

## **MLA JULIE GREEN – YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE – IN THE MEDIA**

### **MLAs' discussion on sobering shelter quarantine doesn't happen; project set to continue**

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Link: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yellowknife-sobering-shelter-return-normal-1.5537541>

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Discussion of request to reopen shelter was deferred by MLAs Friday, stakeholder meeting expected Tuesday

A decision on whether Northwest Territories MLAs will ask the NWT Disabilities Council to reopen the downtown sobering and day shelter to regular use did not happen on Monday.

The discussion of such a request was first deferred on Friday.

On Monday, Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green said the issue did not come back onto the agenda of the committee of MLAs considering the motion. In an email, Green, who has led the sobering centre discussion so far, said she would wait until after "stakeholders" meet Tuesday before considering the matter further.

"I have had discussions with department staff about the importance of having the sobering centre returning to its original purpose when the isolation period there is over," Green said. "I think they know what the issue is and they are prepared to re-evaluate the use of the centre."

Since April 1, about 30 people have been quarantined inside the downtown building at 5111-50th Avenue with the expectation they would remain there for at least 30 days in an attempt to protect them and the public from possible spread of COVID-19. The temporary closure of the shelter to regular use means those not inside have lost the warmth, showers, laundry facilities, internet and food they may have grown accustomed to.

Last week Green said that without the sobering centre open, RCMP are picking up intoxicated people to place in cells. She wants to see the shelter return to its normal function. In an email Monday, RCMP said they could, as a last resort, hold an intoxicated person in custody under section 87 of the N.W.T. Liquor Act. Numbers for how many have been lodged since the shelter went into quarantine mode are not yet available.

In an email Monday, Denise McKee, the executive director of the NWT Disabilities Council, which has a contract to run the centre, confirmed there would be a meeting Tuesday that includes representatives of the shelter, and departments within the territorial government.

McKee also stated she expected the shelter would remain repurposed as a quarantine space for the full 30 days "as agreed to."

"We have seen some significant positive outcomes that we hoped for but could not concretely expect," McKee stated.

Reopen shelter 'ASAP'

As MLAs deferred their motion Friday, downtown Yellowknife had the feel of spring. Temperatures hovered just above zero; the sun was strong enough to melt snow.

Some of the grittiness of life in downtown Yellowknife was on display: a bottle tipped back and shared just outside the front doors of the liquor store; bottles of water, or otherwise, and cigarettes passed about in small alcoves out of the wind; and close quarter contact despite the physical distancing orders of the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer.

Russell Mantla, from Whati, N.W.T., was downtown Friday. He said he was healthy but recently had a bad cough checked out at the hospital where he said he tested negative for COVID-19.

"It's pretty hard [staying] six feet apart," he said. "We can't shake our friend's hands, and we gotta wash our hands every day, [but] that's good."

Mantla said he and others wash up when they can find an open restroom. Or else they make their way to the Walmart on the other side of town where hand sanitizer is freely available.

He said he has a place to stay and didn't frequent the shelter very much when it was open.

He said he's never been offered a face mask or approached about his well-being, but he's seen officials — whether it was RCMP or bylaw was not clear — approach people in the street to advise them about physical distancing. The advice has little effect on their behaviour, he said.

"They don't even care ... they don't pay attention to what they are supposed to be doing."

Mantla was ambivalent about the sobering shelter being open to the public or closed. It's current use as a quarantine centre, he said, was good for those who had nowhere else to go and now had a place to sleep.

Missing the shelter

For Ralph Joseph Lafferty it was a different story altogether. Originally from Deninu Kue (Fort Resolution), Lafferty said he has been living without a home in Yellowknife for about 12 years.

He said he's been staying at the Salvation Army lately, but when the shelter was open he stayed there. He said his only meals now come from the Salvation Army, and that he was hungry. Lafferty said he's never been approached on the street about his health, but that he goes to the hospital regularly to be checked out.

Standing outside the shelter Friday he said he's healthy, so far, but he missed the shelter's doors being open for him.

Lafferty did not know politicians had met that day to consider the future of the shelter. He seemed encouraged by the thought of leaders working to reopen the facility.

"Make sure they do it right away," he said.

"A-S-A-P."