

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Yellowknife Airport Revolving Fund
Committee of the Whole—2021-2022 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Infrastructure—March 2, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'd like to turn to the Yellowknife Airport Revolving Fund. There is a significant surplus that has built up here, and I'm just wondering when we're going to start to spend it. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just going to see what the big increase was. We do have a surplus, very true, in the Yellowknife Airport Revolving Fund of \$12 million. The fund bought various assets; however, they are owned by the GNWT, so for accounting purposes only, it's just a method of disclosure. The total accumulated surplus includes the value of the net assets transferred to the revolving fund by the GNWT. It is true, yes, we are going to start spending on things to improve lines and baggage, improve lines and baggage. The airport has a 20-year master plan, which is about to be released for a competitive procurement. Without wasting too much of the Member's time: yes, we will be spending this, but yes, we do recognize that we have a surplus. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes. I was hoping for a rather quick answer as to when we're going to start spending the money. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. We are currently going through a plan right now. We've got a lot of work to do within committees. We've got a lot of consultation. We've got an RFP going out to be able to look at a number of things. As for when, right now, I'm looking at some of our current projects will be doing the airfield lighting upgrade that is expected in spring of 2021. My list could go on, Madam Chair, but we are spending the money. I have some current projects, airport drainage, capital purchases, a tractor tow vehicle, so we are spending the money. It is on par with some of our timelines within this revolving fund. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Rather than have the Minister read it off, perhaps she could provide that to me or to SCEDE? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, absolutely. It's not 20 pages; it is a number of pages on the different projects and upgrades, such as current projects, capital purchase, what are some of the things in queue, what are some of the upcoming potential capital needs. Yes, I can share that with the Member. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. That was a rather long yes. I understand that there are two advisory committees of some sort that have been set up to provide advice to the Minister and the department about the spending of the revolving fund. Can the Minister tell me whether these two committees are actually in place? Are there vacancies, and so on? Because there is absolutely no information whatsoever on the Infrastructure website about these committees. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to turn that question over to Deputy Minister Loutitt. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Deputy Minister Loutitt.

MR. LOUITT: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are two committees that are established. One is the EAC, the Economic Advisory Committee. That committee, we are currently in the process of restarting. Actually, this morning, I was going through the terms of reference, the renewed terms of reference, and we will be appointing membership shortly on that. The other one, the Airline Consultative Committee, is a committee just with the partners at the airport, and it is a committee that we are currently operating with. That's an internal committee. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. When this was being set up, there were a number of concerns and issues raised around the accountability of these two committees and whether they were really independent and whether they were going to be doing any kind of public reporting. I can't even find one word about them on the Department of Infrastructure website. I had understood that they were going to be keeping minutes, that the minutes were going to be made public somehow. There was going to be an annual report from each of the committees. There's nothing. Can the Minister commit to giving us a status report on each of these two committees, who the current members are, and how they are going to try to increase accountability, transparency, and reporting from these two committees? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, we can share that information with him, given that we are re-looking at the committees to be able to start some of the master plan work going forward. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. I appreciate that, Madam Chair. I've had concerns expressed to me by the City of Yellowknife and the Yellowknives Dene First Nation that they do not have any representation on these committees; certainly, at least, the Economic Advisory Committee. I understand the other one is more the air carriers themselves. Can the Minister commit to consult with or work with the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment to make sure that we have the right representation on the economic advisory committee? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. The easy answer is yes, but I do want to get the deputy minister to explain. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. LOUTITT: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have had several groups who have reached out to us for representation on the committee. We are looking for a good cross-section of individuals for the committee, and at this point, the composition, we would like our Indigenous partners as well as industry and the public represented on the committee. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. The deputy minister sounds a lot like me four years ago when this was being set up, when we made these suggestions about who should be represented on the committee. It kind of fell on deaf ears with the previous Minister in the 18th Assembly, so I guess I will ask again: is the Minister prepared to work with the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment to look at a more appropriate composition of this committee and how they can report publicly and better engage the public in general? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have engaged with Cabinet on this and provided a presentation to committee. We want to get input. I am not going to sit here today and commit to who is going to be on the committee, but we will have that conversation with committee. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. That's great. That's exactly what I was looking for. I appreciate that commitment from the Minister. That's all I have on this one. Thanks, Madam Chair.