



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

**No. 25 — April 26, 2023**

**Published under the  
authority of  
The Hon. Randy Weekes  
Speaker**



**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

**Twenty-Ninth Legislature**

### **Hansard on the Internet**

*Hansard* and other documents of the  
Legislative Assembly are available  
within hours after each sitting.

<https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/Calendar>

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

Mr. Terry Dennis, Chair  
Canora-Pelly

Ms. Erika Ritchie, Deputy Chair  
Saskatoon Nutana

Mr. Gary Grewal  
Regina Northeast

Mr. Travis Keisig  
Last Mountain-Touchwood

Ms. Lisa Lambert  
Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood

Hon. Tim McLeod  
Moose Jaw North

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit  
Yorkton



[The committee met at 15:30.]

**The Chair:** — Good afternoon. Welcome to Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice committee this afternoon. My name is Terry Dennis. I'm chairing the committee. With us today we have Mr. Gary Grewal; Mr. Travis Keisig; Ms. Lisa Lambert; subbing for Greg Ottenbreit is Mr. Daryl Harrison; and filling in for Ms. Ritchie is Ms. Meara Conway.

Today we'll be considering the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Government Relations; Bill No. 104, *The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2022*; and Bill No. 105, *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2022*.

**General Revenue Fund  
Government Relations  
Vote 30**

**Subvote (GR01)**

**The Chair:** — First we'll consider the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Government Relations. We will begin our consideration on vote 30, Government Relations, subvote (GR01), central management and services.

Minister McMorris is here with his officials. As a reminder, I'd ask to please state your name, officials, before you're speaking and don't touch the microphones. Hansard will take care of that. Also, members, please do not open the desks if you're seated at a desk on that side. Minister McMorris, please make your introductions and opening comments.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon. And I think when we are done, I'll be saying good evening. Bit of a spread in between, but good afternoon. And I will be speaking to the spending priorities outlined by the Ministry of Government Relations budget and business plan for the '23-24 budget year.

I have a number of officials with me, a great group of officials that will be helping me answer questions as we go throughout the next five hours that we're allotted. I'm joined this afternoon by my deputy minister, Laurier Donais, and other ministry officials, as I said. And as they speak, they will introduce themselves and also name their title and help answer the questions.

I'd like to begin by providing a few general comments on the ministry's budget and a few highlights and priorities for Government Relations for the year ahead. First I'd like to acknowledge that we are gathered here for the committee this afternoon on Treaty 4 territory and homeland of the Métis.

The Ministry of Government Relations budget invests both in municipalities and First Nations and Métis communities and organizations to ensure that our province continues to have growth that works for everyone. Our government is working to build a thriving economy that benefits all people in Saskatchewan. We're honouring our commitment to advance economic reconciliation and strengthening First Nations and Métis participation in a growing economy.

In the coming fiscal year, the budget of the ministry is \$796 million. That represents a 22.4 per cent increase from the previous year.

I'll touch on municipal revenue sharing, which is the flagship program better known as MRS [municipal revenue sharing]. The MRS formula is based on three-quarters of one per cent of the provincial sales tax collected two years prior. This no-strings-attached provincial funding allows municipal leaders to address key local priorities ahead of time.

In '23-24 our government will commit nearly \$298 million to the 767 municipalities in Saskatchewan. This represents a 13.4 per cent increase from last year and is a record amount for MRS funding. Since 2007 the MRS grants have increased by 134 per cent as our government has now provided nearly \$4 billion to municipalities through the MRS program.

Saskatchewan's MRS program is the envy of many jurisdictions in Canada because it is consistent and stable funding. The predictability of MRS funding allows municipalities to plan for their own budget and make investments based on their priorities. It continues to be this government's belief that the local elected are in the best position to know the needs of their specific community.

Infrastructure and other grants. Providing funding to Saskatchewan communities for infrastructure projects continues to be one of the major priorities of Government Relations. This year provincial budget includes \$152.7 million in support for municipal infrastructure. In '23-24 we will see \$119.1 million for the provincial portion of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. This total amount includes the federal portion, which equals \$265.1 million; \$8.6 million will be provided through Government Relations for the provincial portion of the New Building Canada Fund. That total amount includes a federal portion of \$19.3 million.

We continue to administer the federal dollars for the Canada Community-Building Fund, formerly known as the Gas Tax Fund. More than \$72 million will be distributed to municipalities this year through the Canada Community-Building Fund. These projects grow our economy and improve the quality of life for Saskatchewan residents.

We are also proud to provide nearly \$3.8 million this year to several municipalities under the transit assistance for people with disabilities program. Supporting paratransit in Saskatchewan's largest centres ensures our residents with diverse disabilities continue to have access to critical services and economic opportunities.

Government Relations also supports local governments with the tools to serve their residents, including new and ongoing building and technical standards as well as subdivision development and community planning. For example, this year the ministry will train the municipal sector on public sector accounting standards for '23-24; allocate \$1.5 million to the targeted sector support initiative with municipal associations to ensure intercommunity collaboration; help building capacity and promote good governance; and develop and distribute information and materials for building owners, industry, municipalities, and

building officials to ensure a smooth transition to *The Construction Codes Act* and adoption of the 2020 building, energy, and plumbing codes. I encourage you to review the ministry's '23-24 business plan for additional details on these and all other important projects under way.

First Nations and Métis. Moving on to the budget for First Nations and Métis programs, this year the Government of Saskatchewan will provide more than \$92.4 million from gaming payments to the First Nations Trust community development corporation and the Clarence Campeau Development Fund. These payments will benefit First Nations and Métis people across the province. It demonstrates that the province and our partners are back on track following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the expansion into online gaming platforms.

First Nations and Métis community grant programs. The Ministry of Government Relations also administers grant programs targeting First Nations and Métis communities' initiatives and events. These grants are open to all Indigenous people and organizations in the province.

This year our government will continue to invest \$400,000 in the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund to support First Nations and Métis communities to engage in activities related to the duty-to-consult. Its intent: to remove costs as a barrier to participation in the duty-to-consult process as communities provide information on potential impacts that development may have on their treaty and Aboriginal rights.

Last year the Ministry of Government Relations reviewed the consultation policy framework and this funding allocation is part of that consideration process. The Government of Saskatchewan is continued to fulfilling the Crown legal duty-to-consult and accommodate as articulated in the consultation policy framework, protecting treaty and Aboriginal rights and advancing reconciliation and promoting certainty for investments in our province to benefit all Saskatchewan residents.

Advancing economic reconciliation also continues through treaty land entitlement claims. The ministry continues to work in partnership with First Nations in Canada on creating reserves in both urban and rural areas,

In 2022 there were three TLE [treaty land entitlement] agreements finalized in Saskatchewan. Two other First Nations are currently in negotiations for a TLE agreement with the province at this time. The most recent announcement is that nearly 60 hectares of Crown mineral rights will be transferred to Cowessess First Nation about surface attaining reservation status under the Cowessess TLE Settlement Agreement. It's my hopes that we'll continue to see further TLE agreements signed in the coming years to support First Nation communities' growth and traditional land use, as well as advancing opportunities for business development and urban centres, and creating economic development and employment opportunities in all Saskatchewan's resource and agriculture sectors.

The Government of Saskatchewan will continue to invest \$800,000 to support community-led Indigenous initiatives. This includes \$400,000 that will be distributed through the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls+ community resource

fund. This fund was created to address issues raised in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Projects that have been supported through this fund include violence prevention and self-defence workshops, land-based healing circles, and programs to support the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

The remaining \$400,000 is allocated to the First Nations and Métis community partnership project and First Nations and Métis sponsorship funds. Again these are to support Indigenous community-led projects and events that support safe communities, stronger families, student achievement, and economic growth.

In '22-23, seven community projects and 24 events received funding through these grants. The projects ranged from empowering youth to supporting festivals and events like Back to Batoche and National Indigenous Peoples Day to support economic development and reforms and information sessions. Intake for these funds will be open soon, and I encourage all eligible First Nations and Métis organizations to apply to support their project and events this year.

In addition to these grant programs, the Ministry of Government Relations continues to support suicide prevention programs in northern Saskatchewan through the enhancing life initiative. We work with a cross-section of Indigenous leadership, government ministries and agencies, and industry representatives to ensure we are taking a meaningful approach to mental health support for residents of the North. It is a goal for the Ministry of Government Relations that First Nations and Métis residents share in Saskatchewan's benefits and opportunities, and these programs support that commitment.

The Provincial Capital Commission. The Provincial Capital Commission will receive 7.3 million in funding from the province this year. The Provincial Capital Commission provides enhanced visitor experience and education programs in the Wascana Centre Authority and at Government House to inspire pride in Saskatchewan's capital city while focusing on stewardship and operating the Wascana Centre.

The PCC [Provincial Capital Commission] are currently in the midst of a master plan review and renewal of Wascana Centre, updating the current 2016 master plan. The Provincial Capital Commission and their partners are engaging the public and stakeholders this spring and summer. Ultimately this feedback will help ensure that the master plan serves Wascana Park for decades to come.

In conclusion my remarks, I would like to describe our budget by closely examining our expense types. More than 97 per cent of Government Relations' budget reflects third-party transfer payments. The majority, 84.6 per cent of the total transfer funding, is provided to municipalities and municipal stakeholders primarily through revenue sharing and infrastructure grants. 11.8 per cent is provided to First Nations and Métis organizations, and 0.9 per cent is provided to the Provincial Capital Commission.

That means that approximately 3 per cent of our ministry's total budget is allocated to delivering ministry programs. This

includes community planning and support; ongoing program services; reconciliation efforts concerning our First Nations, Métis, and northern portfolios; and building and technical standards. It underscores the ministry's commitment to working transparently and efficiently, focusing on our government's goal to invest in our communities. By investing in our communities, we are investing in our future, enabling growth that works for everyone.

That concludes my overview of the Ministry of Government Relations '23-24 budget. My officials and I will be happy to answer any questions, and I think we're going to be starting on the Provincial Capital Commission. So I look forward to those questions.

[15:45]

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. Before we get open to the questions, I'd like to welcome committee member Mr. Tim McLeod. He's joined our meeting. And I will open it up for questions. Ms. Conway.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you, Chair. Yeah, Meara Conway, MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Regina Elphinstone-Centre and critic for PCC. So the minister is absolutely right; we'll start there. I have about an hour of questions, and then I'm going to pass it along to my colleague, Erika Ritchie. Thank you for those opening remarks, Minister. Thank you to all of the committee members and the good folks that are here joining us, the officials here in the Chamber today.

I guess my first question, Minister, is the overall budget in this area is increased, but unfortunately we see that the allocation for the Provincial Capital Commission has gone down by 0.4 per cent. And over the last couple of years, we see the PCC getting a smaller share of the overall budget.

It's a bit of a concerning trend since the Sask Party government took exclusive control over the PCC. Can you speak to why the budget decrease, and why a smaller percentage of the budget overall?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I'll start and as we go on, you know, as the questions get more detailed, I'm probably going to be turning it over to either Jenna or Jeff.

But I'll start on this one. It's a pretty easy explanation. The change from last year's budget to this year's budget is simply the fact that SaskBuilds is taking a bigger role in looking after the accommodation of buildings, where we were looking after that before. So we had staff or some budget to manage that. SaskBuilds is managing all the property, I guess is what you could say, all property moving forward.

And if you go back a couple of years, you know, we did have a switch in the security, I guess you would say . . . community safety officers. So you could, you know, go back a couple of years and say it was dropped a couple years ago. But it really is no less money going to the PCC. It's how it's being allocated through government.

Community safety officers would probably be through Corrections and Policing. And in this situation, from last fiscal

year to this fiscal year is simply money that SaskBuilds will now be having, and not as much . . . It's a small, small part of it, but not as much responsibility from the Provincial Capital Commission.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you for that clarification, Minister. I will have some questions around that CSO [community safety officer] piece. I confess I am new to the file, and so I had a couple of questions about how exactly that operates. I understand now some of the security you see on PCC grounds — be it CSOs, be it legislative security — is under the Minister of Corrections and Policing. But I did have some questions about that interplay in terms of when the PCC, you know, identifies some security needs. But I will come to that in a moment. I appreciate that answer.

Would that involve the Conexus Arts Centre? I see that they previously received \$750,000. I'm wondering what that went towards and the explanation for why that's missing this time around.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So regarding the Conexus centre . . . yeah, Conexus Arts Centre — I still want to call it the Centre of the Arts; that's how dated I am — it really was all driven around COVID-19 and the pandemic. You can imagine, probably harder hit . . . No business or sector was harder hit through the pandemic than entertainment. And of course, they just were not able to conduct any business hardly at all.

So you know, that 750,000 in last year's budget . . . They're up and running and doing well. We were able to supply 750,000 to them last year to keep the power on and people around managing it, to bridge to hopefully this year, which they can have a whole, full year of operation and get back to where they were pre-pandemic days, because they were doing such a good job.

The board has done such a good job in management of the Conexus Arts Centre. It's done such a good job of using that facility for more than just concerts and using it. You know, the Shake the Lake comes to mind and different things. So we didn't just support it for one year. It's been supported for two years. If you go back two budget years, we had 750,000 that allowed them to keep operating.

And this year we kind of thought that, you know, we may not have to spend the whole 750. But if you go back a year at Christmastime, they rely so much on that Christmas season, and they lost all of that. At times it looked like maybe they were going to be able to hold some Christmas parties and company parties, and then right around that time things tightened up again.

And so they've needed to use that whole 750 to get to this fiscal year, but we're confident, they're confident that the way things look moving forward . . . And you know, it's not only the Conexus Arts Centre that is up and running, but artists are up and running, and they're looking for places. I mean, they've had two years of kind of being on the shelf themselves, and so there is a lot of groups touring now. There are a lot of concerts.

And when I look at — we're talking about the Conexus Arts Centre, but — just the various entertainment venues across the province, the number of concerts that are coming to the province probably in the next year would probably be a record amount.

Because everybody is . . . Not only are the venues looking to get back into business, but so are the artists that are doing the touring, and so are so many of the different events.

So I think it looks good. We are very, very comfortable and confident with the leadership of the Conexus Arts Centre not only on the board level but at the management level. And you know, we're certainly glad to support them through those two years, but feel that they're in a good position to be self-sufficient into the future like they were pre-pandemic days.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you, Minister. Yeah, absolutely very challenging times for the arts community. They were often the first to lose work and the last to return to work, so really good to hear there was that temporary stopgap measure for them, and promising to hear that they feel they're in a good position to move forward without that support.

So we've had a couple of changeovers within the PCC, which make it hard, a little bit hard to assess funding on my end as opposition because, you know, we've had a few things shift over to the responsibility, maybe, of other ministries. But you did say, Minister, that there haven't been any cuts across, kind of, the services and the maintenance within the PCC.

Can you speak to whether there have been increases that would account for inflation? Like do you see . . . Without being able to see kind of a breakdown of what that funding, that specific allocation looks like, have there been any increases to account for the inflationary pressures that no doubt, you know, we're all facing, but certainly the PCC will be facing as well?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'm glad you're asking these questions because I learn something new each time too as I go through the answers.

So really it is a status quo. And on the inflation side . . . And I was thinking on the inflation power and, you know, we run a lot of buildings, but that's all on the accommodation side that isn't paid for directly through PCC. It's paid through SaskBuilds as the property management, so all of that remains. The increases would be found, if there was for inflation, through SaskBuilds. But for ours, that would be through accommodation.

But through the Provincial Capital Commission, it's pretty much status quo. There is some money that goes into capital and depending on the projects, some were deferred just because of materials, couldn't get what we needed at the time because of supply chain issues, as you can imagine. But moving forward, we think we're in a pretty good spot to maintain everything regarding any inflationary costs moving forward.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you, Minister. As I mentioned, I'm a new critic to the area. Is there any way that you could table kind of a more detailed breakdown of the budget for the PCC, just so I get a sense of where resources are allocated within the PCC, beyond what we're kind of provided in the budget books?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'm going to turn it over to my officials to kind of get into the detail on the revenue and expenditure lines. But we do table an annual report every year which will have that breakdown moving forward. But for this afternoon still we can go through the rundown, so I'll maybe turn it over to my deputy

minister, Laurier Donais.

**Mr. Donais:** — Thanks. Thanks for the question. Laurier Donais, deputy minister of Government Relations, deputy minister First Nations, Métis and northern affairs, and also the Chair of the Provincial Capital Commission board.

So with regards to the revenue sources of the Provincial Capital Commission, there is the 7.3 million from the Ministry of Government Relations. So that's the provincial portion, but there's also funding from the other partners of the Provincial Capital Commission. So the city of Regina provides 2.7 million, and then also the University of Regina provides 800,000. And then there's also like a small component that would be considered PCC-generated revenues, so lease fees and user fees and those types of things. So that's about 1.097 million on that. So that comes to a total revenue of about 12.6 million.

We do have a capital budget there as well, just internal transfers from the accumulated surplus of about 750,000. So that totals total revenue sources of 12.64 million.

And then on the expenditure side of things, we've got a number of areas. We've got our . . . You know, administrative offices total up about 1.2 million. That's finance, corporate services, our executive director offices. We've got accommodations of about 3.1 million, which as the minister had mentioned, is really provided through SaskBuilds and Procurement, and so we provide funding for that.

Outreach and visitor experiences, about 1.5 million. And then we've got stewardship operations of 675,000. We've got forestry operations of 728,000, horticulture of 609,000. And then we've got sort of maintenance around the park and general, you know, grounds upkeep and those types of things, of 2.722 million. And then we've got development and infrastructure projects, and so that's sort of the capital budget side of things, of 1.85 million.

[16:00]

And then we've got, as PCC follows Public Sector Accounting Board rules, they do capitalize their assets and then amortize that over the lifetime of the asset, so there's a amortization expense of about 120,000. So that brings the total expenses to 12.64 million. So PCC basically is budgeting on a break-even basis.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. I just missed one number, the forestry operations. And then can you just speak to where, like, urban agricultural initiatives come out of? Would that be horticulture? Can you speak to that?

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Good afternoon. Jenna Schroeder, executive director of the Provincial Capital Commission. And just to repeat, it was . . . the forestry number that you were looking for is 675,000. So when we have, I think what you mean by urban agriculture — so we've got trees, shrubs, perennial flowers and grasses, annual flowers and grasses — that's coming from forestry and horticulture.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. I want to ask about the ongoing Brandt litigation. Just looking for a status update on that, the publicly consumable version of that status update. Also hoping



to hear . . . One of the questions I have is whether you, when you're involved in litigation of that sort, do you prepare for a worst-case, best-case scenario, you know, if things don't go as you hope? Where would that loss in court, where would that come out of? Would that come out of the PCC budget or some other budget? Looking for a bit of clarity on that. Just looking forward to the different ways that that could play out.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Just on the litigation piece is that the PCC has been released from any litigation, and now it is between the Government of Saskatchewan, which is represented through SaskBuilds, and the Brandt Group of Companies, or Brandt. So that's the . . . Anything that will be moving forward, we really don't have anything to do with. That's all through SaskBuilds, as the property manager and owner, and the litigant.

**Ms. Conway:** — Okay, understood. Thank you. Is there any other litigation that the PCC is involved with at this time?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — No.

**Ms. Conway:** — No. Because there was, you know, there were some more exciting years in that category recently, but it seems like things have kind of settled down. Okay.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — That's succinct, yeah.

**Ms. Conway:** — Moving to the master plan, I know that a lot of folks are excited about this. Could you maybe just provide a little more detail on where you're at with this, the expected timeline? You know, I don't want to hit you with too many questions off the bat. I can always follow up. But to what extent have you started the public participation portion of the plan? Could you just maybe speak to this? And then I may have some follow-up questions.

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Absolutely. Thank you so much for the question, and I'm very excited for this. The master plan is the most important document that we have as the Provincial Capital Commission.

So we are in the midst of the renewal right now. Based on our regulations, *The Provincial Capital Commission Regulations*, it says that we have to renew and renew the master plan here in 2023. And then on a go-forward basis, every 10 years, that master plan will be reviewed.

Now there's been a long history of master planning for Wascana Centre. The very first master plan was in 1962 when the Wascana Centre Authority was created. We are now on the 11th sequential master plan. But even before that, there were plans for this area all the way back until 1908 and 1913, so this is a very special area within Regina that has a long history of planning.

With the change of our regulations, the new policy, and our new procedures, we do have a very extensive public consultation process outlined for this review of the master plan. The actual process started with the release of our public participation plan. That came out this past January. It's online, [wascana.ca](http://wascana.ca). We've got the entire plan of how we will be engaging the public, when they can expect to see us, the ways that we're engaging them, and the ways that we're notifying them as well.

And to get to that point of releasing the public participation plan, our consultants . . . We did hire through a competitive process. It's a joint effort here. So DTAH, out of Toronto, they're the lead consultant, and they're the ones who are going to be writing the master plan. And then locally we have Praxis Consulting. They're leading the engagement.

And just a more about DTAH. They have been doing the master plans for Wascana Centre since 1982, so they've got a long-standing tradition of doing master planning here. They really know Wascana Centre. And then locally as well, they do the master plan for the University of Regina, their campus master plan. So there's a lot of good crossover here.

And then Praxis Consulting, they've done a lot of work throughout Regina, for the Government of Saskatchewan and the city of Regina too. So they're well known in the community.

Where we're at right now is we're at the end of stage 1. So stage 1 was where we were just introducing to the public what is the master plan, how can they get involved in this review, and just providing them some more context and information.

But ultimately there is a total of five stages here for this master plan. So stage 1 again is the assessment of current conditions. Stage 2 is the vision and objectives. Stage 3 is the initial draft of the master plan. Stage 4 is the final draft. And then stage 5 is the approval of the master plan. And the public will have opportunities to engage and provide their feedback in the first four stages through various methods.

**Ms. Conway:** — Sorry, can you repeat the first two stages?

**Ms. Schroeder:** — For sure. So stage 1 is assessment of current conditions and stage 2 is vision and objectives.

**Ms. Conway:** — And sorry, you said that you've just completed the first stage?

**Ms. Schroeder:** — We're nearing the end of it, yes.

**Ms. Conway:** — Okay. And the first stage, did that involve any part of that public participation plan, or is that something that's really going to kick into gear in the second and subsequent stages?

**Ms. Schroeder:** — No, we actually did . . . Thank you for that question. We did quite a lot of consultation here in stage 1 that was led by our consulting team. So ways that the public was able to get involved is there were one-on-one interviews with various First Nation and Métis leaders in and around Regina. There was also an Indigenous sharing circle where First Nation and Métis citizens were invited to come and share their thoughts at the First Nations University this past February, on February 13th.

We held a public open house on February 15th in Wascana Place, which is the headquarters for the Provincial Capital Commission. And then there was an online survey that was open for two weeks as well in February where members of the public could provide their feedback. And then we had a series of stakeholder engagement sessions. So for example, the participating parties — the Government of Saskatchewan, the city of Regina, the University of Regina — could provide their feedback directly.

Our partners in the park, which are the big tenants within the centre, had their own session. And then user and community groups within the centre were invited to provide their feedback.

**Ms. Conway:** — So I know that there's been a lot of interest in, you know, designating some space in the park for ceremonial uses and traditional cultural uses. And I understand that that is a topic in this engagement as part of the master plan. With that in mind, can you speak to . . . Can you give us a little more meat on the bone about this engagement? Can you speak to, for example, how many one-on-one interviews did you have with Indigenous individuals and leadership? How many sharing circles? And can you speak to the uptake on that online survey? Like how many people have you heard from, for example?

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Thank you for that question. There were invitations sent to 10 First Nation and Métis leaders. Nine of them were able to find space in their calendars in time to participate, so those interviews were conducted again by Praxis. The Indigenous sharing circle that happened at First Nations University, there were only 10 people who participated but they were very engaged in providing their feedback throughout the evening.

For the public open house, there were over 160 attendees. And just for context, the last time the Wascana Centre master plan was reviewed there were only 60 people who came to our open houses. So quite a lot more participation.

And new this year was the online survey component. We didn't have that the last time the master plan was reviewed, and there were over 670 responses.

**Ms. Conway:** — Wonderful. Just wondering why only 10 leaders. Like was it . . . How did you select the folks that were kind of invited to provide that one-on-one feedback? Because that seems to be a really wonderful opportunity for some really enriching conversations. So just wondering is it a capacity issue? Like how did you identify those 10 leaders? It sounds like you had excellent uptake on that, 9 out of 10 is great. Just wondering why maybe that wasn't extended further?

Sorry, I should direct these to the minister. It's . . . Yeah.

**Ms. Schroeder:** — All right. Thank you for that question.

We relied on some expertise from our consultants who know Indigenous leaders within Regina. So we tried to focus on the communities and the leaders who would have a direct impact, or they're directly affected by Wascana Centre. So for example, First Nations University is on reserve land, so in extending the invitation to Star Blanket Cree Nation and just some of the other leaders who have reserves within Regina. And then, of course the Métis community as well, Métis Region III.

**Ms. Conway:** — Wonderful, thank you. In terms of the consultants, so there were two RFPs [request for proposal] or just one? And can you just speak to the value of those contracts with DTAH and Praxis.

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Okay, thank you for that question. I do want to provide just a bit more information about how the public and stakeholders can be . . . they will be engaged throughout the

process. So coming up in stage 2, we're taking a bit of a different tactic. Stage 1, we asked the public and stakeholders to come to us. Stage 2, we're going out into the community.

So we're going to have a series of pop-ups around Regina. We're in the process of planning all of those to try to be in spaces where members of the community already are and get their uptake, get their feedback linking to the survey. We'll do another online survey that'll be open for two weeks. And that's really best practice in the engagement world of a two-week period.

We're also going to be continuing the Indigenous community leaders interviews. And that's going to happen . . . it happened in stage 1. We'll do it in stage 2. We'll do it again in stage 3. And then when we get into stage 3, we've got a repeat of what we did in stage 1 for engagement. So we'll do again the interviews with Indigenous community leaders. We'll do another sharing circle. We'll do a public open house and an online survey. And then when we get to stage 4, when it's the final draft of the master plan, we're only having an online survey because at that point we should be pretty close with the master plan. So we won't have any public, in-person activities, just a survey.

And going back to the RFP, we did do that competitive RFP using Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement's standard processes. And the tender was to do both the public engagement and the review of the master plan, so understanding that there's two distinct portions here but we ran it as one contract. And the total value of that contract was \$200,000.

[16:15]

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. Just maybe, maybe it's too soon to tell because you are in the middle of this engagement, but you know, there have been calls to designate that west lawn as a designated place for cultural exchange, ceremony, peaceful demonstration. Any indication on kind of where that's headed? Or is it simply too soon to tell?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thanks for that question. And yeah, I mean I compliment the PCC. This is great work. And what we want more than anything else is public engagement through this process because it is such a special space for not only people in Regina . . . But I just know from experience having some people come to Saskatchewan — this was many years ago — for, of all things, a wakeboard competition, and they couldn't believe what we had in the middle of our city. I mean it is really the crown jewel especially of Regina but of Saskatchewan too.

So this is really important stuff and important stuff to get right. So what we do, and Jenna's explained it very well, but we hear from the public through the first couple of stages, and then we go back to the public and tell them, this is what we've heard. What do you think of it? So you know, I'm sure through the engagement we've heard of ideas of what to do with the west lawn and what to do with the whole park because, you know, that's the whole point of these first two stages, but it's also then to go back and say to the general public, this is what we've heard. What do you think of it?

And you know, you'd mentioned that there was maybe only 10 at the sharing circle. I think this is going to . . . We had a great turnout of the public. I think — especially as when you start

saying, this is what we're hearing to do in the park — you're going to get even more engagement even then because there'll be some that'll agree and some that will disagree. There will be some that will want it, certainly maybe more commercialized, and there will be some that want it less commercialized. There will be some that will say that is a perfect spot for, you know, Indigenous, but there may be some that won't. But until we hear what people want, and then go back to the public and say this is what we're hearing, that's kind of the whole process of it.

And I really, you know, again commend the PCC and SaskBuilds for selecting DTH Consulting. They've been doing this work in the park since 1982. Even though it's a firm from Toronto, they use Praxis from Regina; they probably know the park more intimately than anybody else in Saskatchewan or in Regina.

And they don't come by this by just doing it here in Saskatchewan. This is the work that they do. You know, I don't go through their whole résumé across Canada, but the National Capital Commission in Ottawa, they do the master plan and have been doing the master plan for decades. So this is the work that they do. I don't think we could get a better consultant. And then being able to leverage a Saskatchewan firm, I think we're going to be served very, very well.

And like any of this engagement, when it's all said and done, you know, I don't think we're going to have a 100 per cent consensus. I don't think you ever do. But it does set a path for Wascana Centre and the Provincial Capital Commission for the next seven years to fulfill. And so we're really excited for this engagement, have been excited with what we've heard so far, and excited moving forward.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you, Minister. Yes it sounds like DTH is experts in the field, experts in Wascana Park. And you know, giving credit where credit is due, you know, people talk, people are involved in this already. And the feedback that I've been getting has been very positive from the folks that have been involved up till now. So congratulations on what appears to be, you know, a very successful initiative this far.

I want to turn . . . I forgot to ask a question on the Brandt topic. I'm just wondering the status of that site. It's back to dirt. What does the future hold?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So the site has been fully remediated. The building has been removed. All the concrete has been removed. The hole has been filled, and I believe it's been sodded or grass has been planted. I don't if we sod or plant grass, but so it's been fully remediated back to — well I guess I can't say the natural state because that was a long time ago because that CNIB [Canadian National Institute for the Blind] building has been there for a long time — but back to the original state.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. I have a question just turning to the topic we touched on earlier, the structure around security in PCC grounds. It's something that I'm trying to wrap my head around because I understand we have CSOs and legislature security operating in PCC grounds but they are under the . . . So sorry. I have a tickle in my throat. They report to the Ministry of Policing and Corrections. Could you speak to that structure?

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Thank you for that question. The community

safety officers, like we mentioned, up until last year had been part of Provincial Capital Commission and Wascana Centre Authority before that. So what had happened with the changeover is all of those FTEs [full-time equivalent] were transferred to the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing with the creation of the provincial protective services branch.

There has been no change to the services that are offered to folks within the centre even though it's a different reporting structure. They are still doing patrols, talking with folks within the centre, providing some education. So that hasn't changed. And they are still located within Wascana Place, within our building. So when we need to talk with them if there's an issue emerging that we know about or if they know about, there's still that communication. Just the formal reporting is through Corrections, Public Safety and Policing.

And when it comes to the security of the legislative grounds, that was the Sergeant-at-Arms. So that wasn't PCC or the Wascana Centre Authority before that. That's always been separate.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. So the workflow, like if a security issue is identified by PCC, they simply reach out to that structure within the Ministry of Policing and Corrections.

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Yes. Yes, we do.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. Okay. Just let me collect my thoughts here for a moment. When estimates happened this time last year, there was an ongoing third-party security contract, Minister, with . . . Sorry, I'm forgetting the acronym, but just give me a moment here.

I guess I'll start just by asking if there are any ongoing third-party security contracts between the PCC and any other third party.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I guess a couple things come to mind if we go back, you know, set the calendar back and not even on the fiscal year. But what had happened before is, there was a contract through the Regina city police for security around Frost.

It was the first year that Frost went on, and there was some extra security needed at that time because of, I guess, the environment of where everybody was at in, probably in the world but definitely in Canada. And we weren't immune from some of those concerns and making sure that we had proper security in place when the general public was coming to this park.

That was just a short-term contract, and now we just work with the commissionaires, contract with the commissionaires for any security, for example, in the centre. So yeah.

**Ms. Conway:** — Yes, and I think as well you had contracted security, SRG [Security Resource Group]. SRG, that was around the same time, around the Frost festival? Or was that for some other purpose?

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Yes. Thank you for that question. So Security Resource Group, they were contracted as well to provide support along with the Regina Police Service. And so going forward in 2022 and 2023 after those short-term security contracts had ended, we do continue to have an ongoing standing contract with the commissionaires.

And so some of the things that we had invested in this past year was a commissionaire at Wascana Place, PCC's head office, for a total of \$57,055. We also hired the commissionaires to monitor the warming shack around the rink on Wascana for Frost this past year. The value of that was \$8,000. There was some additional overnight security from the commissionaires just to monitor the Wascana hub during Frost festival, so that was \$1,000.

And then at Government House, when there's any outside of normal business hours events, we do bring in the commissionaires. So that was just over \$1,000 for a total this year of \$67,285 to the commissionaires.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you for that. I have a question. I know you have a new permit bylaw. I'm just wondering, I don't know if you keep stats on this, but roughly what amount of the protests . . . Of course PCC involve grounds that are very popular for protests because of course they're right outside the Legislative Assembly where folks feel they, you know, often need to come to be heard on, at least, provincial issues.

I guess what percentage of the protests that you see throughout a year involve folks actually reaching out for a permit in advance, and how many of those are spontaneous? And how do you deal with protests when a permit is not obtained in advance?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I guess I'll start by saying, touch wood, that we really haven't seen a lot of protests in the park or in and around the building in the past year. Not to say that there won't be in the future, but anything that has happened, they've applied for a permit. We haven't denied any. They're at zero cost.

But I would also say that through the PCC, we monitor and try and keep ahead of it. So we work very closely with the Regina Police Service as they monitor and try and be out in front of anything that might be boiling up and so that we're ready for it and we're aware of it. But I will say again, you know, I'm just trying to think, there really hasn't been anything major in the last year and anything that did was . . . a permit was granted, and probably not even a lot of them. But it's not to restrict; it's to have a better understanding who will be in the park.

And you know, and I go back to that Frost, the first time it was in the park, and at that time in the world there was protests going on. And I just want to commend the PCC, the Regina city police for making things work as smoothly as they did. You look around, in so many other jurisdictions it didn't work nearly as smooth as it did here. And it's from the good work of what they were able to see and put in place to kind of quell any of that prior to it, blockading the front of the building. So good work. And to your question, nothing really comes to mind that were not granted.

[16:30]

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you, Minister. I echo your comments about the good work being done. Is there a protocol in place though, when a group of people are protesting, they don't have a permit. Like, how would that be handled? Would they be approached and sort of . . . Would there be a discussion to make sure folks are on the same page? I know that there have been high-profile incidents of permitless protests in the park, so I'm wondering if anything came of that in terms of developing a

protocol.

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Thank you for that question. If there are protests that happen that come down to the centre and they haven't applied for a permit, the first thing that we do is we have folks from the PCC go out, talk with the organizers, and really try to work with them to understand when they will be coming, about how long they'll be here, the number of people that they expect — those sort of logistical questions so that we can keep everybody safe. If an event gets larger, if it's about a hundred or more people, we do want to be looking at closing down roads just so that there isn't any conflict between traffic and people who are out here protesting.

The other thing that we do as PCC when we get permit applications for protests, we have an issues alert that we notify our partners. We send it to RPS [Regina Police Service]. We send it to the building managers here, just some folks so that they're aware that there is going to be . . . there's people who are coming to gather. So it's a lot of information sharing, a lot of working with the people who are organizing the protests.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you for that. Just moving on, I'm going to pass it over to my colleague here momentarily. I neglected to ask about the pillars, the five pillars. Have they changed at all? Can you speak to that?

And then I'd also like an update on the goats and whether they successfully controlled weed growth, and whether you're bringing the goats back. What do you do with the goats after the summer? Was the shepherd in scope or out of scope? I have so many questions about the goats. Were the goats in scope or out of scope? I have so many questions.

**Ms. Schroeder:** — Thank you for that question. And quite honestly we could be here for the next four hours if you want to talk about all of the wonderful projects, and especially the goats.

The pillars of the Wascana Centre master plan. They are outlined in the master plan right now, and they're based on the founding vision of Wascana Centre. So those pillars are the seat of government, education and research, cultural arts, recreational opportunities, and conservation of the environment. And part of what we're doing in this review here is specifically asking the public and stakeholders, do these five pillars, do they still make sense? Is there anything that we need to do to change it? So no decisions have been made yet about changing that.

And then your question about the goats. The goats were probably the most popular thing that we did last year, other than the Frost festival and our Thursdays in Wascana. So we did have a group of about 60 goats that came in twice throughout the summer last year. So in June they were brought in while the weeds, the invasive weeds that were growing around the hill, Wascana Hill, to try to eat them back while they were still tender and young. They were here for 10 days. Lots of folks were able to come out, enjoy them, and we were able to put out some social media of Know Before You Goat to give people some idea of what to expect when you're visiting them. And they did come back for another 10 days in August before the weeds went to seed to try to manage that. And from what we can tell — my ecology team when they were doing surveys before and after — the goats were very successful in controlling some of our invasive weeds.

So yes, the goats are coming back this year, but we're going to have a much larger flock. We're looking at about 300 this time. And so we'll make sure to put out some more information, especially the Know Before You Goat again, so that folks know when the goats will be back, the locations that they will be, so that they come and watch these goats at work.

And we actually contracted a company called No Kidding Weed Management. They're based out of Elbow in Saskatchewan that they have this flock. It's a much larger flock, and I can't remember the exact number of sheep that they have. But we had just a small portion of them, that they would be transported from their fields where they typically graze in Elbow, coming down to Regina for their short stay here, and then they were returned to the rest of their flock.

**Ms. Conway:** — Wonderful. Thank you for that update. With that I will cede the floor to my colleague, Erika Ritchie. And I'd like to thank the minister, the officials, the staff, the Chair, the Clerk, Clerk's office. Yeah, thank you.

**The Chair:** — I'd like to thank Ms. Conway for her questions and move on and welcome committee member Ms. Ritchie to take over. Ms. Ritchie, you have some questions?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And good evening, Minister, and officials. It's a pleasure to be back in committee for estimates on Government Relations. Nice point of transition after following on the goat question. I did a quick scan or web search. There's several acronyms for GOAT — you may be familiar with some of them — the most prominent being “greatest of all time” and Muhammad Ali. And Meara always sets a high bar and is a tough act to follow. So I'll attribute her to GOAT status as well and pick up where she left off.

So I'll be focusing of course more on Municipal Affairs in my questions. And I just want to sort of start it off a little bit high level before we drill down a little bit and ask about, you know, during the budget development process. Can you tell me, Minister, what was the intent with this budget and how it was different from previous years?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Mr. Chair, before I answer the question, just want to clarify. Will you have any more questions on the Provincial Capital Commission? Because if not, we'll let the two officials go rather than keep them here till the time when we're done. So if you're okay with that?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Yeah. No further questions on capital commission.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — No? No more questions? Great. Thank you for that.

So as we were developing this budget, you know, really probably the strongest message our government has been able to deliver and follow through on is growth, and growth that works for everyone. And so that is kind of the theme that our budget worked around as we developed the budget for '23-24.

And it starts with so many of the different programs that we are able to administer. I think it's a pretty phenomenal number, that 97 per cent of all the money that comes through Government

Relations is flow-through to third parties. So you know, whether it's municipal revenue sharing at just under \$300 million, that goes to the 767 municipalities in the province with no strings attached.

And that was very evident at SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] again this past week and a month or so ago at SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], is the whole fact of that three-quarters of one per cent of PST [provincial sales tax] from two years previous flows through. It's predictable funding that they know what is coming.

There was a bit of a dip, not this moving forward, but last fiscal year of about 3 million, but it's back up to . . . It's a record amount of municipal revenue sharing that will go to municipalities. And so that's kind of the flagship of the Government Relations programs, is municipal revenue sharing.

The other piece that, you know, the budget is centred around is the infrastructure needs of the province. And there are great infrastructure needs, not only at the provincial level, but at the municipal level. And I would say that was probably the common theme that I heard again at SUMA and at SARM, but especially SUMA with the urban municipalities and the infrastructure that they have, you know, whether it's water or water and sewer, those type of infrastructure needs and the aging infrastructure in the province.

So it was very common, very common for municipalities to wonder what the new ICIP [Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program] program is going to look like, and as are we. I said to the municipalities, please lobby the federal government. We'll be there with our money moving forward, but we would need all three levels of government — the federal level, provincial level, and municipal level — to deal with the infrastructure needs that are in the province.

So the ICIP program comes to an end after this year because all the money had been allotted that was allotted federally and provincially. So you know, those are the two major programs, that revenue sharing that goes to municipalities no strings attached, and then infrastructure programs with the partnership with the federal government.

Other programs too, such as the target sector support program, which is one and a half million dollars coming off the top of revenue sharing, and that's a very good program. That program helps municipalities work in collaboration, whether it's a community plan for a number of municipalities, municipalities and First Nations seeing how they can work together. So it's a very good program — fully, I think, subscribed last year. And we're going through the inputs this year, another one that sunsets on May 1st and then moving forward.

But that's a program that municipalities have taken up. And I think the interesting part for that one is that there's a strong component of SUMA administering it but also SARM, the urban administrators' association, the rural administrators' association all having a say in where this money goes and which projects that come forward are eligible. So those are kind of the three major programs from the municipal side.

There is also record investment in the First Nations and Métis

side. And you know, it's a total . . . Approximately 249.1 million is targeted to programs with First Nations and Métis. The lion's share of course is the gaming grant that is \$92.4 million. That is certainly nice to see come back to a pretty healthy number, because we went through two years where we had very little or no income through the gaming agreements and, you know, our government supported First Nations and Métis. I believe the one year was 35 million and I think the second . . . The first year was 45 million and second year was 35 million. But seeing this come back to where it is being funded through what was always meant to be a gaming agreement that was targeted in large part to First Nations and Métis, so that is a great program.

[16:45]

So overall it's a budget that I think continues on the theme of growth in the province by supporting infrastructure at the community level through MRS, infrastructure at the community level through federal-provincial and municipal dollars, dollars for planning into the future because, you know, a classic example is what's going on in and around the Jansen area with BHP potash mine.

And having a meeting with them, with BHP last week and what they're looking at as far as development in that area, and they have identified the communities that are going to be impacted. It was quite interesting to see that they drew an 85-kilometre circle around Jansen. And they're . . . It's more than a goal and I don't want to speak for them, but they are saying that anybody that's working underground, anybody that's operating their equipment has to live within the 85 kilometres of Jansen.

And their explanation . . . You know, I kind of questioned it in a way but their explanation made such perfect sense in that that's about a 45-minute drive to 50-minute drive. They work 12-hour shifts underground. So they'd have to leave their house an hour before the 12-hour shift, 45-minute drive there, 15-minute trade-off with the crew that's previous, 15-minute at the end of their shift, and then a drive home. They're putting in a 14-hour day. Because, you know, we heard earlier today in the House through Workers' Compensation that an accident, automobile accident, is an accident on the job. And BHP is taking that very seriously.

So you know, when this province was developed, they didn't put the potash near the biggest cities; they put the potash where the potash is. And it's sometimes in sparsely populated areas where the communities have to put a lot of infrastructure in place. You know, housing is a big one moving forward.

My point of all of that is that those communities, be it the rural municipalities or the towns and villages — and Humboldt would be the only city that is relatively close — are going to have a lot of work ahead of them to meet the infrastructure needs that are needed, whether it's housing, whether it's recreation facilities, whether it's entertainment, all of that. And you know, we're really looking at some of the programs that we have that will be targeted in that area, especially even, you know, the targeted sector support that those municipalities could access to help them develop the needs within their areas.

So that's kind of a long-winded answer, but that's what this budget is built around, is growth that the province is seeing — and you know, I use the example of Jansen but it's even here in

the city of Regina — whether it's the canola crushing plants, whether it's Yorkton and the canola crushing plants, whether it's the potash development, whether it's a greenfield like BHP, or you know, the other potash mines that are looking at ramping up production, making sure that we're investing in those communities so that they'll be ready for the growth that's coming to this province. Because I think over the next number of years that's going to be significant. So I'll just end it there.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that wide-ranging response. I certainly would like to come back to that example that you focused in on and how that is providing opportunity and challenges for the city of Humboldt. Certainly I've also had the opportunity to meet with the mayor and council, and understand what that looks like for them. But I'll resist the temptation to dive in too quickly here.

I guess, you know, you've mentioned growth and infrastructure sort of guiding the build-out to the budget. And I mean we are kind of following on the heels of SUMA last week, and you know, some of the questions and resolutions that came forward that provide some pretty consistent themes that I've been hearing as I continue to engage with civic leaders across the province.

And it occurs to me that, you know, the roles that our cities and towns are playing in terms of providing service to their citizens has evolved, and that your ministry in its role as Government Relations, your role too necessarily evolves. And so I'm wondering if you can speak to how you see that relationship and that role as Government Relations sort of changing over the last couple of years.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thanks for the question. And you know, I don't know if I would agree completely that the relationship has changed in the last couple years. Now I can only speak . . . Because I've only been the minister for two and a half . . . fortunate to be the minister for two and a half years so I guess, you know, I'd rely on people and other ministers because we've had a number of ministers that have been in charge of Government Relations.

But in the last two and a half years, what I knew before but learned and have been told many times, that local governments are autonomous. They make their own decisions. They don't want provincial government dictating to them the way things should go or not go. And again I've said it too many times probably already, but that's why the MRS program, the municipal revenue-sharing program is so important.

But you know, our goal at Government Relations really is to be a conduit to help municipalities — urbans, rurals, towns, villages, First Nations, all those governments — work together. Like how can we help you work together? We don't want to make the decisions for you, but we want to help you get to that decision point. And that has been very clear to me, that municipalities want their say so how can we help them . . . not want their say. They want the decision making. They don't defer decision making to us at all. They want the decision making in their chambers. But how can they work better with communities?

And we have the opportunity I guess from the 10,000-foot view to watch all 776 — 67 — municipalities; I've interchanged that number a couple times, but I hope you don't call me on nine

municipalities, that I get it one way or the other. But there are some really great success stories. And you know, I think if . . . Well because of the storm you weren't able to get to the awards banquet but the Saskatoon, Warman, Corman Park won an award at SUMA for their working together. How many municipalities were there? There was a number, five or six. Six I think it was, and that do such a good job working together. And we can kind of see what works well and help, through our targeted sector support, allow others to kind of go off of that model. But having said that, it ultimately is the municipalities themselves that make that decision and decide which direction they're going to.

I would also say that I'm fortunate that there are a number of municipalities. What is the number, 767 or 776?

**A Member:** — 67.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — 67. Okay, 67. Centennial year. I got that down now. 767 that, not all but 740, 750 are represented by my colleagues and the rest are yours. But Regina and Saskatoon have both opposition and government MLAs that are in the cities all the time, and every other city in Saskatchewan is represented by government MLAs. And we're fortunate — every municipality in this province is represented by a government MLA. So we get a lot of feedback as to what's working in local governments and what isn't. The only area that is not represented would be the Northeast, at Cumberland. And then, you know, we have Athabasca that I know our MLA is involved in that area.

So we get a lot of feedback, not only from the municipalities directly, not only from SUMA or SARM or the New North or even FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations]. We also have the opportunity to have feedback from government MLAs that are out and about in each and every one of those communities, be it urban, rural, or First Nations.

So I don't think the relationship is changed a whole lot. I think that stays pretty static. We just want to make sure that we're hearing their voices and helping them in whichever way we can. And I'll just leave it at that.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. I guess what has become apparent to me, however, is that the needs within our municipal sector have evolved. And you know, there has been many concerns and criticisms I guess laid on sort of offloading and downloading onto municipalities, who feel very burdened by issues. And some of those issues came forward at SUMA last week. You heard them yourself around issues with mental health and addictions; a lack of housing for underserved populations; issues with policing; and access to health care, physicians, and ambulances.

And you know, all of these issues are things that obviously fall within the realm of other ministry portfolios. But when they land in the purview of mayors and councils of towns and cities across the province with, you know, limited budgets but increased needs to address because they're sort of the last stop, it does kind of beg that question back to you, sir. In terms of that special role that you play in ensuring that where in these other areas of government responsibility that things are falling short, you know, how do you advocate on behalf of your constituent stakeholders to ensure those issues are being addressed?

And I'll maybe just give a couple of examples. You know, we

hear about issues around increases of violence on public buses, the need for, you know, greater protections for transit workers. That means extra cost. That means decreasing services for other patrons, and it speaks to those unaddressed issues around mental health, addictions, and a lack of housing because then they spill out.

[17:00]

You heard last week mention of the formation of tent cities in places like Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and elsewhere where, because of a lack of social housing, which would fall under presumably, you know, Sask Housing Corporation and lots of vacancies within that realm, that there's, you know, there's unmet housing needs within the cities.

And then when I speak with municipal mayors and councils, they talk about how their resources are being diverted over to deal with these emergent social issues. So whereas before, the fire department might focus on building inspections, now they've got the fire trucks out in the community doing first response to overdose incidents and the like. And so we really see, you know, communities struggling mightily.

And again when I sit down and I talk with these leaders and I say, you know, what are your primary issues? What are your concerns? And it's a pretty consistent list of things that I'm hearing about in terms of those unmet social needs that, because of a lack in these other government areas, the municipal leaders are having to pick up the slack. And that's why I ask about the evolving nature of the relationship and how you see your role in, you know, advocating on their behalf and ensuring that these issues are being adequately addressed.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So that question is kind of a tough one for myself to answer because there's many, many different factors there, whether it's housing, which would be Social Services; whether it's health care, which would be the Ministry of Health; whether it's, you know, whichever one. Like you said, you talked about safety, which would be Corrections and Policing. And those questions would be better set to those ministries and ministers. But I will just kind of take a broad-brush answer on this.

Again I had said earlier that I think our engagement with the municipalities is strong. And some of it stems even, you know, from my short time here is . . . Just take COVID, for example, where at times we were on a phone call with every city mayor, all 13 city mayors, SUMA, SARM, the New North, with a number of officials from Education, from health care, from Public Safety Agency, where we were . . . I mean it was so fluid at that time as far as restrictions and all of that and how that was affecting municipalities. We got to, kind of, for a while maybe once a month, and then it sped up to once every two weeks, and it bounced around as they needed.

But I think, you know, the silver lining from all of that, the positive from all of that is the relationship that was built between Government Relations and so many of the municipal leaders, because we were talking to them on a regular basis. And I had offered at that time, once it settled down, if we want to do this every month or every couple months, I have no problem engaging. And so we haven't had the formal calls, but there has

been a . . . Most of them all have my number directly, and if they have a concern, they get in touch with me and, you know, I can direct them to the proper ministry.

So you know, to your question is to Government Relations, can we fix all those problems? No. But what I think our role is, and I said it earlier, is to work with the communities and they can have . . . if they don't feel . . . I don't think it's they have a line to the Minister of Health or Corrections and Policing, but they can certainly go through our ministry and I can put them in touch with whoever they need to talk to.

So I think, you know, from our perspective is making sure that the communications are there. And I certainly felt it when I left SUMA last week and SARM before. In fact I've had a number of texts from mayors or, you know, the executive of SUMA being so very appreciative that they have an open door kind of relationship with our government.

Does that fix every problem? No. These are very large issues. And I guess I would say there is some evolution, certainly the issue around homelessness and that piece. Affordability is driven by many, many factors, many of which are not in the control of a provincial government. They're external pressures that are causing some of these changing issues that cities are dealing with.

I can't answer those questions as far as social services or health care, but what I can do is commit to all municipalities that when you raise it with a local MLA and it comes to either my office or the minister's office, they're going to be heard.

I said at SUMA that there is a difference between a decision that's made after, you know, full consultation and it doesn't go their way, doesn't mean that we didn't hear what the issue was. It means that perhaps we can't address it the way they want us to at that time. So just because a decision maybe doesn't go the way the municipality wants doesn't mean they weren't heard, because we hear what the municipalities are saying. Again I mean, we represent every one of them except for the ones in the Northeast, and any calls that come in from there we answer as well.

But we certainly hear what they're saying, and those messages are delivered to the various ministers and ministries to do what they can do. And that's why, you know, I don't know how many hours of estimates, but there's an awful lot of hours of estimates in this Chamber and downstairs in committee room number 8 to deal with those specific issues within those specific ministries. Our role is to make sure that municipalities have access to us as Government Relations.

**The Chair:** — I would at this point ask Ms. Ritchie to keep her questions pertaining to estimates and supplementary estimates on this Government Relations ministry and not to other ministries, please.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Of course, yes. And I suppose what I'm focused on right now is the municipal revenue-sharing component of the Government Relations budget, which you've already indicated represents 86 per cent of the overall budget for the ministry. And I think alongside of that funding formula and transfers to third parties, as you've indicated, 97 per cent of that budget being to third parties, the largest of course being the municipalities, who

arguably are your largest third-party category by far in a way. And certainly, you know, that role as Government Relations ministry and how those funds are providing the basis for their programming and infrastructure projects.

And I guess what I'm trying to highlight is, you know, how it's become more complex. Of course you talked about aging infrastructure, water and sewer, very classical kinds of, you know, bricks and mortar kinds of investments. And yet there is also this social component to programs and services that these monies through the MRS are having to be diverted towards. And hence the conversation and the line of questioning that I've had so far.

And so as I do that and you explain to me how you see your ministry's role and your role as the minister, I just wanted to also understand, you know. When you say you're passing along this information to other ministries or, you know, your caucus colleagues, your cabinet colleagues, can you speak to how issues such as, for example, the resolution that was passed, you know, for SIS [Saskatchewan income support] rates to be increased to account for cost of living?

Like I want to understand how you as a minister sort of see your role in carrying forward those asks that are coming from the municipal sector.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So just trying to, you know, be as accurate as I can on your question which was quite, was really quite broad. It started with MRS and ended up with SIS.

But what I would say on the MRS piece is that again, it's for municipalities to make their decision as to where that money goes. I, at SUMA — well I don't know if it was mistakenly but — used the example that, you know, money goes out to a community and they get to make that decision where that money goes.

And I just said, I don't know if anybody is from Fort Qu'Appelle here because I represent Fort Qu'Appelle and I'm in Fort Qu'Appelle an awful lot, and I said, you know, they'll put some money towards something that they think is important in town. And I may not agree as a minister, but it doesn't matter whether I agree or not. It's not my say. That is unconditional money, and so that money goes to that municipality. And you know, so I can only answer for Government Relations what we do through municipal revenue sharing.

What we have been very fortunate to do through ICIP . . . Because, you know, that's a federal program. We have a say in it, but then we have to fund it. And so, you know, we're very fortunate that, you know, government has done well and we've been able to fully allocate the ICIP program as it is.

But I will say — just kind of because it was more of a general question, I'm going to answer this pretty generally — that I'm fortunate enough to sit on treasury board where you have every ministry come through. And I can tell you that I haven't seen many ministries that come through with a bad idea. They all come through with great ideas, but we also have to balance then all the ministries together. Not just one-offs, which is easy to do when you look at a certain ministry and say, why didn't they do this, this, and this? Because you have to look at it as an overall



budget.

Such as municipalities have to do when they're setting their budget. You have to look at what your expenditures are and what your revenue is and be able to match that. And be able to not only match it for this year, but make sure that you can match it into the future, sustainably.

[17:15]

So you know, you're talking about SIS and MRS and all that. It's an overall budget of government. We are responsible for the expenditure of Government Relations, but on an overall answer is, as a treasury board member, you balance all the ministries together to make sure that you're meeting what you think are the priorities of the people that you represent and balance it with the revenues that you're bringing in that will be sustainable into the long term.

**The Chair:** — Once again I will ask Ms. Ritchie to please keep your questions pertaining to the estimates on Government Relations, please.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Mr. Minister, I have some questions about New North and the funding that they receive, and you know, how that work is supported. Because I think again this is an area where there's been a lot of change in the way that advisory services are provided and New North is responsible for, sort of, addressing a number of those needs within the North.

So can you tell me how much money New North is receiving in the current budget compared to last year, and what the priorities are for that?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So thanks for the question on New North. And I've referenced them once or twice kind of in my answers previous, and I've referenced them in the terms of talking to SUMA, talking to SARM, and talking to New North. And for example on the COVID calls, we had New North represented on most of those calls along with SUMA and SARM. So I quite often, in my mind anyway and I think it's legitimate, compare New North to SUMA and SARM.

We do not set priorities for SUMA, and we do not set priorities for SARM, and we do not set priorities for New North. What we do is grant money for their operations. They also receive money from other sources, but we, as a government, grant this year \$360,000 to help with their operations so that they can set the priorities that they see fit for their municipalities. Yeah, I think I'll just leave it at that.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Well I guess this is probably more just sort of an information, you know, fact-finding kind of a question with regards to New North and how you collaborate and provide services in the North. Maybe you can help me understand the evolution here again because it's . . . In terms of the municipal advisory support that your ministry gives to those northern communities represented by New North, perhaps you could tell me what portion of the budget is directed to supporting those northern communities and how you collaborate with New North, and how that has changed over time?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I'll turn it over to Sheldon here in a

second because he can get into more of the details of the services that are provided through advisory services.

But just in your question, you kind of conflated New North and advisory services, and they're really quite different. Again I think of New North as, you know, an example of SUMA or SARM, but for the North. So that's separate; that's non-government. It's simply a grant to help those municipalities function as a group, as an association, I guess, for lack of a better term.

Advisory services is definitely a program that we offer to municipalities throughout the province — urban, rural, north, or south. But we have . . . It's split. There's a northern advisory services which, you know, Brad Henry's here from northern municipal advisory services.

But I think what I'll do is I'll turn it over to Sheldon to describe then kind of what the advisory services do, especially on the northern municipal advisory services.

**Mr. Green:** — Good afternoon. Sheldon Green, assistant deputy minister, municipal relations division for Government Relations. Thank you for that question. Advisory services really provides technical assistance primarily on municipal administration matters. We know predominantly it's municipal administrators or persons involved in administering a municipality that are asking the technical questions. But the inquiry lines that we offer to the public and through our website contacts, we do respond to inquiries from public, from ratepayers, as well as elected officials as well.

Advisory services is really established to help support the success of the sector in delivering on the ministry's mandate to help support well-governed communities. And so common things that are managed under advisory services, the ministry will have well over 125 different resources on government's website of different kinds, everything from webinars to guides to sample bylaws to technical explanations and so forth.

Municipal advisors, and specifically in the North, we have three northern municipal advisor positions that will handle those calls from citizens. They will at the request of a council, for example, come and meet with the council to talk to them about governance questions that they might have. They deliver training as well. The advisory services folks are also involved in the northern municipal administrators' association, working directly with administrators, just help to advance their professional capacity.

Other kinds of things that municipal advisors get involved in is, is that if there's particular changes in a municipality — maybe looking at a boundary alteration or those sorts of corporate governance, structural kinds of things — they will facilitate those as well, that sometimes make their way all the way through to a minister's order to make those alterations.

There can be a range of services that they're providing. They will often provide liaison and facilitate a municipality that might have a question that pertains to another ministry regarding a transaction that they're working on with a resident. And so we're a helpful conduit back into government for some of those inquires as well.

So those are a number of the common features that advisory

services plays on that technical assistance side.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — So you know, it's my understanding that the need for support on governance matters by those represented by New North is of a higher order, and I'm wondering, just sort of twofold, both the ways in which you meet that higher need and then also how you track and assess the degree of need.

You know, I know that overall there are audits that are undertaken to ensure that the filings you receive from municipalities are up to snuff, and so on and so forth. But you know, how many . . . How would you assess the state of the governance practice in the North? And how are you focused to meet what I can only assume is more sort of unique and pressing need?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So again I think we'll tag team on this. I'll start and then Sheldon will get more into the detail. But you know, a change was made a few years ago regarding municipal revenue sharing, and the municipalities had to follow through with eligibility requirements. And those were we didn't think too onerous. But you know, they had to have an audited report every year. They had to have a filing of the EPT [education property tax], the education portion of property tax. There was three or four eligibility requirements that all municipalities throughout Saskatchewan had to follow.

[17:30]

It was phased in . . . Again maybe Sheldon will want to talk about the phase-in process, but it was phased in through I guess the southern municipalities and some of the northern because, you know, as you had mentioned, there are some challenges I guess through some of them. They had a little bit longer phase-in time. Not all municipalities have been able to meet the eligibility requirements both in northern Saskatchewan and in southern Saskatchewan.

And our reasoning for this is to never withhold that municipal revenue sharing. We want that municipal revenue sharing to go to each and every municipality, but they have to meet some of these requirements to make sure that there's good governance for the ratepayers — if they're ratepayers — or citizens of those municipalities. I think it is our obligation to make sure that those municipalities meet the eligibility requirements to be able to access municipal revenue sharing. And again that was never to withhold revenue sharing; it's to get the revenue sharing out, but make sure that these requirements were followed by all municipalities.

I will say that I think you're right, you know, and our numbers would show that there are a few more per capita of municipalities . . . You know, if there's 24 northern municipalities, there'd be a few more of those northern municipalities struggling to meet these requirements. And so you know, we work with them as much as we possibly can. But I have to go back to the one thing that I've learned more than anything else, is municipalities want to be autonomous. They don't want government to come in and take over their books or whatever, you know, and so we're working with them to try and help them meet these requirements.

And sometimes it's . . . You know, I met with a municipality just not very long ago. They're working and their auditor . . . they

switched auditors and there is a delay. And you know, it's not like you can go down the street in whichever community and knock on another accountant firm that can do the audit.

So there are some legitimate reasons why it's a struggle for some of the municipalities to follow, but we're working with them. Because again I can't stress enough, that's not our goal is to withhold money. Our goal is to make sure they get the money that's allotted to them, but we have to also make sure that there's good governance in place. And these are just a few of the stipulations, the requirements that we say municipalities have to have in place.

So on to what we actually do to assist municipalities without going in and taking over, because we don't want to do that. They need to be autonomous. I'll turn it over to Sheldon to talk about some of the services that we provide.

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. There are six eligibility requirements that the ministry was directed to begin implementation of in 2019-2020. The first year though was to be a full just test year. We wanted to give the municipal sector ample time to acclimate to new requirements for the program. So we did undertake a process where we did a declaration of eligibility as a mock process online with all municipalities in 2019-20, with communication that we would formally implement in the next fiscal year, 2020-2021, which was the first year. So we're just embarking this fiscal year on the third year of the eligibility requirements.

The six eligibility requirements are: the submission of an audited annual financial statement. Municipalities are required under legislation to complete their financial statements and to have them audited, and they submit a copy of those to the ministry. That's the first item.

The second is the submission of public reporting on municipal waterworks to the ministry. And that's only for those municipalities that are in fact operating a distribution system for human consumptive use. So it doesn't . . . Not all municipalities have that level of service.

The third is to ensure that education property taxes are in good standing with respect to the reporting and remittance of the education property taxes. Now the fourth is the adoption of a council procedures bylaw. It's a one-time task that they would need to do. The fifth item is an adoption of an employee code of conduct. And the sixth item is just ensuring that the members of council are filing and annually updating their public disclosure statements. So those are the six items.

And what we do as we start in the middle of November of each fiscal year is preparation work for the coming fiscal. And so we put out a declaration of eligibility. It's an electronic process where the municipal official, administrator, or city manager or so forth can go into the system and just make their declaration. They're required to provide a council resolution with it to show that council is aware that they're making the declaration. That period closes on January 31st.

Then we go through a process of communicating with communities that maybe didn't meet the deadline. Most do, but sometimes with administrative changes and so forth they don't.

And then we work toward ourselves for the new fiscal year that we're in to understand just whether or not we have to apply our policies with respect to withholding.

In southern municipalities our withholding policy is that if they fail to meet the items, the grant is withheld until they comply. And we've had . . . The ministry's been pleased with the implementation of that. The sector's responded very well to that. Northern municipalities, we recognize the challenges that northern municipalities experience, particularly with regard to consistent municipal administration that's qualified. And so we began a multi-year phase-in of the policy that we're still in at this time.

We recognize the importance that revenue sharing plays to their necessity of their operations, and we certainly don't want to jeopardize that. And so if a municipality this year gets the declaration in, and they've met three of what we would consider lower or more easily achievable items, then they will get a significant portion of their revenue-sharing grant.

There is a small withholding though to continue to maintain their attention. There's a small component in their formula that is a per capita element, and it ranges for communities. It might average about 20 per cent of their annual amount will be withheld until they can get into compliance.

The more easily achievable items that I reference in that policy approach is a council procedures bylaw. The ministry does offer a sample bylaw that municipalities can tailor to their needs and adopt. It's a one-time adoption, so if they have a council procedures bylaw and it's working for them, they will meet that eligibility criteria for the years ahead until such time they might repeal it.

The other one we consider to be more easily achievable as well is the employee code of conduct. Again we offer a sample bylaw on that topic as well to be adjusted and modified and adopted locally and, once done, positions them well for the future. And the third item that's more easily achievable is the council members filing and annually updating their public disclosure statements.

With regard to the part of the question around . . . I think the structure of the eligibility requirements speaks to how we assess in a formal way. Of course our northern municipal services folks, we're pleased with the work that they do. They have very good relationships with the 24 northern municipalities and through the northern municipal administrators' association. And so they're on the ground and they're watching and being made aware of how communities are doing as well.

But the municipal revenue sharing eligibility requirements certainly help to more formally clarify and understand and help communicate with the community where they've got some deficiencies on some core governance matters. The types of things that we'll do to assist them I alluded to, are sample bylaws that we have to try and make it as easy as we can for communities to comply. But we also, on the other more challenging pieces that can be a challenge at times to achieve with regard to annual financial statements, we do provide guides and training around what's included and sample templates for communities to help them with that.

Regarding municipal waterworks reporting, again we've got template reports that they can use, and we've got technical assistance in the North. We have a 1-800 toll-free number for them to call as well to remove barriers. If they feel that they don't want to incur an hour of a call of our time, that's okay. We want them to call our toll-free number. And again it's really the training that we'll provide for those other items is the work that we do.

The other piece — and I'll close with this — on this question at this point is that we do one-on-one work with the communities that are challenged with the three items that are more difficult to achieve. And we're working this year on tailor-making a customized offer to work with the community and identify a plan and a path forward to help them achieve sustained success, is what our goal is, so that they can get their full municipal revenue sharing allocation is our goal.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that description. I'm wondering about . . . I know you say that it's phased in, but what sort of metrics are you using to track the completion of these six eligibility requirements? And how many northern communities are currently non-compliant?

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. The first part about the metrics we use to track the success, well we certainly use the annual declaration process that we do. But then if they're in non-compliance, we're in constant feedback with them, wanting to find out if they've made progress.

With respect to northern municipalities explicitly, we're working to try to have a one-on-one relationship with them on those items and set out a plan. This may not be a real parallel example, but I've heard colleagues that are educators indicate that at times they'll have an individual education plan for a student that's experiencing challenges. And I think that there's a parallel there with our approach as well, where we're trying to work with them one on one on a plan of what is it that they need, because each community's challenge is going to be unique. And so we'll use that to track where their success is at.

I think your other question was, or part of that question was what is the success rate of municipalities with the eligibility requirements? And so overall, as of just at the end of March . . . So these are the most current statistics that the ministry has available, is that 97.1 per cent of the overall municipal revenue-sharing program budget allocated to Government Relations is free to proceed with eligible payments right away. So officials are involved in preparing the communications for that. Due to FAM [financial administration manual] rules, there's different payment structures for different sizes of grants, and we're sorting all of that out as we speak.

So that does though leave about 2.9 per cent of the overall program that is currently in a state of being temporarily withheld. I know that the numbers change every day. The eligibility number improves as communities advance through the fiscal year. Overall of the 767 municipalities, we've got 705 of them are fully compliant and will have no encumbrance temporarily placed upon a portion of their municipal revenue-sharing grant.

There's 51 of the municipalities or about 6.7 per cent are currently deficient in an item. We know from the previous two

years that communities will pick up those items and get them dealt with. Frequently it is a delay and then having an audit done or there's a delay in getting a report in and so forth.

With respect to each . . . If I break it down more specifically across . . . When we look at the municipal revenue-sharing program, we think of it as in four buckets, if you will, within the program itself. So in terms of urban municipalities — and those would be towns and villages; they're split out separate from cities — they're sitting at a 91.4 per cent of that number of municipalities being fully compliant. And so that's a very high number. Rural municipalities are at 95.6 per cent of full compliance as of March 31st. Cities are at 100 per cent compliance.

[17:45]

And then the fourth category is northern municipalities. There's one that's not compliant, and there's 10 in partial compliance, because they do have a different policy as I described in responding to the previous question. And so the partial compliance will be where they're achieving a number of the . . . typically it'll be the more easily achievable ones and perhaps one or two of the more complex requirements, but they haven't met all six. And so that's the quick summary of our assessing and tracking and where the statistics are of the regime for municipal revenue sharing.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that response. So you mentioned that training is provided to northern communities to help assist them with meeting these new requirements. Who and how is that training delivered? Is that in partnership with New North or another agency or directly by ministry officials?

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. Generally when we get into situations where communities have a specific need, it's tended to be one on one with our technical officials providing guidance and information to that community as best we're able to tailor it to what we see their deficiencies are. Occasionally we will, at the request of municipal associations, attend a meeting and deliver a session on a particular topic of interest. It might be on local government elections, is a common one that we'll speak to. Other ones, it may be on particular grant programs available to them. We could update them on that or other opportunities for funding to support their interests.

Speaking more broadly though about the kinds of training that we do provide that all municipalities . . . And we try to encourage them and we put as much of it online these days as we can. Minister referenced in a previous question our targeted sector support initiative where we do use 1.5 million from municipal revenue sharing in partnership with the three associations — SUMA, SARM, and New North. And we do have a number of northern projects where they've been the applicant and they're working with partner communities to do work.

And so that supports . . . Some of those projects are about training where the municipalities are seeking to obtain training. It may be on governance and administration but a number of them, it's been on with respect to their fire service arrangements that they've got with neighbouring communities.

I had referenced previously the 125-plus guides and webinars.

We've got recorded webinars and so forth online. We would drive communities to those tools if they already exist as well on a one-on-one basis. The other I've already mentioned is the technical assistance that's provided in our 800 number for communities that want to reach out to us that way or via email.

Another interesting initiative that is offered — I think it's of particular value to the elected officials in the municipalities — is our municipal peer network that we have in partnership with the municipal associations, where experienced elected officials and experienced administrators have voluntarily agreed to be representatives of New North, SUMA, and SARM to participate with us to take a phone call from a colleague who may not be comfortable phoning a provincial government employee but would prefer to just chat with a colleague that's working in another municipality that has a lot of experience.

So we would certainly encourage elected officials in communities that are having challenges to reach out to those tools. We're really proud as well of a long-standing program, being the municipal leadership development program, that we established in 2003 in partnership with the municipal associations.

And today and from the beginning, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities delivers that on behalf of all municipalities. And a particular . . . Of the six full-day modules that are under that program, the roles and responsibilities module is one that we would definitely want and have seen New North deliver in partnership with its northern communities at some of their northern mayors' meetings through the years.

I mentioned the roles and responsibilities module because it's about more general governance, but the other modules under that program are community and land use planning, human resources in the municipal workplace, municipal economic development fundamentals, strategic communications for municipalities, and then particularly more directed to the items that relate to the municipal revenue sharing eligibility requirements, the last module is on strategic and financial planning for municipalities. So those are some of those tools.

We also offer a municipal administrator career spotlight that communities or organizations like New North, we certainly encourage them to use it to promote students and citizens in the community to get interested in working in a municipality or being on council. We did a quick pilot with the Regina District Industry Education Council a number of years ago with the town of Lumsden and the RM [rural municipality] of Lumsden. That was the genesis of that option to support northern leaders.

And we offer 10-minute trainers online, which is an electronic tool of a webinar that works through questions that councils in 10 minutes can sit down and look at with their administrator. It's got some guiding questions that they can work through together to build an educational piece into their council meetings.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — And how are you tracking the uptake of those initiatives? How do you know how many clients or stakeholders you're reaching and the impact those services are providing?

**Mr. Green:** — Each of the initiatives that I've mentioned, we'll track usage. We know that in excess of 5,000 municipal officials

have attained and have taken modules through, for example, the municipal leadership development program. The administrators of the program can break that down by sector — urban, rural, North — elected versus administration. And that's a fairly common approach to tracking the statistics. Our ministry does that with any workshops that we do.

We do have a standard practice of doing an evaluation after and trying to seek 100 per cent response if we can to it as well. But we track attendance. We do track website downloads of documents. For example, we do have an excellent tool online. That's our municipal government sustainability self-assessment tool. It's fully downloadable for use, and we do track downloads on all of our resources that we have online. I think those are some of the common ways that we do that.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — So you mentioned . . . I just want to go back. I've got a few more questions about New North. So you mentioned \$360,000 in this year's budget to New North. And how does that compare to previous years? Is it possible maybe to get an outline of, you know, funding for the past five years?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So the funding has remained static at 360,000 for the last three fiscal years. The one going forward and the last two, I guess. And then we will — I think you'd asked for the last five years — we will endeavour to get the previous two years before we're done here tonight.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. Thank you so much. I think I had one final question with regards to New North. Yes. So what have been the priority issues that New North has communicated to you in your recent conversations with them?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I guess I'd start by saying as far as the priorities that are coming forward to us . . . And I'm not saying that they may not have some priorities around policing. That isn't coming to us. They probably are taking that — you know, the municipal leaders — maybe to Policing and Corrections or whatever.

But what we're hearing from, you know, some of their priorities is around I guess compliance to MRS and what is not allowing them to comply. And it's not only in the northern municipalities but any smaller municipality. And it can be a RM, but we're seeing it more often in small urbans being able to attract administrators and/or keeping administrators. And certainly that's the case in the northern communities.

So that is kind of the priority. And I mean Sheldon already kind of talked on what we're doing as far as trying to assist them without going and taking over and being the administrator. That's what we don't want to do. But that would be kind of . . . You know, whether it's bookkeeping or whether it's accounting, auditing, those type of things which . . .

You know, in a way I think I take from that that the eligibility requirements that we're asking are what we should be asking, and it's allowing municipalities to prioritize really what we think they should be focusing on, is good governance, good management of the municipality, good management of the resources that they're getting not only from government through MRS but also through their tax base, that it's being properly managed.

So you know, I think the requirements that we've put in place are working, because it's certainly got municipalities to focus on what we think should be a priority, and that's good administration and good governance within their municipality.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — And so in those conversations, are you saying that they haven't been bringing to your attention other sort of community issues? You did mention perhaps policing. You know, I am aware that there is a shortage of police officers, vacancies within RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] detachments in the North, and issues around soaring drug use, access to health services, education and training, road construction and maintenance, and so forth. And so have any of those issues come forward in your meetings with northern municipal representatives or New North?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Yeah, I think I'll answer this like I answered kind of the very early questions that I'm not . . . When I'm saying that they're not coming forward to us, that doesn't mean that there are not issues within that community. But when they're talking about municipal revenue sharing, the issues, their priorities are trying to be compliant, and so that's what we're dealing with.

I can tell you that I had, you know, the opportunity to be in La Loche on Friday and heard from the mayor and some of the leaders. And those are real issues that you had just mentioned, whether it's drug use, or you know, addictions and mental health. Those are all issues that are in those communities.

[18:00]

But you're asking me, as the Minister of Government Relations, are those the priorities that we're hearing? What we're hearing from those communities is to be compliant. I'm not saying there aren't those issues, but we're not getting them directly through our office because that isn't the office that they would be going to for those concerns.

I know for example, the mayor from La Loche was down here yesterday and had a meeting. I was in it with the Minister of Health, the Minister of Policing and Corrections. And the Minister of Education wasn't there, but the deputy minister was there. So you know, those concerns are raised directly to the appropriate ministry. You asked what are we hearing? We're hearing about the governance piece and the administration piece.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Can you tell me what the formula is for northern communities for municipal revenue sharing? How is it compared to southern municipalities?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I will let somebody else get into the detail, because there is, as Sheldon mentioned before, there's a number of baskets; for example, small urbans are different than cities, and that's different than rural, which is different than the northern communities. So we'll get you a real in-depth explanation on how all that's broke out. And I'll learn from it as well.

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. With respect to the northern municipalities allocation, one of the four pieces of that program — \$21.89 million or 7.4 per cent of the overall budget of about 297.8 million — is earmarked for northern

municipalities. The historic formula that was designed in about 2009, it takes into account the four cost centres that municipalities have. And it looks at their administrative costs; their water and sewer, wastewater-related costs; transportation-related data costs; as well as the costs of landfills. And so that's been the historic approach that's designed for many years, and has provided them the base of which then each municipality gets their allocation.

There's a process where the formula would look through that data for all of the municipalities, and it would look at their past data, and then it would also factor in a per capita component that then the community would have. So it varies slightly from community to community. What we have found though in recent years, is that the formula over time has become less and less reliable. And so with the support of northern leaders last year, the entire municipal revenue-sharing program had a slight dip of about 4 per cent. The preference was to just hold the formulas the way it was and just allow the overall program allocation to roll through, which is essentially what occurred with the rest of the pools. And this year we've seen a 13.4 per cent increase, and then that's applied to northern municipalities.

One of the things that we're talking to northern leaders with — we've already begun the conversations — is what do they think a future-facing formula could look like, and we're talking with them about those kinds of options. It's very preliminary at this point.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I would just add to that is that the lion's share is kind of based on population per capita. Not all of it; as Sheldon mentioned, there's other factors that go into it.

But I know the one concern that we've heard from a number of municipalities is the accuracy of the census, and how important that is because it impacts their municipal revenue sharing, especially on smaller urbans, I think, more than anywhere else. Some of the concerns that they're raising there, and it was an interesting conversation that I had at SUMA in the dialogue session, a couple municipalities were saying, you know, we should do more to have their citizens, have citizens be accurate on the census. And one of the community leaders said, we as municipalities, it impacts us directly. We need to do a better job in getting our citizens to accurately fill out the census forms because it means dollars and cents to our community. So it's not the only, as Sheldon said, it's not the only factor, but it's a major factor on determining revenue sharing.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — So are you also saying then that, you know, in terms of how this compares with other parts of the province, is it a different proportion for the four categories that you mentioned? Or how does it look different?

**Mr. Green:** — I think I'll just provide a very short explanation of where the genesis of the program came from when the ministry was directed to develop and implemented it. It was implemented in 2009-10, and what it did was it looked back at the expenditure buckets of municipalities in each of those four sectors. And it looked at those and undertook a discussion directly with the sector of saying, okay, which of these cost centres that you experienced have a larger potential provincial policy interest in them in terms of what municipalities do? Or are they very much local?

An extreme example could be a community might have 20 splash parks. Is that advancing provincial policy objectives? To some extent, but maybe not as high as their expenditures on policing might have, for an example. So at that time then, the quantum of the program was based on what those expenditures were in each of those four different categories of municipalities that have different, different realities between cities, towns, rurals, and North, and then linking it to the PST. So that's how the 7.4 per cent for northern municipalities was determined, based upon what their costs are and based on in relation to what their ability would be to generate their own revenue to meet provincial policy objectives of being a municipality.

And so they do receive . . . If you were to look at it on a per capita basis, which wouldn't be appropriate, but if we did that, it would show they had a really high per capita proportion at getting \$22 million for northern municipalities. But we support that, and it makes sense to us as to why it is that way.

The cities have chosen to receive their funding out of the program strictly on a per capita basis. They said that works easiest for them, and so they receive a per capita allocation. Towns and villages have had a long history of saying, well we'd like a small base grant first that every town and village gets. And so today, \$2,025 is the number that they've historically wanted to keep. That's the base grant, and then the rest of theirs is per capita.

And rural municipalities have a more complicated formula, but it's predominantly about 70 per cent based upon what we would all expect their major costs to be under the provincial policy objective, which is a seamless transportation system. So 70 per cent is on transportation-related data that we work in partnership with the Ministry of Highways to obtain. And then 30 per cent for rural municipalities is a per capita component.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Yeah, that's a great segue. I'll take that segue, because it is sort of a question I did have. So just to sort of close off on northern affairs, you mentioned 7.4 would look sort of disproportionate per capita-wise. Can you quantify that for me? And not even necessarily right now, because I do want to keep moving along, but when you say that it represents . . . How much of the population base compared overall for the province? Like it's 7.4, the funding, but how much of the population do they represent? Maybe that's the easiest way to look at it.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — We don't have that, we don't have that breakdown with us, or I'm not even sure we've done the exact breakdown. I'm pretty sure I know what you're asking for: in northern Saskatchewan per person, what does the 7.4 mean per person compared to in the cities? So we can work on that. We won't be able to get it to you tonight, but we'll work on that and get it to you as to what the dollar per capita is in northern Saskatchewan compared to some of our cities and our towns and villages.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just curious to know how it compares. But I did want to move into this other question. You know, I'm sure you're aware that SUMA has expressed some desire to look at that proportion that they're receiving compared to rural municipalities. And I think they put forward a fairly legitimate case in terms of, you know, who accesses their services. You know, they come from more sort of a regional area that includes surrounding RMs and so forth. And so you've told

me what the formula is as it currently exists. Are there any thoughts to re-evaluate that and take into account some of these other factors that urban municipalities are raising?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So that's an interesting question, and I certainly heard some of the rumblings at SUMA myself regarding municipal revenue sharing and how it's divided up and who should get what. And I guess the nice part is that the pie has been getting bigger. It certainly got much bigger this year at 13.4 per cent, so every municipality is benefiting from that.

Urbans would say that they have, you know, more expense. And I know what you're talking about, whether it's the rink or whatever, and whether the RMs should be paying more like in direct costs, or the urbans should be getting more through municipal revenue sharing. Realize that when you add to one, you've got to take from somewhere else. It isn't like you just add and everybody stays the same. So where is it going to come from? Is it going to come from rural municipalities to help support the urbans? Is it going to come from northern municipalities?

So you know, those are all discussions that can be had at the various levels. But I don't think you can take municipal revenue sharing unto itself, by itself in isolation. Because if you look at infrastructure dollars and the amount of infrastructure dollars that has gone out in the province over the last five or six years through ICIP, the vast majority has gone into urban municipalities. Some have gone into bridges in rural, but the vast majority of dollars has gone into urban.

So you know, you can't take just one program in isolation. You've got to look at the basket of funds that go to municipalities. And some of that, you know, infrastructure costs that urbans would say they have, which are greater than rurals. They also get the lion's share of any program that has put infrastructure funding out. So it's a combination of things, and you know, I'd invite the associations, SUMA and SARM, to come forward with an agreed-upon proposal on how to divide it between their associations.

[18:15]

**Ms. Ritchie:** — I know that you do have funding set aside for, you know, planning studies around, you know, regional studies to encourage more sort of collaboration. And I'm wondering if you can tell me what other means and initiatives you're undertaking to promote regional collaboration.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I believe your question is kind of geared towards something that we've touched on a little bit already, but we're certainly glad to talk more about it, is the targeted sector support. In other words, not money that just kind of goes to all municipalities, but it's on an application basis — municipalities that work in collaboration with others that want to move a . . . not a project ahead, but whether it's planning for growth ideas, that type of thing, moving that ahead.

So what it is, is a \$1.5 million that comes off of municipal revenue sharing, right off the top. So the \$197 million from municipal revenue sharing, you take 1.5 off of that. That goes into the targeted sector support. That is an application base, and I think the important part about the application base is the

determination who decides is representatives from SUMA, SARM, New North, and then . . . Right, GR [Government Relations], but also the administrators' association . . . No, the administrators are not part of that one.

So it's the SUMA, SARM, New North, and Government Relations that then determine who's eligible. And there's two or three, a couple intakes a year to allocate that funding. I'll let Sheldon talk about just some examples, so you can get a better idea of where that money actually goes and, you know, the communities that have accessed it and have been successful in the collaboration work that they're doing.

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. We initiated this program just in front of the pandemic. Our initial intent was to have two intakes per year working with the municipal associations. The Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association does provide a key piece of the administration of the program, then under a committee of the partners.

Our goal was to have two intakes per year. Of course that was delayed slightly during the pandemic, but we've achieved that now and we're actually . . . We have an intake open at this moment. As minister noted, it's an application-based program; we've got several streams. The whole intent of the program is to assist with strengthening regional collaboration at the local government level and to do things that, because it's using municipal revenue sharing dollars and GR's mandate to support well-governed communities, the projects firstly have to have a partner when they apply. The partner is very broad. We encourage municipalities to partner with neighbouring First Nations, maybe it's another, a couple of urban and rural municipalities. We just want them to have a partner to apply. And then as long as it's advancing core governance interests, they can receive up to \$100,000 at 75 per cent cost recovery, so 75-cent dollars from the program.

The categories that we've been notionally encouraging municipalities to think about when they're applying are around dispute resolution and relationship building, capacity building, regional co-operation, and municipal transition. And some examples of our most recent intake that was concluded last winter was, for example, the town of Shaunavon, a group of 20 communities together wanted to do regional governance training and bring some trainers in on some specific topics, and that was supported.

Town of La Ronge had a couple of partners, and they received funding for fire department strategic plan and fire service agreement. Town of Radville had a project with a neighbour doing administrative and governance enhancements. Village of Loreburn, just as another example of something slightly different, had a partner and they did a lagoon assessment.

The city of Weyburn and their partner did a district plan review more on the formal planning side. Another planning example, one of more formal planning, RM of Paddockwood with four partners did the North Central Lakelands Planning District land use plan.

And so there's a smattering of different things we are seeing. The town of Fort Qu'Appelle partnered to explore discussions and opportunities to improve regional service delivery and

sustainable delivery with Treaty 4 governance communities. City of Melfort did land use planning with a couple of partners in their district. And those are some of the key examples of the program.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — And how would you characterize the objective of the program overall? Because I think I have a little bit of a misunderstanding, so maybe if you could sort of give it to me in a nutshell.

**Mr. Green:** — We think about it and talk about it as having two steps in terms of what the objective is. One is municipalities learning to work more collaboratively with their neighbours, so regional co-operation. And two, that they're advancing core governance and administrative responsibilities in some way through the funding support for the project that they wish to undertake.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — And do you have an even broader objective, you know, in terms of sort of seeing more collaboration when it comes to infrastructure projects, in particular some of those shared services as a means of overall cost reductions and those sorts of things?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'll start and then Sheldon or whoever can fill in if I'm missing out. But really as Sheldon mentioned, you know, the initial part of the program is to have a partner work with somebody. And then it is really kind of building up on better governance so that the partners can have better governance. And you can see a lot of it, whether it was . . . The Shaunavon case was strictly a number of communities coming together and bringing in, you know, a facilitator to talk about what constitutes good governance.

And there's some that will work on area planning. It's kind of working together as to what makes sense in their area. So it's about making the governance stronger in the area. But I think maybe the spinoff that isn't necessarily always said, but it's getting municipalities to start working together and perhaps through spinoff off of that, whether it's on to recreation facilities or whatever. Once they get in the room, they're talking, hey, we can get along with each other; what about this issue or that issue?

On infrastructure and working together, I'd go back to the ICIP program and how important that program is, and the application process is heavily weighted to having partners. It's not one community, one rink; next community, one rink. It's how can they work together. And you know, the water initiatives are probably the one that resonates the most, that if we can have a group of communities, so they've got one water treatment plant handling a number of communities, including RM and First Nation, as opposed to each doing it individually.

So the targeted sector support I don't think addresses what you were kind of asking, but certainly the ICIP program, along with targeted sector support, kind of is trying to build that good governance and working together towards what's better for the citizens in your area.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Another issue that has been brought up a lot by, in particular, you know, the municipal sector is the PST on construction, and certainly with inflation, it's exacerbated the issue. And I'm wondering if you can tell me if you have any thoughts around removing that, and if not, why not.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you for the question. And I mean the easy answer would be to say that that's not really Government Relations. That would be better asked of the Minister of Finance, because she's the one that — well not she, I shouldn't say that — the Ministry of Finance, and it's the government that makes those decisions through treasury board and the budgeting process as to PST and what's eligible and what isn't and what is the number and all of that.

I certainly have heard it, the whole piece around PST on labour on municipal projects, and I've said this a couple times, and you know, it's a decision that needs to be made by government.

But having said that, just to the municipalities — and I've said it publicly to them a couple of different times to the municipalities — that if you want to be exempt from PST on labour, that's fine. Then all government projects would be exempt from PST on labour. We spend, you know, billions of dollars as a government whole, meaning ministries as well as Crown corporations. You think of, you know, the billion-dollar spend on SaskPower each year, which is highly labour-intensive.

All of that money then would come out of revenue sharing. All the PST that the communities put into it and all the PST that government and Crowns put in. So the pool that we take three-quarters of one per cent from, the pool would significantly drop, so their revenue sharing would drop.

Now they would say that it's still maybe not proportionate, they still put in more, and even if all that was taken out, they would be better off. And I guess those numbers would have to be run, but there's many examples of things that can be done.

I don't know if you heard at SUMA but I did, and president Goulden just kind of mused about it at the mike. Instead of 0.75 per cent of 1 per cent of the PST two years previous maybe it should go to 0.8 or 0.9; maybe it should go up to 1 per cent. How would that look? So there's a whole lot of models that could be run I guess to look at it. Or you could look at, instead of at a 6 per cent PST, keep it 0.75 of 1 per cent but drop it down 5 per cent PST for everybody in the province, so then everybody benefits.

There's a lot of different models that could be looked at, but again that isn't a question for Government Relations. Yeah, the municipalities will complain about it, but that is a finance question where again, you drop the revenue of the province, can you afford it? Are we still able to balance?

[18:30]

So it becomes a much bigger and much more complex question than just drop the PST off of labour for frankly urban municipalities because I've never heard of it. I shouldn't say I've never heard, but it's not an issue at SARM because they don't have the infrastructure projects like SUMA does.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Well I did want to sort of touch on a SARM-related issue kind of in the same vein, because it had come up at the SARM convention as well, and that was the changes to how rural municipalities . . . And apologies up front if I get the terminology wrong. You'll know what I'm talking about, I'm sure. But the ratio for the mill rate being capped.



We've got some municipalities who have a very high ratio on oil and gas leases, and now those will have to be scaled back. And I'm just looking for a bit of an understanding of why you felt it was necessary to impose a cap.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I think we have till 8:30 for estimates tonight and so that question, I'm afraid, may be your last question by the time I properly explain it because it's a very, very . . .

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Just a short answer.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'll give you the short one, and then if you have a few more, because it's a very complicated process to determine what is fair taxation within the province for all. And I have Rod Nasewich beside me that can fill us in after, if I don't answer it completely.

So there is the mill rate factor which only took into consideration just the mill rate. It didn't take into consideration all the other tax tools that municipalities have, and they have a number of other tax tools. They have a minimum tax and a base tax that they could add on. So the mill rate factor could be one and then they could add \$1,000 per property on a minimum and then a base tax on oil wells. So there is a number of tax tools that municipalities could use.

Their mill rate factor would be within seven to one, let's say, or nine to one. It was nine to one. It could be within nine to one. But then when you add all these other tax tools, if you put all of that together, it's called the effective tax rate. And what the effective tax rate was . . . Now all but about 16, 17 rural municipalities are pretty close. In other words, they're in . . . If you take the effective tax rates, that is you take all those taxes combined and you compare, for example, oil and gas and ag property, oil and gas can't be seven times more than what ag property is when you take into consideration everything in the effective tax rate. And the vast majority of municipalities are within that seven to one.

But there is an area of the province that was certainly outside of that. And it's an area that there are legitimate higher costs because it's in the heavy oil production area in the Northwest. We had tax rates from the lowest, let's say ag, to the highest — effective tax rate when you combine everything — that were 25 to 1. In other words, oil and gas would have a 25 times more effective tax rate than agriculture. There's about 16 municipalities that were quite offside. So we said, this is just unfair, because it affected competitiveness — especially in that area when companies were looking at spending capital just across the border in and around Lloydminster or on the Alberta side, when their effective tax rate was much closer.

And it's tough. It's not exactly apples to apples, Alberta to Saskatchewan. There are some variants, but there was quite a discrepancy. And what was happening is, if a company was looking at . . . you know, their property tax in that area is your biggest expense. Where are they going to invest their next tranche of capital? It may not be in Saskatchewan. And so we had put these tax tools in place saying, they can't be abused. You can't get completely out of line. And unfortunately there are a number of municipalities that did.

Now what they have to do is look at, you know, what is their

revenue coming in and what is their expenses? Can they shift tax from . . . If they want to get to the 7 to 1, can they shift to other categories such as ag or residential? Or could they look at their expense side? Because there are some municipalities that, some would argue their expenses are disproportionate to others. Those municipalities will argue, but their costs, such as road maintenance because the oil can't be piped, it's got to be trucked . . . And so there are some legitimate arguments. But I can tell you that 25 to 1 just was too much of a discrepancy.

And it affects . . . It's like a 2 per cent or 1 per cent. It's not a very high percentage of all the municipalities — Rod, you might know — all the municipalities in the province. But it was one grouping that we felt we needed to change the tax tools that were, not the tax tools . . . bring them in line on an effective tax rate. They can still charge . . . They still have the use of those tax tools.

The other thing that they have is road maintenance agreements. And we have changed kind of the way the road maintenance agreements were figured, and there was some — was it through legislation or regulation? — legislation that changed that whole process so that there's more transparency from the RM's perspective and also the industry's perspective. So there are still other things that they can work on to make up the difference that they're seeing. But we did feel that that effective tax rate is a much fairer way to judge the differences between the classes.

There was one other thing I was going to say on that, but I think I'll stop at that.

Oh, the other thing that we have said to those municipalities because some of them have such a discrepancy, that it would be very, very tough for them to bring it down to 7 to 1 within a year. And so we've given those municipalities that are affected the most some time to get that ratio over a year or two, three years, and depending on what the discrepancy is.

And I . . . you know, again, legitimate concerns. Some municipalities that I've met with . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah. That's a good point too. Some municipalities have entered into a two- or three-year road building program that they've, you know, they've already contracted out, and they would have a hard time.

So you know, we've given them the option to show us a way to get to 7 to 1. It doesn't have to be in this fiscal year. But show us a way that, if it is a road building program that you've entered in on, and at the end of that, that drops off your expense sheet, and where do you get to then?

I mean there are organizations and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, CAPP, along with a growth coalition of a number of companies that a number of industry people, not just all in the oil and gas industry, put together, and they were lobbying quite hard for 2 to 1. And so I know there were municipalities where we've heard from the ones that don't like the 7 to 1. There are a number of municipalities that were quite glad that it was 7 to 1 and not 2 to 1, because that would have been very, very difficult to come to.

So I think we found middle ground on that, even though I know and I've heard from them, and directly met with them at SARM, have met with them in my office. Our MLA from that area is

very, very, very familiar with this issue. So it's a concern, but it's about fairness, and it's about trying to attract investment into our province as a provincial government.

And Rod, did I butcher that?

**Mr. Nasewich:** — You're good.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Yeah, that's great. And I think that's sufficient to provide me with the answers that I'm looking at, because I do want to move a little bit into another area before I am transitioned out in 20 minutes for my colleague to come in for a spell.

And so the area I want to focus on next has to do with the governance piece for municipalities, and adherence to bylaws such as they may be, and I wonder if you . . . I'm looking for a little bit of an overview in terms of the process that ratepayers follow when they have concerns with perceived non-compliances to bylaws. Where do they take their concerns? How can those be addressed?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thanks for that question, and it's certainly one that, as the minister, I've learned a lot more about in the last two and a half years. Number one, on what's available for people that may be struggling with council, or council struggling with ratepayers, kind of the process there.

But I've been a little surprised on how often there is disagreement between ratepayers and councillors and that type of thing. But there is a process to go through. I mean, they're a form of government. They're autonomous. They're a form of government. So ratepayers can attend council meetings. Their council meetings need to be public. They can lobby the council. They can talk to their councillors. They can talk to the reeve. They can talk to the administrator. There's different avenues that they can lodge complaints.

And I think you're talking more about ratepayers to council that aren't . . . or you had mentioned bylaws. But let me just talk about just kind of the dispute resolution process. So that would be number one, is just treating them like a form of government and then lobbying them for changes or improvements that they would like to see. On the opposite end of the spectrum is if it doesn't work, at every four years there's a chance to change who is sitting on those seats, those seats, or at council seats. So that is the ultimate.

In between, you know, if a citizen feels that it's a big enough issue, they can go to the Ombudsman. And the Ombudsman will certainly look into it and see whether they want to pursue it or not. And that's completely out of our control. Of course that's, you know, an arm's-length office.

So those are kind of the really broad-brush dispute mechanisms or mechanisms to deal with some concern that ratepayers may have. But, Bonnie, I'm going to turn it over to you and you can get more into depth.

**Ms. Chambers:** — Okay. Good evening. Thank you for the question. My name's Bonnie Chambers. I'm the executive director of the advisory services and municipal relations branch within Government Relations.

[18:45]

The bylaws that you're talking to . . . As the minister said, municipalities are a level of government. The bylaws that they pass are their laws, and therefore it's their laws to enforce. But citizens do have many mechanisms that they can use.

As the minister suggested, going to council meetings. We've prepared a guide for citizens on how they can approach their council. There's other mechanisms. In certain situations they can petition. They could petition for a referendum. They could also petition for a management audit or a financial audit if they felt there was a need to be one. There's also even just appearing before council as a delegate. They could petition for a public meeting. So that's a number of things that they can use to hold their councils accountable.

When it comes to the bylaws, like I said, that is the council's. It's their laws so it's up to them to enforce. So we would encourage a citizen to talk to their council about enforcing their own bylaws. Have I answered your question?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Well you've provided a great starting point, so thank you very much for those responses.

Now I guess what I'm also wondering about is, you know, in terms of dispute resolution, where there are allegations that a council is not following their own bylaws in terms of how they're making their decisions, what recourse do ratepayers have? Because there can be very significant decisions on the line in terms of local development, you know, impacting those ratepayers.

And so you mentioned the Ombudsman, although, I mean, the Ombudsman is non-binding. They can, you know, put forward an opinion, but they don't have the powers of a judge or a board, Municipal Board. So yeah, I've been dealing with a number of concerned ratepayers who feel that there is a lack of enforcement provision to ensure adherence when councils make decisions. So what is to be done in those cases?

**Ms. Chambers:** — Thank you for that question. I think I know where you're getting at this on how they could challenge it if they weren't enforcing it. And there is a number of opportunities for citizens to take. And it wouldn't be where Government Relations would do it. We do, you know, in some situations we may intervene. But it could be a court challenge. Some bylaws have an appeal mechanism such as . . . And you brought up development bylaws. So they have an appeal process which would go to the development appeals board and ultimately could end up at the SMB [Saskatchewan Municipal Board] or even could be, in certain situations, challenged in the court possibly.

In situations . . . Every municipality has to have a code of ethics bylaw where a citizen could file a complaint if they felt that a council member wasn't acting accordingly. Because you had mentioned about decisions that could come in. So a citizen could file a complaint, and every municipality not only needs the bylaw but they need to have it an investigative process set out in their bylaw too.

There's official examinations, and this is when the ministry could step in. In situations where, it could be an Ombudsman report, if

an ombudsman made a recommendation and council didn't consider it, then possibly the ministry could step in, and the minister could direct council to take a direction. That also is an investigation under the Office of the Privacy Commissioner too. So there is a number of things . . . or petitioning for a referendum, a binding referendum. So there is a number of things that citizens can do to hold their councils accountable.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Now I understand that when there is a bylaw approved by a municipality to, say for example, open up a new subdivision, create a subdivision, that that and perhaps others, those bylaws have to then go to the municipality and be signed off. So how does that factor into the process when there are allegations coming forward, you know, suggesting that there has been some kind of code of conduct infringement or some other lack of due process?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Well there's a couple of, kind of two segments to this I guess. And Ralph can start with the planning bylaw and Sheldon can deal with the conflict of interest.

**Mr. Leibel:** — Okay. Good evening. I'm Ralph Leibel. I'm the executive director for the community planning branch. And thank you for the question. It's very critical. It happens from time to time where citizens are concerned about new development occurring within their community — lakeshore developments or adjacent neighbourhoods — things of that nature.

And under *The Planning and Development Act*, the municipalities establish their authority for official community plans to set policies for development in their areas, in their neighbourhoods, and zoning bylaws which is the regulatory kind of standards to apply. Those are their bylaws to apply, and yes, under the legislation, *The Planning and Development Act*, for rural municipalities and urban municipalities for their official plans, those bylaws come in for review at the ministry.

They get reviewed for procedural compliance with the legislation, *The Planning and Development Act*, and they get reviewed to ensure that they comply with *The Statements of Provincial Interest Regulations*. And the legislation is clear that the authority to direct a municipality to change a bylaw or not approve a bylaw is essentially based on the statements of provincial interest rather than a provincial priority that it's in conflict with.

When it comes to a conflict of interest, there's nothing in that legislation that gives direction to withhold a decision that's basically administrative in nature, that if they followed the procedures of the Act. And therefore conflicts of interest or perceived conflicts of interest falls under *The Municipalities Act*, not under *The Planning and Development Act* authorities. And that's where Sheldon can explain those components.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Just one question. Thank you very much for that response, but maybe just one quick question before we move on. I mean I assume — and you maybe mentioned it — that when you review these bylaw changes or additions, you're looking for procedural . . . you know, that the process has been followed that led up to the bylaw being approved by the council.

So am I right in that understanding? And if there are community members coming forward saying that they believe that there were

procedural non-compliances, then what do you do with it?

**Mr. Leibel:** — So when the bylaws are submitted to the ministry, they're accompanied with a statutory declaration that states different facts: they held a public meeting, they had proper public notice of this, they engaged the public, they provided landowner notification, those types of things. And those are the things that get checked for. In a public meeting if the municipality has received comments, those comments are also received so we can see what they are and we can see some of those. If some of them relate to environmental factors, they could tie into the statements of provincial interest. If it's regarding flooding, well there's standards in the interests about flood issues.

So those community comments are provided to us. So they are brought to our attention, but we don't have evidence and the authority to intervene in the conflict of interest in the decision of that bylaw. The decision of council to proceed with finalizing and adopting the bylaw is the decision of the council that they made, and we're looking at it to ensure that yes, they adopted it correctly and that it meets the statements of provincial interest.

The conflicts of interest, we do not have authority under the planning legislation to intervene and go and undertake an investigation into it. We may seek some clarification and understanding of the circumstances, but the times I've seen those . . . We don't have the authority to go in and investigate the municipality to do that under that planning legislation.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. I guess I'm still a little bit unclear about the situation where . . . I mean you mentioned this declaration that municipalities provide in terms of yes, we followed the process; here you go. But if that's in dispute by ratepayers and they provide compelling evidence or some evidence to suggest otherwise, what do you do with that?

**Mr. Leibel:** — Those are matters that are . . . We don't take that into consideration in the sense of here's what the Act says. Those are matters that have to fall under *The Municipalities Act*. And so when citizens call us, and they do call us on these things, we talk to them about their ability to go before council and raise these issues, the conflict-of-interest guidelines, the code of ethics that municipal councillors have, and that the individuals need to seek the corrective matters under *The Municipalities Act*. *The Planning and Development Act* doesn't provide for that authority. The authority to deal with conflicts of interest falls under *The Municipalities Act*.

[19:00]

And so we give them that direction that that's where the citizen has to go before council or make a submission. I know some have gone towards seeking Ombudsman's review, municipal Ombudsman's review. Those are matters that are there. And so we encourage them to follow those procedures under *The Municipalities Act* that Sheldon is going to comment on.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — And so, just to see if I have this right. In terms of assurance that proper procedure has been followed, you look to that declaration and take that at face value. And if that's in any way in dispute, then we kick it over to *The Municipalities Act* or the Ombudsman to . . .

**Mr. Leibel:** — There are certain things that could be in that statutory declaration that are disputable, that we've actually raised with the municipality. For example, we've received declarations where it said no submissions received, but we know that they held a public meeting and they did receive some comments from people. And we'd go back to the municipality to have them look at that declaration and correct that declaration as to the matter of what those statements are. Sometimes it's a typographical error. Sometimes, you know, they say there's three submissions but they never attached the submissions, would receive notes to the public hearing that they held.

Because it's the public hearing in the planning Act and the municipal adoption process of those bylaws, the engagement with the community is at that level. It's the municipalities engaging the community through the processes established in *The Planning and Development Act* for a planning bylaw or zoning amendment.

It's critical in the sense that we don't go out to those public hearings because that's the role of local government to engage their community and make a local decision. So it's at the local decision on whether that zoning bylaw proceeds or not. There's X number of members around that council that are responsible for that bylaw and the adoption of that bylaw, and whether that bylaw is going to be submitted to the ministry for review in accordance with the planning Act.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Yeah, and I guess, I mean my question really has to do with the recourse when there are concerns brought forward by ratepayers and how to ensure that there is that due process. So I'll maybe leave it at that. Thank you very much for your elaborate response. I know you were going to sort of pass it over for . . . through the second part of the answer. And then once we have that, I'll take my leave.

**Mr. Green:** — Thank you for that question. I think I won't repeat a few things that my colleague Bonnie Chambers talked about in terms of, the Ombudsman will look at situations where there's a concern for an explicit sense or an allegation of a conflict of interest. They will look at that. But as you noted, they will make recommendations.

The ministry does watch the reports that they publish and if there was a situation where they said, you know, there might have been a conflict, of course the Ombudsman is not a court so it wouldn't be any kind of an official ruling. And if there's clear evidence that the Ombudsman says, and the council has said to me that they're not, you know, they don't agree and they aren't willing to do it, we would probably engage with them and offer them some training and try to prevent that from happening again and ensure that they know what they're doing.

But there is more teeth in the legislation than that as well, and other features. There isn't a direct black-and-white, step-by-step process for it because typically what we see with allegations of conflict of interest are really sometimes they're very localized and they're personal — sometimes personal conflicts that may not always perhaps be real conflicts. They're perceived, but maybe not. There's all kinds of situations. So we do find cases where citizens feel that the conflict is something that actually bumps into allegations of corruption or other sorts of things that we always will quickly refer people to take their concerns to the

proper law enforcement. Typically it would be the RCMP. Others it might be the Ombudsman may be an appropriate place to look at.

But the legislation specifically, in all three municipal Acts, identifies that a council and a voter — it's clearly articulated — have the ability, if they believe they have reasonable grounds to believe that there is a conflict of interest by a council member, that they can ask a judge to determine, to take a look at it for them. It's pretty straightforward. We do encourage people if they're going to do that, they should probably obtain independent legal advice because it's a legal process. But we've seen the courts occasionally make a decision on some of those situations.

A citizen has three years within which to do that if they feel they have reasonable grounds, to take that to a judge to be an official arbiter to determine whether a disqualification has occurred. If the judge does so, the judge could remove the council member; and if they did, the person wouldn't be eligible to be nominated in a municipality for 12 years in Saskatchewan.

Lastly, some relatively recent provisions in recent years in *The Municipalities Act* is where council itself has authority if it believes a member of council is disqualified — and conflict of interest could be one of the items for disqualification — they could declare that member disqualified themselves. And then the onus is on the individual councillor if they feel that no, I don't think I had a conflict, well they then have a window of time under the legislation to go to a judge to look at it, to determine whether in fact they were in fact disqualified.

So those are some of the avenues that we'll guide folks on. And as my colleague earlier had mentioned, we do have a guide for citizens to influence council decisions and in there are a variety of these kinds of provisions that are in there that we make available.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. Yeah, thank you. I have had a look at that guide, and there's a lot of good information and direction provided in there. So I thank you all very much for your responses, and I will return later.

**The Chair:** — I'll thank Ms. Ritchie for her questions. And we now have Ms. Nippi-Albright substituting for Ms. Ritchie.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. You've had a long day already with estimates, so I'll try to not be too long-winded in asking my questions. For the answers you don't have immediately, I'm happy if you would just table them so that we can move your day along much quicker, and mine as well.

So just one of the questions I have, and just looking at some of the . . . Other ministry departments have Indigenous advisors within their department. Will the Government Relations be seeking to have an Indigenous advisor in the ministry?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So just to start with . . . And I know this question had been asked of other ministries, if there is an Indigenous advisor. We don't have an Indigenous advisor; we have a division. And I'll let maybe Laurier talk a little bit more about what that division does. And yeah, we'll leave it at that.

**Mr. Donais:** — Sure, thanks. Thanks, Minister. Laurier Donais,

deputy minister. Yeah, as the minister indicated we don't have any . . . like a specific senior Indigenous advisor. But I guess what I would say is we have a division. Our First Nations, Métis, northern affairs division actually advises and provides guidance with regards to Indigenous affairs and matters to the ministry, but also specific programming, you know, through that sort of one-team approach across government, you know, to other ministries and agencies.

And so some of the things that we will do sort of within our ministry and with regards to across government under that one-team approach is, you know, just advising and providing guidance on engagement with communities.

So protocols and relationship building, you know, working with elders, knowledge keepers, you know, when asked, and some of those protocols that exist, kind of acknowledging the traditions that exist within Indigenous communities and cultures, and that with respect to even just approaching elders and knowledge keepers, and some of the ceremonial offerings that may apply or may be appreciated and the gifts associated with that.

So those are some of the things that we do sort of on that advisory side of things. I mean within the division, we certainly have our, you know, delivering our treaty land entitlement claims programming. We've got relationship building with communities, you know, and policy development within Indigenous communities and within the North.

And I guess I would just maybe just close by saying, you know, we've got multiple staff who have that experience and knowledge related to Indigenous matters and the North as well.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. I was just going through some of the . . . just looking at the estimates here and kind of the figures. In February 17th of 2022 there was an order in council for one of the Métis Local 138 for 50,000 for 2022, to March 31st of 2022. And then there was also an additional 50,000 that was allocated to that Métis local just last summer in July 21st of 2022.

And I'm just wondering — like, that one Métis local, the Sturgis Métis Local 138, received 50,000 in the 2022 fiscal year and then is allocated another 50,000 — is that a carryover or what is that?

[19:15]

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I'll start, and then I'll turn it over to Giselle to kind of get into the detail of the specifics around each order in council, and kind of what triggers something that has to go to order in council, and when it isn't triggered to go to order in council.

But first of all I just wanted to say that this year in the budget, there's \$400,000 in the First Nations and Métis Consultation Participation Fund to support the First Nations and Métis communities to engage in activities related to the duty-to-consult. So that's what is the fund that this would be triggered out of. And if it is budgeted at 400,000 and there are a number of — whether it's Métis communities or First Nations — communities that have applied, we've always . . . Whatever the application is, we've made it up within our budget, so it's not a hard cap at 400,000.

But I'll turn it over to Giselle to talk about the details of when

order in council triggers.

**Ms. Marcotte:** — Good evening. Thank you. Giselle Marcotte, assistant deputy minister with Government Relations; First Nations, Métis, northern affairs division.

So just a little bit on the detail. Per project a community can apply for \$10,000 at a time. If it looks like it's getting close to the 50,000 mark, we need to go for an order in council to allow to be able to go to 50 or beyond. And if it's going to go again closer to 100,000, we would go back. And it's based on application, but it's also us getting permission so that we don't have to wait for too long for decision makings through the process. We try to get ahead of that with the orders in council.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you for that. Yes, I have received a number of these orders in council. And thank you for talking about the \$400,000 that is allocated. And when I was reviewing some of the orders in council . . . Well I'll just read them off.

In June of 2022 there was an order in council authorizing 150,000 to the — yeah, okay, I'm going to chop up the name — Ya'thi Néné Land and Resource Office. And July 21st there was another one authorizing 50,000 to Kineepik Métis Local 9, and of course the Métis Local 138 with Sturgis that I just talked about. And then another \$200,000 to Ya'thi Néné Land and Resource Office. So their office received — there's the two — 350,000 for their office. And in October of 2022 there was also another order in council authorizing 50 K for Melfort Local 22.

So like, this is over the 400,000 that you had just mentioned that was allotted in the fiscal year. So what resources or funds were available to other First Nations and Métis locals that were south to engage in these consultations?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I think all these questions . . . I'll start and then I'll turn to the officials to help out if I'm kind of off base. But first of all, the Ya'thi Néné is an organization that represents a number of First Nations bands. So they'll put in an application that will cover a number of bands; it's not just band-specific. The other thing is that they tend to represent bands in the North where there's a lot of resource development and interests. So that's why those numbers would be higher.

And then you asked if there is . . . you know, what the bands from the south would be, whether it's a Métis local or a First Nation. They apply the same. There is not a cut-off. Like I said, the 400,000 is not a cap. It's a budgeted item that if we go over — and you know, you've identified a few that would take us up to that limit already — what do we do? Does that mean nobody else gets money? No, if they apply . . . I don't know if we've ever turned anybody down if it meets the criteria. Regardless of what is in that pool of money or not, they're still eligible.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So where does those dollars come from then? Which pool of money do you get those dollars to allow for the consultations to occur?

**Mr. Markewich:** — Thank you for the question. Good evening. Jeff Markewich, assistant deputy minister, central services and standards. So as a ministry, historically from one year to the next we use ministry savings to help offset these additional costs. And if we were not able to offset the additional costs, we would go

for supplementary funding, so estimates or a warrant.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Wonderful. Oh, got other questions that were submitted to me. So we've asked this previously and I wasn't sure if this has ever been received. But can you provide the most up-to-date table tracking the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] Calls to Action that are relevant for the provincial government, and the government's progress on meeting those Calls to Action?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So just to the obligation of the province, there are about 34 that are recommendations that apply directly to the province. We've fulfilled 30 of those Calls to Action. There are 17 others that were directed more directly at the federal government that have also been fulfilled in the province.

And you know, of the 30, we could certainly go through a number of them. If you're interested in getting a copy, we can certainly work on getting you a copy of what the Calls to Action are. There have been a number of them that . . . Some are both federal-provincial; some are just distinctly provincial. The one that comes to mind is the residential school memorial, which was 82. That was fulfilled, for example.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. So is there also a tracking document for the MMIW [missing and murdered Indigenous women]? And if so, can that be provided?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I'll start in again as always. I'll start and the ministry can add if I've missed something. So this year in the '23-24 budget we've allocated \$400,000 into the province's first-ever missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls+ community resource fund. This fund will support community-led Indigenous projects that address the issue raised in the final report of the national inquiry on murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. The fund was co-developed by four Indigenous representatives who collaborated with Government Relations staff to develop the MMIWG+ [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls+] Community Response Fund.

We're proud to say that Government Relations has fully allocated last year's funding to 12 approved projects, and I could go through the names of those 12. But this budget year another 400,000, and we expect it would be fully allocated again. Last year we were able to fully allocate it and I've got a number of the projects if you're interested. We could probably provide you with a list of the projects. Moving forward, I think it's going to be on our website, those projects that we've funded and then any projects moving forward.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — That is wonderful. I know folks have been asking about where do we find out, so that is good to hear that they are going to be posted for folks to see. And also the \$400,000 that was allocated and to have my friend Myrna LaPlante come here. It was wonderful to see her when you made the announcement back awhile ago.

So on Red Dress Day the government supported the FSIN's women's declaration. So of that \$400,000, has any funding been committed to that commitment?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So what we'll say to that is that last year . . . So the program is application-based. They have to apply and, you know, as I said, we had 12 approved projects through an application base last year. Of those 12 that were approved, none of them were . . . Red Dress did not apply for any. That was not an applicant last year, but I would encourage them to look at this fund for this year moving forward. And it's just opening up now, is it? I believe it's . . .

**Ms. Marcotte:** — June 16th.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — On June 16th, the application process will open.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. The folks would be very interested in that. So I'm just going to shift over a little bit here, or actually drastically shift over from MMIW to the TLE allotment.

[19:30]

So I see here that there hasn't been a change, yet in some of the TLE claims, like with Mistawasis, there was 9.1 million I believe. And Ahtahkakoop also there was that claim that went through. So I guess my question is . . . First of all, maybe I should have broke this up into two questions. So the first one will do with Mistawasis. So that 9.1, is that included in the budget here, the 335 million? Is that what's in there, or has those dollars been allocated at all? And was it this fiscal year, last fiscal year, two fiscal years ago? But, yeah.

**Ms. Carani:** — Good evening. I'm Susan Carani, executive director of lands and consultation branch. So for the treaty land entitlement agreements, they're paid in one lump sum. Mistawasis was paid in 2022, and Ahtahkakoop and Zagimē.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay, that's good. So with Ahtahkakoop, of the 43.3 million that was provided both from the federal and provincial government, what portion of that was provincial?

**Ms. Carani:** — I don't have the 30 per cent . . . I'm trying to think what it was. I'll have to get back to you on that one.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — That would be wonderful if you could.

**Ms. Carani:** — Sure. Yeah.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — That would be good. Okay. We're moving along, and I'm just cognizant of the time because my colleague will be back in here. Just one second here. So of the . . .

**Ms. Carani:** — I have an answer for that.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Go ahead.

**Ms. Carani:** — It's 12 million.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — 12 million is what . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . 12 million is Saskatchewan's share. And that was allocated in 2022?

**Ms. Carani:** — Yes. Yes.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thanks. So is there any other land claims that you anticipate that you'll be paying out this year, in this fiscal year?

**Ms. Carani:** — We're currently in active negotiation with Hatchet Lake and Big Island Cree Nation. And so the negotiations are confidential, but we are in an advanced stage of those negotiations.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So in terms of the TLE Framework Agreement, that it has expired, the 30 years expired — and there was discussions on renewing that agreement — where are we? Or, I guess, where are you in that process of finalizing that TLE Framework Agreement? Or is that going to happen?

**Ms. Carani:** — So the 1992 TLE Framework Agreement is not expired. We paid those agreements out in 12 years between Saskatchewan and Canada because we had 25 bands to pay at that time. What happens is there's reserve creation procedures and they are looked at every 15 years.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So to date, how many of those lands have been turned to reserve status?

**Ms. Carani:** — From the 1992 agreement, approximately . . .

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — In the last three to five years, do you have an idea of how many of them have been turned to reserve status?

**Ms. Carani:** — In 30 years, we have about eight hundred and . . . close to 890,000 acres that have transferred to reserve status. And in the past couple years it's been about — three to five years — about 10,000 acres that has transferred.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. So in terms of dollars, how many of those . . . I guess the taxes would be that the municipalities or the area would be out. How much in dollars would that be about?

**Ms. Carani:** — You said in terms of jobs?

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — No, the loss of the . . .

**Ms. Carani:** — Oh, tax loss. Sorry.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — The taxes with the TLE transfer of . . . Yeah.

**Ms. Carani:** — Okay. Sure. So you were talking about taxes compensation and how much we have paid out in the past three years?

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — To the municipalities that would have lost that revenue from the taxes.

**Ms. Carani:** — Right. And school divisions.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Yeah.

**Ms. Carani:** — So we paid out approximately 700,000 over the past three years in tax-loss compensation.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So how do you . . . Is there, I guess, is there a kind of a formula that you use? Because of the decreased opportunity for TLE bands who wish to purchase land, is there kind of a formula that you use of where they can purchase land? And like what's . . . Tell me that process briefly if you can.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So what happens with these agreements is that the First Nation is given the money. It's roughly a little over \$1,000 an acre, and if you want to get into more detail on that we can probably kind of visit that. But they're given \$1,000, roughly, over \$1,000 an acre, and then it's up to the First Nation to purchase what land they see fit where they want to. It needs to be a willing seller.

And you know, if they purchase land that's at, you know, \$100 an acre, they're going to get 10 times the amount kind of thing, than someone purchasing at 1,000. And if they want to get into some expensive farm land, it's probably more than 1,000 depending on where they're going.

So they're given an allotment of money through the entitlement, and then they determine when and where. And it's probably a bit of a timeline on the when. I think I remember that. But if you want to get into that I can get the information. But it really becomes . . . It gets down to a willing seller. And then they can invest where they see fit.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you. So how many parcels of Crown land were sold in this last fiscal year?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I've got to date that 407,515 acres of Crown land have been sold under the TLE agreements, with 336,747 acres transferred to reserve status. So it's not all transferred to reserve status right away. But that would be 407,515 acres of Crown land sold under TLE agreements. I mean the total number of acres to date that have been transferred has been 890,000, but this is just the . . . It's Crown land that has been transferred.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Thank you for that. That's good to know when it comes to the TLE. So of the . . . And this is in general that's not related to the Crown lands. So how many parcels of Crown lands were sold not for TLE, not for that?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I would just answer that, not that we're trying to avoid that question, but we don't have that answer because it isn't us that is selling it. It would be Agriculture, Crown land under Agriculture, or Crown land under the Ministry of Environment, that would be the ministries that would have that. We don't have that as the Ministry of Government Relations. We have the TLE piece, but not Crown land.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So then you wouldn't know the dollar value of that either then? And no portion of those dollars of Crown lands go to Government Relations?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — No, it doesn't come to us.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — And it just goes to general revenue?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I believe so, but again you'd have to talk to the Minister of Finance and/or the ministers of the

ministries that is selling that land.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. So I know that not all TLE bands . . . Like, I'm just looking at First Nations, and it's not including the TLE bands. But has any Crown land been sold to non-TLE bands, First Nation bands?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Can you just repeat that?

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So the TLE land, that is TLE bands that buy Crown lands. So you've talked about that — how much has been sold for those TLE to fulfill the TLE agreement. So of the Crown lands in general, how many non-TLE First Nations purchased Crown lands?

[19:45]

**Ms. Carani:** — So your what we call non-TLE . . . When First Nations have land claim agreements, specific claims agreements, Crown land is also made available for sale to them. And they have also purchased land from the different . . . usually the Ministry of Agriculture.

Saskatchewan's not a party to those agreements. They're strictly between Canada and First Nations. We facilitate those agreements, because in 2000 we signed an MOU [memorandum of understanding] with Canada where they provided us some funding to allow for tax-loss compensation to rural municipalities and school divisions. And through that we helped facilitate reserve creation. We work as closely with those bands as with TLE bands.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay.

**Ms. Carani:** — And we can get you the number, as far as how much Crown land has . . . I know it's been about 80,000 acres has transferred to reserve under specific claims agreements. And I'm just not sure the exact number that was Crown land.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay, okay. Thank you. As you were talking I was like, okay. There is something else that went through my mind. I thought okay, it's too complicated, the time that I have. I was like, that's for another time.

So have you sold any Crown land to the Métis Nation or Métis locals? Has any Crown land ever been sold or — yeah — given to Métis people?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Again I think I would just have to answer that question like I did. We wouldn't have that number because we, as a ministry, wouldn't be selling the land. It would be through Agriculture, Environment. Probably those would be the only two ministries that I can think of, but that wouldn't come through our ministry.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. And then you probably wouldn't have the answer to this one as well, where I'm asking: so how much of the parcels of Crown land that were sold last year were sold to entities outside of Saskatchewan? They don't have that. Okay. Good. Okay. That's good to know.

So I just want to do another switch because I have a few minutes here. And I just want to chat about the commitment that was

made to FSIN in their ground radar searches that the province I believe promised like \$2 million for ground radar, sonar-radar search. Has that been allocated in the . . . What fiscal year was that allocated to FSIN to do that work?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So the amount that was transferred directly to FSIN was \$2 million. That was in the last fiscal year. It's not part of this fiscal year, but I'm certainly more than willing to touch on that. It went to the FSIN, for them then to determine how that money was to be spent in which communities, and by which method that community was wanting to . . . whether it's ground-penetrating radar or any other form. But again, it was again pretty much no strings attached, straight to the FSIN to then administer out for that specific issue.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So just with the residential school survivors that have filed claims against the provincial government for their part in operating the schools — like, I know it's still up in the courts — is there a . . . to get in, I guess, and help the survivors that are alive? Is there any intention of giving them the documents, their documents when they went to residential school, or is that going to be still going to be done through the courts?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I think you are referring to Ile-a-la-Crosse and Timber Bay?

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Yes.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Yeah, which were day schools and boarding schools. They didn't fit the criteria for the federal government to be classed under the residential school payment.

Having said that, of course those communities — and you identified it — have decided to go the legal process and it's before the courts right now. So I really can't say too much more on that because there's document disclosure and all of that. So I'll just say that's kind of the basis of it, is that they weren't identified through the federal government's residential school process.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — So is there going to be further investment? Because we know with the First Nations, the residential schools that were operated here in the province — and we have a high number of them — that a number of them have already done their searches and found unmarked graves. So is there any further investment that the province will make to support the First Nation communities that are finding more unmarked graves on their Nations?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I would just start by saying that — and I've already mentioned it — there was the \$2 million that we came up with right when the issue was coming to surface, starting in Kamloops unfortunately and then with Cowessess. And so then, you know, we as provincial government put that \$2 million straight to FSIN.

We haven't really been asked for anything else. But it tends to be a conversation much more with the federal government. And I don't know if there has been any asks of the federal government. We wouldn't be privy to it if there was. But I would think that, you know, FSIN or individual First Nations would probably be doing that, having that discussion with the federal government



first and then . . . But they haven't come to us as of yet.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay, so Nations, if they decided to apply for the First Nation and Métis funding initiative, wouldn't fall under that? Or could it?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I would say that there is, you know . . . We're trying to think of, you know, your question and where a First Nation could fit in. And we have the First Nation and Métis community partnership project sponsorship fund. And so I'll just give you a quick criteria and see if it fits. But I think, you know, depending on the community and depending on the project, this could be some funding that could be made available.

The ministry funds community partnership programs that promote culturally relevant healing and programming to Indigenous men, women, and families, promoting Indigenous language and cultures, and creating educational resources for neurodiverse Indigenous students to help them gain work experience and connect them to employers. So it does have kind of a bit of a broad range that, depending on the community and depending on the project . . .

Just one other thing. The ministry sponsors events that aim to advance reconciliation, promote Indigenous culture and language, and foster economic development. So it does have a fairly broad range, and again I would, you know, recommend any First Nation that is looking to see if that fits in . . . and it's an application base again. And you know, those funds, we want those funds to go out the door to communities that need it.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay. So I know that there was going to be, or you at one point — I think it was a couple weeks ago — said there would be an announcement coming forward regarding the First Nation and Métis consultation policy framework. Like where is the stage on that? And is that something that is going to be forthcoming shortly?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I think your question was kind of twofold, but you talked a little bit about the timeline as to when the themes . . . What I spoke about is that it was six to seven months of extensive engagement. And I'll going to let Giselle talk a little bit about who we all talked to and met with.

[20:00]

So we've done that engagement process. We've compiled, and there's some very common themes. And I'll just kind of read a number of the themes that have come out, and then kind of the next steps, and I'll let Giselle. As far as timelines, I can't give you an exact date but it's, you know, it's within the next two or three weeks I would think that the engagement, kind of a report on the engagement process will come out.

Yes, the preservation of land practices, Aboriginal and treaty rights was a strong theme. Building strong relationships, improving transparency and communication throughout the consultation policy framework process, improving policy processes, and implementing of the consultation policy framework, and building greater capacity within First Nations was certainly a theme, and Métis locals — those were kind of the themes.

We received just an awful lot of feedback in those eight months, which was great. Really appreciated it. Not only from, you know, First Nations and Métis communities but from the chamber of commerce, from SUMA, from SARM, from the mining association, from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers — there's a whole list of people that were engaged and a tremendous amount of feedback.

And I just want to publicly say on the record here, and I will in the future, compliment the ministry staff for all the work that they've done kind of condensing it into a little bit of a description there because that is a lot of work. There is a lot of feedback and a lot of engagement. And I just want to thank again the ministry staff publicly. But before I go too far on thanking them, I'm going to turn to Giselle to talk a little bit more on the numbers and that type of thing, if you would please.

**Ms. Marcotte:** — Thank you. So between July and December 2nd, the Aboriginal consultation unit team, along with other government officials throughout, went throughout Saskatchewan to meet with First Nations and Métis industry, tribal councils, municipal representative organizations. We sent out letters, the minister sent out letters of invitation to hold an engagement session. We didn't stop there. We made approximately 400 follow-up phone calls and meetings and had information sessions. By the end of it all, we had the formal engagement with 31 per cent of First Nations, 38 per cent of Métis locals.

And we met in community. We met in urban centres. Maybe one or two or just a few done virtually. It was all based on what the First Nation or the Métis or industry requested. So our team was ready to go where they were asked to go. And we received nine written responses and 16 responses to our online survey.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Besides the report and the themes that came out of the engagement sessions, will there be any extensive changes to the consultation framework?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I would just simply say that what we need to do is compile what we heard. We would like to then, again a little bit like the Capital Commission, we need to then kind of go back to the stakeholders that we've engaged with and talk to them as far . . . Not necessarily talk to them, but they will all get a report on what we heard, kind of the overall package. And then we'll be working on changes to the consultation policy framework.

**Ms. Nippi-Albright:** — Okay, well thank you so much for answering my questions. And anything that you weren't able to answer, I'm more than pleased that they be tabled. So have a good evening, and my evening is done. Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. I'd like to thank Ms. Nippi-Albright for her questions. And now we'll move and welcome back Erika Ritchie.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — I want to ask a question about the public transit component of ICIP. I've had some questions and concerns brought forward by local bus riders in Saskatoon who are dismayed with the level of funding support, and concerns around how that stream is being, you know, redirected into other areas. And so I'm wondering if you could provide me with more of a high-level, I guess.

There's a number of federal initiatives, as you are aware, to support communities. And then I guess not only that but there's also, as I mentioned earlier today, some other issues around safety concerns as well. And I would like to know sort of what the government's position is on supporting transit ridership more generally in the province as a way to address emissions, greenhouse gas emissions overall and the needs of the communities.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I think the question kind of started focused and then got fairly broad I think, because it started regarding ICIP and the funding for ICIP, and then it got into kind of greenhouse gases at the end.

But on the ICIP funding specifically there were five pools of money and one was for transportation. There was really only four communities in Saskatchewan that were eligible for that. It would have been Regina, Saskatoon of course, Prince Albert, and Moose Jaw. And those communities could have used the money for transportation, or they wanted to or could have and did apply to have that money transferred into other pools.

It wasn't our call one way or the other. The federal government was the one that would approve, has the final approval on all of these projects. We would take in an intake, and this isn't just for the transportation, we will take an intake in and then put it through a rating process, and then forward however many we could to the federal government. The federal government then is the final decision maker as to which ones go forward. Haven't rejected very many, but some. So that's how the process works.

On the transportation, neither Regina or Saskatoon wanted to use their full allotment for transportation. They had other priorities in their cities. We really felt that was up to the local decision makers to decide what that infrastructure money should go to.

And so I would say it was a decision of Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, and Prince Albert to move that money into other projects, whether it was green projects to deal with your GHG [greenhouse gas] issue. That would be up to the cities if they wanted to move that money into other projects, whether it's culture, recreation. I don't have the five in front of me, and if you want me to get the five I certainly can. But transportation is one of them. And for the most part the four cities that were eligible chose to move the lion's share of that money into other projects.

**The Chair:** — Again I would ask Ms. Ritchie to contain her comments towards the estimates on the Ministry of Government Relations please.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Certainly, Mr. Chair. I believe in the minister's remarks, you mentioned that we were moving into, I think, the final instalments of the ICIP program, of which transit is one of them. And so this pertains to funding for public transit, and you know, so there's a portion from the federal government and then a smaller portion that comes from the province.

Constituents, ratepayers in Saskatoon who rely heavily on public transit to navigate the city, get to doctor's appointments and other locales are very much interested in seeing the build-out of the bus rapid transit system in Saskatoon and for that to go forward in a timely fashion. So the awarding of the funds from the ICIP program to the city to enable that to happen is where the issue

and concern lies.

And so I apologize for the wide-ranging question. But I guess that's really sort of what I'm trying to drive at here is there seems to be concern with some of the delays in some of those funding decisions. And I'm sure that now that we're sort of reaching the conclusion of the program, that those things will be forthcoming. Maybe you could tell me when, sort of what the schedule is right now for any further receipt of applications and the time frame under which those will be decided upon.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I will start, and then again I'll have Iryna to fill in the blanks, because there will definitely be some blanks.

So again the federal . . . You had mentioned kind of at the start where the federal government puts in some money and the provincial government puts in less. That isn't the case on a lot of the streams. The federal government and the provincial government put in the same amount and then it's made up, you know, often 33, 33, 33, kind of thing.

It depends on certain streams. Certain streams that have a large First Nations content would have a higher funding level from the federal government, but on most of the projects that have been approved, it's a cost-share between the federal government and provincial government. And I just don't want it to be out there that we would be a less-funding partner in many of these projects.

[20:15]

On the ICIP, so the last intake was in the fall. It's all been allotted. There is no more dollars to go out to ICIP, but there are a lot of projects that are at the federal level that are waiting for approval. So for, you know, the city of Saskatoon, if they wanted to apply for more transit, that's already been allocated. But there are projects that the city of Saskatoon has, for example, put forward that we've put forward to the federal government, and we're still waiting for approval.

I would say that — and you know this is not to be difficult at the end of the night because I'm tired, which tends to happen often — is that we are waiting an extremely long time for the federal government to make decisions on some of these projects. And the problem with that has been with the escalation of costs. What a community thought they could do with the dollars, by the time it is finally approved . . . You know, at a 30 per cent inflation on building costs we've had communities back out of projects because it's taken too long for the federal government to decide.

So one thing that we have been really pushing on, and I don't know if I said this earlier, but I spoke — I shouldn't say I spoke. I asked SUMA cities to do as much lobbying with the federal government as they possibly can to take some of the strings off that the federal government had put in place with the ICIP program.

I again think communities know best what's needed in their community and they should be making that decision. Not a decision made by a federal government that may be looking at catering more to Toronto and Montreal than it is to Sedley and Forget, you know. So what we need is the federal government, and we'll be there as a provincial government, to let the

communities make those decisions as much as possible.

On the piece regarding Saskatoon and what projects are waiting for . . . That would be on the busing. We've got one, two, three, four, five, six projects that are waiting for federal approval. When that is going to come, we don't know. Our money, it will be there on the matching piece but we don't know when that approval will come. Is there any room for further intakes? No, there isn't until there's another federal program.

Some would say, well just start a program provincially and not leverage the federal dollars. That doesn't make sense, so we're waiting and in negotiations. We're lobbying hard through our ministry for a federal program, as are the municipalities here in Saskatchewan.

And do you want to add something?

**Ms. Soloduk:** — Yes. So good evening. My name is Iryna Soloduk. I'm executive director for municipal infrastructure and finance branch. Just to give a bit of, you know, background on ICIP.

So ICIP is a program that we started in 2018. It's a federal-provincial-municipal program. Within the application, the way, like, kind of historically, it goes that we accept the applications obviously. We give usually between one month and two for people to apply within a certain stream. Then we obviously review those applications, making sure that they're eligible, then score, then rate them, and then it goes for the provincial approval.

After provincial approval, we send those applications to the federal approval, and that's where we kind of see a little bit of the time delay. We have been seeing . . . it goes between a few months to, like, many months, let's say. And then only after the federal approval, then the applicant can start acting on the project. So that's how the project would go. And obviously we do understand that, you know, there's a delay in that process, and we do work with municipalities and federal government to get it as soon as possible.

On the Saskatoon project, we do have six projects that, as minister already mentioned under the public transit, five of them are recommended and one is conditionally approved. So obviously funding will only be getting . . . the municipality will be getting only funding after they submit the claims to us. So obviously the work has to happen, and as soon as that work has happened, we have a process in place to issue that funding to municipalities as soon as we can.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, thank you very much for that response. I'm going to move on to a couple more questions. I think I have about another 10 minutes, 5 minutes, so rapid-fire round now, I guess.

It's my understanding that, for regional park boards, the board members must be resident in the RM that oversees the park. And has any thought been given to provisioning for the individuals that have cabins or cottage owners in a regional park that live outside of the area to also have representation on regional park boards?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — We'll be quick on the answer. That

would be a really good question to ask the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport. We don't deal with that at all.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Yeah, I think there was a municipal angle to this. But okay, we will pass that one along in the interest of time.

Another concern that's been brought to my attention is the definition for a "place of worship" within *The Cities Act* and how that is determined. I think, you know, for some obvious reasons, that is something again that has come up from constituents in terms of how a religious organization is defined and substantiated by a religious organization or what sort of limits are put on that. I know its . . .

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So we haven't heard that concern. I don't know. I mean I would be interested to hear where that came from, but we haven't heard that concern. But even more, I guess, relevant is that we don't believe there is a defined definition of "place of worship." We're going to check *The Cities Act*, and if we find something in the next day or so, we'll get it to you. But we don't think that there is any sort of . . . I think you asked what is the definition of "place of worship," and we believe that *The Cities Act* just identifies a place of worship and doesn't define a "place of worship." And if we're wrong on that as we do some more research over the next day or two, we'll get back to you.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I think that was actually the point, is that there is no definition. And would the minister consider defining it so that it would be clear in terms of how that definition would apply and then in terms of receiving tax exemptions and the like?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — We can certainly make note of that. But that would . . . You know, like so much . . . It tends to come from the stakeholder which would be the cities, for example, if it was in a city or an urban municipality. And so there is a process that they would normally go through is this is what . . . From our perspective we'd want to make sure that it isn't just one isolated situation that the city would want and need a definition. And then what would that definition look like?

So there'd have to be an awful lot of consultation around the wording around defining what a "place of worship." And that would be generated not necessarily from the ministry, but we would want the stakeholders directly involved so that the definition is suitable for all.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. And I think this will probably be my final question. SUMA had commissioned a review of SAMA [Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency] practices by the International Property Tax Institute. Their report entitled *Review of the Property Tax System in Saskatchewan* was delivered a year ago. Can you tell me what the current status is of both SAMA and the province's analysis and response to this report? An easy one.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I've been told that SUMA and SAMA, along with some representatives from cities as well as, I think, we think that maybe SARM may have joined the working group. This report is fairly new and so there's a working group that's looking at the report and will be deciding what to say on it in the future. We have observers, so we are kind of privy to the conversation that's going on.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — All right. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates today, we will now adjourn consideration of these estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Government Relations. I'll ask the minister for his closing comments.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Just quickly I would like to thank the three members opposite that asked questions, yourself, and the committee for being here. And I don't know what the scores in the hockey games are, but I've been dying to find out. Not that I'm a Boston Bruins fan.

**A Member:** — The Chair's not very happy.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Uh oh, so Boston's down.

Anyway, thank you for indulging. But most importantly, thank you to all the officials from Government Relations. I've had the opportunity to serve for two and a half years, and it's been a pleasure to work with all of them that know their files so well and have such experience in helping me learn an awful lot — not only when we have briefings, but even through estimates. All night I was, like, is that right? Is that how that works? So thank you all very, very much for your service to the province and to our government. We really appreciate it.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. Ms. Ritchie, do you have any closing comments?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — I would just like to echo the minister's statements, extend my thanks and gratitude to the officials present here today, assisting the minister with the responses to my questions. I also want to give a shout-out to my staff and team who've helped me in preparation for the meeting here today, and other legislative staff here this evening to facilitate these proceedings, and yourself, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** — Minister, do you need a few minutes to change officials?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I don't think so.

**The Chair:** — Okay.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — We have two bills and . . .

**The Chair:** — Perfect.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I think I would probably just say, if you're not involved with the bills, you can carry on. Thank you.

**Bill No. 104 — *The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2022***

**Clause 1**

**The Chair:** — Okay. Thank you, Minister. We'll move on to Bill No. 104, *The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2022*, clause 1, short title. Minister McMorris, please make your opening comments and introduce your officials if you wish.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I think all my officials have been here for long enough, so I'm going to go straight to my comments. So tonight we are considering Bill No. 104, *The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2022*. This Act allows municipalities to fund municipal works or services through a levy on special properties that will benefit. For municipalities that use local improvements, these changes will simplify the process. This will make local improvements a more appealing method of funding localized or targeted capital work projects.

[20:30]

The amendments fall into three main categories. First, school properties would be exempt from local improvement levies. These levies can strongly impact school divisions' finances, since the divisions can no longer set their own mill rates to recover costs. Although exempt from property tax, schools are not currently exempt from local improvement levies. The Saskatchewan School Boards Association has repeatedly raised issues with the ministries of Government Relations and Education.

Second, we intend to improve the appeal process for a local improvement to make it faster and more efficient. Feedback from municipalities indicates that the current process can be too complex and time consuming. Currently the Saskatchewan Municipal Board approves all local improvements. In many cases this is unnecessary. The amendment approval process will improve efficiency while maintaining public accountability and engagement.

Finally, minor amendments will align public notice and petition requirements with those in the municipal Act.

The ministry has consulted with the Ministry of Education, the Saskatchewan Municipal Board, municipalities, and education sector associations, and several municipalities that the ministry was aware that used local improvement. Most of the feedback received was positive. Several municipal stakeholders did not support exempting school properties, claiming that more costs will be offloaded to municipalities.

However local improvements are one of several tools to funding infrastructure projects and have always been entirely optional for municipalities to use. Officials work closely with the Saskatchewan Municipal Board to ensure the approval process maintains an appropriate level of oversight.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that, I'll answer any questions.

**The Chair:** — Thank you for your opening comments, Minister. I'll open it up for questions. Ms. Ritchie.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess one of my first questions, maybe perhaps you kind of answered in your introductory remarks. Because certainly as it pertains to exemptions for school properties, I did hear similar concerns from municipal stakeholders in terms of now, you know, the costs that otherwise would have been paid by the school properties now are going to have to be redistributed to the other ratepayers and/or the municipalities.

And so I guess I'm just wondering if there isn't, you know, some

responsibility for schools that are benefiting to then also share in the costs regardless of, you know, other budgetary pressures that they might be under, and if perhaps other alternatives had been considered to the one that was ultimately landed on in terms of the exemption for school properties.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So you know, we heard those concerns too. That is certainly the municipalities . . . Some municipalities raised that concern, but I would say it was very minor compared to like . . . I'm not saying that properly. There are very, very few municipalities that use local improvements anymore, so the vast majority of municipalities it doesn't impact, but there were a few that were relying on it.

Most of those local improvements weren't just improvements for the school but for the betterment of the whole community. And when school divisions no longer have the ability to increase their mill rate, you know, that would be coming out of educating in the classroom. Municipalities have a lot of ways to generate revenue, not the least of which is municipal revenue sharing.

So yeah, those concerns were heard, but it was decided — again, you know, as many of those concerns were heard from a couple municipalities; school boards around the province were very concerned with the other way, if we left it the way it was — so we decided to move in that direction.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay, yeah, and I guess the manner in which I received that feedback was . . . You know, I guess similar to how school divisions are feeling, I think municipalities also are feeling like there's already a lot of downloading and other constraints being placed on them. And so this was just sort of another sort of chipping away of their ability to generate revenue for projects.

And yeah, I guess the other thing is you started to mention that, you know, there are other avenues, and you know, I'm curious to know if you can sort of in a quantified way give me a sense of how common or how often this provision is used in municipalities.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So we asked last year and we had response that three municipalities had used it.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — And I had seen some media coverage for the town of Battleford with respect to some improvements that were proposed and petitioned against. Would Battleford be one of those three communities?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Battleford was not one of the communities that we heard from.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — I note that the section 3 was repealed. I believe section 3 provided a list of works and services that could be undertaken as local improvements. Could you provide a bit of a rationale for why that section was repealed and how it will be addressed instead?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Thank you for the question. Andrea Ulrich, director of legislation and regulations for the Ministry of Government Relations. When we were looking at the Act, it really is about how projects are funded. It's the funding mechanism and how the levies are used. The type of project does

not factor into whether it's a local improvement or not; it's just the way it's funded.

So having a list — and it was a list of “it may include” — was unnecessary because projects outside of that list could be undertaken under the Act. And so instead of appearing to restrict the use of it, we took it out and instead described the general purpose of the Act, instead of sort of drawing a box that really didn't exist. So it can be used for any type of project.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that response. Yeah, I did kind of come to that same conclusion under section 2.1(3), where you have a local improvement benefit of a property if it enhances and you go on to explain that.

I guess one of the questions I had in regards to that is if a local improvement is enhancing a property, then it has an impact on the property values, I would expect. And so like, how do you sort of make that calculation, I suppose, in terms of trying to show sort of the value that might be attributing to those properties and then apportioning those costs. I suppose that's more of a question for the municipality.

Say well, you know, you're going to have to pay \$2,500 over three years, for example, for this improvement, but your property value is going to improve by \$10,000 or something of the like. Like is that the way that it's intended to function?

**Mr. Nasewich:** — Thanks for that question. I'm Rod Nasewich, the executive director of policy and program services. That's not really the intent. And I don't believe municipalities look at the increase in a property's value as a result of a local improvement.

There are a number of ways in which a municipality may allocate the costs of a project, one of which would be on the actual assessed value, sort of the current assessment, property assessment. They can also do it on the frontage, sort of the amount of frontage that a property has. Say for example, if it's a sidewalk or a lane, then they're benefiting to a greater extent than someone with a smaller frontage. They can also do a determination of the relative amount of benefit that they think a property would receive from a local improvement and allocate it that way, or do an equal amount per lot or per property.

So those are all options that are available for the municipality, and I would say that in addition to having the property owner's right to appeal against it if they think it's not apportioned properly, they can petition to the municipality. They can also appeal to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board if they feel there's been an incorrect determination of those levies, based on their property.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — I have to go back a bit because I'm a little bit confused by the need for these, you know, changes to the legislation if it's so underutilized, and if it's the ministry's intention that this be something that be encouraged or promoted or seen as another avenue, more than it has been in the past. Like what's driving these changes ultimately?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I think I said it in my opening remarks. I mean municipalities have a lot of ways to fund an infrastructure project. In past when it was used, probably quite a bit, school

divisions had the opportunity to offset a local improvement by raising the mill rate, which was again just increasing the tax for the people in the area. It's the same taxpayer. But school divisions then, they'd either have to increase the mill rate or pay it out of their existing operations, which then would take away from education. They don't have the opportunity to increase the mill rate.

So it was really kind of a — and they don't . . . maybe stick is not the right word — but you know, municipalities held that over school divisions that they could just tack on a local improvement and the school divisions had virtually no defence. And their defence before was property tax and they don't have that anymore, so that's why we decided to take it out. And it came from a very good source, a person that served on school boards that had that very thing hoisted on them.

[20:45]

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. So I guess that while you were making those amendments there was an opportunity to undertake further changes, and I guess we'll get into those a little bit more here.

I'm interested to hear some of the reasons for removing some of those requirements for the municipal review board, I believe. And now it seems that the municipalities will be able to sort of make some of these determinations and decisions on their own. Have I got that right? Can you expand a little bit on why those changes were seen as needed?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — I'll start and then we can go from there, just kind of further to why we thought this needed to be done. Three communities that use the current levy on school divisions — there were three and two of those resulted in lawsuits. So the only recourse for a school division was to take the municipality to court, and what a waste that is. So that's another piece.

On the Municipal Board, it is just trying to streamline the process. A number of the local improvements do not need to go in front of the Municipal Board for approval. They could be approved . . . You know, so it's really about streamlining the process to make it easier for local government to put on a local levy if they so choose.

**Ms. Ulrich:** — I can expand on the Saskatchewan Municipal Board oversight. So part of doing a local improvement is that property owners can petition against it and then it wouldn't go forward, or property owners can petition for it. And so if that's the case, property owners already have a very significant role in determining whether or not that project goes forward.

We've taken out approval from the Saskatchewan Municipal Board in those cases where property owners have that petition ability, because really it was at that point then it's more about the financial arrangements. And that actually has to go to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board under other legislation, if they're borrowing, for example, to do that. So it resulted in doubling up of that review process, and it was just unnecessary in the case where property owners had that ability to petition.

Now there is one way for council to do a local improvement without the ability for property owners to petition, and if they decide to go that route then there will still be approval by the

Saskatchewan Municipal Board as per current process. And that's just to ensure that the oversight is there to have that second look at the project and just ensure that it's in the best interests of the property owners.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — And so is there the risk of necessary local improvements not going forward because the local residents have petitioned against it? I guess I'm kind of wondering if you kind of end up in a situation where a municipality could have a bit of a patchwork of, you know, uneven infrastructure improvements if, you know, some areas or some neighbourhoods are in agreement and others petition against it. And then I mean what does it do to overall, like, local area planning?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Thank you. So local improvement is just one method of funding a infrastructure project. So example, you're replacing just one sidewalk on a street or something like that, or curb and gutter replacement. It's quite expensive but it's really just benefiting a very small group of properties.

For funding infrastructure projects, of course, the municipality has many other ways of doing that: just through taxation, paying for it completely on the municipal side, doing special taxes. So there's other tools they can use. If it's important and if it's for the benefit of the municipality, then they can certainly use other options, which is I think why we see local improvements not utilized very often. But it's just one tool that might be appropriate and might not. And that's of course for the council to determine.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that response. I believe I had seen somewhere where there is a provision for if costs exceed a threshold of 50 per cent, then there's an action taken. And maybe you could remind me what that is. And the question more is around how you arrived at that 50 per cent cost overrun and is that the right amount? Or might it have been lower?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Thank you. So the 50 per cent cost overrun was suggested by the Saskatchewan Municipal Board, who is of course the expert when it comes to these applications because they've been reviewing them for several years. So that's why we used that figure. And we included it just as a protection for property owners. So maybe they agreed to the local improvement when the bylaw was put in place, but then as the project went on, if it's exceeding it — the original estimated cost — by that much, then council is, you know, required to go back.

We also had put in a requirement for the municipality to inform property owners when those costs are increased, I believe it's 20 per cent above original estimated costs. And that's a transparency, accountability measure just to make sure that they're aware.

Of course costs increase over the life of a project. That's to be expected. But 50 per cent was just the threshold recommended for where the original approval should no longer be valid.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Could there not be situations though where a 50 per cent cost overrun could amount to a fairly sizable cost burden for an individual property owner far in exceedance of, say for example, what they're paying in property taxes? Like it seems to me that this could be particularly burdensome financially for property owners.

And is there any recourse? Because you mentioned the 20 per cent where, you know, they have to be informed. So can they take any action at that point before it reaches a 50 per cent amount?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — It would just be the normal ways of interacting with their council and making their concerns known. So they would be informed though that that was happening, and then would be able to make, you know, representations, for example, to council. And of course the 50 per cent is large and there might not be a perfect threshold, but it was important to put that protection in.

And you know, it also puts some onus on the municipality to make reasonable estimates in the first place so they're not lowballing the estimated costs at the beginning just to get it approved. This way they're more accountable for providing a reasonable estimate in the first place that they are comfortable they're not going to be exceeding by 50 per cent.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. Well that might take us to section 6, which was repealed and substituted with a new section, respecting a report on local improvements where, you know, there's a number of items listed here for what's to be communicated in terms of the planned or proposed local improvements, including under item (d), and (e) I suppose, in terms of the share of the cost and how it will be financed.

And so I'm wondering if it's felt that, you know, there's enough information that's being provided and the basis of the estimates as well is sufficient enough to ensure that cost overruns are avoided.

**Ms. Ulrich:** — So in section 6, we didn't remove or actually add, except to combine two different sections of the Act that previously had some overlap. So that was originally a part of the report. And again, I would just stress that the municipality is accountable for ensuring that they are doing their due diligence in estimating those costs, as they would for any project when they're starting that. So this report that they're sending to the property owners of course would keep them accountable for their work as part of proposing that project.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. I'm just going to do a quick check here and make sure I haven't missed anything. Maybe just one final question. Oh I see we're . . . Okay, well we've only been at it for half an hour.

You know, we've talked earlier in the evening about governance, competency overall, and so you know, the bill is removing some of the approval mechanisms that formerly were being undertaken by the Municipal Board. What kind of assurances can be offered or what plans are intended to ensure that, you know, the process is going to be adhered to without that additional oversight by the Municipal Board in all cases?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Oh sure. Thanks for the question. So this Act is a bit unique when you look at other forms of taxation and infrastructure. Municipalities make many decisions with little to no provincial oversight in that area already. So this Act was actually an anomaly in the amount of oversight that was being done and the burdensome approval processes that were in place, which is . . . You know, we can speculate. One reason why they are not used very often is because it is quite the process to do one.

[21:00]

Using local improvement levies to fund projects is similar to using other methods of short-term taxation, and those don't require provincial approval, like special taxes for example. However provincial oversight is still retained when it enters the financial borrowing and debt limits that are in place. So municipalities, other than cities, would be going to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board in order to have that approved anyways, whether it's a local improvement or not. So that financial oversight is removed from this Act, but only because it was already redundant with approvals required under other legislation.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that response. Mr. Chair, I have no further questions.

**The Chair:** — Seeing no more questions, we'll proceed to vote on the clauses. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 31 inclusive agreed to.]

**The Chair:** — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Local Improvements Act, 2022.*

I would ask a member that we report Bill No. 104, *The Local Improvements Amendment Act, 2022* without amendment. Do I have a mover?

**Hon. Mr. McLeod:** — Mr. Chair, I so move.

**The Chair:** — Okay. Mr. McLeod has moved. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. Is there any comments on closing the bill?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thanks to the officials for all the work on this bill.

**The Chair:** — Ms. Ritchie, do you have any closing comments?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Just to echo the minister's comments, thank you very much to the officials and the opportunity to ask some questions on the bill this evening. Thank you.

**Bill No. 105 — *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2022***

**Clause 1**

**The Chair:** — Thank you. We'll now consider Bill 105, *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2022*, clause 1, short title. Minister McMorris, please make your opening comments, please.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Late this evening, we are going to be considering Bill No. 105, which proposes amendments to *The Local Government Election Act, 2015*.

This Act governs all local elections across the province, including cities, urbans, rural, and northern municipalities. It also governs school board elections which are often held jointly by municipalities and school divisions. These changes will improve voter accessibility, make it easier for local governments to conduct elections, and incorporate a variety of processes and efficiency improvements.

The amendments fall under four main categories. First, the returning officer will have more authority and flexibility to make local-level decisions, which will include the ability for the returning officer to establish polling locations. Returning officers will also be able to temporarily postpone an election dealing with an emergent situation such as inclement weather. Second, it will make it easier for municipalities to establish voters' lists and maintain them electronically.

And the third goal of this bill is to improve voter accessibility. Advance voting is a proven way to increase voter turnout. Therefore all municipalities will now be required to establish at least one advance poll. It will also be easier to set up polling places in hospitals and personal care facilities so that more residents and people receiving care can have their vote taken at the facility.

Finally, the bill will incorporate a variety of efficiencies and process improvements to reflect suggestions from stakeholders. For example, candidates will have to provide their contact information with their nominations, and municipalities will have the option to hold a by-election to resolve tied votes.

The ministry consulted extensively on the changes in the bill since the 2020 municipal election. Consultations occurred internally with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, and subject matter experts within the Ministry of Government Relations. External stakeholders consulted include the municipal associations, municipal administrators' association, city clerks, the School Boards Association, the Chief Electoral Officer, and Elections Saskatchewan.

Consultation provided no consensus on a consistent election date. Therefore local election dates will remain unchanged to keep consistency throughout the province. A consistent election date will result in better coordination between municipal offices and school boards, improving public awareness, and the ability for voters to vote for school boards at the same time as municipal councils.

Thank you for your time. And myself and the officials will be more than happy to answer any questions that you have.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. I will now open it up for questions. Ms. Ritchie.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Perhaps I'll start where you left off, Mr. Minister. I think the one contentious issue with this bill, as you've indicated, has to do with the date for municipal elections.

I received a lot of feedback in my consultations with city mayors and councils on the myriad issues that they have with the dates as they're currently set and, you know, things such as the confusion that some voters have between, you know . . . Because the provincial election date and the local election dates are so close together, it's very difficult oftentimes for voters to understand, you know, who the candidates are and whether they're provincial or local.

And you know, we already have issues with low voter turnout. And it was felt that by moving the local election dates to a different time, not close in line with when the provincial date is set, that it would remove some of that confusion. Not only that, but also concerns with the administrative burden that results from having these sort of close on the heels and, yeah, just a lot of complexity and confusion around pay scales for workers and whether they're available. And then of course the seasonality concern as well in terms of particularly what happened in 2020, when elections had to be postponed due to, you know, storms occurring in the later fall period. And for these and other reasons, the interest in having dates set in the springtime.

And I guess also, it was also pointed out to me that, you know, we do already have election dates, you know, exceptions for some of the villages or hamlets in the RMs. I may not have that completely correct, but you know, there are some other variances that exist. And so the argument around keeping things consistent wasn't very convincing when, you know, I'm discussing it with local elected members.

And I guess I'm wondering in light of that, in light of the various issues and concerns . . . Oh, I should also mention, you know, it overlaps with the budgetary process. That creates issues for both administrators as well as any new councillors that are coming in. And so the timing doesn't seem to work on a number of different fronts and for a number of different actors who are part of the process, whether it's administrators, electeds, those who are contracted to work during those time periods, and then the voters themselves as well.

So many compelling reasons affecting, you know, a range of very important stakeholders and that desire to shift the dates so that they don't coincide with the provincial elections. You mentioned . . . And I'm almost done. But you know, you mentioned also how the school boards also . . . there was some lack of consistency there in some of the responses you got back.

But you know, it is the cities and towns that are carrying out the elections and are most affected by this issue. And I wonder if you might sort of reconsider in terms of moving those dates as has been requested and very, I think, clearly outlined by the municipal sector on what their wishes are. Would you care to comment on that and consider shifting those dates?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So yes, I heard certainly a number of concerns, you know, through the different associations. And whether it's the cities or villages, every one of those groups were given the opportunity to come up with a consistent date. They needed to find . . . They could have set their date had they found a consensus, but they didn't. SARM was in the fall, absolutely. But even what was really interesting was SUMA didn't have a consistent date. I think if you were to poll each mayor of a city, they had different dates, and the villages and towns had a



different date, and none of them coincided.

So then you leave school boards, which is another level of government. When would you elect those? So you virtually could have had RMs on one date, cities on a couple different dates — that's three elections. Towns and villages on a different date — four. And then, I don't know, I guess a separate election for school boards; that would have been five dates, not to mention resort villages which is in the summer. You know, we could have six elections in a year in Saskatchewan.

They were given the opportunity, find a common date and we'll go with it. If you suggest a common date, we'll go with it. I heard all the arguments, and you know, the last election in 2020, weather was a factor in a couple of communities. That's why we've changed in this Act, to give the returning officer more control to . . . Before they didn't have the control. It had to come to the minister to postpone an election. They have control of that now where they didn't in the past.

[21:15]

So I know that there has been concern. Again, we're going to make this decision. We've made this decision, and it isn't because there wasn't consultation and I didn't hear what they said. It's just I heard too many messages. They couldn't come up with a common date, and as a result, things will remain unchanged.

The weather argument is a tough one, but again the returning officer is the person that would be in charge of that. It was interesting when I was at SUMA last week, weather interruptions didn't come up at all on the 20-something, the second of April. You know, and we could have held them in April and they would have all been postponed across the province, in April. So you know, if you're going to play the weather card in Saskatchewan, you better buy farm land. Because, you know, to do it on election dates just is . . . So it is what it is and I know there's some concern.

I also know that, you know, there's some concern with the proximity to a provincial election and that's, you know, I've heard that as well. But that's why it's so important, we think, to give voters more of an option. I mean you know what it's like in a provincial election. It's not election day, it's election week. And that's what it's going to be, need to become in municipal where they've got advance polling. That's in this bill as well.

So there's a lot of things that have been added into the bill to address the concerns that we've all heard, and you know, I wish they would have come up — the municipalities, SUMA and SARM — with one solid date and that would have been in this bill.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — When the consultation occurred, as you say, did you provide options with pros and cons for consideration?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — We had said to the municipal organizations, you guys tell us when you want them.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — But how does that drive towards a consensus? It seems like a free-for-all.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — But that's what it is because you can't find consensus. That's what it is. And that's why they couldn't find consensus because they don't agree within their own sectors.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for those responses. So I understand that with some of these changes that have been made there's . . . where a by-election — I'm sorry. I'm not quite sure what section I'm in right now — but where a by-election must occur, that you've identified Wednesday as the date for by-elections. Can you tell me how that day of the week was arrived at?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So that day was selected to coincide with the day of the week of the election, of the general election on a Wednesday. And we're just going to clarify whether it was a sector that requested that or the clerks. But that was a request to have it on the same day as the general election.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — That's just a clarifying question. Election days are typically Mondays, not Wednesdays. That's in that section 5(2).

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — We're going to kind of have to take some, a little bit of time, that's . . . we'll go way back.

**Ms. Ulrich:** — I would have to dig quite a bit to find out exactly where the request came from, but municipal elections are held on Wednesdays and the ministry was aware that by-elections were not always held on Wednesdays. So this just makes it absolutely clear that it would happen on a Wednesday.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you very much for that response. You know, I appreciate some of the changes that have been made to put more sort of decision-making power in the returning officer's hands for, you know, a number of these issues and items that are addressed in the bill.

So I'm wondering if you can tell me how the accountability shifts now, and to who that returning officer remains accountable in terms of their decision making as it's been amended here in the bill.

**Mr. Nasewich:** — Thanks for the question. The returning officer has historically and always been in charge of the local election, and that's to distance itself from council, to distance those election practices and procedures.

So in various places in the Act they're given authority to set polls, determine polling places, and then actually run the election on election day as . . . and they are like the Chief Electoral Officer in terms of having complete control and running the election.

So we found in making these amendments there were some areas where that authority wasn't clear or it still rested with council. And so to be consistent and to remove any perception that a council might be interfering with how an election might be run or how places are decided or chosen, we made it clear wherever those spots were identified, either by stakeholders or internally by us, we would make sure it was the returning officer that had control of that.

I also have, I think, I have a follow-up to the Wednesday question. What the Act currently says is a by-election must be held as nearly as possible, in accordance with the provisions of

the Act, as they relate to general elections.

So I recall that there was some uncertainty about what does that mean. Does that mean they have to be held on a Wednesday, you know, when they're deciding? So the decision was to make it clear. I'm pretty sure that was the source of the need to clarify that piece.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. Thank you for that clarification. Much appreciated, in both cases, those answers. But just for my benefit, again back to the returning officer. How are they hired? Like, who are they accountable to? Like, what is the reporting relationship? Obviously they need that independence in their role, but for accountability purposes, where do they report to?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Thanks for the question. So the returning officer is the administrator unless otherwise appointed. But council appoints the administrator as the returning officer, as that formal appointment. And the administrator, you know, part of their role is to know the legislation intimately. So they're accountable to the Act, to the legislation, accountable that way, just as elected officials are accountable in their own ways. But they are already the experts in the legislation.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. So I mean given some of our discussions earlier this evening around, you know, competency and, you know, governance, is there a mechanism for monitoring and tracking compliance with the legislation? How do we ensure that those administrators, sort of knowing sort of some of the limitations different municipalities might be under, are adhering to the Act?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Yeah, so we do follow up in two different ways after local elections. There's election reporting that is required by each municipality. And so along with this ability to postpone or move a poll due to inclement weather, that would have to be reported as part of that reporting. So as a ministry, we would be able to see where and how this is being used, and then if there's a concern we could, you know, do something about that.

We also do a post-election survey that's voluntary. We get a very high level of response where municipalities tell us about the issues that they experienced, what went well, what didn't, what suggestions they might have for future legislative amendments. So we check in right after elections that way as well so that we have a good pulse on how those have been going.

And of course, as the administrators themselves are certified by either the rural administrator association or the urban association, so they are held accountable to their own professional standards as well.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Are there cases where administrators are not certified? Like, are they . . . Is that a requirement for the role? I imagine there's probably some exceptions.

**Ms. Ulrich:** — It is a requirement for every municipality to have a certified administrator. The associations do have conditional certification process for administrators working towards that certification, but that is managed by the administrator associations.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Is there any provision within the Act, or might

have been contemplated, to allow for election observers in cases where there may be concerns of non-compliance?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — So we haven't made any changes in that area. In the Acts they're called "agents," but they can be appointed as observers and observe how the election is being conducted, and the polls, and then raise any objections. So that is something that's already in the Act, and we haven't heard any concerns about those provisions being lacking.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that response. It's in subsection 3(c) . . . I'm sorry. Again I've kind of lost the exact section, but I'm sure you'll find this familiar. So:

Information, including a person's name, must be removed from the voter registry for the following reasons . . .

(c) In the opinion of the returning officer, the information is false.

[21:30]

And so my question is, under what circumstances . . . or what's contemplated in terms of situations where a returning officer would determine that to be the case? It just seems a bit open-ended.

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Sorry. Did you have the section number so I can look at the same section?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — I'm just trying to find it. I think it's somewhere around 53 though. Yes, 53.3(3)(c).

**Ms. Ulrich:** — So, sorry, there's a number of provisions related to the voters lists, as you are probably aware. And this is new, something we've added to be more in line with the provincial elections, so trying to encourage the use of voters lists because it does make for a smoother election, better information handling, and so on. And we will be doing some regulations around this as well, just because it is new.

But there's also the opportunity for voters to say, hey, you got that wrong — I shouldn't have been taken off, my dad shouldn't have been taken off. You know, something like that. And there's also the safety net, I guess, of nothing in the section prevents a voter whose name does not appear on a voters list from voting in accordance with the section. So if you're not on a voters list for some reason, if that name has been taken off by mistake, that absolutely does not prevent someone from voting.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. There is a provision or amendment made in section 24 I believe to give the returning officer the authority to establish polling places in rural municipalities. I hope I have that section correct, although my notes suggest otherwise.

Anyways, I'm wondering if you can tell me if there are criteria or requirements that have been identified in terms of where those polling places will be established, and any other kind of guidance or expectations in terms of how the returning officer makes that decision.

**Ms. Ulrich:** — So the current section, the way it is right now is that the council of a rural municipality would name one or more

polling places within for each division. And so because that is a council decision now, that's one of the areas where, you know, it could possibly have the appearance of council interfering — well, I'm going to put the poll in a place that is more favourable to the people that I think will vote for me, for example. So we changed that to the returning officer. Now the only requirement for where it is, is that there must be one in each division.

**Mr. Nasewich:** — I'd add that in the very next section — which we didn't change in the bill — there is criteria for polling areas and places. And so they are to be established in such a way that there's an equal number of voters. If there's more than one in an area, that they can vote on all matters on which they're entitled to vote. That they're situated within or close to certain polling areas and polling places. And if wards are established, that there's at least one in each ward, but they can also be a general one that applies to all wards.

So there is criteria in section 25 that we didn't change that provides some direction for returning officers.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. So these are for local elections and applies to both rural and urban municipalities, correct? I'm just wondering in terms of, like a typical southern, sort of more central Saskatchewan rural municipality. How many polling stations would there be and where would they typically be located?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Thank you. Consulting our experts.

So in a rural municipality, what is fairly typical is they would have a polling place for each division, and those could all be actually located in the municipal office. So it would be, you're in division 1 you vote here, you're in division 3 you vote over here, like that. So if you have, you know, a fairly sparsely populated area, that's more practical.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that response. It's kind of what I expected to hear, so no surprises there I guess. What else? So I understand that nomination day is different depending on whether it's for a resort village or some other type of municipality, and I'm wondering if you could explain why there is that variance.

**Ms. Ulrich:** — So it is different for resort villages, but just because of when their elections are. But it's the same time requirements. And for resort villages, their elections happen on Saturdays instead of Wednesdays, and that's designed so that you have the most people in that community at the time. More likely to have more of the seasonal people there on a weekend. So it's the same time requirement, just a different point in the calendar.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that response. There are amendments to section 96 that allow a returning officer to decide the form and manner of a poll book. I guess I'm not really clear on, you know, what is in the poll book. And then are there potential issues that might arise if you have variants in different municipalities in terms of what that looks like. What was the reasoning behind this amendment?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — Well that amendment is to make the provisions more electronic-friendly. We have prescribed forms currently for the poll book, and it's really just recording the voters as they vote.

You put all those papers together and there's your poll book, right. And so the requirements for the information contained is the same, but they likely would want to use a spreadsheet or a database or something that is a little more, you know, conducive to conducting your election using electronic tools and not just relying on paper as it has been in the past. So that's really a modernization.

Part of that again is we want to encourage municipalities to use voters lists. So if they have information-sharing agreements with the provincial government, for example, they already have an excellent base in their voter registry to generate those voters lists. Of course that's all in electronic format. And just using this information, it's often the same information but it might just have a different name depending on the use, where it is in the Act. So just giving them flexibility so that they don't have to use the prescribed form for that, which just isn't going to work if they're using any kind of electronic database for that information.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay, thank you for that response. Is it the case that where there is a tie in the votes that the tie is addressed by drawing names? Or are there other provisions that are available?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — That's a request that we had. So currently a tie is decided by drawing names, and the request was, well we'd like to have the ability to have another by-election to determine the winner. So now we decided to leave it as an option. Because we did hear from a number of stakeholders who said, well we don't necessarily want to have a by-election if there's a tie, we're happy with just drawing the name. So we left it as an option.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Okay. Thank you for that. I wonder if, Mr. Minister, you want to comment at all on how you think these amendments might lead to greater voter participation. You know, are some of these amendments targeted directly at achieving that end result? What kinds of amendments were considered with that in mind, and what was included or not?

[21:45]

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — So I think there are a number of initiatives in this bill that will hopefully increase voter turnout. I think that's certainly the goal. And there's a couple of larger ones and then a few smaller ones, and I'll just touch on the larger ones first.

I guess, the whole piece around advance polls, and just from, I think, our experience with the provincial election, you see how many people go out to those polls earlier. And you know, it's almost 50 per cent of the vote is done before election day, and that's been beneficial to provincial. And so you translate that to municipal, and so advance polls are one.

The second piece would be around the returning officer having the ability to suggest, set up polls in various locations that weren't perhaps done before, whether it be in a hospital or a long-term care facility. And so hopefully that allows people that maybe couldn't get out to vote the ability to vote in a poll set up closer to them.

Those would be two of the larger ones. Some of the smaller ones would be, you know, centred around if a student is going to school, a student, and they have a spouse living with them. The

spouse wasn't able to vote, just the student, so this allows this spouse to vote in that location. And the second kind of the smaller ones would be around a personal care home. And people working within a personal care home can vote in that location if that's where the poll is.

So you know, hopefully those will increase voter turnout. I mean, we're all working on — whether it's federal, provincial, municipal, or school boards — trying to get people out to vote as much as possible, and those were suggestions that were made that we've accepted.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that reply. Earlier there was mention made of, you know, the poll books and aiding in digitization, which kind of brings up the issue around protection of personal information. Can you explain or tell how these amendments will ensure that people's private information stays protected?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — So in the provisions added there's a voter registry and there's a voters list. So the voter registry is what would be used to collect information that would include personal information. And so that would be protected under LAFOIP [*The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*], and you know, there would be requirements around keeping that secure and so on.

Now when it comes to the election, they would generate a voters list. And so that would not have personal contact information. For example, it would have just names, and then people would have the opportunity to correct that list. So the personal information is in the registry, which is not public, and the voters list is public, that would not contain those details.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that reply. I may have reached . . . I might have, but I'm just doing a quick check here to ensure that I've asked all the questions that were prepared. Oh, it's just the same question over and over again: why wasn't the election date changed? So I guess we've basically canvassed that question, Mr. Minister, unless you have any further to add?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Yes, I just have one other comment. When do you think it should be?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — There was high interest in mid-May.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Mid-May?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Yes, towns and cities for mid-May.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — And that's from SARM as well?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — No. No, there wasn't. I think the thinking was that, you know, SARM could keep it where they want it, but towns and cities would prefer to sort of break away.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Okay. So then when would you put school division elections? In an area that is mainly, that RMs make up most of that division, when would you have the election for school divisions then?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Are you trying to turn the tables?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — No. I mean, it's easy to criticize, but I would like to find a solution. And you seem to think that our solution is not correct, so what would your solution be in that case?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Yeah. I am in my role asking the questions and bringing forward the concerns and issues that were raised by these stakeholders, and so I'll refrain from answering that question.

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — That's why more than . . . As an opposition that thinks they're going to be government — after the last poll, that's what we were hearing from benches — I think you should have a position on it.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Oh, I do have one final question here. This was around the number of days for advance polls. Were there requests to increase the number of days for advance polls? Or where exactly did you land on that?

**Ms. Ulrich:** — No, we did not hear any requests in that regard. I would say that change is incremental. So this is the first time that all municipalities will be required to have an advance poll, and that's an important step. And you know, as that becomes the common practice and the standard, then certainly we're . . .

As I said before, we do this post-election survey to hear suggestions and issues. And if we hear that there should be more days for advance polls, then certainly we'll look at that in future amendments. We do amend this Act quite often.

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you for that reply. And with that I have no further questions, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. Seeing no more questions, we will proceed with the vote on the clauses. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 51 inclusive agreed to.]

**The Chair:** — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2022*.

I would ask a member to move the report of Bill No. 105, *The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2022* without amendment. Ms. Lambert moves. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. That completes our committee's business for tonight. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

**Hon. Mr. McMorris:** — Very brief. Thanks again to the officials and the committee for sitting this late into the night. So thank you very much.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. Do you have any closing comments?

**Ms. Ritchie:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, just to thank the committee, the officials present, the minister for their long hours here this evening and answers to questions, very thoughtful responses. It's very much appreciated. And I wish you all a good night.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Ms. Ritchie. I would also like to echo thanking the minister for his long hours here tonight and good job, and the staff and you too as well, Ms. Ritchie, along with the rest of the committee and also the staff here and Hansard. I'd like to thank everybody.

I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Keisig has moved. Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. The committee stands adjourned until Tuesday, May 2nd, 2023 at 3:30.

[The committee adjourned at 21:58.]