

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE

Housing Needs Surveys & Planning

Committee of the Whole—2016-2017 Operating Budget Review

NWT Housing Corporation—June 15, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister tell me what sort of surveys (will be carried out) and how that relates to the five-year housing needs surveys that are conducted by the NWT Housing Corporation? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the needs assessment that's done, for example the 2014 needs assessment that was done last, is done every five years. That is used throughout, nationally, actually, and that defines the core need that people advocate within that, 30 per cent of your income going to housing, et cetera. So that's a national tool that we utilize to kind of determine where we are on par with the other regions.

The survey that we're seeking to send out is really about individual choices and individual needs. The biggest thing that stuck out for me is Aboriginal governments asking me for culturally appropriate housing. The 2014 needs assessment does not identify anything around culturally appropriate housing, and so I need to find out more information on that from the people from the communities so that we are providing appropriate housing within their communities, not based on a national survey but actually on what each community says they want to see. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the Minister for helping me to understand the difference between these two tools that the Housing Corp is going to be using. I'm still trying to understand how the current surveys that are going to be sent out, is there going to be questions around costs to bring housing stock up to or out of core need? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you Mr. O'Reilly. Minister

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We will not be asking in the survey what they think the cost, what they would need to bring it up to core need. We will, however, be asking what their incomes are to assess whether they are in core need. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So the survey will ask questions about affordability in terms of income, I guess, of some communities. I am not quite sure how--what that level of detail, but how about the other two aspects of core need: Suitability and adequacy? How are those aspects to be reflected in the survey that's to be undertaken? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, so what we will be doing is providing them kind of a background that says based on the 2014 needs assessment within your community, this is what we identify as the needs, and then we will be asking the communities based on those and saying can you

prioritize what your needs are within that, and are there other needs that we haven't addressed. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So as I understand it then, in this work that's going to be done as early as this summer, there will be questions around suitability, adequacy, and affordability. I'm just wondering, I fully understand the need to have community-based housing plans, but if that information is not rolled up in some way at a territorial level, how can there be a plan, a budget to actually do the work to get our housing out of core need, and to roll that up does require some level of consistency in terms of soliciting information. I'm not suggesting that one size is going to fit all in terms of the plan, but if you don't have a consistent way of asking questions and identifying these--the core need and costing it somehow, how do you roll it up at the territorial level to develop a proper budget or a plan? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the surveys that will go out actually will be the exact same for each community. The questions will be the exact same. It will just be the answers that we're looking at compiling and dividing that on communities.

So for example, if I asked Yellowknife and said what would be your priority for this year and they said--I'm just giving examples--and they said for our community, we want a seniors' home, and I asked Whati on what their priority is and they said we want to have CARE-major expanded, then we would look at that within our needs assessment, so we would be using both tools and saying okay, the needs assessment says that within Whati, their core needs for suitability is this percent, and they've identified that as their major goal, so within that fiscal year, we would be costing and putting that focus within that community on what they want. Whereas in Yellowknife, we would be costing and putting it on towards more of, say, the seniors' home that I gave for example.

Each community will get the same questions. The answers will be costed, and then we will define the priority, what we're going to do in each community. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So I think I'm understanding this a little bit better, but the communities then themselves are not going to be asked about costs. The costs are going to be developed by the Housing Corp in terms of helping communities put together their plans and then rolling that up somehow? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the costs of doing this work will actually be on the NWT Housing Corporation. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So that's good to hear, because then there will be a consistent way of costing out the work, and the Housing Corp knows how to cost out housing projects, so they will be applying some sort of consistent methodology presumably, and that stuff can be rolled up. Then would we be in a position to make some predictions of how that will address core needs across the Northwest Territories? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As stated before, we're not throwing away one tool to recook another. They're kind of two different tools. The core needs are actually addressed within the needs survey that are done nationally, so those would still be there. They will still be our priorities. However, we will be asking the communities what they want us to focus on. So if, for example, we have--if the federal government, say, gave us \$300,000 to address care major, then we would look at that \$300,000 and say which communities out of the 33 communities have identified CARE-major as their priority, and then we would focus that money, so it would be individual.

If we had federal money for seniors, then we would say which communities have identified seniors as their priority and that would be how we would distribute the money, versus the current system, instead of saying we get \$500,000 for seniors and we got 33 communities so we will just try to give a split of that to every community, which, in my opinion, is not the most effective usage of our funding. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Still just a little bit confused here, how this information is going to be rolled up to develop a plan that addresses core needs, but also can be used to prepare plans, proposals that can be submitted to the federal government, given that they seem to have more money for housing. There's some kind of disconnect there. I don't understand how this work is going to help the Housing Corp develop plans that cost out core need and that can be then submitted to the federal government for funding. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, really wanted to focus that the advocacy to the federal government is based on the core need assessment, the 2014 core needs assessment. The federal government does not need to know, in my opinion, what each community has prioritized. They need to know that core need within the whole NWT is substantial, and then as well, remembering that we have agreed to a partnership tri-territorial that we are going to be advocating to the federal government, so it would be really disrespectful, in my opinion, once we have agreed to that partnership, that we would be looking individually and trying to promote our own.

The three territories when we speak about housing have been speaking in general to the federal government and saying as the North, we have huge core need issues and we need more money. You cannot use the base formula based on population to address our needs.

In general, we're not saying to the federal government that this is how many houses in each community. We're saying we have higher costs of living. We have huge needs. We have lack of infrastructure. We have higher, bigger challenges than communities in the south, so therefore, we need to have base-plus funding. Thank you, Mr. Chair.