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HANSARD

Wednesday, March 26, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2025 Spring Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Lane Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

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Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
Hon. Nils Clarke	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Government House Leader Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation; French Language Services Directorate
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

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THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, March 26, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

Speaker: We will proceed at this time with the Order Paper.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of visitors.
Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of winter festivals

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an array of exciting events that brightened our long, dark winter. The mercury in the thermometers is cresting above zero, the days are getting longer, and spring is on the horizon. Before spring and summer arrive, let's reflect on some of the winter celebrations that Yukoners enjoyed across the territory.

The Dawson Thaw di Gras festival wrapped up a few days ago — a true community event. Dawson came alive with a variety of games from the ridiculous to the creative to the simply outrageous.

In February, the engines revved and the 2025 Alkan 200 Road Rally Race was off, with participants roaring from the US-Canada border to Dezadeash Lake and back.

Haines Junction sure loves their sled races. March 15 marked the 4th annual Yukon Hardwater Racing event at Pine Lake.

Heading to the southeast, Yukoners stepped onto their sheet or cheered from the sidelines for the curlers of the 43rd annual Watson Lake Outdoor Bonspiel or you enjoyed the family fun at the Watson Lake Kiki Karnival.

Or if skiing is your thing, maybe you participated in the 38th Buckwheat International Ski Classic at Log Cabin.

In Marsh Lake, we had the winter carnival just a couple of weekends ago.

Earlier in February, we had Available Light, Mr. and Mrs. Yukon, and Rendezvous.

This is one of the beautiful things about living in the Yukon. This is a land of winter lovers, people who know how to make the most of the short daylight hours by moving through the snowy, icy landscapes that we call home. Some of our most memorable and unique festivals happen in the depths of winter.

To put on these events takes a tremendous amount of community support, dedication, and effort. This tribute is for those who bring together Yukoners in all of our communities. As a government, we can assist our communities with funding or providing infrastructure, but it is the people who make them

unique and vibrant places to live. I extend my gratitude to the boards and organizers of these events and the many more I didn't mention, plus the volunteers. We would like you to know that your efforts are recognized and appreciated.

To Yukoners, I encourage all of you to attend a community event to make memories that you will never forget.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, this weekend — Saturday and Sunday — the Yukon Literacy Coalition is hosting a celebration of culture at the learning centre, Haa Shagóon Hídi, in Carcross. I will see you there.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize some incredible events that take place throughout our communities here in the winter months.

In a time when we are looking inwards for tourism opportunities close to home, it's wonderful to have so many events that we can attend with the family, opportunities for sport recreation and just getting outdoors.

I just want to highlight some of these events and give our thanks to those involved in making them a success. Haines Junction hosts Yukon Hardwater Racing, a weekend for the snowmobile enthusiasts and family to take in some great racing at Pine Lake. The third annual Glacier Nights Snow Festival was also hosted in Haines Junction, featuring family-friendly activities, music, and more. Watson Lake's Kiki Karnival is held annually and features many activities, including the great Watson Lake bonspiel — this is the 43rd year, I believe. Another Yukon famous curling event is the Teslin Lakespiel. This year was the sixth annual, with more out-of-town participants than ever — teams from Watson Lake, Carcross, and Whitehorse. Teslin also holds a Mini Rendezvous Festival, which has been going on for over 50 years.

I would like to highlight many of the sport tournaments, like minor hockey hosted in our communities for our youth. The kids are so excited to get out of town and play hockey or other sports in a different town and have the opportunity to travel. These tournaments are great happiness and revenue generators.

Marsh Lake's Winter Carnival, Carmacks' Winterlude, Dawson's Thaw di Gras, and so many more events take place helping to celebrate the days getting longer and the sun shining a little more brightly.

This is an important time to support Yukon and Yukon events. Each of these community events helps the local economy in so many ways. Winter revenue for hotels, restaurants, and local businesses is always welcome and appreciated.

I would like to thank all organizers and host communities, private sector sponsors, and volunteers who make these events possible.

Our community organizations benefit; they do well. Just as an example, the event that I help organize, the Yukon Hardwater Races at Pine Lake — this year, the St. Elias grads made \$8,000 to go toward their year-end trip to Japan. Our local

St. Elias Lions Club made \$4,000 that they will put right back into the community, mainly for youth.

So, a big thanks to those who take part as a racer, skier, curler, or just a spectator or even someone who just needs an excuse to go for a drive, get out of town, and go see something. Your support and enthusiasm are drivers of these events.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the winter festivals and carnivals across the Yukon. Winter festivals in communities around the Yukon are a celebration of resilience, culture, and the unique beauty of the northern winter. These festivals bring people together to embrace the cold and darkness, transforming them into opportunities for joy and connection.

From the vibrant lights of Thaw Di Gras in Dawson to the Glacier Night Snow Festival in Haines Junction to the Kiki Karnival in Watson Lake, the Ice Worm Squirm in Faro, and the EDI Hut to Hut here in Whitehorse, it's clear that Yukoners know how to have fun all winter long. These are just a few of the festivals that remind us that, even in the harshest winters, there is warmth and fun to be found in community and celebrating together. These gatherings are more than just a series of events; they are a testament to the creativity, ingenuity, and occasionally the quirkiness of the people who call the Yukon home.

So, I'm pretty sure that a chainsaw-chucking contest qualifies as quirky, and that's really just the beginning of the fun to be had here in winter. Curling on lakes, ice sculptures, dog-sled races, snowmobile races, and the traditional dancers are just a few of the activities that highlight the diverse talents and cultural practices of the region. Each festival is a unique reflection of its community, offering a glimpse into the local customs and stories that have been passed down through generations. Winter celebrations provide a space for people to come together, share experiences, and create lasting memories. In a place where the winters can be long and isolating, these festivals offer a much-needed chance to reconnect with friends and neighbours. They strengthen the bonds within communities and remind us all of the importance of coming together to celebrate our shared heritage and the beauty of the Yukon winter.

Through these festivals, we honour the past, celebrate the present, and look forward to the future with hope and joy.

Applause

In recognition of Celebration of Swans

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of the Yukon's most cherished spring traditions, the Celebration of Swans festival.

Each April, the skies above M'Clintock Bay at Marsh Lake come alive as tens of thousands of swans, ducks, and geese touch down upon the thawing waters to rest on their long journey northward. At the heart of the festival is the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre, which has served as a beacon of education and appreciation for these magnificent birds since its opening in 1994. Located on the traditional territories of the

Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Swan Haven provides space where visitors can witness the beauty of these migrations first-hand and learn about the critical role that early spring open waters play in sustaining migratory waterfowl.

More than 4,000 visitors make their way to this special place each year, drawn by the chance to experience one of nature's greatest spectacles. Swan Haven is open daily in April and offers a wealth of learning opportunities for people of all ages. Through interactive exhibits, knowledgeable guides, and daily swan counts, visitors can deepen their understanding of the birds and their habitat.

New this year is a Swan Haven audio tour, "A Walk with the Swans". This 25-minute self-guided tour will play on your phone or tablet and leaves from the Swan Haven stairs down to a viewpoint 500 metres along the shoreline of M'Clintock Bay.

Whether it is a child seeing their first swan, a seasoned birdwatcher marvelling at the elegant display, or a photographer capturing a perfect moment, the experiences found at Swan Haven are nothing short of magical.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of photographers, each year, the Government of Yukon produces a collectible poster for the celebration that features spring-themed artwork from a local artist. This year's poster includes an image from photographer Takeshi Hanatani of a swan near the edge of the ice. Posters are available at the Department of Environment office at 10 Burns Road and at the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre.

Beyond its role as an educational hub, Swan Haven serves as a testament to the Yukon's commitment to conservation and stewardship. As we celebrate another year of the festival, let us take a moment to appreciate the significance of the migration season and to recognize the efforts of those who work tirelessly to preserve these habitats and to educate further generations about their importance.

And let us be reminded of the responsibility that we share in safeguarding our environment for all who call it home, whether they walk upon the land, swim in the waters, or take to the skies.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Swan Haven and the Celebration of Swans, which takes place from April 1 to 30 each year.

M'Clintock Bay is about to get a little busier and a whole lot noisier with the arrival of the swans and, in turn, the arrival of people. It's such an exciting and much-anticipated time for Yukoners who gather annually to get a glimpse of the migrating swans from the viewing deck at Swan Haven or from the shoreline. These majestic birds stop here to feed and rest during their journey, as the area offers shelter from winds and open shallow water for ease of access to food.

Informative guided walks are offered throughout the month by staff, and running tallies are available for all species of water birds seen in the area. This year, an electronic self-guided tour has been added to the experience, playable on your phone and available throughout the month.

Other events taking place throughout the month include art workshops by this year's artist in residence, Rhoda Merkel, and others, interpretive walks, cross-country skiing, and more, with additional information and a schedule of events located on the government website. School programs offer students the opportunity to participate in activities and learn about swans in an interactive and fun way.

We wanted to recognize the McClintock Bay Resort, which is located just past Swan Haven. They keep area trails groomed and in great shape and offer shoreline access, goodies, and year-round recreational activities.

We don't get many swans down in my riding, although sometimes they do overnight, but as I drive to Whitehorse, I am always amazed at how many are gathered in the Johnsons Crossing area. I understand that at the peak of the season at Swan Haven, daily counts can easily reach into the thousands.

We encourage Yukoners to take a drive out to Swan Haven if they are able or hop on the Yukon Energy swan bus when it's offered. Thank you to all involved in making the Celebration of Swans a great success and memorable experience for all.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to welcome the swans back to our beautiful territory. The arrival of the swans is a sure sign that the winter is leaving and spring is finally here. Families and friends gather to watch the water open and thousands of trumpeter and tundra swans, along with a variety of other waterfowl, rest on their long journey north. This is a time for Yukoners to reconnect with nature and each other, a moment to celebrate the arrival of spring, ideally mitten-free.

A heartfelt thank you to the staff and volunteers at Swan Haven, who work tirelessly to create such a welcoming place, not just for the swans and waterfowl, but for Yukoners of all ages who come together there. I continue to be impressed year after year by the events and programs being offered which help us tap into our creativity and learn more about the natural environment that makes the Yukon so special.

As we welcome spring back to the Yukon, we also welcome the swans and the renewed sense of hope and joy that their arrival brings.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 28 — response

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity this afternoon to address the Raven ReCentre petition tabled by the Leader of the Third Party on March 13, 2025.

As the territory transitions toward an extended producer responsibility program, we want to set the conditions to see even higher volumes of recyclables being processed in the

territory and to see even more reusable materials diverted from the landfills. This is our goal for recycling in the territory. The crux of this petition lies in its final clause requesting that the Yukon government publicly disclose the reasons behind the need to shift the processing of community recycling from Raven ReCentre to another Whitehorse-based organization. I will do so by walking Yukoners through a timeline of our communications with Raven.

I will demonstrate that not only was Raven informed of the need for this change order but that their leadership understood and accepted that the changes they made to their business model would impact what we would be able to do with them moving forward. I will table the documents that I refer to so that Yukoners can have access to these materials for themselves.

Yukoners were concerned when they heard the news release that Raven ReCentre would no longer accept non-refundable recycling materials at their public drop-off. Raven said that they were shifting their business model and would only be accepting bottles, textiles, metals, glass, and e-waste. Everyone was left wondering what this meant for the future of recycling in the territory. Whitehorse residents were left wondering what they should do with their household recyclables. Communities were left wondering what this meant for community recycling, as Raven was quoted in a *Whitehorse Star* article that same day saying that they — and I quote: "... have begun the process of selling our processing equipment."

For clarity, Mr. Speaker, when recyclables arrive in Whitehorse from the communities, they are not sorted. We need a Whitehorse processor that can process recyclables. After extending the deadline for closing the public depot several times, the executive director of Raven ReCentre told CBC on April 11, 2024 that they will no longer accept paper, plastic, packaging, cardboard, or tin. These messages were not hard to interpret, Mr. Speaker. Raven was no longer going to be a processor. Therefore, the department, the City of Whitehorse, Raven itself, and other partners in the recycling sector undertook considerable efforts to find an immediate solution and see recycling continue in the Yukon. We also wrote to Raven to clarify that they would no longer be able to receive community materials because of their exit from the business of processing non-refundables.

Raven ReCentre acknowledged on that same day via e-mail that they understood that their decision to no longer accept non-refundables meant that they would not be getting shipments from communities again, because refundables and non-refundables arrive in Whitehorse jumbled together. In that e-mail, the executive director stated — and I quote: "I imagine you will now be sending both materials to P&M Recycling while you are still managing PPP [packaging and printed paper]."

On June 13, 2024, we reiterated to Raven that the sorting and separating of non-refundables and refundables at the depot and dropping it off at different locations is not contemplated by the contracts that we have with the transporters. Despite this shift from Raven, Community Services still has several

contracts with Raven ReCentre for various recycling initiatives in the territory. My office and the Department of Community Services have been in communication with Raven ReCentre regarding their decision to change their operations and to help plan for post-extended producer responsibility regulations.

As a result of Raven's decision, public servants with the City of Whitehorse and the Government of Yukon were left to figure out how to bridge that gap.

In the end, Raven participated on a recycling committee with membership from the Government of Yukon, the City of Whitehorse, and members of the recycling sector to provide recommendations on how the City of Whitehorse could implement a blue bin collection program here in the city.

The Yukon government is subsequently supporting the City of Whitehorse with up to \$2.4 million over two years through 2025 for a curbside collection program, which has reduced the cost for Whitehorse households by roughly 50 percent. Curbside recycling in Whitehorse is a major win for recycling and for our environmental stewardship in the Yukon and for our planet and our future, one that Raven helped to bring about.

I will conclude by reiterating that our decisions to implement and pay for curbside recycling in Whitehorse and our need to shift the processing of community recyclables to another Whitehorse-based organization were made in response to Raven ReCentre's clear decisions and their written and verbal communications. We respect their decisions, but as a result, we had to make some of our own.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Yukon listened to the direction that Raven gave us; we found a new processor so recycling could still be offered across the territory. I'll end with a call-out directly to Raven: As we have said repeatedly, if you would like to get back into the processing business, we would welcome you. We will remain —

Speaker: Order, please.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House thanks the Alaska House of Representatives for passing House Joint Resolution 11 that recognizes the importance of a strong and sovereign nation of Canada and firmly supports Canada's right to self-determination, national security, and economic independence.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?
This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Local food production and distribution

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, as people across Canada become concerned about the developing trade war with the US, there's a growing wave of public support for strengthening our

own economy. It's also a time when people are reflecting on missed opportunities to do that.

Four years ago, this Liberal territorial government made an election promise — and I quote: "To empower the Yukon's agriculture sector to continue to grow and thrive..." by taking steps including — quote: "Establish an internal Yukon government team that works to maximize local food purchases through procurement."

Can the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources tell us how much money the government spends per year on buying locally produced food?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I will work to get the number for the members of the House about how much is purchased. What I can say is that we have been working closely with the Yukon Agricultural Association and creating an internal marketplace, working with the Department of Highways and Public Works and the departments that are the major producers of food, to improve access to local products.

I will just also say that earlier today, we offered to provide a ministerial statement on local business growth and supports here in the territory, but the Official Opposition said no to that.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, in an August 2021 press release, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources announced a three-year pilot project that was supposed to be the government's solution to — quote: "... help government institutions connect with local businesses to get healthy and nutritious food grown here in the Yukon." The same press release says that government spends about \$3 million per year on groceries, food, and food preparation.

So, over three years, out of about \$9 million spent on food, how much did government spend on this local food purchasing project? According to the minister himself in the House, \$124,000 over the three years.

Can the minister please tell us if he thinks that the Liberals broke their election promise that the government would — quote: "... maximize local food purchases through procurement"?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, yes, when those numbers came back last year, I asked the Agriculture branch to please redouble their efforts in support of the Agricultural Association to work to find more pathways for the suppliers of food here in the territory so we could connect them up with the purchasing powers of the departments. They did that work and they created a new marketplace within government. That work has been happening over this past winter. I think that my last sit-down with the Agricultural Association was three weeks ago or so. We went over that work and talked about its potential and are still working to improve it, so I think that the member is correct — that there is room for improvement here — and I want to thank the department and the Agricultural Association for working with us to try to improve that.

Mr. Cathers: This Liberal government is again talking a good line about buying local food, but they still haven't lived up to their own promises from four years ago.

Yukon farms produce products including vegetables, beef, pork, eggs, flour, and poultry that could all be purchased by government to use in continuing care facilities, schools, and

more. That would allow Yukon farms to increase production and, by doing so, improve price competitiveness with imported food.

In 2021, the EMR minister said: “Supporting local food is win-win for our health, our environment and our economy. By encouraging government services to source more of their food from local farms, producers and businesses, we are increasing market opportunities for local producers, improving our food security, contributing to our local economy and reducing our reliance on food shipped into the territory.” But the Liberals fail to deliver.

Will they now commit to take real action, such as dedicating funding that has to be spent on local food and provide Yukon food producers multi-year purchasing agreements at a fair price?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I do think this is an important issue. When we sat down with the Agricultural Association, we talked about how to amp this up. What has come is called the “farmers market” — Energy, Mines and Resources working with Highways and Public Works and with local farmers and food producers to enhance supply opportunities, make purchasing easier, and explore procurement options. This led to the launch of the farmers market late last year. We put out a tender for folks to apply on, and it closed in December 2024 and will be launched this year. The branch is working hard on it. I will report back about the numbers.

But I agree that we should be purchasing as much as we can locally, and we will work to connect up our departments with those local suppliers.

Question re: Government support for local media

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, so, in the face of an ongoing trade war, governments across Canada have been taking action to bolster local economies and stand up for local businesses by putting a focus on buying local and buying Canadian.

One way the Yukon government could do that would be to increase its spending on locally owned publications and newspapers. Previously, there was a significant reliance on the advertising of government procurement opportunities in local newspapers, especially those available in all Yukon communities.

This was good for transparency and allowed folks in rural Yukon to be made aware of work that was being done in their communities. Unfortunately, the Liberal government changed this policy and now much more of their advertising is spent with American-owned big-tech companies like Google and Meta.

Will the government reverse this policy and start putting more money toward local advertisers instead of American tech giants?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, first, I just want to urge the member opposite to go back over the numbers that he has reviewed, because at the time of the challenges with the *Whitehorse Star*, we went back and did a review of all of the expenditures by the Yukon government, and we actually saw increasing expenditures in the years leading up to their closure.

A small amount was being spent on digital media; the majority was being spent with local newspapers, not only just your standard weeklies but some of the other publications. The numbers that are being quoted are incorrect.

Look, I think that our Department of Economic Development is right now looking at the dollars that are in our mains — in the main budget. We put \$1 million aside; we’re working with chambers; we’re going to look at the best way that we can use those dollars to ensure that we have local impact.

Again — look, I’ll go back and also find out what is happening with local publications and advertising buys over the last while and moving forward.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, just for the Premier — I didn’t actually quote any numbers, so maybe if he just wants to listen to the question.

Over the past several years, we have continuously heard from local media outlets that the Liberal government’s focus had been too heavily skewed toward American tech giants like Google and Meta. The result of this has been that a business case for local media and local journalism has become even more difficult. The results have been obvious. We saw the closure of one long-time local business — the *Whitehorse Star* — back in the fall of 2023. When we last asked the government to revisit the policy of cutting back on spending on local companies and instead heavily relying on American tech giants, the Minister of Community Services answered, and he gave a flat no.

Now that there is increased attention on the need to buy local, will the Government of Yukon reconsider this decision?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Look, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite was excited — this question was written for him today to come in on an “I gotcha”, but the reality is that we were spending more on local newspapers. Moving up to the point of the *Whitehorse Star*, actually the three years before that, we increased our expenditures. There was only a fraction of the advertising that was going to other —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, not after — before. So, the members opposite can speak off-mic, but the reality is that they didn’t do the research before they actually put the question together. We were spending more money year over year on local newspapers. Actually, the premise of the second question is actually now completely debunked, because — the second question was: Why are you spending less on local newspapers over the last number of years? That’s actually not factual — and we haven’t diverted those expenditures to digital; it has been with local — when you look at the majority of spends.

So, I look forward to question 3.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, it’s an interesting tack taken by the Premier.

Anyway, back in the summer of 2023, representatives of the local media industry wrote to the Premier himself to request that the government reconsider the declining level of support that is provided to local newspapers and media outlets. It was pointed out to the Premier at that time that the Liberal government continues to advertise heavily with American-

owned tech giants, like Meta and Google, but the amount of investment in local media had declined.

Here is what one local business person in the media industry said — and I'll quote: "This decline in financial support hampers our ability to provide quality journalism and keep the public informed and engaged."

So, since this push by local media back in 2023, can the Minister of HPW tell us how much money the government spent in the Yukon versus tech giants from the United States?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, if I remember correctly, there were some statements made in the media — maybe that exact statement. What our team did was we reached out to at least one of the publications and said: Can we go back through and take a look at what we've been spending year over year and how much revenue you've been making directly from the Yukon government?

In that case, really, the conversation changed immensely once they had the opportunity to actually review the revenue they had coming from the Yukon government.

Look, I'm always going to agree on spending local. It's something that we've been solid on. You know that the first thing that we did when we had the threat of tariffs was to sit down with chambers and make sure that they had extra resources, financially, to identify a number of different opportunities here where we can spend our money locally. You see videos that are out online right now, and that's some of the content that we just wanted to support to make sure that was happening, but we're also going to see an opportunity here in the spring where we can have some other investment through the Department of Economic Development.

But again, today, we did want to come in and have a discussion about the entire supports that we have for local business, but the Official Opposition didn't want us to share that with Yukoners.

Question re: Vaccination online booking system

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, this government recently announced that the online vaccine booking system will be down from March 28 to May 25 for site maintenance. That means that, for almost two months, people won't be able to book vaccine appointments online.

This winter has been the worst flu season in more than a decade. Vaccinations are critical to keeping each other safe, and helping people to get vaccinated means making the process as easy for them as possible. For most people, booking online is the easiest option, and now, that won't be accessible.

Why will the Yukon's vaccine booking website be down for almost two months in a time of record flu infections?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to stand today and encourage Yukoners to have vaccines. It is certainly the best way for us to protect ourselves, our families, each other, and our communities. Vaccines continue to be available through the Department of Health and Social Services at our vaccine clinic. They are also available through an expanded scope of practice for our pharmacists across the territory who can provide that service for individuals, often on

a walk-in basis or appointment basis with the individual pharmacies.

I will determine whether or not the information provided in the preamble to this question is accurate or not. It's not something that has been brought to my attention, but I certainly will determine if there is a problem with that service being provided for a period of time, why that is the case, and how we can work to make sure that Yukoners are not adversely affected by that.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, we've heard from many people who are struggling to keep track of when they need boosters or yearly vaccines. They want to be vaccinated, but they have lost track of when they need to book their next appointment. They got their initial vaccine for COVID and other illnesses but now are behind because of logistics. Some of them don't know if or how often they need boosters.

Yukoners live busy lives, and it is this government's responsibility to ensure that vaccines are accessible and that vaccine information is easy to find. One way that has been suggested is to send reminder e-mails to people who have previously had a vaccine.

Will this government offer e-mail reminders to help people keep up with their vaccines and protect the people around them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the Whitehorse vaccine clinic here in town continues to serve Yukoners as part of the government's ongoing effort to integrate COVID-19 support into the broader health services operations. Our clinic offers walk-in vaccination for flu and COVID-19 and appointments for publicly funded vaccines for people aged five and older.

I note that these are free to Yukoners, that immunization delivers vaccines immunizers across the territory to help protect public health. There are often vaccines available at public health clinics and community health clinics; routinely publicly funded vaccines — routine — will continue to be offered through the Whitehorse Health Clinic at 9010 Quartz Road, as the primary focus there is clients under five years of age. Of course, those are critically important, particularly now that we see things like measles spreading in communities that are primarily unvaccinated — completely preventable illness and can have very serious effects. So, we certainly encourage individuals and families to really consider the importance of getting this particular vaccine.

I look forward to the next question.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, it's not just the COVID and flu vaccines that are a concern. Measles outbreaks are on the rise across the country, and people are worried about how vulnerable we are here in the Yukon.

During this Sitting, we have asked many questions about health care and barriers to accessing primary care. Emergency rooms are over-capacity, there is limited access to the walk-in clinic, and there is a years-long wait-list to be matched with a family doctor or a nurse practitioner. Rural communities are particularly at risk and need specific supports to prevent outbreaks. Our health care system is in crisis, and that makes us very vulnerable.

What measures is this government taking to prepare for a potential measles outbreak?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I hope that the member opposite and all Yukoners who were able to hear recent media — local media — radio and interviews with our chief medical officer of health, Dr. Sudit Ranade, who spoke about the importance of measles vaccines — vaccines generally but indicated that the importance of measles vaccines are critical. It can remove the risk of almost 90 — over 90 percent, certainly — 95 percent of individuals and children obtaining or being susceptible to measles. The measles vaccine is incredibly effective. Measles itself is also a disease that has a widespread impact on individuals once it is in a community.

Community Nursing delivers routine publicly funded vaccines to children under the age of five and has maintained access to core infant series primary vaccinations. While some primary vaccinations are individual choices, we encourage families to avail themselves of all of the information and the education to protect their families.

Question re: Contract procurement

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, during the last election, the Premier promised the business community that he would reverse his predecessor's decision to end the practice of publicly opening tenders.

Has the Premier directed the minister to return to this much more fair and transparent practice of publicly opening tenders?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I will defer further questions on this to the Minister of Highways and Public Works through procurement.

I just want to set the record straight. The Leader of the Official Opposition stood next to me, as well as the Leader of the NDP, when this question was asked. My response was, "It seems like this is something we should look into. It's a good idea."

I just want to let folks know that we have been having those discussions to figure out how it can be done, but again, I am making sure the record is set before the Member for Kluane sort of really changes the facts on what actually happened.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, that's the Premier's promise. It doesn't look like he directed his minister to return to the much more fair and transparent practice of publicly opening tenders.

This was a topic that came up at the most recent annual general meeting of the Yukon Contractors Association. The contractors have made a recent request to the government to move back to public tender openings. According to their president's report from the AGM — and I will quote: "... contractors and procurement processes would benefit from a more transparent approach to tender openings."

Mr. Speaker, how will the minister respond to this request from the Yukon Contractors Association?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to thank the Yukon Contractors Association for inviting me to attend their meeting. It was great to interact with their leadership and provide opening comments. It was good that the Leader of the

Official Opposition and the Leader of the Third Party were there as well, paying close attention.

The Yukon government promotes open, fair, and transparent procurement processes. The practice of public opening of bids at the time of tender closing stopped on April 1, 2019. Through Bids and Tenders, the public can still view tender prices within days of tender close for open tenders.

The public can view the initial bid submission prices and the bid value reduction adjusted prices in the cases where it was applied. This change in practice ensures that bid prices are disclosed only after a compliance review by the Procurement Support Centre to ensure accuracy. If all bids are non-compliant, bid prices will not be posted, allowing for immediate retendering or scope provision without compromising competitive pricing. Transparency is still maintained, with bid prices posted shortly after the tender opening.

The Yukon government is currently reviewing the policy on tender opening practices in light of the feedback from the Yukon Contractors Association. It is anticipated that the procurement policy review will take a broad holistic assessment of the overall effectiveness —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Building code and standards

Ms. Clarke: Over the past several years, Yukon homebuilders have been raising concerns about overly burdensome regulations, red tape, and administrative processes that make it difficult for them to do their jobs and build the homes that we so desperately need in the Yukon. To their credit, the City of Whitehorse has been trying to find ways to address these permitting issues and make the process simpler to get more homes built quickly. On Monday, the city debated and unanimously passed a motion asking the Government of Yukon to reconsider the automatic adoption of the National Building Code. This would require Yukon government to make regulatory changes.

Can the Minister of Community Services tell us if this is something that the government will support?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I have been working with the City of Whitehorse on this file. I have heard from councillors, and I, of course, know about the meeting on Monday and the desire for the City of Whitehorse to talk about this.

I will say that modern construction standards benefit Yukoners by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving safety, and enhancing energy efficiency in new buildings. They also provide a regime across the country that is standard — it is a standard regime, which really is what the nation is talking about these days — really trying to break down trade barriers and have equal rules across the country. I want to throw that on the floor of the House this afternoon to think about.

Again, national building standards support a unified market for materials and equipment, expand access to skilled tradespeople, and enable Yukon workers to take on projects in neighbouring jurisdictions — again, cross-border trade. The National Building Code of Canada is developed by the

Government of Canada, through the Standards Council of Canada, industry experts, and volunteers, with public consultation prior to any changes being made. The Yukon government relies on technical expertise from larger jurisdictions to access code changes and their impacts on the industry.

The next National Building Code of Canada update will be issued in December of this year, 2025, and will come into force on April 1, 2027. It is still years away, but I am working with the City of Whitehorse on this subject.

Ms. Clarke: According to the motion put forward at the city, the current process of automatic adoption of the National Building Code can lead to increased construction costs and regulatory challenges that do not always align with Yukon's unique building conditions. I will quote from it: "Delaying automatic adoption until full consultations are conducted with municipalities, builders, and other stakeholders would help ensure a more regionally tailored approach. This would support sustainable development while reflecting Yukon's distinct climate and construction realities."

Mr. Speaker, this proposal would require the Yukon government to make regulatory changes. Is the Government of Yukon willing to consider such changes?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I will answer this question again. I am working with the City of Whitehorse and I am talking to councillors. I have heard their concerns. I will say that this is now, more than ever, an issue that we should discuss, because we are talking about having a national standard that everybody adheres to that allows the free movement of labour and the free movement of materials, where people from PEI, New Brunswick, Québec, Ontario, or Saskatchewan know what to expect when they come here. I know how these barriers get erected, and we are right now in a time when Canada is seeking to reduce trade barriers. The National Building Code is one of those standards that helps to regulate a national standard that allows for the free movement of labour; however, I have heard the concerns from the City of Whitehorse.

I will say that the next National Building Code of Canada update is going to be issued in December, which is months away, and then will come into force on April 1, 2027, giving another 18 months for work with the City of Whitehorse and builders and everyone else to understand what the implications of this new standard are — this standard that will allow free movement of labour and materials across the country and a national understanding of buildings.

Question re: Internal trade barriers

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, the Premier stated that the Yukon was participating in a plan to remove all internal trade barriers by July 1. Many Yukoners want to know what this will mean for the Yukon, so I will ask for some specifics.

Under the current system of supply management, some Yukon farmers are not allowed to sell their products in other provinces or territories. For example, a local egg farmer cannot

legally sell eggs to customers in northern BC. Will this interior barrier to trade be removed by July 1?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, for a bit of background, some of this work was led by Nova Scotia talking about the free movement of goods across the country and an elimination of all these trade barriers. What has been tabled by the federal government is a concept to move to the elimination of all these items across the country, knowing that there are some items that have to be worked through. They have gone back to all the provinces, and I can give an example here.

We have one final agreement for a First Nation and the specific benefit in that self-government agreement, which is anchored in their treaty, happens to be identified in the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*.

So, there is some work to be done, but the real concept here is for the country to lead on making sure you can remove as many of these barriers as possible.

I think there will be lots of questions in the House — very particular things that are in those 29 exemptions here for the Yukon. But what we're doing right now is as much work as we can to ensure that there can be as free movement of trade across this country — it's something that can significantly help the Yukon as well as many other jurisdictions.

Ms. Van Bibber: Another huge barrier to labour mobility is in relation to doctors. The Canadian Medical Association has long called for what they describe as "pan-Canadian licensure". This would remove the restrictions that doctors can only practise in the province or territory in which they are licensed.

Will the Yukon adopt a system of pan-Canadian licensure for doctors by July 1?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I apologize to the House if I've missed something. I did not see that on the table.

There is a specific group working on mobility in a number of areas. Of course, we've talked here in the House about the Atlantic registry, which four provinces have adopted. We've had the opportunity to see one medical practitioner, I believe, go through that system and now be licensed.

But again, these are things that — whether it's going to be a regional approach to start when it comes to doctors and mobility, the colleges of physicians in each one of these jurisdictions have to be brought to the table.

I agree with the member opposite — if the member is saying: Look, let's figure out how to remove all of these barriers and have one licensing for doctors across this country — absolutely agree. If that framework gets put on the table, that's something that I think we absolutely have to move on. Of course, we'll do the due diligence that we have to do. But I haven't seen that position yet. Hopefully, we do see something like that tabled through the mobility working group.

Ms. Van Bibber: Another obvious example of an internal trade barrier that affects Yukoners is in relation to liquor sales. Currently, there is a personal-use exemption that limits the amount of alcohol that an individual can bring into the territory. Will this internal barrier to trade be removed by July 1?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, yes, like I have said, we have to be open here in the work that we're doing. We're looking at absolutely every one of these exemptions. That's what the commitment was at the table: to go back and take a look at all of these.

There have been some concerns by some premiers to this particular item where they focused on the fact that — I know some of the other territories have talked about having dry communities. They're very concerned. I have heard that from some of my colleagues. We didn't table that concern; it has been discussed before.

We just want to make sure that we can have the proper discussions and consultation at the Yukon Forum but also with our producers. We think that this is something that we can get behind, but again, we want to have the dialogue with industry — I think they will see great opportunities in it — as well as the appropriate stakeholders and governments before we make a final decision.

Again, we believe that we should be able to open this up as much as possible. There will be some impacts and sacrifice; that's why it hasn't happened before. But we are in a moment in time to make the tough decisions and open up this economy.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed. We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Ms. Blake): Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Bill No. 216: *Third Appropriation Act* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Yukon Housing Corporation

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Good afternoon and thank you, Madam Chair.

As Minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation, I am pleased to rise to outline the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* for the 2024-25 budget year. With us to assist in today's proceedings, I ask my colleagues here to welcome Samantha Paterson, the president of Yukon Housing Corporation, as well as Jamie McAllister, Yukon Housing Corporation's vice-president. I want to thank the staff of Yukon Housing Corporation and the board of directors for their commitment and dedication in their day-to-day work as they strive to increase affordable housing options for Yukoners.

The corporation is requesting an increase of \$240,000 under repairs and maintenance. This is the result of inflationary pressures on materials and contractor rates, which are largely beyond the corporation's control. The increase is necessary to ensure that housing units are kept to a standard that meets adequate and safe accommodations for Yukoners.

Under capital, the corporation is not requesting a change to the total appropriated amount but is transferring \$800,000 from the Yukon home ownership loan program to the developer-build loan program. Madam Chair, the home ownership loan program was not meeting the needs of Yukoners and was paused pending a program review. The program's surplus budget is better applied to the developer-build loan program in the interim. The home ownership loan program is going to be replaced with a new program that will better meet the needs of first-time homebuyers. The program will come into effect later this spring.

In addition, a transfer of \$2.7 million from the replacement of aged-out assets to other programs is requested. Of that \$2.7-million transfer, \$600,000 will go to the renovation and rehabilitation program, \$500,000 will go to the community housing development program, and \$1.6 million will go to the housing initiatives fund. This transfer better aligns with forecast spending and priorities for capital projects until March 31, 2025.

The corporation has additional recoveries of \$500,000 from the Government of Canada. This funding assists with the renovation costs at the corporation's 408 Alexander Street building in downtown Whitehorse. The 17-unit building is home to a supportive housing program being operated by the Safe at Home Society.

To conclude, Madam Chair, with the revisions and initiatives that I spoke to, our overall priorities on affordable housing across the continuum remain on track. I will now cede the floor for questions.

Ms. Clarke: I would like to thank the officials from the Yukon Housing Corporation for joining us today.

I have a few questions for the minister responsible. Last year, there was almost a \$2 million decrease to the home ownership loan program, and in this supplementary budget, there has been another decrease of \$800,000 to this program. Can the minister confirm that this was due to low subscription to the program? How many applicants were there to this

program, and how many were successful? In the briefing, we were told that this program is under review. When will this review be complete?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That is correct in the sense that the program was paused. We had lots of rigorous debate over the last two years around this program. We, of course, have to ensure that the corporation applies the right risk assessment on applications. It has gone through many iterations over the years, but we were focused on trying to make sure that we have a workable program. I think that there were questions from the member opposite, probably going back to last year, about the number of applications we had and very few applications that were successful.

What we have done is that we paused the program and said that we need to go back and figure out, in the current context of the housing market, how we can make this workable. The program, as it was used over the last number of years, was not working. What we are really focused on is how to get money into the hands of Yukoners so that they can buy a home. That is the work that we have been doing. I can tell you that the review is complete. We are actually in the midst of just looking at building out the final pieces of what we believe is going to be a very strong program — something that will be leading in the north. We are likely just weeks away from being able to share more with Yukoners, but we are pretty excited about something that we think can really meet the needs of Yukoners and get more Yukoners into those first homes that they are looking to purchase. Very shortly, we will have a broader discussion, likely being able to get into detail even as we debate the mains later this spring.

Ms. Clarke: I thank the minister for that answer.

The \$800,000 decrease from the home ownership loan program has been transferred to the developer-build loan program. Can the minister confirm how many applications were received for this program and how many were successful? Last year, this developer-build loan program decreased significantly. Was there a change in eligibility or application process that contributed to this higher uptake?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Hopefully, I understand the question correctly. The transfer to the existing program that we are talking about — we have seen two applicants who are using this program, one being the Yukon land trust program, which is a strong program. I believe that some of that work is being done in the member opposite's constituency. The other one is the work that is being done by Chu Níikwān. That's where the funds have gone to fulfill those agreements — two very successful programs. We are seeing the trust, of course, being built out now. I know that last night, the leader of the opposition and I were both at an event actually celebrating the work of Chu Níikwān. Actually, one of the things that they were highlighting is this great program and their ability to build out a subdivision. They have done it very quickly, they have done it on budget, and now we seeing new homes available.

So, that was something that we haven't seen done in the Yukon. That was something that was very innovative, being able to partner up with a Yukon First Nation development corporation and to see them build out on settlement lands and

having a long-term vision about being one of the best partners here in the Yukon and in Whitehorse when it comes to making sure there is available housing stock for Yukoners in this growing community.

Ms. Clarke: There is an increase of \$500,000 to the community housing development. Is this allocated for a specific project or a continuation of current projects?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That is just moving into the completion of an existing program that is underway.

Ms. Clarke: There is an increase of \$500,000 for the unsheltered homelessness encampment initiative program recovered by Canada. Can the minister explain what projects this is allocated to?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: 408 Alexander — I believe that we have 17 units in that building. Speaking with the contractor, one of the concerns was that we could have the proper controls in place at the entry to the building, so we have used a portion of that money to make sure that we changed the access point so there can be better ability to oversee who is coming and going into that building. What we have done is that we have moved a number of individuals in there. We want them to be safe. We have used a bit of the funding for that and for some of the O&M around that. That's the building just across the way from 405 Alexander.

Ms. Clarke: I thank the minister for that answer.

In this supplementary budget, there is a line of Other Capital for \$38,970,000. Can the minister provide a breakdown of this?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just to clarify, I think the number is the larger capital of \$38 million, so that would be the bigger projects that are happening right now. So, that would be Ryder — significant project, bringing a number of — I think 22 new units online over and above what was in the previous building. That's at the end of Main Street in Whitehorse just behind the building of the brand new Hyatt Hotel.

This is also work that has been putting money toward Korbo, which is the project that is being built in Dawson City.

So, these are funds for some of the biggest projects that we have. Likely when we get into the mains, we'll have a chance to update the House on each and every one of these large projects, but I think really what this money is doing as well — the money that we'll talk about later this spring — is it is providing the largest investment that we've ever seen in affordable housing in the Yukon.

Ms. Clarke: I thank the minister for that answer.

We recently had a meeting with the executive director of the Safe at Home Society in regard to a number of projects, but I would like to ask the minister some questions about a few of them.

I'll start with the Hearth. In the briefing with officials, we were told that \$6 million of the \$38,970,000 in Other Capital in the supplementary budget was allocated for Safe at Home's Hearth project.

Can the minister provide an explanation of what the \$6 million was for?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: For the ongoing renovations that fall within the scope of the Hearth project.

Ms. Clarke: We note that there is also money in the upcoming budget for this. Can the minister provide an explanation of what that money is for?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just speaking with officials, this spend is over this two-year period, so it's the continuation and completion of that project going into the next year. We will be happy when we are in the mains to probably give a — and I'm sure that there will be a number of questions around the Hearth project. It has been something that has been debated here.

I am glad to hear that the members opposite spent some time with Safe at Home. I know that there has been a bit of opposition from the other side on the project, but I think that it's great that folks in the House are coming together and understanding how important this project is.

Ms. Clarke: Can the minister provide an updated timeline for this project?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I can come back with dates based on what their project manager is identifying, but we believe — spoke with officials who say the spring of 2026.

Ms. Clarke: I thank the minister for that answer. Can the minister remind me how many rooms will be in the new facility and what the total square footage is?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I believe that there will be 67 units in the new facility. I would have to go back to take a look at the square footage, because part of that, of course — there is substantial square footage on the first floor, and I think that they are still looking to see what the use is for that square footage. I know that the investment that was realized here from the Yukon government, when you take into consideration what we're getting for units per square footage, was much less than what we're seeing when go out to build new units — I can definitely share that with Yukoners.

Ms. Clarke: With the \$6 million in this supplementary budget, can the minister provide the total cost to date for this project?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The total budget is \$42 million on the project, but what we can do is figure it out from a cash-flow statement from within the organization. Probably when we come back to the mains, we can give a sense of what has been spent to date. We don't have it here with us today.

Ms. Clarke: Within municipalities, what is the available grant for the construction of secondary or garden suites? Is the municipal portion a tax credit and Yukon Housing Corporation a cash grant?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The portion that comes from the Yukon Housing Corporation is cash. I will leave it to the municipality just to provide that information. If the member opposite wants us to, we could just reach out to our officials and pull that policy from the City of Whitehorse or from other municipalities, but I know that, for the program that we administer, it is actual cash that is provided.

Ms. Clarke: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the minister for that answer.

Are there programs available for secondary suite construction for people living outside municipal boundaries?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The only funds that we administer at this particular time is the home repair, which is something that

is available to all Yukoners. Specific to what is being administered by municipalities for secondary — I don't have that today. For us, really, the dollars that we are putting in place are for home ownership and that is the program that we will be detailing — in more detail later this spring.

Ms. Clarke: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the minister for that answer.

There have been staff housing challenges in many Yukon communities. Can the minister, by way of return, tell us how many staff housing units there are in each community and if there is any money in the 2024-25 budget to construct more?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: A bit of background here — the Yukon Housing Corporation — we manage 79 direct leases with employees, and the average rental time is about three years. As of March 14, 2025, we have just about 10 folks right now who are on the wait-list.

Going into the next year, what I can share with the House is that, in our mains, we have some funds going into projects across the Yukon. One specifically that we are working on right now, where we have a First Nation government coming to us, we are negotiating out funding, and they want to own the units, yet they want to have that unit so that it is available to employees in the community.

What we have been really looking at is where we can match — not just that the Yukon government or Yukon Housing Corporation is going out and building units for Yukon and government employees but that we are in a position where we can help de-risk, in some cases, existing projects. The offer that we put on the floor to a number of community organizations is that, if they, say — as an example — would want to build a fourplex, we would be in a position to then lease a unit or two units from that new construction. We could use it for employees, and it could help to make sure that project is easily bankable.

Those are some of the conversations — I think in the mains, we will talk a little bit about what we're building out in the communities, and it will give a sense of some of the solutions that we're coming up with for some of those individuals — but also some of the opportunities that we have. We have the housing incentive fund, the HIF — sorry, housing innovation fund — and that has been really successful. I think that we are over 900 units since its inception back in 2018. I think it's 931 units right now. That is a great example of the private sector organizations coming and building out units. Also, that gives them an opportunity to be in the affordable rental space.

Ms. Clarke: This is my last question, and I'm going to cede the floor to the Third Party.

In the 2021-22 five-year capital plan, a community housing project in Mayo was scheduled to be completed in 2024-25 for \$4 million to \$5.5 million in total. Now it isn't scheduled to start until 2027-28, will take three years to build, and will probably cost \$9 million to \$12 million.

Can the minister tell us why this is delayed and what changes to the scope have been made to see it double in price, or are these two separate projects?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I just want to go back on one — just so that it's on the record — the home repair budget that we have, which we provide, is \$450,000 for 2024-25. I just wanted to make sure that was on the record.

I can get a bit more information concerning the total budget line item. What we tend to do is ensure that we're looking at what our projects are coming in at market. We have built in Mayo. We have supported a project in Mayo. Just a couple of years ago, a number of us were there for the opening of that project. I went through our HIF funding, and we have been building a number of units in Carmacks and in Faro, so we have a sense of what the pricing is coming in at. I will go back and look at the total envelope that has been identified for this to get you a bit more clarity around the actual pricing and the dollars that we have put toward that.

We have been back and forth with the municipality. It's just identifying appropriate areas of land that we can use and, to be open, because we have built in a number of communities — and, of course, there has been a big discussion here about expenditures. I know that the opposition has challenged some of our total budget. I appreciate the fact that there seems to be a sense to really make sure this investment goes into the communities. We agree, but as you know and as we have discussed today, we are seeing at one time the largest investment into affordable housing between Watson Lake, Whitehorse — a number of major projects — Dawson City, and then our surrounding community.

Again, there is an incredible envelope of investment that is being done right now and that is what drives a significant capital budget. I'm happy to see that collaboration here in the House around the need and understanding that this investment is incredibly important.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the officials for being here, to the minister for answering questions, and to all the folks in the department who are helping out behind the scenes. I really appreciate it.

My first question is — the minister mentioned that there is a decrease of \$2.7 million to the replacement of aged-out units that has been moved into various other funds, and I understand that this is because some projects that it was expected to fund are not as far along as hoped. I wonder if the Premier could give us an update on what those projects are and what caused the delays.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I wouldn't get into specific assets. Of course, we have a large portfolio, but what I can share with the member opposite is that we are looking at the entire portfolio of units that we have. We are looking to see if there are units that are completely aged out and how to handle that.

Do we look at how to best use the funds when it comes to renovation? Are there some minor renovations that can get us to the appropriate level?

I can tell the member opposite that we are tracking this weekly, looking to see how many units are in need. I can dig into that in a second as well. Maybe I will ask officials to grab that for me.

Just getting a sense — because one of the things that we want to ensure is that we put dollars as quickly as we can toward

getting units back into operation. I have had some questions from the Member for Watson Lake and others on occasion. We are trying to make sure that we can move a unit that has not been in use as quickly as possible — understanding what that takes. In some cases as well, when individuals are moving out, we deploy some funds to make sure that the unit, if there was any renovation or if there was any damage that we have to repair and things such as that — that the work continues to get done.

I will come back and give a sense, but just overall, when you think about repairs — between April 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024, we did 2,346 minor repairs and emergency work orders in Whitehorse. In our communities, we did 944 minor repairs and emergency work orders — throughout the communities. When we talk about those larger projects, we are talking about 65 major repairs between April 1 of last year and December 31, 2024.

MLA Tredger: I didn't quite understand, so I am just going to try to recap and then maybe the Premier can correct me. I think he is saying that the original \$2.7 million was meant for a number of different small replacements as opposed to one big building replacement and that the decision was made that the money was better spent or could be spent more quickly on rehabilitating existing units as well as the projects in the community housing development and HIF.

Maybe the Premier can let me know if that is accurate.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I want to just go back to clarify but also to share where we are at when it comes to our units and what we are looking at that needs to be repaired.

So, when we look at our total amount, we have about 830 units right now that are occupied. We have, under allocation, 15 units. Under capital, we have about 11, and then we have about 28 units right now that are under repair.

What I was sharing is that, while we're still making assessments on how to best use our funds, this has been reallocated into different areas of the corporation where we think it can best support the operations of the corporation and the work that we're doing moving forward, whether that's to support the work that we're doing to build new units — but again, we are inevitably coming back to a place here, as we go into our mains, where over the next number of years, we are going to have to expend significant dollars when it comes to ensuring that we do the proper maintenance and, in some cases, significant renovation to some of our housing portfolio.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the Premier for that. I wanted to ask about the sale of the lot that formerly had Macaulay Lodge, 2 Klondike Road. Could the Premier talk about how much it was sold for and what the conditions were in terms of what could be developed there?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'll just look to officials to provide me a note — if I have the sales price or not. I will look to find out what the sale price is for that particular lot, but I will share some information, because I think this is something that we have debated lots in the House. There have been questions about it.

First, the land was owned by the Yukon government — Energy, Mines and Resources. So, that's an asset that Energy, Mines and Resources sold.

Macaulay Lodge, which we have talked about, was demolished in the summer of 2022 after it was determined that renovating or repurposing it would not be economical due to the poor condition. It was determined that the private sector would be the best place to redevelop the lot and a price-driven tender was issued. So, that was a public process that I think that we discussed here on a couple of occasions.

Prospective developers were encouraged to pursue funding through Yukon Housing Corporation, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and the City of Whitehorse to support affordable housing.

I checked with our officials today — understanding that if you go back to the original statements that we made, this is exactly — there were programs. If the developer wanted to go out and leverage those programs, that would also give the developer an ability, if they wanted to, to provide affordable housing.

For us, there were no applications and no funding that was requested at all from Yukon Housing Corporation to access any of our programs. The site was then zoned mixed-use — residential and commercial development. Again, it was discussed and debated in the House. This was a decision around — and a request from the City of Whitehorse. They felt, within the work of the official community plan, that it would be most appropriate — the municipality — if they had that mixed use. I think that it is about really making sure, from my time in city council, that there is more opportunity for individuals in Riverdale to access commercial assets — businesses and such — and that there was housing as well. That fell in line with the official community plan.

I have seen that there has been some advertising out for that project. It looks like a local developer now has taken on the project and is looking, I think, for an expression of interest or for sale on that project.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that, and maybe I'll follow up about the sale price or ask my colleague to follow up about the sale price in EMR debate when it comes up.

We did have a lot of debate about the selling of this site and there was a lot of concern that it went from being a long-term care facility supporting people who needed a lot of support to — from what I have seen in the offers for sale or the interest for sale — what look like luxury condos. They look beautiful, but they don't look affordable. They don't look like they are for people who need a lot of support.

I want to quote from a CBC article called “Whitehorse residents weigh in on former Macaulay Lodge site” from March 15, 2023 — quote: “Pillai said new property on the site will still help fill housing gaps, and that affordability is a priority for any development there.”

I want to know how we got from having affordability as a priority to the beautiful but very fancy condos that are for sale now.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First of all, the zoning change was something that the city wanted to see. That is the first thing. The second part is that we were in a position where we were there to grant programs that could make it affordable. That is

what we have been doing on all of our projects — to provide programs that can bring down the capital requirements for a developer and give them that opportunity. In this particular case, it went out to the private sector and they made a decision to not use those programs.

Look, what I'll challenge is the fact that I think that we would be in a very difficult position today in this debate if we were not making the single largest investment in affordable housing in Yukon history. It would be a tough debate — to see that we put that land out, but I'm actually — you know, where we are at today is a solid place. We are in the midst of building multiple buildings that are really going to make an impact in the affordable housing market, but we are also seeing that lot repurposed to provide homes to a growing population. So, what we want to see is an entire ecosystem in place. In a couple of weeks' time, we're going to have an opportunity to come into the House and we're going to talk about our new program that will make first-time home ownership probably more attainable than it has ever been in the Yukon. We want to see Yukoners have that opportunity to get their first home, and if they are not in that position, we want to make sure that there are affordable housing options. In many cases, with the Canadian housing benefit, you know, we have probably 300 households as well who are leveraging those dollars to offset the pressures of renting.

We think that we are doing some really good work when it comes to the rental market. We think that we are in a position to make sure that we build new affordable housing at a pace that the Yukon has never seen. We know that, through our HIF program, we have spent about \$6.5 million that we have invested into new affordable housing, and that is happening across the Yukon. At the same time, we are seeing some great projects built. In this particular case, the developer made a decision — after going out through a public process in the market — and now sees that the type of projects that they want to build are projects that are more along the way of market rental. Just in closing, the sales price was \$1,322,900.

MLA Tredger: Thanks for the moment to just make sure I had that written down properly.

I just think it's such a loss to the Yukon public, who had this collective resource and this land that could be used for affordable housing — for so many things that are a collective public good, and that's gone now. It is now in the hands of a developer, who I'm sure is going to make sky-high profits on that piece of land, and I think that is a real loss for Yukoners.

While we're talking about public projects, I wanted to ask for an update on the work that has happened with Vimy Heritage Housing Society in the last year.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On the last remarks, I respect the position of the member opposite, but I think it's also incredibly important that it's not just government building housing in the Yukon. That is not sustainable. We need to make sure that the private sector plays a key role in ensuring that we have proper housing — not just housing but land development. That's why we talked earlier about some of the loan programs that have helped us see subdivisions built by the private sector.

I will leave it for now. It's probably a different perspective, but I do think that there are incredible investments being done, and it's not just because that is a public piece of land, but we have figured out ways to use private sector land to build public good, so I think that is incredibly important. Also, in many cases, what we have done is we have teamed up with First Nation development corporations to breathe life into self-government agreements and the vision around chapter 22, whether it be the fan Kwäch'än Council, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, or others. So, I think all of that creates great value in the Yukon.

For those who are listening today, for some background on the Vimy Heritage Housing Society project, we know that there is a growing senior population, and we know that we are absolutely committed to investing in measures that will allow Yukon seniors to age in place in their community of choice. The government continues to support the Vimy Heritage Housing Society. The first thing that we did was to hold land with a value of about \$1.35 million — \$1,350,000 — so that land is still being held. Over the last number of years, we have provided \$700,000 for Vimy to continue to de-risk their project. Going back to 2024, we provided \$455,000 for Vimy to be able to build out a class B cost estimate.

I attended the Vimy Heritage AGM just a couple of weeks ago. I had an opportunity to face questions and share information with them. The vice-president was there with me as well.

Where we stand today is that there are a number of items that CMHC — the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation — have requested from Vimy. They seem very happy with the sense that they are going to provide all that information. To give you a sense of some of that information — they want to provide food services. That could be an expensive endeavour. That can be a challenging endeavour to be able to provide. CMHC has come and said: What does that look like? What's the costing of that?

It's all really about de-risking a project that is pretty significant. I think they are looking at the demand for the units that you have, and Vimy has gone out and done some substantial work on identifying potential clients who they would work with. What's the structure? Who oversees this? Who does the property management? You have a volunteer board. Who makes sure that the building is looked after? So, those are things that CMHC have requested.

From our side, we have just committed another significant amount of dollars. We will talk about it in the mains, but it's enough money for Vimy to get to a class A estimate. It's a very substantial amount of money that we have now put on the table — actually more dollars now than we had spent in investing in their project to date, all in one tranche. That gives them a sense to be able to work with CMHC, answer the questions, de-risk the project in the final stages before they can go to access the debt that they are looking to have provided by CMHC. At the same time, it gives them an opportunity to have the strongest numbers possible on what the cost of the building is going to be. In between, if I remember correctly, there was a delta on the capital that the actual organization has to bring to the table. So,

there was some work there that they were doing. I think it was \$3 million that they were still looking to identify besides the investments from all the other partners who are involved.

MLA Tredger: Thank you for that update, and I will follow up more about the money in the mains when we get to the mains.

I wanted to ask a couple of questions about Yukon Housing specifically. Can the Premier give us updated wait-list numbers?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Our current wait-list is at 332.

MLA Tredger: Would the Premier be able to break that down by community and by stream for accessing Yukon housing — so affordability or seniors or people fleeing violence and the other priority streams?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'll go through community, and I'll break it down from senior to non-senior. The criteria that we use for prioritization is something that is within the application format, whether that's a victim of violence or somebody who has a disability — the many things that we use to weight the decision-making. But by communities, we have: one non-senior in Carcross; we have five non-seniors in Carmacks; we have 12 non-seniors and nine seniors in Dawson City; in Haines Junction, there are two non-seniors and two seniors; in Ross River, we have one non-senior; in Watson Lake, we have 14 non-seniors and three seniors; and in Whitehorse, where the bulk of potential clients are, we have 176 non-seniors and 107 seniors.

MLA Tredger: I appreciate those numbers. It's helpful to have them on the record.

Could you talk about the time that those people have spent on the waiting list? I'm particularly interested in the time spent by people on the waiting list who are in the affordability stream versus one of the priority-access streams.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just for the Assembly, some of the things that we have done over the last number of years is — not only are we consistently tracking and weekly, when I meet with the president, I'm going through the list. So, I'm happy to share with the House.

Just a couple years ago, that wait-list was north of 500; today we see much less. So, I get excited when I actually see the fact that what we're building right now in the Yukon can make an incredible impact. So, it does show that, if you have the courage to make those investments and you take a look at the wait-list and you think about the hundreds of units that are coming online, we're really getting to a place where an incredibly challenging situation can be taken on.

We do track senior and non-senior breakdowns on how long people are on the wait-list. We do it — we list, again, by secondary status, but I'll go to the affordability piece.

Under affordable housing, the numbers that I want to share with you are: 194 would be the total number of folks under that affordability; 122 of those individuals have been on the list for a year or less; 49 have been on the list for one to three years; 14 individuals have been on for three to five years; and eight individuals have been on the list for five to seven years; and there is just one greater than that.

MLA Tredger: The reason why I'm asking about affordability versus the other streams is that in the Auditor General's report on housing, it was found that the people in the priority streams were actually getting housed more slowly than people who were supposed to be lower priority — people in the affordability stream — so I'm wondering if that is changing.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that we are seeing some changes and, of course, we have taken the OAG's report very seriously and tried to implement all of the pieces that are there. As well, the OAG's report stated that we should be looking at community housing models. That, of course, has a real diverse group of individuals inside of the housing — so, you are trying to meet those needs of a number of different people — it could be seniors as well as affordable — within some of the larger complexes. So, you want to meet that goal, but at the same time, you want to make sure that those folks who are really in need continue to have affordable housing.

What I will share with the House — and it's a sensitive subject, but we are continuously — victims of violence are one category of folks. Those are individuals whom we are always prioritizing. What we have seen is that individuals from outside of the territory, because of their circumstances, to be safe — maybe because they have extended family here in the Yukon — move to the Yukon. Of course, once they have met the criteria, they are then in a position to access Yukon Housing.

We have had some discussions. I have had some discussions with different leaders to say: How do we make sure, especially when we are seeing individuals coming from another territory — and how do we work with maybe those communities to see if they feel interested in investing in Yukon affordable housing so that they have safety nets for their citizens when they come to, usually, Whitehorse? We can build, but then again, we are in this position where we know that our obligation is to Yukoners, but people are moving to the Yukon and are becoming Yukoners and, in some cases, they are in very precarious situations. That is something else that we are balancing within our criteria — in making sure that individuals have appropriate places to stay.

I will also say that another sensitive comment — and I would say that there have been times when officials have asked me not to maybe share this, but I think that it is important for the House to know. We built at least one project early on in our mandate here in the Yukon — I think that it is 26 units — and there have been times when I have been questioned — when we built these new units, new projects — and members opposite have asked me, appropriately so: Why haven't you tenanted this particular unit? We are driving by, you have invested in this affordable housing, and you are in a position where it is not filled yet.

Part of the challenge is that we have criteria for folks who are on a wait-list — where we reach out to them — I think that it is two weeks that we usually give individuals to make a decision. In many cases, we make that offer, and because of the location within the city — and in some cases because of the size of the unit — they have made the decision to not take the unit. If we have folks on our wait-list — and I can tell you that our building that was built on the south access, we were north of 30

individuals on the waiting list who did not want to move into that beautiful new building because of either the unit size or because of the location. Of course, we are building throughout the city, but in those particular situations, I want to say that there are many individuals on our wait-list who we need to ensure have appropriate housing and that is why we want to build out, but I don't think that it is indicative of the significant needs of everybody on our wait-list.

As the member opposite said, we need to make sure that those people who are really in need, as the OAG's report said, are getting into units that they really need, understanding that some people put their name on the wait-list years in advance. They fill out their applications and, when I first came into the role, people were saying: Well, I have a place now, but I might need a place later.

Then, of course, we get into some of the work around the means testing.

There was a period of time when people had their own home and they would still put in an application for down the road, so we are sifting through all of that and making sure that the folks who are in most need can get into units that we are either refurbishing or building new.

MLA Tredger: I am going to follow up on my question in a minute, but I first want to comment on this idea about people coming in from outside of the Yukon and ending up on the Yukon Housing wait-list. I am happy that the Premier is pursuing different ways to fund Yukon housing. I am very grateful that anyone fleeing violence who comes into the Yukon is eligible for a place. I think that anyone in the Yukon or coming to the Yukon who is fleeing violence needs a place to live. I don't really care how long they have been in the Yukon. I think most of the people in this House and most of the people in the Yukon have not spent their entire lives in the Yukon, and I don't think that makes them any less entitled to support from this government. I want us to be a welcoming territory where we don't count how many days people have been here to decide if they deserve housing — that we say that this person needs housing and we find it for them. I think that's really important.

I had asked about following up on the Auditor General's report where they found that people who are on the priority list for a number of reasons, including fleeing violence and another being needing an accessible unit, were being housed more slowly than people who were there just for affordability criteria. I didn't really get an answer to that. Is the department tracking the amount of time that people are spending on wait-lists divided into those categories?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I was saying in my previous answer — maybe there was a misunderstanding with the member opposite — is that we are incredibly inviting to individuals, and that has been another significant reason why our units fill up very quickly — because of our ability for our corporation to help victims of violence.

When it comes to — again, I want to be clear. There is a challenge at hand, and the challenge is that we are making sure that we prioritize through our criteria, but we also have the Auditor General's other recommendation that is around the

distribution. I think it's 60:20:20. So, following one of the Auditor General's recommendations on the mixed use and at the same time trying to meet another one of the directions of the Auditor General.

What I can say is that I think what we've been able to share — and when I go through some of the folks who are in our most challenging and different categories looking for — whether it's medical or it's victims of violence and others, we're in a position where individuals who are being housed and they are on the wait-list, then, for us in less than a year — in some cases, maybe the maximum we're seeing, really, is about two years. There is maybe one other situation that is probably really to do with where they are at geographically in the Yukon. But for the most part, we're seeing things move very quickly and that's the good work of Yukon Housing Corporation and the folks who are dealing with client services.

Again, it's important to note that we're trying to meet all of the recommendations from the Auditor General.

MLA Tredger: I'm not clear on my question. Is that information being tracked and it's just not being prioritized right now, or is it not being tracked?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm going back to the data that we have, because we track. We're tracking all of these items. We're looking at the time period and we're looking to see how quickly individuals are coming in. For victims of violence, I will state that, just on that one, we have the Canada-Yukon housing benefit, which helps us with the private market to offset the costs for individuals.

We also do provide funding to other organizations like Kaushee's where, of course, they're providing some interim measures for individuals. So, it's not just about our stock.

As the member opposite knows, whether it's focusing and supporting the by-name list, if it's working with the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition or working with Safe at Home, there are many organizations that we have relationships with — financial relationships with — to meet the needs if we're talking about the most vulnerable individuals in our territory.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister. So, I understand they are tracking the data, but they don't have it here today to speak to whether the recommendation about making sure that priority groups are being housed at least as quickly as non-priority groups — so, he doesn't have the information today about whether that objective is being — whether that change is being made.

I just want to quote from the Auditor General's report briefly. It says — they found — quote: "The average time for priority groups to be housed was 276 days, with the average time for non-priority applicants to be housed was 141 days ... These results indicate that the process did not assign housing to priority groups more quickly than non-priority groups. The corporation was not able to provide an explanation as to why this was the case." I think that this is pretty important, that the priority groups are being housed more quickly, and I think that it's an important question to know whether that is changing. I'm hoping that perhaps when we debate the mains or perhaps in a legislative return the minister can come back with that information.

I wanted to ask: Does the Yukon Housing Corporation have an eviction prevention policy?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Look, I'm going to just get that question — again, I think — look, we could debate back and forth on it. I think that I was — I have shared the fact that we're meeting the policy that we have to meet, which is a breakdown of 60:20:20 on a distribution in new units, so we have to meet that criteria. At the same time, we are tracking the individuals who are coming through and who are, again, individuals needing support. The member opposite has just said that, from their perspective, if an individual arrives in Whitehorse — from their perspective — and is an individual who needs housing right away, they should get it right away. The impact of that is that a person from the Yukon who may have a medical need, may be a senior, may have mobility issues would be further down, although they are part of the criteria that the OAG is identifying.

Look, I'm good to debate it, because I don't want to leave this topic if there is a lack of understanding on the other side of the floor, but we are trying to meet all of the criteria and the policy points that have been identified for us, and at the same time, some of the policy positions that have been taken by the member opposite would be counter to the line of questioning that I'm getting here today on this topic, or we can go back to it during the mains.

I just missed that last question, Madam Chair.

MLA Tredger: I didn't want to split hairs, but I understand that the Premier is saying that the policy to have a tenant allocation policy that is partially approved through the affordability stream and partly through the priority stream came from the Auditor General's report. I thought that was an internal decision. I don't remember seeing anything in the Auditor General's report suggesting or requiring Yukon Housing to have that allocation.

Can he point to where that is in the Auditor General's report?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm sorry. I will just correct the record. It is from the social housing transformation plan. That was the community housing framework that was developed in consultation with NGOs here, Health and Social Services, and the housing action plan that was built out by Yukoners. We have all of our organizations locally coming together to put our action plan together saying: This is what you need to do. Then we also have the OAG saying: You need to do this. So, we are trying to meet both of the criteria.

Again, many of those organizations who are supporting the most vulnerable folks in our community are saying: This is how we want to see housing built out. And at the same time, we are trying to follow the recommendation on how to house some of the most vulnerable folks in our community.

MLA Tredger: I am just going to quote quickly, because the Premier was saying that this housing allocation policy that comes out of these various plans was supported by non-profits and non-profits are doing the work.

I am going to quote from an article from February 2, 2023 from CBC titled "Yukon's new social housing policy works against the most vulnerable, critics say"; the sub-headline is

“Policy determines how new social housing units are allocated, starting with new 47-unit facility in Whitehorse”.

It says, “... critics say it discriminates against those in most desperate need.” I am going to skip down, because I really want to hear from the people working in the field. For example, it says, “In a letter to a territorial legislative committee in November, Kate Mechan of the Safe at Home Society — a non-profit advocacy group — said her organization initially supported a more ‘person-centred’ approach to housing the vulnerable. But Mechan wrote that Safe at Home is now ‘adamantly opposed’ to...” — Yukon Housing Corporation’s — “... new tenant allocation policy.”

Further down in the article, it says, “Kristina Craig of the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition agreed that there were problems with how the old policy worked. But she shares some of the concerns about the new policy.”

Then she says, “There are some real concerns around what this will mean for people who are needing housing.”

I think I would challenge the idea that this was supported by non-profits given that a number of them wrote a letter to the legislative committee explaining why they thought that this was discriminatory.

I understand that Yukon Housing is trying to do many things at once. I have no doubt that is extremely challenging. On one hand, they are trying to implement a tenant allocation policy that was vehemently opposed by the non-profit sector. On the other hand, they are trying to implement the Auditor General’s report, which found that they were, in fact, housing priority clients more slowly than non-priority clients.

I think that it is fair enough to ask the question: Is that Auditor General’s report being addressed? Are our priority clients being housed at least as quickly as non-priority clients? I don’t think that implementing their own decision around an internal policy is an excuse not to do the first.

Does the minister have data looking at whether priority clients — and by “priority clients,” I mean all priority clients. I am not trying to pit people fleeing from violence against people with disabilities against seniors; I am saying that all the people in the priority client streams — are they being housed as quickly as the people in the non-priority affordability streams?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I appreciate the quote from the newspaper article from two of the local organizations. I think that it is important for Yukoners — the first quote coming from the lead at Safe at Home. We are happy that we are in a position to be doing the \$42-million project with Safe at Home, and I think it’s important just so that people see the full context here. We also talked about our new 17 units at 408 Alexander, and we thank Safe at Home. They have been a key partner.

What I don’t have are all of the NGOs. There are two NGOs that were identified. I think the language that was used by the member opposite was a bit of a stretch, but that’s fine. We are having a good debate in the Assembly.

What I did try to illustrate is that, if you take into consideration where we have individuals — the majority of them, who are here are in a very short time frame. When it comes to our policies, we are consistently going back and reviewing where we have on policies. So, if our team goes out

— I will make sure that I go back to the same entire NGO list that we had before, and it will give us an opportunity to see if they have now, besides the two who are quoted today — feel that there should be change. I know that there are constant meetings — I think through the HAP — community housing as well. We could have a discussion on that.

What I can say is there were over 500 people on the wait-list. At times, we have cut that in half, and we are building an incredible amount of affordable housing that gives us an opportunity to support almost all of the individuals who are on this list.

At the end of the day, what we are trying to discuss — and as the member says, we can split hairs — but I think what we all want to achieve is that individuals who are on our wait-list, can we provide them through — which is our goal, to look to see: Can we provide them with that stable, affordable housing, all those individuals, and then do we actually have an opportunity to have them move into another part of the housing continuum? So, again, that is our focus.

I will go back and see which NGOs fed into the housing action plan, and then we can reach out to understand and then later on this year, if folks have changed their perspective on the work that was done there as it pertains to one of the items from the OAG’s report.

MLA Tredger: I am going to leave that, because I’ve asked it three times now. I am going to move on.

Does Yukon Housing have an eviction prevention policy?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Sorry, I caught some of that — an eviction policy, but I’m not sure.

MLA Tredger: Does Yukon Housing have an eviction prevention policy?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Officials are saying that, no, we don’t. We have a standard and practice, but we are building out this year with our policy team an eviction prevention policy.

MLA Tredger: Does the Premier know when that will be ready to be implemented?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: By the fall of this year.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the Premier for that. I am excited and think that will be really helpful for a lot of people.

Something that I hear about from people is getting either incorrect rent notices or incorrect eviction notices in Yukon Housing. I understand that mistakes get made. I make mistakes and everyone makes mistakes, but these can have pretty profound impacts on people when they get a surprise eviction notice that they aren’t actually going to be evicted or an inaccurate rent notice that tells them they owe too much money or maybe not enough, and that then affects their other sources of income. Does the Housing Corporation track the number of incorrect notices sent out, and could the Premier share that information, if so?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There is not specific tracking for eviction notices. From my conversations with tenants — sometimes, it’s for an outstanding balance and there might have been a period of time where an individual has dropped off payment and then they received a notice as well. We understand that it can cause significant anxiety for those individuals. I know that our team dealing with client services tries to remedy

these as quickly as possible. Those are very, very busy individuals — I will also share — who have a tremendous amount of responsibility. Depending on the form of communication that individuals want to use, I think a lot of times, from my experience — I went and spent time in every one of our buildings coming into this role here in Whitehorse and then met with the individuals who represent the Yukon Housing Corporation in the communities. You hear directly from tenants about some of the stress that a mistake inside of that information process can cause them. Officials have shared with me that they don't specifically track that. I know that our system normally would only put out a request if there is some sort of an outstanding balance. I think that there have probably been some challenges before, but what we try to do — like any organization — is, when there is a challenge like this, try to remedy it and get things figured out for individuals as quickly as we can.

MLA Tredger: I guess this is my pitch to start tracking it. I'm glad that it's remedied when it happens; I think that is really important and, like I said, I know that mistakes happen. They are going to happen and it's important that there is a remedy. But I think that it would be useful to track how often those mistakes are happening, because I can only imagine, for a person who has experienced housing security for a long time, how upsetting, traumatic, and overwhelming it would be to get a notice that was incorrect and maybe said that they were going to lose their housing. I think that would be awful. As someone who has had pretty stable housing through my life, I would feel confident to call them up and ask what is wrong, but I think that someone who has had a lot of trauma around housing might not. So, I do think that it would be worth tracking that so that work can be done to measure it over time and see that it's improving.

I'm going to finish my questions now for the day and save the rest for the mains. I really appreciate the work of the officials here and the work of the officials behind the scenes. I thank the Premier for the conversation that we've had today.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the officials for being here with the minister today.

I had a question regarding the availability or the possibility of staff staying in social housing. I know that sometimes social housing is built with certain funds that can only allow it to be used for social housing.

Specifically, in this case, we have a conservation officer in Teslin — full-time, permanent conservation officer. She has been away on maternity leave. She is due to come back. She had her employer submit a housing application on her behalf in October. They told her that an exemption was required. The Public Service Commission then granted that exemption in January.

Of course, as the minister knows, we had a period last fall and into the winter when we had no housing manager in Teslin. There was some confusion there, so this conservation officer spoke to people in Whitehorse where she was told that she didn't qualify because of her income level. So, we have this case of staff needing to live in units, and the only units currently available in Teslin are social housing units.

I wrote a letter to the minister just in the last day or two regarding this specific case, but I thought, since we had housing up today, it was a great opportunity to bring it to his attention and hopefully the department can figure out a way to make something happen for this individual, because obviously, a conservation officer in the community is an important position and it's much needed.

I'll just leave that with the minister and see if he can provide us with anything.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We're happy to look into it — for sure. Just as we close — specifically to Teslin, I'll just say a couple things. We're going into design in Teslin. We have taken some of the advice, I think, from the community. I know we had discussions directly — the member opposite and I — during the community barbecue a couple years ago and it was really about how we can make sure there is private investment into what is looking to be built there — I think it is a sixplex. But we are also taking into consideration that the territorial office, of course — where will that end up being housed?

We will take a look at this particular issue. I will look for the letter and even if there is something that we can do in the interim so that the individual has a spot to come back to — and figure out what we have for units and if there is a unit open and we can do something in the interim to make sure. Especially because the exemption has been written by the Public Service Commission, we can take a look at that quickly.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate that commitment from the minister and, of course, as he knows full well, one of the other situations that we have in Teslin is that we do have private sector units, but unfortunately — and I mean, it is a good “unfortunately” — the community is busy with the construction of the new bridge, so all of the potential units are currently rented, which, like I say, is a good problem to have. But in the meantime, it has left an individual in a precarious situation — so I appreciate that.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I don't know if there any more questions there. For the folks at Yukon Housing Corporation, we are in a position today to illustrate — from some of the questions — that we have a small team that does a tremendous amount of work on maintenance both in Whitehorse and in the communities, and they have an incredible workload. There was some disruption in the work that they were doing in 2020 and 2021. I will thank other members as we go into the mains, but specifically today, I just want to thank the folks in maintenance. I want to thank them for the advice, direction, comments, and ideas that they have shared with me at their team and staff meeting earlier this winter. I appreciate, on behalf of all Yukoners, the significant work that they do.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line debate.

MLA Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$240,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$240,000 agreed to Yukon Housing Corporation agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will take a brief recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Highways and Public Works — continued

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I would like to thank the officials for coming back this afternoon to assist the minister as we move through the afternoon.

I have a couple of questions — well, a question or two, yes, I guess — regarding highway maintenance. I know that we have been hearing from highways camps from Watson Lake to Eagle Plains about concerns with winging and steaming or lack thereof, I guess. I noticed, even on my travels in on Tuesday morning, that the lack of winging of the shoulders is allowing — in this warm weather, you get the melt during the day and the water is out almost into the centre of the road in places, and then there is freezing overnight causing glaciering and obviously some very slippery conditions. I'm wondering if there is a reason that Highways and Public Works has cut back on the winging and steaming this spring as per normal.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the opportunity to be back in Committee of the Whole for the supplementary budget debate on the Department of Highways and Public Works. I just wanted to introduce, to my immediate right, Deputy Minister

Tracy Allen, and to her right is Assistant Deputy Minister Richard Gorczyca.

I have some general answers about maintenance here. I am certainly prepared to — and I might be able to get some specific answers to the winging and steaming question that was given. Obviously, it would perhaps be more in the nature of the main budget discussion, but nevertheless, we try to help as able.

The department uses asset management principles to prioritize investments across the Yukon transportation network to ensure we maximize the life of our infrastructure and minimize the cost to maintain that infrastructure. For fiscal year 2025-26 O&M budget — which is obviously not the supplementary budget — for highway maintenance is \$49.758 million. This is made up of the following programs: highway maintenance, such as plowing, sanding, and blading; BST aggregate production; signs and lines. The 2025-26 supplementary information and statistics report for Highways and Public Works lists budget estimates for highways and also includes non-direct highway maintenance costs, such as administration costs, safety and training, and equipment.

While the maintenance budget per highway section remains consistent year over year, the costs associated with non-direct highway maintenance are more subject to fluctuation. The department is currently conducting a review of how the highway maintenance budgets are presented in this schedule to provide more clarity in terms of the direct costs of maintenance being planned for each area of highway in the Yukon.

I just want to see if there's a specific answer with respect to the —

Specifically with respect to the winging and steaming, HPW prioritizes winging and steaming for Yukon highways as the season changes. Our roads are inspected daily by road forepersons. Winging and steaming activities have commenced across the network.

So, I can certainly get more information in preparation for the main budget discussions, but that's the information I have so far.

Mr. Hassard: This isn't a main budget issue; this is something that's traditionally done in March. There's definitely a decrease in this maintenance happening this year. So, I'm curious: Is there a budgeting issue, or is this a new policy that Highways and Public Works is decreasing winging and steaming?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I'm not advised of any service decrease specific to any sort of policy. The department assesses the need for winging and steaming based on conditions, and that work has commenced.

I understand that the member opposite may have a different view of this, but I have no information with respect to any sort of policy or budget change with respect to those activities which are occurring across the Yukon.

Mr. Hassard: I would urge the minister to go for a drive. You can travel any section of highway in the entire Yukon and you can see that there is a reduction in services this year. We have heard from multiple communities that they are being told

by the highways camps that they are not allowed or not doing the winging this year that they have done forever and ever.

Again, I am curious if this is a budgetary issue, or is this a change in policy?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: No, it's not a policy change or a budget issue. The department assesses the need for winging and steaming based on the conditions. As I indicated, the roads are inspected daily by road forepersons. Winging and steaming activities have commenced across the network. HPW is still prioritizing winging in the areas of most need, so that's the information I have from Highways and Public Works.

Mr. Hassard: I won't belabour the issue, and I will move on. But again, I'm going to urge the minister to take a drive and go to Jakes Corner, go to Carmacks, or go to Haines Junction — whichever direction he chooses — and he will see for himself. If he would rather not go for the drive, I would be happy to take some pictures for him any day of the week, and I can table them for him or hand them to him personally to show him exactly what I'm talking about.

Moving on, I understand that the Biathlon Yukon building tender was cancelled yesterday. I know that this is a Community Services project, but it's done through Highways and Public Works through the procurement services, so I'm wondering if the minister can inform the House about what the schedule is for retendering this building and if he can tell us if the new schedule will allow for this new building to be done in time for the Arctic Winter Games.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Of course, very exciting news for the new biathlon facility, and of course, it's incredibly important that we try to meet the deadline of it being ready for the 2026 Whitehorse Arctic Winter Games. The member opposite is correct that Highways and Public Works is working with Community Services to rectify the situation. I believe that the solution that is proposed will allow for the tender to be — for the bid to be retendered in due course and quite soon and that we have every intention — Highways and Public Works and Community Services — of meeting the deadline to have the facility ready for athletes from around the circumpolar north in 2026.

Mr. Hassard: I'm wondering if the minister could provide us with a timeline on when the project would have to begin in order for it to be done in time for the Arctic Winter Games.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: It is fair to say that Highways and Public Works, of course, is dealing with the contract and the tender; however, Community Services will be the department that is responsible for the construction. Providing perhaps not a particularly helpful answer this afternoon is that we plan on retendering and executing the workaround or the approved new tender as soon as possible and, of course, Community Services will want to operationalize their contract and their work schedule as soon as possible. That is where we are at with respect to the biathlon centre.

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Madam Chair; I guess we will just move on, then.

We asked the question in the Legislature during Question Period today about the Yukon Contractors Association wanting the government to return to public tender openings. I am just curious if the minister can provide us with some thoughts on how he feels about this request from the Yukon Contractors Association and if he will, in fact, consider going back to that practice from the past — and remind the minister that it was a commitment from the Premier in the last election campaign.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. I think that I would just say from the outset that Highways and Public Works is working diligently with the Yukon Contractors Association on this issue and understand that it remains an ongoing request from the Yukon Contractors Association. I did indicate in Question Period this afternoon that the Yukon government is currently reviewing the policy on the tender opening practice in light of the feedback from the Yukon Contractors Association. As well, there will be a review of the procurement policy conducted by an external contractor by 2026. It is anticipated that the procurement policy review will take a broad holistic assessment of the overall effectiveness of the policy, its implementation, and overarching outcomes.

The member opposite did hear me on the support for the proposition about why there was a change in policy. The other thing that I have been advised about in my briefings with Highways and Public Works is that — and I will receive a jurisdictional scan with respect to how the other 10 provinces and two territories are dealing with this, but my understanding is that — and perhaps it's still — maybe it's still a good idea to go back to open bid, but my understanding was that, if we did return, we might be one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that had reverted to that process. As I said, I'm open to being convinced, I guess, as the Premier has indicated some support for that proposition as well. But like I said, I think that a jurisdictional scan would reveal that the Yukon would be returning to a process that is not being adopted by perhaps — like I said — any of the rest of the country.

Like I said, we are working with the Yukon Contractors Association to better understand the interest of returning to this practice. My officials spoke with the president of the Yukon Contractors Association as early as today to explore this further. I would just give a shout-out to the Yukon Contractors Association — as I indicated earlier this afternoon — for their invite to their annual general meeting and the collegial discussions that we have. I certainly thank them for their efforts, and we have supported them in their efforts of advocacy with respect to general procurement matters, for vendor performance review, for Yukon First Nation procurement policy issues, as well as any other irritants that may exist in their association.

I commend them for the work that they're doing; I commend their executive director for the modernization of their website, and I congratulate the new board of directors who were elected last Friday afternoon. I would say on balance that — and I was there, and the executive director did thank the hard-working officials at Highways and Public Works for the collaborative relationship that has existed, in their view, over

the last few years in dealing with various issues, which could include returning to open tenders.

Like I said, I will receive additional information on this — open to being convinced otherwise, but as I said, my at least preliminary understanding is that Yukon might be an outlier. There might be good ideas and good reasons for the Yukon to be an outlier in this regard. If, in fact, there are, I will take advice on how to move forward.

Mr. Hassard: When I was a kid, my mom used to tell me that just because some other kids are doing it, that doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. I would remind the minister that maybe listening to the contracting community in the Yukon might be a good idea. Apparently, the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes doesn't like my questions, but I will continue. Yes, I would encourage the minister to actually listen to the other side of the coin, I guess — the people who are involved in this issue — and certainly take their advice.

Another concern that the Yukon Contractors Association had was with regard to the vendor performance review. I am wondering if the minister can inform the House on how things are moving or how things are progressing with the vendor performance review with respect to the Yukon Contractors Association's concerns.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As I indicated in my prior response, this is a good, strong example of the collaborative relationship that the technical team at Highways and Public Works has with the Yukon Contractors Association with respect to this issue, and that has been acknowledged as well. At this juncture, while I am on my feet, I can provide some background with respect to this matter for the member opposite and for Yukoners listening at home.

The vendor performance review program is being designed to recognize and encourage vendors to deliver good performance on contracts and provide constructive feedback for those contractors who do not. We continue to evaluate contracts over the \$50,000 threshold to have a mechanism to monitor and enhance performance. Since the introduction of the vendor performance review program in late 2021, 370 performance reviews have been completed. In fiscal year 2023-24, 180 vendor performance reviews were completed. This includes 74 for construction contracts, eight for goods contracts, 98 for service contracts, and two formal contestations — two performance reviews were submitted. In fiscal year 2024-25, until January 31, 2025, 120 vendor performance reviews were completed. This includes 43 for construction contracts, six for goods contracts, 71 for service contracts, and two formal contestations — two performance reviews were submitted.

The Government of Yukon is committed to collaborating with industry to ensure that the evaluation framework and implementation of the vendor performance review program meets its intended goals. The Department of Highways and Public Works is actively engaged with the Yukon Contractors Association and the Yukon Chamber of Commerce procurement committee to help vendors adapt to the program and to gather feedback for continuous improvement. We will

continue to meet with industry to listen to their input and consider potential adjustments to the program.

We are working with the Yukon Contractors Association on a pilot project to have meaningful progress on this file.

Implementation of the program has been phased to ensure that both the Yukon government project managers and vendors have sufficient time to become familiar with the new process. The first phase was between October 21 and October 22, where scores were collected but not kept. The second phase began in October 2022, which collected scores from vendors but did not apply them to procurements. We are still in the research and development phase. The government will continue to collect vendor performance review scores but are not using scores to impact procurements.

The Department of Highways and Public Works is reviewing industry feedback on the program and is considering changes which will be discussed with industry and project managers and rolled out in phases.

Our government is eager to continue advancing this program and strongly encourages the industry representatives to join us at the table, helping to drive this work forward.

The breaking news is that there is a discussion between HPW and the Yukon Contractors Association and others to pilot a project where the rubber would start to hit the road. But certainly, Highways and Public Works heard loud and clear over the course of the last year or 18 months that the Yukon Contractors Association wanted there to be more work with respect to accountability and transparency, ensuring that the Yukon government project managers and the vendors become familiar with the new process.

My officials and I are actively engaged with the Yukon Contractors Association on a number of topics. As I indicated, vendor performance reviews are a great example. We are exploring setting up a working group to work through the scoring system so that it better reflects the interests of contractors and project managers who use it. We meet with the Yukon Contractors Association regularly to touch base and to listen to their perspective on this program and many others.

I guess the summary is that the data continues to be collected and we continue to work with the Yukon Contractors Association, but the program is not live.

Mr. Hassard: The minister and I have had a few discussions over the past couple of years about work on the Yukon River bridge or Lewes River bridge — that section of road.

Now, I know that there are plans this year to change the intersection of the Alaska Highway and Sawmill Road. I'm curious if there is any indication as to a timeline for when that particular project will be tendered and we can see, hopefully, some progress on that section.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on safety improvements to the Lewes River bridge, which, of course, is of the utmost importance to this government and to all Yukoners.

Lewes River bridge, located at kilometre 1393 of the Alaska Highway, is an important part of the Yukon's transportation network and is 154 metres long. Highways and

Public Works is actively working on several safety enhancements for the Lewes River bridge area. In 2024, we updated the line markings and extended the no-passing zone farther from the bridge approach. This spring, when conditions allow, reflective hazard signage will be added on the bridge to help improve visibility. We are also currently assessing the speed limit in the area as well.

In early December 2024, the department submitted a project to YESAB to improve safety for travellers in the approach areas of the bridge. The project design proposes modifications for the access of Sawmill Road onto the Alaska Highway in order to allow for an improved approach guiderail at the northern side of the bridge. \$500,000 is allocated in the 2025-26 budget to start work on the project. The tender for this work is expected to be published in early summer.

Planning and design work is also underway for new lighting on the bridge and streetlighting along the highway approaching the bridge. The bridge lighting will be tendered this summer, and the highway street lights are being designed and implemented in coordination with ATCO. Construction of the highway street lights is planned to start this summer. I have more information, but that is the work plan for this summer. That is the information that I have so far.

Mr. Hassard: I'm not entirely sure, but I don't believe that I heard a timeline on when the Sawmill Road intersection would be tendered.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As indicated I believe in my prior response, the Sawmill Road improvements are progressing through YESAB and that application was submitted in December 2024. Once that application progresses through YESAB — and hopefully is approved — the tender will be finalized at that time. It is anticipated that the tender will be issued this summer.

Mr. Hassard: I have a question or two regarding airport leases at the Whitehorse airport. Apparently, there has been a change in the setbacks on some lots that make them unavailable for parking, and some of the lots are actually now unusable. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us when this decision was made to impose these setbacks and why that decision was made.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. I would indicate that I have met with the Yukon aviation council relatively recently, I would say within the last few months. I have not heard of this issue, but I certainly accept that the member opposite has received concerns with respect to this and that the information he is receiving is that there has been a change in setbacks, making some of the property or leases unusable.

I will certainly endeavour to get back to the member opposite and will also be in contact with the Yukon advisory council as to what their concerns are. I will provide a legislative return to the member opposite on the issue of the airport leases.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate that commitment from the minister. I just had my colleague looking while we were having the discussion. According to YESAB on March 4, they are waiting for a decision document. They sent their recommendation on March 4, so they are just waiting for a

decision document from Highways and Public Works with regard to the Sawmill Road realignment.

I am wondering if the minister has any ideas on when that decision document would be complete from Highways and Public Works.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I thank the member opposite for the question.

I am now advised that Highways and Public Works is reviewing the YESAB recommendation and will proceed to tender ASAP once the review is finalized.

Mr. Hassard: I am happy to hear that is moving forward ASAP.

My last question for the day is in regard to the new gymnastics facility. I am wondering if the minister can provide the House with some idea on what the expected O&M costs are for that new facility.

With that, I would like to again thank the officials for being here, and I will turn it over to the Third Party.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the questions from the member opposite. I look forward to further questions in Committee of the Whole for the main budget discussion, which will occur in the next weeks.

With respect to the Polarettes facility, the new Polarettes and Climb Yukon facility in Whistle Bend is planned to be completed this summer. It is an exciting milestone in recreation facilities for the territory and Whitehorse. The Polarettes Gymnastics Club will be moving into that purpose-built facility in Whistle Bend, which is designed specifically to meet the needs of the club. This new facility will help to meet the territory's growing demand for recreational facilities. The space was funded by the Government of Canada's Investing in Canada infrastructure fund with an investment of \$31.6 million and an additional \$2.5 million contributed by the Government of Yukon.

I recall being involved with the initial plans for the Polarettes to relocate from the current St. Francis of Assisi space, and at that time, I believe that the Polarettes had something like 1,100 members — or something like that. I know that Climb Yukon had a fundraiser at MacBride relatively recently, and the Minister of Community Services attended. There was a buzz of excitement, and it was very well-attended. They would have in the range of somewhere between 150 to 200 members. I'm sure that they will have more going forward.

I am advised by my officials that this is a purpose-built, state-of-the-art, energy-efficient building but that Highways and Public Works and Community Services are still working on the O&M expenses. I certainly congratulate the Polarettes Gymnastics Club and Climb Yukon for their anticipated occupancy of this amazing facility — yet another piece of amazing Yukon recreational infrastructure that we are building. This will certainly be a gem and will be attractive to families who are living here and who would consider moving here.

In any event, yes, we are working through the O&M equation, but as I indicated, this facility is anticipated to be finished in the summer of 2025. As I said, congratulations to both the Polarettes and Climb Yukon for this anticipated wonderful piece of new Yukon recreational infrastructure.

MLA Tredger: I thank the officials for being here as well as all those behind the scenes. I appreciate you helping us with this debate today.

The first question I want to ask is, in the handout from the briefing, under the approximate O&M highlight of Property Management division, there is an increase for \$152,000 for water quality program and filters. Is that related to the water testing in schools in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: This will be brief. Yes.

MLA Tredger: Could the minister give us an update on how many schools still have water fixtures that are above the Canadian guidelines for lead levels and when those are expected to be remediated or replaced? What's being done right now to protect student and staff safety in those schools?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question. The health and safety and well-being of students and staff is, of course, our priority. All Yukon schools have access to clearly identified sources of potable water.

From the start of the school year, each school had at least one clearly identified potable water source that meets Health Canada's *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality*.

The Department of Education supported the Department of Highways and Public Works and contracted a third party to complete water sampling in all schools owned and operated by the Yukon government. The sampling was finished in December of 2024 and all results have been received. The Department of Education is collaborating with Highways and Public Works, Environmental Health Services, and the chief medical officer to analyze the results and draft a recommended action plan.

Testing and remediation of potable water sources is an ongoing project. The departments of Education and of Highways and Public Works, in consultation with Environmental Health Services and the chief medical officer, are developing a long-term water management plan. The plan will include regular monitoring of potable water sources in Yukon schools.

I would indicate that Highways and Public Works contracted a third party to install filters at all Elkay water stations. This work was completed in October 2024.

For persons listening at home, those were, I believe, akin to the filters that exist at various places, but my experience would be at the Canada Games Centre — downstairs at the Canada Games Centre near Booster Juice and upstairs on the second level. Elkay is a company. That would be the Elkay water stations that exist. The work was completed in October 2024. An Elkay water filter is a type of filtration system designed to improve drinking water quality. These filters typically work to reduce contaminants such as chlorine, lead, and other impurities, ensuring cleaner and better tasting water.

I will look for more information while I am on my feet.

A "critical fixture" is defined as that which is used for drinking water and food preparation. These fixtures are most likely utilized for the preparation of food for consumption. Critical fixtures include hallway drinking fountains and kitchen faucets in staff rooms, home education rooms, cafeterias, and

class sinks. Non-critical fixtures include janitors' sinks and bathroom sinks. These fixtures are less likely to be used for consumption.

That is the information that I have so far. I have some more but will leave it at that to see if there are any follow-up questions.

MLA Tredger: The minister said that all of the schools have at least one potable water source. I am just reading from the press release on March 11 from the Yukon government about this topic. It looks like 24 schools still have fixtures that need remediation, mitigation, or replacement. So, 24 schools still have at least one fixture. What is happening with those fixtures in those schools? Are they blocked off? Are they disabled? Can the minister just explain a little bit about what it looks like in the schools?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yes, the fixture would not be usable until it is remediated and the standards are met.

MLA Tredger: So, can I just have a bit more detail about that? Are they blocked off? Are they disabled at the mains? How are we making sure that kids aren't going up to these water fountains or taps or whatever and drinking from them?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I can certainly endeavour to get back to the member opposite prior — at the mains discussion or prior to, and I can get a better picture from Education as to what it looks like. The bottom line is that if the fixtures don't meet standards, then the water is turned off, and there is — I just don't want to paint a picture that I personally haven't seen, although I do go to schools — you know, school council meetings — relatively frequently, but to paint an accurate picture for the member opposite — yes, they're not usable unless standards are met, so there would be no water that one could possibly consume from nonconforming fixtures.

MLA Tredger: That is reassuring to hear. In the March 11 update from the Government of Yukon, it says — I'll just quote from it. It says — quote: "While water samples collected from some fixtures in Yukon schools were found to have exceeded the..." — maximum acceptable concentration — "... for lead, the analysis of the testing results obtained to date do not suggest that students and staff at Yukon schools are being exposed to lead levels that would be considered a health risk." When I go to the guidelines — I'm looking at the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality: Guideline Technical Document — Lead* — it talks about the different effects and says: "The threshold below which lead is no longer associated with adverse neurodevelopmental effects has not been identified. As the..." — maximum acceptable concentration — "... exceeds the drinking water concentration associated with neurodevelopmental effects in children, every effort should be made to maintain lead levels in drinking water as low as reasonably achievable..." So, the maximum acceptable concentrations are still higher than where you see neurodevelopmental effects on children, and then those fixtures in the — the water in 24 out of 32 schools is higher even than that. I'm confused about why the department drew the conclusion that there wasn't a health risk to staff and students.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Some of these questions are more pertinent probably to the CMOH, the chief medical officer of health, whose guidance we are following and the Department of Education are following.

We might in some respects just be agreeing with each other, because what I said in my previous comments was that all Elkay water filters have been installed in all schools so that the drinking water that students have access to comes from an Elkay filter.

All Yukon schools have clearly identified fixtures with safe potable water that does meet current Health Canada guidelines. We are now in the process of fixing or removing drinking water fixtures that tested above the maximum acceptable concentration of lead, and we are working to develop a long-term drinking water monitoring program. This program will follow established protocols and best practices for regularly testing school drinking water in order to ensure that it meets all Canadian guidelines.

So, the water that is being consumed by students in Yukon schools is being filtered by an Elkay filter.

MLA Tredger: I thank the minister for that.

I wanted to ask about a change to capital recoveries. I understand that there is a decrease of \$99,000 for the small communities fund to reflect reduced expenditures on the eligible projects. Can the minister tell me what the small communities fund is used for and what those eligible projects generally are?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the opportunity for the Highways and Public Works team to find the information that was requested with respect to the small communities fund. The small communities fund has been used to fund building improvement projects. The reason for the reduction in recoveries was due to work that was not completed in fiscal year 2024-25 associated with the Yukon University roof replacement project. Briefly, I believe that this project, which is now going into its third year, totals in the range of a \$16-million to \$17-million project for the entire Yukon University campus. That is very exciting for greenhouse gas reductions.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that.

There is also a decrease to recoveries of \$1.585 million for the green infrastructure program, and I am wondering what happened there. That is a lot of money to have left on the table, which is too bad. I am wondering what led to that decrease.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am advised that the recovery reduction was in relation to deferred work on the Haines Junction district biomass system, which I believe is around a \$4-million or \$5-million project. We certainly do wish to proceed with that if at all possible. That would connect YG buildings in downtown Haines Junction.

MLA Tredger: So, is that money going to be available again in future years? Is there a plan to still go forward with that project?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I'm advised that the design work has been completed with respect to the Haines Junction district biomass project. We do plan to proceed with construction in a future fiscal year.

I will endeavour to get the answer with respect to whether the recovery funds can be profiled into a future year, hopefully before the end of this afternoon.

MLA Tredger: My last question about recoveries is the same question but for the active transportation fund. It has decreased by \$218,000 in terms of what we are recovering, and I am wondering what projects weren't able to go forward and if that money will be available in future years.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As it pertains to both the Haines Junction biomass and the active transportation fund, I will get back to the House, to the member opposite, as soon as possible but certainly no later than when Highways and Public Works returns for main budget debate.

MLA Tredger: The last thing I want to ask about today — I know that leaves us at a bit of an awkward time of the day, but this is my last question. I understand that the Dempster fibre line is now in operation, which is super exciting. Congratulations to everyone on getting that to happen. So much work, I know, has gone into that and I am really glad to see that it is ahead of schedule coming online. That's pretty cool.

I understand that Northwestel is leasing it for 20 years. How much are they paying for that lease, and what happens at the end of 20 years?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I would love to speak about the fantastic work — well, I will just take one minute just to say that, yes, it's amazing that the Dempster fibre line, a 778-kilometre fibre optic line that follows the Dempster Highway from Dawson City to Inuvik, is complete. I have said this before, but we do not now have to malign the poor Bobcat operator in Fort Nelson anymore — or less, anyway — as that appears to be where the fibre optic and Internet line seems to have been severed in the days, weeks, and years gone by. Now there is a redundant fibre loop in northern Canada.

I have a lot of material to talk about that, but I won't this afternoon. Perhaps I will have that opportunity in the mains debate. I thank the member opposite for their acknowledgement of the great work that was done by Highways and Public Works, by rural contracting, and by First Nation government subcontractors as well. It was truly an engineering marvel.

I had the honour and privilege to have been up on the Dempster during a few summers to visit both the Klondike and Ogilvie grader station solar arrays and also to see the installation of the fibre. It was really impressive to see. It is great news for all Yukoners that there is redundant fibre and that we should have fewer interruptions.

The specific answer is that Northwestel contributed \$15 million to the project. They are responsible for the operating costs for the 20-year lease. Then after the 20-year lease, it would be subject to renewal and renegotiation at that time.

MLA Tredger: Just to clarify, they contributed \$15 million toward the capital cost and will also be responsible for the operating costs. I just want to confirm that I understood.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The short answer is yes, but Northwestel has a 20-year indefeasible right of use for the Dempster fibre line, which will form the operating period.

In exchange for this indefeasible right of use, Northwestel has agreed to operate the Dempster fibre line at no ongoing operational costs to YG. So, yes, it's \$15 million — the indefeasible right of use for 20 years of the Dempster fibre line — and they have committed to fund the ongoing operational costs of the redundant Dempster fibre line.

Chair's statement re Chamber lighting outage

Chair: As members are aware, the lights have gone out. We can still record the proceedings and continue as long as members do not object to debating in the dark. A new fuse will be installed tomorrow.

Are you agreed?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Thank you.

Member for Whitehorse Centre, please.

MLA Tredger: I just wanted to thank the officials again for being here and all of the folks in the department.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you to the officials and thank you for the questions from the members opposite. I look forward to passing the supplementary budget for Highways and Public Works.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line debate.

MLA Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$8,403,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$12,537,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$20,940,000 agreed to

Department of Highways and Public Works agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 53, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for five minutes.

Recess

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 53, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Energy, Mines and Resources — continued

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am looking forward to questions. I just want to welcome back to the Assembly deputy ministers Paul Moore and Sierra Vander Meer, who are here to assist with providing information for colleagues.

Mr. Kent: I join the minister in welcoming the officials here this afternoon. We have limited time left this afternoon, so I will just try to get in a few questions regarding some of the changes in the supplementary estimates.

On page 1 of two of the handouts that we got at the briefing, it does have some highlights and main drivers of the changes. There is a \$55 million increase for Eagle Gold emergency response. I am just curious when we can expect to see the corresponding recovery from the bonding company, because I believe that this expenditure is to be fully recoverable from the bond that was posted for remediation and closure by the company.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The deputy ministers have explained to me that the recovery of the bond is — it happens through the courts. So, if a transaction is approved by the court and supported by the Government of Yukon, it is the way that it will happen. So, it is subject to an order of the court.

Mr. Kent: Deputy Chair, so, the use of the bond in this situation — and I guess further as we move through some of the additional expenditures on this — has not been approved by the court yet? I just wanted clarification on that. I thought it had been approved by the court, but it sounds from the minister's response that it has not been approved by the court yet — to use that reclamation and closure bond for these types of expenditures at the Eagle mine.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The bond has been approved through the court. The question that is still remaining for the court is how it will be treated in an accounting treatment. That is all, and that is the step that comes next.

Mr. Kent: So, if the minister can tell me when we can expect to see that process go through the court on the accounting side of things so that this \$55 million and, I would presume, another \$50 million can show up as a recovery on the Yukon government's budget documents or in a future supplementary.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: My colleagues have just clarified for me that the money has been received. The money is there, in place. There is still this question about how the accounting treatment will be done. It is determined by the courts. I don't have a date at this time, but that doesn't mean that we don't have the money in place and being used. It's just how it is accounted.

Mr. Kent: Hopefully, we will be able to get some clarity around that. I believe the receiver is in court, I think, next week with their budget plan from April to the end of September. Perhaps that will get clarified during that time as well.

I do have a question about a request for proposals with respect to water treatment at the Wolverine mine. It was due to close on January 21, 2025, but the bid was terminated. I am just wondering if the minister has any idea why that bid was terminated and when we can expect it to go back out for tender or even if it is going to go back out for tender.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The department is letting me know that it is back out to tender, and we are currently receiving submissions.

Mr. Kent: I will take a look on Bids and Tenders just to take a look at that, but can the minister inform us of the closing date for the tender that is currently out?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: They just updated me again, and I will get the date, but it has now closed, and they are now reviewing submissions.

Mr. Kent: Thanks; I appreciate that. I will take a look on Bids and Tenders. I thank the minister for the offer to respond, but I can have a look and forward it on to the individuals who raised it with me.

There is a \$1.2 million decrease in fully recoverable funds for type 2 mines due to revised work plans that have been approved by Canada. Can the minister tell us which type 2 mines that money applies to and a breakdown of funds, if it is for multiple mines?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: In terms of the \$1.2 million reduction, \$20,000 of that is for Clinton Creek, \$150,000 is for Faro, and \$1 million is for Ketzka for work not required.

Mr. Kent: Just zeroing in on that \$1 million reduction for Ketzka for work not required, can the minister detail what type of work that is that is no longer required with respect to these revised work plans that have been approved?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I'll ask the department, but it was due to a revised work plan. I'll find out what the work was that was changed and stand up if I get that information.

Mr. Kent: Under these O&M increases, there is a decrease of \$500,000 in funding for the grid connection. So, how much is left in that line item for 2024-25 for the grid connection? It's my understanding that the Yukon Development Corporation is the lead on that project — I'm just looking for the minister to confirm that for us. What is left in this line item for EMR at this point, and I guess what will they be spending that money on that is left over in that line item if there is money left over?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, it has transferred over to the Yukon Development Corporation for them, so the budget is just

transferred over. There is nothing remaining in EMR's budget. It is the last of the money that has been transferred over.

Mr. Kent: This I assume will be my last question of the day, depending on how quick the answer is.

If we turn to page 2 of 2 in the handout on the supplementary estimates that was provided by the department, under "Highlights of revenue and recoveries" under "Revenue", it says that there is a \$3 million increase recognizing the interest earned on the loan to the Victoria Gold Corporation through the receiver to align with updated forecasts.

Can the minister explain that line item to the House and to Yukoners? We are booking interest against the money that the Yukon government loaned through the receiver to Victoria Gold; is that correct? And if so, what rate of interest are we charging the receiver on this loan?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer is that it is nine-percent interest earned on money lent to the receiver.

Deputy Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

May the House have a report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the House do now adjourn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to

Speaker: This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following documents were filed March 26, 2025:

35-1-310

Transfer payment agreement, letter re (dated February 10, 2023) from Damien Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Development, Department of Community Services, to Heather Ashthorn, Executive Director, Raven Recycling Society (Mostyn)

35-1-311

Processing non-refundable recycling materials, letter re (dated December 10, 2024) from Hon. Richard Mostyn, Minister of Community Services, to Shannon Powell, Executive Director, Raven ReCentre (Mostyn)

35-1-312

Raven ReCentre, letter re (dated January 22, 2025) from Hon. Richard Mostyn, Minister of Community Services, to Kate White, Leader of the Third Party (Mostyn)

**Written notice was given for the following motion
March 26, 2025:**

Motion No. 1229

Re: sitting beyond normal hour of adjournment (Streicker)