$0.90 leaves the local economy. Locally harvested renewable energies could reverse this ratio, keeping much need resources circulating in local economies.

- Many small opportunities can create diverse, equitable, and meaningful benefits for residents that exceed those reaped from a single large project.

Social

- Thriving sustainable communities emphasize: 1) early childhood development, 2) parenting skills training, and 3) addictions awareness and treatment.

- Community cooking classes and information sessions are ingredients of sustainable communities.

- In sustainable communities, children and youth know there are many options available to help them meet their goals.

Environmental

- An Efficiency and Standards Act may improve energy efficiencies.

- The GNWT should focus infrastructure discussions with the Government of Canada on energy efficiency, green infrastructure, and green transportation options.

-Promotion and supportive policy and infrastructure are needed to facilitate 'active, green ways' of getting around the community and recreating (e.g., biking, walking, skiing, snowshoeing).

- Policies and supports for community-owned and/or cooperative community energy systems are needed.

-More focused policy and action are needed to conserve our water and look after our oceans.

Cultural

-Arts and culture need to be included as a fourth lens for growing sustainable communities.

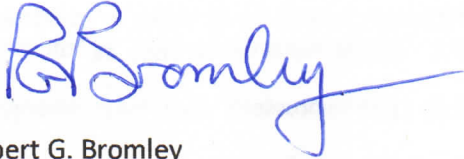
-When/if the GNWT contemplates cuts, it is critical that the arts be protected.

-Support is needed to encourage indigenous food systems and to make these connections with cultural revitalization efforts (e.g., perhaps entrench traditional conservation and management efforts in law).

Clearly, many of these suggestions are not considered sufficiently in place today, and all would benefit from targeted federal, territorial, and municipal legislative, regulatory, and policy development.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to seeing progressive work acting on the opportunities that are available to us to make NWT communities truly sustainable.

Sincerely yours,



Robert G. Bromley

c.c.

NWT Association of Communities

City of Yellowknife

Yellowknife Community Garden Collective

Ecology North

NWT Biomass Energy Association