

## **MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**

### **YELLOWKNIFE DOWNTOWN ROAD MAP AND ACTION PLAN**

**October 27, 2016**

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, those of us who live downtown in Yellowknife have witnessed how dramatically it's changed in the last few years. I've received numerous complaints from residents who find the downtown a more challenging place to live because of a growing population of people who are homeless and/or intoxicated. According to a City of Yellowknife report, the use of emergency shelters increased 14 per cent in just one year, 2015. The RCMP decision not to take intoxicated people into custody just because they are intoxicated has produced a 30 per cent increase in ambulance rides and swamped Stanton Hospital's emergency department.

Mr. Speaker, the good news is that all orders of government have come together to provide a comprehensive and coordinated response to the needs of the street people in my riding. Instead of continuing to respond to the issues on an ad hoc basis, there is now a plan for downtown Yellowknife. I want to thank the working group that produced that road map under the leadership of Mayor Mark Heyck. They've developed a suite of short, medium, and long-term actions that give me hope that downtown will be changed for the better of all of us.

Mr. Speaker, the changes proposed in this report begin with embracing the concept of harm reduction. Instead of marginalizing people who are homeless and/or intoxicated, the road map will provide services that recognize and respond to their complex needs. Once fully implemented, we will have 15 semi-independent living units in emergency shelters and they'll be available to clients 24 hours a day; we'll have central intake for people who need help with housing, mental health, and addictions issues; we'll have a street outreach program that will identify and assist people who are intoxicated and take them to a new safe place to sober up.

These interventions will not only help the people they are intended to serve but will also take the pressure off first responders, whose services are needed by all of us, not just the street people. We've gone from being baffled by the problem to embracing it, and that's a tremendous accomplishment.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that investment in prevention pays off. The investment required to implement the plan is relatively modest, in the order of a million dollars a year. Stack that against the social, human, and economic cost to citizens in the community and the decision to invest is simply the right thing to do. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.