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Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre Improvements
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment—February 9, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm looking at the electronic version that was provided to us when we reviewed the main estimates. Sorry. Yes, it is page 33 of the hard copy. There is a line there that says finance and capital planning, and I am just wondering if that's the line item where money could and should be found for helping to fix up the museum, and maybe even expanding it or building a new facility for the archives, that kind of work. Is that where the money would be found? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Perhaps I could hand this to the deputy minister for an update on that work because, regardless of where it's found, I can provide the committee with some information. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Deputy Minister Mueller.

MS. MUELLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Specific to the work that needs to be done at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, that would fall under the culture, heritage and languages section. We have had a recent study done to look at that whole infrastructure and what the potential costs would be to do all of the work, and it is quite high, so now, we're in the midst of doing a study to look at how we could bring in other revenue to try to offset the costs of that work that would need to be done. Right now, here on page 33 under finance and capital planning, I would have to turn to Mr. Shannon, but I don't think this is the section at all that we would use for that work.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Mr. Shannon.

MR. SHANNON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Any funding for the redevelopment or any new building or construction or anything to do with the Prince of Wales would be in our capital estimates. However, finance and capital planning is our division in headquarters that includes our capital planning section in positions that work with, as Ms. Mueller mentioned, staff in the culture and heritage division to develop the plans to do that construction, ultimately. This is more of the planning function as opposed to the capital budget for the construction project. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I am not asking, at this point, where is the money for the capital. Where is the money for planning this? This facility has lived way past its planned life. There was a flood in the basement when water lines were replaced recently. I have been over. I have looked at it. There are jury-rigged humidity systems and dehumidifiers and stuff all over the place. This building is way beyond its normal life. Is there any money in the budget, in this section, for planning for replacing the building? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. There was money for planning. A plan was done. I believe it was shared with committee. I have discussed it in this House. It is quite a visionary retrofit and expansion of the facility. Given where we are with our finances, I'm not sure if that is something that is doable. That being said, the Member points out that there are significant deficiencies with the current structure that need to be addressed. We have money, and we are doing planning on how we can address those deficiencies and, as part of that, what we can do to perhaps raise revenues to offset it, as well. Yes, to the Member's point, there is money. It is being spent, and it is being spent with the intention of ensuring that the Prince of Wales heritage centre, the life of it can be extended and that we can fulfill our obligation, our statutory obligation to maintain the archives of the Government of the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks for that, or thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks to the Minister for that. Is there a timeline for when this study on potential revenues is going to be completed? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I believe that we are getting close. I think it's in March, but I can go to the deputy minister for more information. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Deputy Minister Mueller.

MS. MUELLER: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. Our goal is working towards having it completed by March 31st of this fiscal. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Can I get a commitment out of the Minister to share that report with the Regular MLAs? I am really quite interested in seeing that and trying to move this along before something catastrophic happens to the building. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Yes. Whatever we can share with the Members, we would be happy to. I don't want anything catastrophic to happen, either. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. That is all for now, but the Minister knows I love the museum and that I am going to keep pressing them on it, so I look forward to that study maybe in early April. Thanks, Madam Chair.

(continuing...)

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I just have a couple of things I want to raise here. The Minister talked about that there was some kind of survey of all the heritage centres, their needs that are under way. I have had a chance to travel to the Yukon several times, and I want to encourage the Minister and the staff to look at some of the fabulous First Nation Centres that have been established in the Yukon. I've been personally to the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation Centre in Haines Junction. We could see that the outside of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation facility, the Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre as well. These are absolutely stunning facilities that include areas on the outside of the physical building for cultural activities. There's people working in there on language revitalization. They have cultural objects, historic artifacts. There's storytelling areas. It just boggles my mind.

I really want to encourage you and your staff to look at some of the photos, and I can share some of them with you, if you'd like. A lot of that funding came from the federal government. I don't know why we're not partnering with First Nation Indigenous governments here to do the same kind of thing. It really takes some vision and leadership to do that kind of work. I have lots of confidence in the Minister across on the other side to do this, but that's the kind of thing that I think we should be aiming for here. Go over and find out what they're doing in the Yukon and learn from that experience and bring some of that here. Is that something the Minister is prepared to look into? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you. I won't be going to the Yukon anytime soon but note to the Member's point. I've had those discussions, and I believe there is increasing interest from Indigenous governments, as well, to start displaying their own pieces and doing those types of things. I can ask the deputy minister who might have some more information on this, but we're very open to all those kinds of things. I have a feeling the people at the Prince of Wales heritage centre are very well aware of what's going on in the Yukon and around Canada, so I'd like to hand it to my deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Deputy minister.

MS. MUELLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. Yes. Just to build on what the Minister said, Indigenous governments have expressed a real interest in working with the culture and heritage staff at the Prince of Wales in that division to really explore where there is opportunities within their own communities and within their own region to either have like mini cultural centres or a combination of art studios, as well, as well as looking at opportunities for on-the-land opportunities where those kinds of activities can take place out on the land that are more family oriented. Certainly, there's an interest there, and our staff do their best to try to respond and help as those discussions take place, or that thinking and that planning takes place. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I know the Minister maybe feels he can't go to the Yukon right now, but I'm happy to share lots of great photos with him, even if I took them myself. I wanted to go into one other area. I know that, of course, we have the

northern studies program component of our education system. As I understood that one of the really important tools that students had access to and could look at is the NWT timeline that's on the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage website. I just thought I'd kind of call that up to see where it's at, and I get this thing on my screen that says, "Adobe Flash Player is blocked." You can't even get into the timeline now.

This, as I understood, is a really important for tool for students in that the Northern Studies course that they have to take in high school. At one time, this was a state-of-the-art website with lots of information. You would have boxes that would open and give people history, links; there were videos, sound recordings. It was a tremendous asset. Now, it's blocked. It doesn't work anymore. Is there a plan to get this online again? Especially with COVID, we know that our high school students are spending less time in the classroom. Is this going to get fixed? Is there some money in the budget to fix this? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. As I am sure Members are aware, Adobe officially stopped supporting and providing updates to Adobe Flash on December 31, 2020. The Internet was outraged, but it has been a long time coming. The timeline was using that. There is not money in the budget to deal with that specific issue. However, a lot of operations go on without specific line items attached to them, so the department will look into this. It's interesting that the Member brings this up. I was looking at the timeline a few hours ago, actually, and I was going to bring this to the department. He's not the only one concerned. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. There's a great line, "Great minds think alike, though fools seldom differ," but I am glad to hear that the Minister and I are on the same page on this one. I just can't say enough about this timeline. At one point, it was state-of-the-art. I know the person who was kind of involved in helping set this up. Unfortunately, that capacity was kind of swept up in the ISSS storm where everybody was centralized over at Finance. I am not convinced that the department still has the capability to do this on its own anymore. If there are no resources dedicated to get this done in the budget here, I am a little bit disappointed, especially because we have students who are trying to do work from home and can't even get this kind of resource on the Internet. Can the Minister give me a timeline for when this work is going to be done? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I can't give the Member a timeline at this point, but just because there is no line item, it doesn't mean that there aren't people who do the work. The Member is correct that ISSS acquired 74 or 76 positions a few years ago, and one of those was the person who was working at the Prince of Wales heritage centre. That being said, there is that relationship whereby we are supported by ISSS, and there are people there to do the work. It's not like, without the line item, it doesn't get done. There are people who do it, and we will ensure that it gets done. Thank you.

