

## ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

### QUESTION 751-18(3): NORTHERN FRONTIER VISITORS CENTRE

May 29, 2019

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure. In my statement earlier today, I itemized some reports about reimagining the design of a new or redeveloped visitors centre here in Yellowknife, the former Northern Frontier Visitors Centre. I pointed out the Minister's statements that redesigns were being commissioned in 2017 and that there was a recent RFP or something, again, to do more design. Before we go out with this new call for designs, can the Minister explain what he intends to do with the first two sets of designs? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Minister of Infrastructure.

**HON. WALLY SCHUMANN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Normally I credit the Member for doing his homework, but there were three designs, actually, that we have received on this. I'm just teasing him. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We received three concept designs as part of this planning process, and through that, we want to go to the next step to develop a schematic design over the summer in 2019, but this is going to largely depend on some of the technical work that has been recently wrapped up on this building. We are waiting to hear back on these geotechnical and structural reports. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for correcting my notes here. They have three sets; that is a lot of designs to work with, then, but it looks like we are going to be going out for some more. When is the decision actually going to finally be made about either resurrecting the current building or knocking it down?

**HON. WALLY SCHUMANN:** I am glad that the Member asked the question that way. As I have said, this geotechnical report and structural engineering review was conducted, again, this year. We had the original one, and we went out and did the work to stabilize the building. We have done a couple of things since then to make sure that the building doesn't get too out of whack.

We already know that we have never met the inspection to be able to have people in there. We went out to the design concept. We got them back, but before we push that any further, we have to see what these reports come back and say about what can be done with this building. My concern is: is it going to be to a point of non-repair? Do we have to knock this thing down? I think that the reports that we are going to get are going to give us a little better of an idea of what is going on.

From some of the discussions that I have had with my department, I would say that things are not looking very well on saving this building, just to get that out there. I think that it is going to look like it is in a condition that could be very expensive to fix this thing up, but I have to wait until that report hits my desk here in the next coming weeks, and then we are going to have to update this House on what we are going to do with this

building moving forward. I don't want to get too deep into long-term plans until we know if this thing is even viable to fix.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for sharing that information. I hope that he is going to share, maybe, a summary of the geotechnical report with myself, as this building is my riding, when it is completed. The other key unknown here, of course, is the role of the City of Yellowknife in promoting visitors services. The Minister once told me that "we are working with the City of Yellowknife to determine the long-term model delivery of the visitors information centre." Can the Minister update us as to what sort of discussion there has been with the City of Yellowknife in providing proper visitors services here in this city?

**HON. WALLY SCHUMANN:** Our department and our officials are in constant contact with the City of Yellowknife with what is happening at the visitor information centre. One of the things that has happened since we shut down the Northern Frontier Visitors Centre and moved it over to city hall. I took a lot of questions in the House about how that is going to work out. Things with the city have moved along quite well.

One of the things that has happened since we have closed down the visitors centre is the number of tourists who actually went to the city's tourists information centre has almost doubled. The department was kind enough to actually give me those numbers. In 2018, when we shut that thing down, there were roughly 7,000 people who went to the City of Yellowknife tourists information centre. I see the number is written down; it is actually 7,105.

In March of 2019 -- and this is a surprising number; and you heard me talk about this in my statement the other day, how much tourists have impacted them, particularly around the aurora viewing -- in Yellowknife, the number of visitors who actually visited the new centre in City Hall is 12,991 people. There hasn't been a whole lot of noise in the Legislative Assembly about the number of people and how the services are going. I think that things are going quite well with the city and how they are handling these things. We are working with them closely. They are trying to put together an advisory committee on how they are going to see the future of this thing working out. I know that our officials have talking extensively with them, because we have a number of ideas that we want to work with.

As you all know, we passed a levy in this Chamber so that the city could actually do that stuff, and we want to see an opportunity for them, moving forward with their bylaws, for how they are going to levy these funds. Maybe it is going to be to support visitors services and, also, the DMO. Those discussions are ongoing with the City of Yellowknife. The City of Yellowknife is the biggest impacted region in the Northwest Territories based on the successes that we have had around NWT tourism. We are going to continue to work with them.

As I have said, the building is another situation, and that is going to feed into how we work with the City of Yellowknife going forward. If we end up ripping this building down, the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly is going to have to make a decision about how we are going to move forward, working with the City of Yellowknife, based around infrastructure and what those needs are going to be. Our capital plan on that is going to be our fiscal

reality in the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly. There are a lot of different questions that are going to have to be answered.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that long explanation of what is going on. The reality, of course, is that our government continues to spend more on a visitors centre in Dawson, Yukon, than we do here in Yellowknife, which is the capital.

The Minister trotted out some great numbers of the increases in visitation at the visitors centre in the basement of city hall. As the Minister well knows, I helped drag him through the visitors centre when we were coming back from lunch one day. I think that the city is doing a good job with what they have, but they clearly don't have enough. What is the Minister doing to set this up for the next Assembly so that we actually can make a proper investment in promoting tourism here in Yellowknife, given the huge growth in this sector that the Minister himself just talked about? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. WALLY SCHUMANN:** I am not even going to go to my notes first here. I am going to address some of the comments that the Member has made. I am the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. I represent all residents in the Northwest Territories, not just the City of Yellowknife and not just the tourists coming to the City of Yellowknife.

What I don't like about the comments that the Member made is that it is kind of "us versus them," the Beau-Del region versus Yellowknife, because of the money that we have spent in Whitehorse. We are trying to address and diversify our economy across all regions of the Northwest Territories.

The City of Yellowknife has clearly been the biggest benefactor of tourism in the Northwest Territories, and I dare any Member to stand up in this House and contradict me on that. That is not the case. As I have said before in this House, we are doing almost too good of a job because we are a victim of our own success, but this is what we are going to do forward, and that was what the Member's question was.

Under Tourism's 2020 strategy, we will invest more than \$1.5 million this year in the development and delivery of funding and programming to strengthen our tourism products and capacity of our tourism operators. The growth of tourism, particularly through the life of this government, confirms that our approach of supporting and growing this sector of our economy is working. That was clear from the numbers that I said in the House yesterday.

As Members may be aware, we are about to begin the process of evaluation of our current 2020 strategy in the interest of developing a follow-up strategy and building on the success that we have seen. Our process will include engagement with tourism stakeholders and operators and will help us to identify the projects and priorities, not just for Yellowknife, but for the full territory. I look forward to having the Member's contributions to this process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker.