

# City given green light for hotel levy

*But likely won't look at implementation until 2019*

by Dylan Short

Northern News Services

A new hotel tax could soon be implemented in the capital after the territorial government gave municipalities the green light last week.

Bill 18 was passed by the NWT legislature on Nov. 1, giving municipalities in the territory the option to impose a tax of up to four per cent on tourist accommodations.

City council will now have to decide whether to enact a bylaw within Yellowknife to impose the levy.

The bill outlines a number of exemptions including stays longer than 30 days and on accommodations that cost less than \$20 a night. Other exemptions include territorial government workers on travel duty and stays that are for medical travel. The inclusion of GNWT workers was contested by several groups before the bill had been enacted.

Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, questioned the inclusion of GNWT workers during duty travel on the exemption list during the second reading of the bill in the legislature.

"Along comes the City of Yellowknife, and they want some independence to raise money, to market tourism, to grow that sector of our economy, and they do not get a lot of love from this government. Independence is to be frowned on. Being a tattle is the way of the future. They are completely hobbled by this ridiculous list of exemptions," said Green. She continued to question who want-



**South Korean tourists Yun Ji, left and Yun Chan** enjoy a meal in front of the famed wall of signatures at Bullocks Bistro last winter. Tourists next year could have to pay a hotel tax of up to four per cent.

NNSL file photo

ed GNWT workers to be included on the list, to which she was told no consulted stakeholders had asked for the inclusion, according to transcripts from the legislature.

Mayor Rebecca Alty said she was happy the bill was passed, but also said she had been hoping for fewer exemptions.

"I'm happy it's passed. We were hoping that the GNWT duty travel wouldn't have been an exemption, we wanted to make sure there weren't more and more exemptions added

which then waters down really the whole purpose of it," said Alty.

Sharolynn Woodward, director of corporate services at the city said the City of Yellowknife would collect the fees raised by the hotel levy but that money would be re-distributed to third party tourism and destination groups.

Before being passed, the bill had public support from the City of Yellowknife, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce and the hotel industry. However each group

raised concerns about the number of exemptions included in the bill during public consultations in September.

"Each exemption affects the overall amount to be collected, which in turn greatly affects the number of dollars that can be applied to the city's tourism marketing efforts," then Yellowknife Mayor Mark Heyck told a committee of MLAs in September.

"Too many exemptions could affect the economic viability of the

accommodation levy."

Alty said she didn't believe council would have any opportunity to enact a bylaw until the new year due to ongoing budget deliberations.

"I'm not quite sure yet so I'd have to look, it's probably in the new year," she said.

Tourism in the territory is growing as the GNWT recently announced the 2017/2018 season broke record numbers with 110,000 visitors spending \$203 million dollars in the territory.

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