

Ombud Releases Special Report on Fairness in Property Assessment and Taxation

The Northwest Territories Ombud, Colette Langlois, released her special report today, *Taxation Without Property: Fairness in Property Assessment and Taxation*.

The report follows an investigation into a complaint made by an individual who asked the office to look into his property tax bill for a parcel of land in his community that he had once lived on as an unauthorized occupant, but that had been vacant for several years. Even though he had no legal interest in the property, and was no longer occupying it, taxes and penalties were accumulating each year because he was still listed as the assessed owner.

Following the Ombud's intervention, officials in Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), which is responsible for property assessment, and Finance, which is responsible for property taxation in non tax-based communities, cooperated to find a solution for the complainant which reduced his outstanding property tax debt considerably and removed him from the assessment roll for the parcel in question.

The Ombud's recommendations are aimed at ensuring that other people who were unauthorized occupants of what is now vacant land and are still being charged taxes, can have their assessment status and property taxes reconsidered as well. The recommendations also call for more accessible information about how property assessment and taxation apply to unauthorized occupants, the Territorial Board of Revision process for requesting reviews of property assessments, and the Property Tax Arrears Relief Program.

"This complaint is an example of how citizen's rights can get accidentally crushed in the complexities of government. It is also an example of one of the basic roles of the Ombud, which is to make sure that administrative problems like this get to the attention of the senior officials who have the power to fix them. The Departments worked together to find a good solution for the complainant and are now also working on fixing the larger issues behind the complaint. I see this as a very positive outcome for everyone," said Langlois.

The Ministers of both Finance and MACA have substantially accepted these recommendations on behalf of their departments and indicated that they have already made some progress on implementing them. The Ombud will provide an update on the implementation of these recommendations in a future report.

For more information contact:

Colette Langlois, Ombud

ombud@nwtombud.ca

1-844-686-6283