

JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
Supplementary Estimates (Infrastructure Expenditures)
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MS. GREEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Further to my colleague's point about the delay in getting infrastructure projects out, I see here a reference to the JH Sissons School planning study, which I would like to confirm, first of all, is complete. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Chair, I am not sure if the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment would know, in fact, if the planning is complete. I believe it is, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, would you be able to answer that?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sorry, could the Member please repeat the question?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member, can you repeat your question?

MS. GREEN: Sure. Is the planning study for JH Sissons School complete?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Right now, what's going on with the school is that all of the materials in the school have been removed in preparation for demolition. There is a contract in place for abatement and demolition, and there is a tender out for construction at this time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thanks for that, Minister, but that wasn't my question. My question is whether the planning study for the school is finished, and if so, why does it appear in this supp? Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. When something is incomplete in the previous year, then it has to get carried over into this year in order to then be continued on with. Especially the Sissons school project, which is multi-year project, the funding that would be approved in one year still needs to get reapproved into subsequent years.

Again, I don't know exactly what stage the project is at, and if the Member wants a more specific answer, I can certainly turn this back to the Minister of education, but the overall school project is a multi-year project. For that reason, the funding will have to get reappropriated and reapproved, since the project itself is not complete at this point in total, but I don't know the specific stage of where it is at at this moment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you Minister. Member.

MS. GREEN: Thanks. I did notice that the construction contract is now on offer, and it was my understanding that the construction was supposed to start this fall. Is that a reasonable time to vet and award the contract and have the construction start, by this fall? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. My understanding is that that is still the plan.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MS. GREEN: I wonder if this contract is, in fact, coming out later than was anticipated and there is some slippage in the timing on this project. Can the Minister speak to that, please?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I am a bit conscious that the detailed specifics should be directed to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, but I think it is safe to say, really, something that is being experienced and seen across all of the infrastructure projects and a lot of the infrastructure projects that are coming through Finance right now are experiencing some delays as a result of COVID-19, whether it's because of procurement slowdowns, whether it's because of slowdowns on the private sector side, in terms of the ability to have uptake. That is not to say that projects can't get back on track and that they will, in fact, be delayed, only that there likely have been some delays in the last couple of months. Madam Chair, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment would like to add something. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The project is on schedule. There is no delay. The carry-over is the difference between the cash flow forecast produced in 2017 and the actual expenditures incurred during 2019-2020. When you start a project, you estimate what the costs are going to be, and sometimes you don't get it 100 percent right. The project is currently at the end of the design development phase. The 100 percent construction documents were finalized at the beginning of May 2020, at which time the design consultant started the construction tender package. The draft package is completed, and the tender is out right now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MS. GREEN: Thank you. If I understand the Minister's answer correctly, the planning study was \$1.486 million over budget? Is that what you're saying? Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Sorry, Madam Chair. No, that certainly wasn't my understanding of what the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment was saying;

just that the total project estimation does require an estimation and that process is not perfect. I'm not sure if the Minister has anything to add.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Minister of ECE, did you have anything else to add?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sure. This is a carry-over. This is money that was already appropriated and is being carried forward. We're not looking for money that was never appropriated. It's not overbudgeted; it is what was already appropriated, but the cash flow didn't flow during the timeline that was anticipated.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wonder if this is an appropriate time to raise the emails that we have all received about the possibility of continuing classes at Sissons school for the next year so that there is more classroom space available for physical distancing. I see all the Ministers looking at one another, so that is for whoever would like to answer it.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't even know how long ago it was now; the days have all melded together. The Chief Public Health Officer, when she issued Emerging Wisely, she also issued a backgrounder document pertaining specifically to schools and the measures that needed to be taken in schools. Since that time, the department has been working with the education bodies to come up with plans on how they are going to implement those recommendations in schools to ensure that staff and students and the public remain safe in the upcoming school year.

There are 49 schools, which means there needs to be 49 plans on how to implement it. What is happening now is that there have been a couple of plans that have been done from a large school and from a small school. We are waiting for the Chief Public Health Officer to look at those. Then we can take that feedback and do the other 47 plans. That's where the planning is right now.

In that planning, YK1 has not indicated that they need that space at Sissons, and at a board meeting today, they voted unanimously to continue with the demolition of JH Sissons, because they feel that they can accommodate their students safely, given their existing resources.

I will note that, in Yellowknife, there is some disparity between the utilization rates of the schools. The Yellowknife Catholic schools have high utilization rates in the 90 percent, over 100 percent in, at least, one school, whereas the YK1 schools have a much lower utilization rate. There is more space in those schools, so it's not such an issue for them. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MS. GREEN: Thanks for that response. The ultimate authority on when the school is going to be demolished is YK1; is that correct? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a YK1 asset, as I understand, but obviously, they are in fairly close contact with the Minister of ECE. I don't think it's quite so simple of an answer as that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MS. GREEN: YK1 owns the school; they can tear it down when they want to. That's what I'm hearing? That's it? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Chair, my answer would simply be no, but I think, for a better explanation, I will turn it over to my colleagues. Minister of ECE.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Now that we've gotten into the world of decentralized delivery of education, the Minister of education isn't almighty in terms of education and really has limited powers compared to, I think, what the public thinks. What we do do is we collaborate with education authorities, and there's very close collaboration, and we have great relationships. I think, in other jurisdictions, they would be envious of how we relate to the education bodies. If we need to tear down a school and build a new one, it will be a GNWT asset once it's rebuilt, and we will provide that. Even though it's a YK1 asset now, we will be building a GNWT asset. Right? It is a collaborative effort. The planning for the delivery of education in the next school year is on YK1. We really have to work closely with them when we make these decisions. They don't have the ultimate authority. I would say we have the ultimate authority. It's a relationship. Thank you, Madam Chair.