



Information Sheet No. 8: Assembly Time Periods

The business of the Legislative Assembly is divided into different time periods. This information sheet explains the difference between a sitting day, a Sitting, a session and a Legislative Assembly (or Legislature).

Sitting day

Each day that MLAs gather in the Assembly Chamber to transact their business is referred to as a “sitting day.” The days and hours of sitting are outlined in Standing Order 2(1) which says, “The time for the meeting of the Assembly shall be 1:00 p.m. on each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday unless otherwise ordered. The normal hour of adjournment shall be 5:30 p.m.” Though 5:30 p.m. is the normal hour of adjournment a Member may move a motion to adjourn the Assembly anytime during the sitting day. This often happens just before 5:30 p.m.

It is also possible to extend these sitting hours. Standing Order 2(5) says, “A motion to sit beyond the normal hour of adjournment must be moved by the Government House Leader or designate at least one-half hour before the normal hour of adjournment. Such motion shall specify the business to be dealt with and may be moved either with the Speaker in the Chair or while the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole.” Motions to extend sitting hours are rare.

Notwithstanding Standing Order 2(1), the Assembly does not sit on holidays (Easter Monday, Thanksgiving Monday, Remembrance Day, etc.) The number of sitting days per Legislative Assembly is not fixed. There were 211 sitting days during the 31st Legislative Assembly (2002-2006) and 283 sitting days during the 32nd Legislative Assembly (2006-2011).

Sitting

A “Sitting” is a group of consecutive sitting days. Section 13 of the *Yukon Act* says, “The Legislative Assembly shall sit at least once every 12 months.” The Standing Orders refer to the Assembly sitting twice a year - in the Spring and Fall - for a maximum of 60 sitting days per calendar year.

The Yukon Legislative Assembly does not have a fixed parliamentary calendar. It is up to the Premier to decide when a Spring or Fall Sitting will begin. Standing Order 73(2) says that once the Premier has decided when the Assembly will begin sitting, he or she “shall advise the Speaker...in sufficient time to allow the Speaker opportunity to give a minimum of two weeks notice of the date on which the House shall meet.” This rule does not apply to a Sitting that takes place immediately after a general election.

When the Assembly reconvenes for a Spring or Fall Sitting, the government has five sitting days to introduce all the bills it wants dealt with during that Sitting. A government bill may be introduced after the fifth sitting day, but this requires the unanimous consent of the House. Once all the bills are introduced the three party House leaders will negotiate how many sitting days there will be in that Sitting. Standing

Order 75(2) allows for a minimum of 20 sitting days and a maximum of 40 sitting days for any one Sitting. If the House leaders cannot reach an agreement, Standing Order 75(3) says the Spring and Fall Sittings shall be a maximum of 30 days each. At the end of the final sitting day of a Sitting the House will be adjourned until the Premier calls it together again in the manner described above.

Session

A Session begins with a Speech from the Throne. It ends when the Session is prorogued or the Assembly is dissolved for a new election. Ending a Session by prorogation effectively wipes the *Order Paper* clean. Any bills or motions still on the *Order Paper* are removed and the agenda commences anew – new Throne Speech, new bills, new motions, etc. There is no rule that determines how long a Session will be. That is up to the Premier. The 31st and 32nd legislative Assemblies were each one continuous session. There were two sessions during the 30th Legislative Assembly (2000-2002) and one session during the 29th Assembly (1996-2000). Since the 1990s the tendency has been toward fewer sessions. During the 1980s it was not uncommon for there to be a new session each year. That is no longer the case.

Legislative Assembly (Legislature)

A Legislative Assembly (or Legislature) begins on the day of a general election. The current Assembly – Yukon's 33rd Legislative Assembly – was elected on October 11, 2011. Yukon Legislative Assemblies are numbered consecutively beginning with the first wholly-elected territorial council, which was elected on June 28, 1909.

An Assembly ends when it is dissolved, either by law or when the Commissioner grants the Premier's request for dissolution. The Premier seeks dissolution when he or she wants to have a general election. The Premier has the right to ask the Commissioner to dissolve the Assembly at any time he or she wants. A Legislative Assembly, therefore, has no fixed time period, though there is - by law - a maximum length of time for it.

Section 11(1) of the *Yukon Act* says an Assembly can last a maximum of five years from the return of the writs (the official confirmation of results) of a general election. The writs for the most recent general election were returned on October 17, 2011. Accordingly, the current Legislative Assembly will, by law, dissolve on Monday, October 17, 2016.

To avoid an automatic dissolution of the 33rd Assembly, writs for the election for the 34th Assembly must be issued on, or before, Friday, October 14, 2016. Since the adoption of party politics in 1978 no Yukon Legislative Assembly has lasted the legal maximum. Based on this practice, we can expect the Premier to ask the Commissioner to dissolve the 33rd Assembly, and for the Commissioner to order the Chief Electoral Officer to issue writs of election for the 34th Assembly on or before October 14, 2016.

For more information contact the Office of the Legislative Assembly at
Box 2703 (A-9) • Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, Y1A 2C6
Phone: 867-667-5494 • Fax: 867-393-6280 • E-Mail: yla@gov.yk.ca

Or visit the Legislative Assembly's website at: <http://www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca>