

Response from Council Candidate Janna Swales

Conflict Declaration:

I am the Executive Director of the Yukon Transportation Museum and a board member of the Yukon Historical & Museums Association. Before Yukon Government became the Yukon Transportation Museum's landlord, we were also issued property tax bills and were also required to file abatement paperwork annually. Our property tax is currently handled with a Yukon Government – City of Whitehorse tax in lieu agreement.

NGOs are mandate driven and streamlined organisations: they produce results. I will encourage the city to continue, and expand, on its active partnering with NGOs to deliver on services, instead of offering them inhouse, whenever possible. I will support the City increasing its pursuit of partnership opportunities with NGOs to deliver on its responsibilities.

This tax situation issue has been persisting for too long and must be resolved – I hold an uncomplicated position which, in summary, is that I am in support of MacBride Museum not carrying the burden of property tax.

It concerns me that 23 small organizations were billed 165,000. I understand that some, and perhaps most, received tax abatement. My stance is that on a per-dollar basis, a properly run NGO will always offer more value to the community than a well-run government would be able to. I think that the NGO tax abatement process is a great example of an easy way that the city can remove an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy and red tape.

What is tax abatement? From my perspective as a not for profit manager – it is an annual form that must be completed by the organization, reviewed by the city, and approved every year. In my experience at the Yukon Transportation Museum, this was a scary form – the reality was that if not approved we would have had to drastically reduce services: people would lose their jobs. Our bill a decade ago was approximately \$25,000. MacBride has also expressed this type of severe impact.

Let's relieve these valuable organizations of yet another piece of paperwork that dilutes their ability to fulfill their important mandates. They all serve our City in many healthy and important ways – not least as builders of our social and cultural fabric, catalysts for economic growth, creators of safe spaces and community recreation, and attractants for skilled talent and business.

I look forward to hearing and learning from other councillors' perspectives on the matter, should I be elected to serve the city next week.

Dear Mayoral and Council Candidates:
2021

October 11th,

Re: Tax Situation at MacBride Museum and other Charities

The City of Whitehorse has three tax classes: “business”, residential and agricultural. All NPO/NGO/Charities who own land are taxed at the “business” rate.

Between 2012 and 2015 MacBride worked with Council and staff to develop and approve a tax solution that ensured MacBride would not pay going forward. Council passed this resolution, which is still on the books at the City: “2015-12-07 as amended by 2015-12-08 (June 15) COMMUNITY SERVICE GRANTS

It was duly moved and seconded:

THAT museums that hold title to their own property be exempted from the provisions of the Municipal Charges and Community Services Grant Policy and the City Grant-making Policy and be provided with a tax grant equal to the full amount of property tax owed;”

Then after almost 70 years of 100% exemption / abatement, in 2018, the City sent MacBride a tax bill. We believe that MacBride continues to be tax-exempt based on the Council vote 2015-12-08 however we do not have the financial or legal resources to fight City Hall. Our website has a section outlining the history of this issue.

MacBride is an entity that solely exists for the benefit of preserving history and showcasing it to our community and visitors. It is not financially viable for MacBride to pay taxes with the O&M that we receive and to remain open year-round.

As a candidate, we are asking the following questions

1. Will you honour resolution 2015-12-08, which has not been rescinded, and provide a 100% exemption to MacBride?
2. Will you commit to a review of the tax classes at the City with a view to creating a tax class for museums at a rate of zero that does not harm the operations of the organizations in the first year of your mandate?

3. We invite you to review the list of 23 charities/NGOS paying \$165K to the City in taxes in 2021. The City has been in a “surplus” position for many years yet taxes museums and service organizations in our community. Will you commit to an immediate review (year one) of Municipal Charges and Community Services Grant Policy and the City Grant-making Policy?

We would appreciate your reply by noon on Friday, October 15th. We will be sending replies to our members and posting them on our social media.

Regards,

Patricia Cunning
Executive Director