

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Community Planning Reductions
Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Municipal and Community Affairs—February 28, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I am looking at page 315. The line item is community planning. There seems to be a catastrophic drop-off of funding for this line from \$421,000 in 2015-16 to \$54,000 in the budget next year. Can someone explain to me why there is this ongoing reduction under the community planning function for MACA? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. SCHAUERTE: The Member has identified an actual error in the statement of the main estimates. The community planning area, where it states \$54,000, that number should be \$162,000. Right above it, the community governance area, where it says \$384,000, it should read \$274,000. The changes there represent the reduction of two positions within this unit, including a junior governance advisor position and a community planner position. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that the Members have now been straightened out. I guess I am looking for an explanation as to why there is a reduction, why this reduction is being made. Is there less work to do? I would like an explanation. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thanks, Mr. Chair. When the department was looking at some restructuring to see if there were ways that we could be more efficient with our resources, we decided that the two positions could be terminated -- they are through headquarters -- and that we would have enough staffing to actually do the extra work that was required. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So it sounds like this is part of the fiscal reduction targets set for the department. Can we just have a little bit more information about what these individuals do? Do they support community governments? It says "community planning," so I know maybe this isn't the right place, but are these people within MACA who, say, review land use planning bylaw changes, zoning changes that have to go to MACA for approval? Some more detail on what the functions are of the positions that are being cut would be helpful. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: The community planner position was actually responsible for assisting in the development of the community plans, but, with the new deal, actually we have changed it so that communities actually develop their own plans

now and we allow them to hire their own planners within the new funding arrangement that we have. Then, at headquarters, we still have two positions. We have a planner and a technician. Like I say, these two positions that are currently here will take over the overlap, and it is not as in-depth anymore. Now that we are not doing actual community plans and we are allowing the communities to develop their own and hire their own planners, the level of work is less. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. I would to remind everyone to just make sure the little light is on before they begin speaking so that we can get it on the record and get it into Hansard. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That is getting closer. Are these the people, though, within the department who give advice to the Minister about whether the Minister should be signing off on zoning changes, general plans, those sort of things that require ministerial approval? The reason I ask this question is because, if we have fewer people giving advice to the Minister or we have a diminished capacity here, is this going to delay the ability of communities to carry out the land use planning that the department seems to want them to do? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the positions actually do provide advice and support to the Minister. However, we still have two positions in headquarters -- like I said, the planner and the technician -- who will be able to provide the support. There should be no delays to the communities actually doing their community plans because of these reductions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate getting that information out. So the Minister says that it won't cause any delays, but does the department actually track the time that the department takes?

It is fine for the Minister to give her word, but I am looking for a little bit more objective information or data. Is the Minister committed to tracking the amount of time that is taken by the department in reviewing these changes and seeing if this reduction actually increases the amount of time the department requires to sign off on those changes? That is the kind of tracking and evidence-based decision-making that I would suggest the department put in place. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, we can commit to actually starting to track the time that it takes for us to reach out to the communities and actually have their community plans. However, there may be extenuating circumstances. It is not always the responsibility of the person providing support. Sometimes there are community issues that make delays in the planning, but we will track what the reasons are and how long it takes.

Like I said, we are looking at, once we get a little bit of time on our hands, actually looking at the whole department and seeing if there is a restructuring that we need to be

done. At that point, then we will be pulling in that information to give us information on whether we need to restructure or not. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that commitment from the Minister. It still seems rather counterintuitive to me that we are asking communities to do more land use planning for themselves, yet we are cutting the capacity within the department to approve the land use plans, the zoning bylaw changes, and so on, that they come up with. It just does not make much sense to me. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, as stated, we are not anticipating that it will cause any delays. We will be conscious of it, though, and watching for it in the future. The planning for the communities isn't done all the time. It is not a constant thing. It is usually done annually. Therefore, we don't see it as being a huge issue, and not all communities are doing it at exactly the same time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I don't want to prolong a debate here. I don't think this is a good idea, but I look forward to getting the evidence from the Minister that this is not going to result in delays. I think this is actually being driven by the fiscal reduction targets again. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. I would like to clarify with the Minister. There are two typos in the main estimates here. I would just like to clarify that the activity total remains \$2,036,000. Minister.