

Sale Of Crown Land

NOMA would like to thank the Ministry for consulting with municipalities on crown land last year. The consultations were a great step towards understanding the need for municipalities to have the ability to acquire land within their municipal boundaries to expand housing and economic development projects. Bill 23 would have been a good opportunity to have used the sale of crown land as a tool to help increase housing development in the North. Acquiring serviceable land within municipal borders has proved challenging but we would like to work with the government to help address the housing shortage in Northwestern Ontario.

Crown land represents 87% of the province, much of which resides in Northwestern Ontario. This presents a critical development opportunity for Northwestern Ontario municipalities. Communities are able to access their land base as a source of property tax revenue. Municipalities are interested in pursuing crown land development within their municipal boundaries, with a particular interest in lakefront lots, to expand their property tax revenue and help meet demand for housing supply.

It is important to note that some municipalities in Northwestern Ontario have large areas of crown land that are unpatented and therefore tax exempt. Some municipalities have expressed frustration that they are required to provide services in and around these lands (e.g. road maintenance and fire protection) but they receive no revenues from them. Even where the lands are used for certain purposes, such as the placement of hydro transmission lines, no property taxes or payment in lieu of taxes are paid to the municipality. This further exasperates the financial burden on municipalities as they do not realize revenue but pay for the cost for service.

The province requested a survey of all conservation land to be evaluated to determine if any are eligible to be developed for housing. **NOMA requests the province to conduct a survey and evaluate all crown land within municipal borders in Northern Ontario to determine if they are eligible to be sold for development to increase housing supply and expand their property tax base. The province would benefit from generating revenue from the sale.**

NOMA asks the province to ensure compensation is provided to municipalities that are required to provide service to tax exempt lands.

NOMA asks the Minister of Northern Development and Natural Resources and Forestry to clearly indicate if the Ministries will pursue this issue further after municipal consultations.

Railway Costs

Many municipalities in Northwestern Ontario have railway crossings within their municipal boundaries. Municipalities experience expenses relating to railway crossing maintenance and some are receiving large, unexpected invoices, with little to no information, from the rail companies for work completed to railway crossings. Municipalities are expected to alter their fixed budgets to pay the invoices quickly, without any forewarning from the company that the work was to be completed or enter into mediation and spend more taxpayer dollars. The additional unexpected costs are affecting municipalities in our region, particularly small and rural communities that have small budgets that cannot sustain these increases or obtain a loan.

The municipality of Machin received an unexpected bill in the last 2 years for \$65,000 for a railway crossing upgrade and they spend ~\$3,500 annually for railway costs. In 2018, the Municipality of Shuniah paid \$186,400 for railway crossing repairs and in 2020, \$85,188, along with their yearly cost of \$24,000 for their 5 crossings. The Township of Hornepayne experienced a \$200,000 bill. The Town of Rainy River pays an annual maintenance fee of ~\$3250 for 2 crossings, yet the neighbouring municipality, Lake of the Woods County in Minnesota, USA, uses the same railway as Rainy River and Fort Frances but they are not charged a maintenance fee for any of their 40 crossings, rather they only pay for inexpensive gravel on approaches. We recognize the different jurisdictions, but this is a truly inequitable arrangement.

In the 1970's, municipalities across Canada were made responsible for covering 50% of new crossings as well as railway crossing upgrades and maintenance. This legislation is archaic and adopted when CN Rail and CP Rail were crown corporations. Since 2001, they have been privately owned companies, responsible to shareholders. They make substantial profits from excellent profit margins, ~32% net profit margins over the last 5 years, while municipalities are often not offered input into the work yet continue to be responsible for 50% of the costs.

A net-profit margin for a large corporation of 5% is considered low and 20% is considered high. The net-profit margin for CN Rail and CP Rail were 31.87% and 32.25%, respectively, over the last 5 years. CN Rail profits made significant increases in 2022. Net income jumped 28% or \$289 million to \$1.33 billion in the June 30 quarter compared to the same period last year. Revenues rose 21% or \$746 million to \$4.34 billion third quarter. Given the significant profits, it is not justified that municipal taxpayers be responsible for covering a portion of the expenses incurred by these multi-million-dollar private, profitable corporations.

NOMA believes it is time to amend this outdated legislation and come up with a solution to remove this burden from municipal budgets entirely. Railway companies should manage their own assets like other for-profit corporations and not be reliant on public funds and municipal taxpayers for maintenance and upgrades to their infrastructure.

NOMA previously brought the issue of railway taxation to the Province of Ontario. If municipalities continue to pay maintenance fees for railways, the province should ensure the fees are amended to account for inflation and current conditions including the increase in rail traffic on an annual basis. A fair and equitable taxation revenue on railway property based on the per

tonne-mile instead of the current acreage model will reduce the financial pressure on the province and provide financial support to municipalities taxation going forward.

NOMA requests the province consult with municipalities with railways running through their communities

NOMA calls on the Province of Ontario to conduct of review of this outdated practice of municipalities paying to maintain assets of a for-profit railway corporation and create solutions to municipalities covering a high percentage of railway crossing maintenance and construction.

NOMA calls upon the Minister of Finance of the Province of Ontario to undertake ongoing consideration of municipal taxation for railroad rights of way properties, based on a per tonne-mile concept as the current formula does not equitably compensate municipalities.

Northern Ontario Road Safety, Maintenance, and Rest Stops

NOMA appreciates that governments increase in snow clearing standards to clear within 12 hours of a snowstorm instead of the previous 16 hours. We applauded the plowing on the highway, and we will continue to monitor the road clearing after storms. However, since this Winter season began, we have seen an increase of fatal collisions on our northern roads.

Since December 31st, 7 people died in crashes in northwestern Ontario with 4 people dying the same day between Nipigon and Wawa, with one on Highway 11 and the other on Highway 17, while the third was on Highway 17 between White River and Wawa. In November, Highways 11 and 17 just outside Nipigon were shut down for 36 hours, cutting off all traffic, including thousands of trucks, from being able to cross Canada. On December 16th, another death on Highway 11 and 17 at John Street and Oliver Road and both directions were closed for 7.5 hours. On December 22nd, poor weather conditions closed Highway 17 between Ignace and Siston's Corner in both directions for a few hours. On December 27th, Highway 17 was closed in both directions overnight between Ignace and Shabaqua from Tuesday night to Wednesday morning. Most recently, on January 10th there were 2 collisions on Highway 11/17, one near Dorion claiming the life of an 18-year-old and the other on the Thunder Bay expressway which closed the eastbound lane for 8 hours. Slippery roads, decreased visibility, and speed were among the most common factors in the collisions. These crashes are not only killing people but also affecting the economy, inflation, businesses, and tourism.

Winter has just begun, and this is the deadly reality for the region. There have been weekly notifications of collisions since the first snow, and they keep coming. We appreciate the amendment to the snow clearance standards to ensure road clearing occurs within 12 hours of a winter storm, but it isn't enough. The province needs a clear plan on how to address the winter conditions in the north and ensure adequate funding is available to keep drivers safe.

Removing the snow is an important factor to save lives but so is ensuring people are driving safely. The government could consider alternate ways to address safety while driving on Highways 11 and 17 including more safety signs advising drivers to slow down and leave more space, more preventative anti-icing, or variable speed signs could be considered.

Finally, we would like the government to enhance standards for rest stops along highways. There are multiple stretches of highway from 100km to 350km in Northwestern Ontario without a year-round maintained rest stop available to truck drivers. The drive from Marathon to Thunder Bay only has one rest stop for transports open year-round for an over 3-hour drive in good weather. This drive can take upwards of 6 hours in snowy winter conditions. From Nipigon to North Hornepayne at the south junction of Highway 11 and 631 is the longest distance in Northwestern Ontario, at ~350km, a trucker needs to drive without a year-round bathroom. A close second is from Fort Frances to Dryden along Highway 71 which is ~310km. There is other stretched of highway over 100km without rest stops for truck drivers including: Spruce River Rd to Armstrong (~235km); Nipigon to 35km east of Terrace Bay (~140km); Nipigon to Spruce River Rd (~100km); Atikokan to Fort Frances (~150km); Highway 502 Fort Frances to Dryden (~190km); and Dryden to Ear Falls (~150km).

More rest stops should be available to drivers along northern highways especially given the unforgiving weather conditions we experience in northwestern Ontario. Rest stops can be made accessible by snowplows for winter cleaning and methods can be used to ensure restrooms do not freeze. NOMA would be pleased to work with the government to help increase year-round rest stops in Northern Ontario and we would happily provide input when planning for northern highways.

NOMA asks the government to clarify the government's plans to enhance highway safety in the north to reduce crashes in northwestern Ontario.

NOMA asks the government to consider and invest in other ways to increase safety on northern roads.

NOMA asks the government to open more maintained year-round rest stops for truck drivers and other vehicles to access washroom facilities.

Immigration Pilot Program

The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) was launched as a three-year pilot by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to support the attraction and retention of skilled immigrants to rural and northern communities. The pilot aims to increase the capacity of communities to facilitate newcomer integration, attraction, and retention with the outcomes of increased skilled workers and strengthened communities. Five of the eleven successful RNIP applicant communities are located in Northern Ontario including North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, and Timmins.

As of April 30, 2022, the Northern Ontario RNIP projects resulted in 325 applications for permanent residency being processed by IRCC. These 325 cases represent 420 persons landing in the region, including 120 in Thunder Bay. By the end of 2022, the city of Thunder Bay exceeded its goal of 250 and they were able to extend to allow 281. Since the inception of the Pilot in late 2019, Thunder Bay CEDC has assisted 213 eligible employers to recruit or retain more than 500 skilled workers, resulting in more than 700 newcomers to the area, a number that includes the successful applicants and their accompanying family members. FedNor approved five applications from the host communities to help support the administration of the RNIP to a value of \$2.4 Million. The RNIP communities have seen positive results in attracting qualified candidates for in demand positions, especially with international students and newcomers residing in their communities.

The immigration pilot contract expired Jan 1, 2023, but the program has been extended to August 24, 2024, for host communities to continue the program. Government clearly understands the importance of this program due to its extension and the recent provincial advocacy to expand the program. The program resulted in a significant increase in applications for residency and filing vacancies. However, the program still hasn't been expanded to include Kenora and surrounding district to fill the 1,351 total job vacancies in the Kenora District as of December 2022: 631 of those being in the City of Kenora. NOMA believes this pilot should be regionally inclusive and ensure Kenora can also be included. Across the North, there are still many employment vacancies across a variety of sectors, and it is important to continue this program to fill those vacancies.

According to the Northern Policy Institute, the City of Thunder Bay's vacancy rate exceeded 9.5% in 11 fields including: Administrative services managers 279 31.8%; Managers in customer and personal services, 105 23.4%; Other installers, repairers and servicers 384 12.4%; Underground miners, oil and gas drillers and related occupations 39 11.8%; Home care providers and educational support occupations 954 11.6%; Corporate sales managers 138 11.6%; Customer and information services representatives 682 11.3%; Managers in art, culture, recreation and sport 70 11.0%; Optometrists, chiropractors and other health diagnosing and treating professionals 237 9.7%; Pharmacists, dietitians and nutritionists 282 9.7%; and Managers in health care 164 9.5%. The Northern Policy Institute is currently monitoring the retention of immigrant to Northern Ontario.

The Federal Government set new targets to allow 465,000 permanent residents in 2023, 485,000 in 2024 and 500,000 in 2025. Their plan has increased focus on attracting newcomers to different

regions of the country, including small towns and rural communities. **NOMA ask the government to allocate more immigrants to small and rural communities in Northwestern Ontario to address labour vacancies.**

NOMA asks the province to consider working with NOMA and others to make the immigration pilot program permanent to continue to address the current gaps in the labour force, to expand the program so more employers across all communities in the Northwestern Ontario region can participate, and that the province considers attaching a funding envelope to the initiative in addition to the FedNor funding host communities are currently receiving.