

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Lack of New Housing
Committee of the Whole—2021-2022 Capital Budget Review
NWT Housing Corporation —October 30, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. If I did my math correctly on page 66, it looks like there are going to be 104 retrofits and nine new units. The nine new units seem to be in Inuvik. Can someone tell me: is that RCMP housing, or is that housing that is going to be made available to residents? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Chair. That would be our RCMP units. I will have Mr. Martin elaborate on the program delivery. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Mr. Martin.

MR. MARTIN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to confirm, those nine units scheduled for 2021-2022 are for the RCMP housing delivery. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Martin. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Why are there no new units for residents of the Northwest Territories? It's all retrofits. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Chair. We did roll out our estimates, and we did put our budget together. We do have some units that were announced in June of this year. I don't have them listed on here, but we are looking at the retrofits and looking at the units. I want to say that I want to bring them up to standard, and I had announced this, as well, that I wanted to sell the refurbished units and to put home ownership on the ground. I will have Mr. Williams elaborate on the response, as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Mr. Williams.

MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister is correct. We do retrofits with our existing finances that we do have, and our inventory. Unless we get new money, new money for infrastructure and new money for O and M, we can't add to the inventory. We do a lot of due diligence on making sure that our existing units are kept in good order, so half of our budget is spent on retrofitting our existing public housing stock. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Williams. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. When I look at all the other departments in here, there are a whole bunch of shiny new toys for everybody except for the Housing Corporation. What's going on here? We have lots of retrofits, I get that, but no new units? I just don't get it. Is this the glass ceiling that we're talking about here, where the Housing Corporation cannot take on any new units because there is concern around O

and M? Is that what we're talking about here? This is a question for the Minister. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, that is correct. It's operations and maintenance funding. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Okay. We've got to get more money into the Housing Corporation for new units. I don't know how I can say that more clearly. If it's pitched to the financial management board as forced growth, a new initiative, I don't care anymore. We need more money for housing, for new units, and for the O and M that needs to go along with that. Can the Minister make a commitment to go to the Financial Management Board and get more money for new units for the Housing Corporation? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I will put something together. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. I think that is the best news I have had almost all year. Look, I think Members on this side want to support the Minister in getting more money for the Housing Corporation for new units, not just retrofits. If you can find some federal money that goes along with it, that is great, but we need more money from our own source, our own pot. I want to shift a little bit here now, Madam Chair, but that was indeed great news and a fantastic commitment from the Minister, and I don't want to underestimate that in any way.

When I look, though, on page 65 of the estimates, this is flow-through money that comes really through the Department of Finance as a contribution to the Housing Corporation for its capital. If you look at 2019-2020, there is about \$17 million and change; 2020-2021, \$11.6 million; 2021-2022, only \$10.6 million. Our contribution to the Housing Corporation for capital is declining over time. How can that possibly be? What is happening? How can our capital contribution to the Housing Corporation actually decline over time when housing is such a high priority? Am I misinterpreting this in some way? That is what I would like to know. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Chair, and to the Member, as well. We do have a decline in the funding that we do receive, but we also have the RCMP units that are coming forward. Those are just RCMP replacement for market housing units. I will have Jim Martin elaborate on the declining of the funding. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Mr. Martin.

MR. MARTIN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. For 2021-2022, the Housing Corporation,

as per the estimates, has set aside approximately \$10.6 million to support our regular capital delivery and the RCMP units, as we identified, for incremental revenues to support our social housing program, so we are doing that. However, in addition to that, we are also making other investments within the allowance that we have within our fiscal framework. Examples of other investments beyond the \$10 million would be an additional investment of \$1.2 million into the Community Housing Support Initiative program. This program has a significant amount of uptake, particularly from smaller communities, and we are going to continue to support that strategic investment.

We also are supporting a couple of additional co-investment fund applications for 2021-2022, as well, and the two in particular that we had built into our fiscal framework right now is the Hay River Family Support Centre -- we are planning to fund that project, our share of it, of course; we are hoping to leverage a significant investment from the federal government with those dollars -- and also the Yellowknife Women's Society's project, Arnica Inn. We have a notional amount set aside of additional dollars to leverage funds there, as well. We are starting to shift a bit of our dollars into leveraging and expanding our base through that means.

Other areas that we are investing in in 2021-2022 that do not show up in the capital plan is: we are continuing to support investments in the public housing lease-to-own program. We do see a significant amount of opportunities for home ownership in this area, and we will continue to support that. Also, for 2021-2022, we are investing additional dollars into fuel tank replacements. We recognize that this is an environmental risk area, and we have done a good assessment of the replacements that need to be completed over the short while here. We will be putting in an additional \$1 million into fuel tank replacements planned for 2021-2022 to accelerate that investment. Then, finally, we are investing in some additional environmental assessments to support our districts with the delivery of our maintenance and improvement projects. Those are some examples of additional dollars that we have been using beyond the capital allowance that we have in our fiscal framework. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Martin. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Look, lest anybody gets the wrong idea, I know our people at the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation work very hard at their jobs, and they are obviously very creative in finding other pots of money and ways of leveraging funding and so on. However, the fact is that we need more money spent on housing. I want to reiterate. I am right behind the Minister when she goes to the Financial Management Board to get more money for capital projects, new housing for the Housing Corporation so that we can possibly start to address our housing deficit across the Northwest Territories and the units that are in core need, which continue to grow. I am right behind the Minister when she goes to get more money. Thanks, Madam Chair.