

March 30, 2026

City Planners and Administration
The City of Yellowknife Planning Department
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

To whom it may concern,

Re: Site-Specific Zoning By-law Amendment Request

Nunastar NWT Ltd. is pleased to present the Development Permit (“DP”) submission for a spectacular new hotel in the City of Yellowknife, N.W.T. The proposed Explorer Hotel 2.0 (a temporary working name only) is a 150-room hotel located adjacent to the existing Explorer Hotel. It is uniquely positioned on a massive rock escarpment along 49th Avenue and uses the same access point currently serving the Explorer Hotel.

The development submission documents include:

- architectural design drawings,
- proposed property line drawings,
- civil design drawings,
- a snow and wind study,
- a traffic impact assessment study, and
- sun path/shadow diagrams.

Along with the submission documents, Nunastar is requesting site-specific zoning request. Based on our pre-submission discussion, given the unique circumstances of the site and the variances requested within the Commercial Mixed-Use Zone, we understand that a Direct Control Zone would be more appropriate.

The following rationale and justifications for the requested variances provide insight into the design considerations that form the basis of the urban planning and site-specific decisions made in respect of this project. These considerations reflect the unique location and topography of the site and should be considered in conjunction with the variance requests. All variance requests are based on Yellowknife’s Zoning By-Law No. 5045, as amended March 25, 2024.

Our proposal fully embodies and promotes the stated objectives of the zoning regulations:

Visually Interesting and Appealing:

With the objective of designing an exceptional new hotel for Yellowknife that is architecturally significant with unique northern flair, we collaborated with our architects to create a design that is both striking and contextually sensitive. The building introduces a bold, northern contemporary aesthetic that will elevate Yellowknife’s skyline and serve as a landmark for years to come. It makes a statement of warmth with wood-inspired finishes, honest simplicity with contemporary minimalist lines and deep respect for the surrounding landscape through its sensitive contrast with the development-defining natural rock escarpment. The feedback we have received has been extraordinary with community, industry, and government stakeholders—locally and through travel trade shows both domestically and internationally—responding very positively to the design. They were excited by the building’s design, its features, its colours, and the composition of its proposed rooms, services, and amenities.

Pedestrian-Oriented Environment:

A defining feature of the development site is the untouched natural rock escarpment extending off the development site and into the roadway along 49th Avenue. Due to this massive natural feature, constructing a walkway along the northwest edge of the road was never attempted by the city and is neither appropriate nor feasible now. Doing so would require extensive blasting, and the resulting sheer cliff would be a visual eyesore and would create an impractical, uncomfortable and unsafe pedestrian condition. The most suitable interpretation of the guideline is to preserve and celebrate the natural rock escarpment by leaving it untouched as a natural podium for the built form, creating a seamless dialogue between architecture and landscape. The existing sidewalk along the southeast side of the street provides a pleasant and suitable pedestrian pathway past the site. For similar reasons, the development proposes utilizing the same existing vehicular and pedestrian access point off the street as the most natural and visually attractive solution. This approach avoids creating additional driveways, eliminating new curb cuts and minimizing additional traffic related impacts along 49th Avenue.

Request for Variances:

#1 – 11.5 Building Setbacks

Nunastar is requesting site-specific setbacks integral to the request for rezoning. As noted, the proposed site has unique topography naturally separating the building footprint from adjoining roadways, pedestrians and properties. Along 49th Avenue, the proposed building is inaccessible

sitting 3 to 7 meters above the street level with the pedestrian experience located on the far side of the street. The proposed setback from the existing Explorer building has been coordinated to suit both buildings for access, code requirements, and circulation. The proposed setback on the northeast property line also utilizes the elevation change to help separate the buildings visually and practically for maintenance access. The existing vegetation helps screen the podium portion of the building on the northeast elevation.

#2 - 11.1.3.(b) Design Regulations – Massing:

The 6 meter and 3 meter “step back” was not considered to be practical or suitable for the following reasons:

- The requirement is inconsistent with the architectural style of the building. From a utilitarian point of view, this requirement is physically impossible to integrate into the double-loaded corridor design of the building and would render the project uneconomic.
- From a massing point of view, the proposed built form is considerably smaller yet complimentary to the massing, scale and context of the adjacent Explorer Hotel. The application of an arbitrary step back in this context would properly be considered prescriptive and unresponsive to the unique circumstances of this site.
- The proposed development does not correlate to typical design conditions referenced for standard street front lots along Franklin Avenue or along other typical grid patterned downtown city streets.

#3 - 11.1.3.(c) Design Regulations – Building Orientation and Articulation:

As noted earlier, the unique and primary site-specific condition impacting the building orientation and articulation is the massive rock escarpment forming a natural base or podium of the development. This rock escarpment was a fundamental driver of the orientation, access and articulation of the proposed building.

- *Pedestrian Access:* Due to the extreme topography of the site, direct pedestrian access to the building front is not feasible. With the main floor elevation of the proposed hotel being 4 to 9 meters above the street, direct pedestrian access from the street to the building frontage is not feasible. Consequently, the primary entrance is oriented toward the interior of the site, ensuring functional

access while preserving the untouched integrity of the natural street facing escarpment. The most compelling vistas of the structure are experienced from vantage points all along 49th Avenue including the major intersection with 48th Street. A dramatic view of the project and the escarpment will also be available down 47th Street from Franklin Ave.

- *Vehicular access:* The existing access from 49th street has operated problem free for over 50 years and is proposed to serve both hotels in the future. As noted above, this approach serves to minimize the impact on 49th Avenue.

#4 - 11.1.3.(c) Design Regulations – Building Orientation and Articulation:

Base, Middle and Top: We suspect the requirement for a “base, middle and top” would be viewed by most design professionals as being overly prescriptive and highly limiting if applied on a broad-brush basis. It has little to do with good design and in this case, is antithetical to the architectural style of the building. The design of the proposed building is anchored by a strong base composed of the massive rock escarpment and the pedestal style foundation. The body of the building is composition of strong proportioned elements defined by positive and negative space.

Orientation and Articulation: The proposed building is highly responsive to the topography and physical context. The orientation of the building animates and responds to the alignment of 49th street. While separated by a substantial distance, the articulated floorplate not only acknowledges, but signals and accentuates the unique curve of the roadway adding substantial visual interest at the 49/48th intersection and along 49th street.

#5 - 11.1.3.(d) Design Regulations – Facades and Materials:

Materiality and Expression: Overall, the proposed building boldly exhibits a Nordic or Northern-inspired aesthetic, with a sophisticated wood-inspired cladding that evokes warmth and authenticity, highlighted by architectural lighting. A bold and distinctive “picture frame” element at the southwest end of the building is a clue to a beautiful vista worth seeing. In addition to a panoramic view of Frame Lake and the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre, it offers an invitation to a spectacular sunset every evening – in a front row seat. As pedestrians or passengers arrive and rise-up the driveway, this picture frame element also invites them to explore around the corner to discover the building entrance.

The building façade along 49th Avenue utilizes two building materials with depth and earth tone color supported strong detailing. Street level experience along 49th Street is enhanced by a

large-scale art-mural installation at the building’s basement level. The Hotel’s façade uses a warm wood-inspired finish that lends itself to blending into the surrounding wooded area behind the proposed development towards Niven Lake. The architectural brown accents tie to the accent colours from the adjacent Explorer Hotel, allowing both buildings to tell their own story but also balancing one another.

#6 - 11.1.3.(f). (ii) Design Regulations – Parking Regulation:

Loading Dock: The proposed location of the Loading dock on 49th Avenue responds to the topography of the site. The loading doors and garbage cans have been integrated into the building design to help soften the effect of the services on 49th Avenue. The proposed location has also been referred to in the attached traffic assessment report as a safe use and works with existing pedestrian and traffic levels. This location of the loading dock also minimizes traffic and pedestrian conflicts on and off the site.

#7 – Building Signage – Monument Signage within Roadway Setback:

A proposed monument sign has been depicted within the roadway setback visible from 49th Avenue. The proposed location is elevated on the existing rock outcrop and is the ideal location for visual clarity while safely elevated within the landscape area.

Preserve the Opportunity to Subdivide for the Creation of the Hotel Site

As discussed with the administration, it is important for ownership and financing purposes to plan for the proposed building to be a separate site from the existing Explorer Hotel. We expect that this subdivision to be completed prior to the completion of construction and occupancy of the building. Please provide comments concerning this proposal so that the subdivision can progress as we move through the development process.

We look forward to connecting with you to discuss any aspect of our application or any concerns you may have. You at reach me at email address, direct and mobile phone numbers.

We think this project is one of the most exciting private sector initiatives for City of Yellowknife for many years. It holds the prospect of enhancing tourism of all types and supporting everyone’s optimistic vision for a healthier and more prosperous downtown.

Sincerely,

Project Name: Explorer Hotel 2.0 – Yellowknife NWT



Nunastar NWT Ltd.

Per: Scott Hanson
Design & Development Manager