

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

PUBLIC HOUSING FOR SENIORS

May 31, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I want to commend the Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation and her staff for their recent survey of residents on housing issues. The response rate of 10 per cent of households across the NWT is remarkable. It also speaks to the importance of finding solutions to chronic housing problems. I look forward to hearing the plan for addressing the housing needs respondents identified in the coming sitting.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to reflect on the need for social housing in Yellowknife. Here is a startling fact highlighted in the Voices on Housing report. While the population of the NWT has increased by just 1 per cent since 2004, there has been a 53 per cent increase in the population of people aged 60 years or older in the same period of time. It is a fact that government is unable to meet their housing needs.

There are 344 public housing units in Yellowknife, and seniors occupy about a quarter of them. As well, the Housing Corporation supports non-profits that provide an additional 94 units. All told, there is currently not enough housing for about 10 per cent of Yellowknife's population age 60-plus. We know that because there are dozens of seniors on the public housing wait list. The wait to get into an independent living unit at Avens is six years. The public housing needs of single-parent families and single people who aren't seniors are even greater.

Mr. Speaker, the people who responded to the survey had some good ideas for creating more affordable housing in Yellowknife. There is significant interest in tiny houses and creating additional housing co-operatives like Borealis and Inukshuk, but people recognize that the availability of affordable land is an issue within the city. The Housing Corporation is interested in moving its public housing clients through the housing continuum, from rental to home ownership, to free up units, but the fact is only 20 families have opted for the corporation's home ownership plan in Yellowknife in the last 10 years. Many people live paycheque to paycheque, putting in doubt affordability and all the additional costs that come with home ownership.

The bottom line here is that both levels of government need to invest in building additional energy-efficient housing to meet the needs of all residents of all ages. The GNWT has not made that commitment. The federal government has promised a paltry \$3.6 million a year over the next 10 years. The reality is that we have a long, long way to go. I will have questions for the Minister.