

# AURORA COLLEGE TRANSFORMATION

# Quarterly Report

JUNE 2022



## Project Status/Overview

As part of the Aurora College Transformation, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Aurora College continue to work in conjunction with one another to meet critical milestones. The Aurora College transformation began in October 2018 and is structured around three phases. Each phase helps to ensure work is done in the right order and at the right time of the multi-year transformation process.

**Phase 1 is now complete.** This phase of the transformation was focused on strengthening the foundation and planning for change. Aurora College working groups and project teams reached more than 45 critical and key milestones across five areas: Academic Program Management, Accountability, Governance, Operations, and Recruitment and Retention of Students. For details on what was completed during Phase 1 read our February Quarterly Report located on the Aurora College Transformation website at <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/aurora-transformation/>.

With the completion of Phase 1, foundational planning for the Aurora College Transformation has been completed and we are now able to start implementing concrete changes to start to create a polytechnic university for the Northwest Territories.

**Currently, the project is in phase 2** of the transformation process which includes several actions and milestones. This phase is an exciting one. We take what was shared with us through targeted engagement with students, the college community, Indigenous governments, community members and more, and put it into products that share what we've heard. Students can get excited about the future of attending the polytechnic university. We will start to visualize the polytechnic university's physical form in phase 2 and continue to explore its ability to increase access to high-quality post-secondary education for Northerners.

## Phase 2: Transformational Change

Phase 2 includes, but is not limited to, site selection for the polytechnic university Yellowknife North Slave Campus, public release of the Facilities Master Plan and the re-establishment of the Aurora College Board of Governors. Completion of each of these items is critical to ongoing progress.

## Site Selection

The GNWT has determined that Tin Can Hill is the optimal location for the polytechnic university Yellowknife North Slave campus. That parcel of land will support the goal of the polytechnic university to increase residents' access to quality post-secondary education while providing opportunities for students to learn in a beautiful, natural Northern environment that gives them the space and resources they need to thrive.

### **Site Selection – How We Got Here**

Establishing an entirely new campus is a far more complex process than enhancing or expanding existing campuses or community learning centres.

Planning for a new Yellowknife campus can only succeed if considered a part of the overall polytechnic university. Success is always framed in terms of the benefits to all NWT residents.

A suitable site was identified for a future Yellowknife North Slave campus and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Aurora College and the City of Yellowknife have been in discussion around next steps to transfer the land. Most recently, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the GNWT and City of Yellowknife to solidify a path forward and clarify the role of each party in transferring ownership of the land and establishing it as a campus. It is important to note that the form and function of the future Yellowknife campus and how it is experienced will depend on its land use and physical context (i.e., the "environment"), and to what extent the campus is integrated or distinct from that environment. This understanding of land, form and function integration has formed the basis for both the investigation of potential sites and the targeted stakeholder engagements that took place to determine their feasibility.

Subject matter experts looked at how campuses across Canada and around the world are chosen and developed. They also heard from students, staff and Indigenous governments about what elements were most important when looking at the best location for the future campus.

Through the research conducted, it was determined that there were three different models that could be applied to help narrow the options for a new campus in Yellowknife:

1. Downtown Integrated (multiple disconnected buildings);
2. Peripheral Distinct (single large space on the city periphery); or
3. Central Distinct (single large space within or close to the city core).

*Figure 1. Campus Model Strengths*

Considerations	Downtown Integrated	Central Distinct	Peripheral Distinct
Flexibility to accommodate and manage growth	○	●	●
Critical mass to support complete campus	●	●	○
Ability to establish campus identity	○	●	●
Presence of hard infrastructure	●	●	?
Accessible by public transit	●	○	○
Options for parking	○	●	●
Proximity to existing and future housing	○	●	?
Proximity to community amenities	?	●	○
Proximity to potential academic partners	?	?	?
Potential for local economic impact	●	○	○

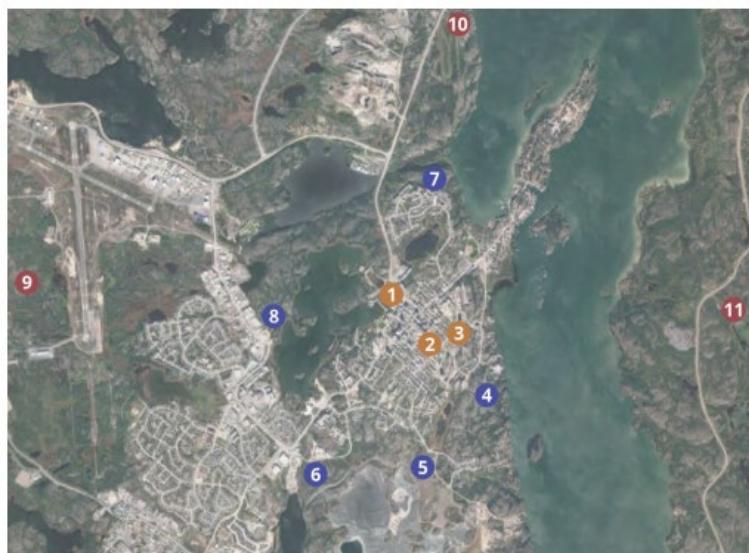
● Strength  
○ Sufficient  
○ Weakness  
○ Unknowns

Each model has different characteristics that shape the utility, learning experience and potential for growth. There are common campus design considerations among institutions in Canada that are reflected in the site selection considerations for the new Yellowknife campus. These considerations are reflected in Figure 1. In addition to referencing these considerations during the selection process, the importance of timing (i.e., can it be done quickly?) and cost (i.e., can it be done efficiently?) were also considered.

A review of Yellowknife and surrounding land identified sites that met the technical requirements of a new campus, and these sites were organized under each campus model as seen in the chart below/Figure 2.

<b>Downtown Integrated Options:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Site 1: City Gateway / Visitors Centre</li><li>• Site 2: Block 38 (51st and 50th)</li><li>• Site 3: Akaitcho Hall</li></ul>
<b>Central Distinct Options:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Site 4: Tin Can Hill</li><li>• Site 5: Con Mine</li><li>• Site 6: Taylor Road South</li><li>• Site 7: Niven Phase III</li><li>• Site 8: Old Airport Road / Frame Lake</li></ul>
<b>Peripheral Distinct Options:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Site 9: Airport Area</li><li>• Site 10: by Giant Mine</li><li>• Site 11: Former Treatment Centre</li></ul>

Figure 2



**Prospective Downtown Integrated sites** provided only the minimal space and would present many of the same challenges to growth experienced by the current Aurora College Campus at Northern United Place.

**Peripheral Distinct sites** were deemed to have potential, but an initial review suggested they would be more costly and would not draw students or provide a genuine university experience relative to the other two models.

**Central Distinct sites** balance land availability with the potential for an attractive and fully functional campus that can grow incrementally. This was determined to be the most appropriate approach.

The next step was to examine the sites associated with the Central Distinct Model and work through the potential of each site. Sites included:

- Old Airport Road/Frame Lake: This site was taken out of consideration because the availability of land in the area is limited by an interim land withdraw.

- Niven Phase III: This site was taken out of consideration by the land owner(s).
- Con Mine: This site was taken out of consideration due to potential environmental liabilities and timing of availability.
- Taylor Road South: This site was taken out of consideration due to location. It is surrounded by old tailings ponds from Con Mine that significantly limit the potential for establishing a campus.
- Tin Can Hill: This site was reviewed multiple times and considered in the context of technical requirement, design limitations and opportunities for future expansion. Based on these considerations, it was identified as the most optimal. A few additional benefits of the selected site include:
  - **Size:** This property is large enough to accommodate all required campus facilities, campus grounds, and an expansion of the campus facilities in future – while also establishing and maintaining a sizable natural preserve on site.
  - **Character:** Tin Can Hill is an undeveloped site exemplifying the rocky, treed landscape of the subarctic Canadian Shield, and occupies a wide waterfront with unencumbered views and direct access to Great Slave Lake. There is a great opportunity to develop a striking and unique campus identity here, one that communicates intimately with the landscape of the North Slave Region. The site creates a feeling of being embedded in nature, and even being remote to the city making it an ideal locale for establishing a peaceful and secure environment.
  - **Location:** The downtown core of Yellowknife is a ten-minute walk from Tin Can Hill. Services and amenities such as grocery stores, restaurants, retail, banks, and government services are all within walking distance from the site. In addition, an existing transit line runs down School Draw Avenue (directly adjacent to the site) and could be extended to the new campus. Through engagements, we have heard that students from across the NWT should feel at home at the polytechnic university, and that access to services and amenities for themselves and their families is important. For students with families, there are two high schools and three elementary schools within a 1.5km radius.
  - **Current Use/Ownership:** The site is currently owned by the City of Yellowknife and is primarily used as a recreational site by dog-walkers and skiers. This use can be maintained and potentially enhanced on the natural preserve that is intended to occupy a large portion of the new campus grounds.

The identification of a site for the Yellowknife North Slave campus is critical for the completion of the Aurora College Facilities Master Plan, due to be completed in summer 2022. Details on the proposed campus will be shared when the Facilities Master Plan is ready for release, but it is envisioned as a vibrant, supportive community, built with a dual focus on student safety and an inspiring learning environment. Its grounds and facilities will be designed to celebrate Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. The campus environment will be integrated with the natural landscape, supportive of land-based learning, and centred around cultural safety and diversified support.

## Facilities Master Plan

The Facilities Master Plan (FMP) will be a strategic document developed by the GNWT and Aurora College. It will be forward looking to the future needs of a polytechnic university, providing a roadmap for the enhancement and expansion of current Aurora College facilities over the next 5, 10 and 20 years.

The FMP is a strategic document that the polytechnic university will use to plan the enhancement and expansion of facilities across the Northwest Territories (NWT), including those in the Fort Smith and Inuvik locations. This includes infrastructure such as academic buildings, student housing, outdoor learning and ceremonial spaces, as well as vehicle and pedestrian routes. Importantly, it will empower the polytechnic university Board of Governors, GNWT and other co-investment partners to collaborate in the ongoing growth of the institution.

The FMP does not commit the GNWT or Aurora College to fund or move forward with any particular infrastructure project. Rather, it will help to ensure informed and strategic decision making during the establishment of annual capital budgets.

Work is well underway to finalize the FMP and the goal is to release it to the public in late summer 2022.

### Facilities Master Plan – How We Got Here

In the summer of 2021, the GNWT, including the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and Department of Infrastructure initiated the FMP process. A Request for Proposals was issued to support development of a plan for the polytechnic, including engagement. A team of architects and planners led by Taylor Architecture Group, and including Urban Strategies Inc. and PlanIt North Inc., were retained to develop the FMP to support the transformation of Aurora College to a polytechnic university.

To make sure that the FMP is comprehensive and reflects the needs and interests of the people who will be using the facilities, targeted engagements took place to support its development. Indigenous governments, partners, key stakeholders, students, the College community and local community members have been engaged with and have provided valuable information that will help shape the FMP. This engagement was led by the contractors and a *What we Heard Report* is being finalized and will be released with the FMP as a companion document.

## Board of Governors Recruitment

Work is currently underway to prepare for recruitment for the new Aurora College Board of Governors under the revised *Aurora College Act*, which came into force May 2022. Changes to the legislation were an important step toward establishing the features of a polytechnic university.

### Board Recruitment – How We Got Here

The *Aurora College Act* was recently amended and has resulted in a new tricameral governance system that will help Aurora College to be effective, efficient and sustainable. Aurora College's new governance model has three bodies that together govern the college, at arm's length from government. The Board of

Governors is one of those three bodies and will be responsible for the strategies and long-term direction and movement towards the College, and eventually polytechnic university's vision, mission and values.

The Board of Governors will play an intermediary role between the institution and the Minister. The Board will also steer the institution in a way that addresses both its unique needs and the public it serves. This is an important milestone for the Aurora College Transformation and work to establish a Board of Governors remains a priority for the GNWT and Aurora College.

## What's Next

This is an exciting time for Aurora College Transformation. The transformation process is, at its core, a series of steps to build capacity and create opportunities for success. Below are some items of interest to look out for next.

- Following the completion of the Facilities Master Plan, the GNWT and Aurora College will share it with Indigenous governments, stakeholders and the public. There will be opportunities for the public to provide comment on specific elements identified in the FMP during the public processes for re-zoning and development, which will take place later.
- Aurora College will soon be seeking nominations for the new competency-based Board of Governors. The Board will be made up of public members with a wide range of expertise and at least five will be Indigenous residents of the NWT.
- Yellowknife residents will also be eager to learn about next steps for the site location for the polytechnic university Yellowknife North Slave campus. The narrowing of potential sites was done based on the needs of the future polytechnic university and limited by the overall availability of land. The approach taken was to engage a defined set of partners and stakeholders around their needs, and then use that information to help inform decision-making. As noted above, Broad public engagement will occur as part of the re-zoning process. Aurora College would be the proponent in the zoning process and the City of Yellowknife is the regulator.

To follow along with the transformation process and see what's coming next, visit the Aurora college Transformation website: <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/aurora-transformation/>.