

AGNUTMAQAN

Welcome to your third edition of *Agnutmaqan*

This edition is a summary of proceedings and matters discussed during the regular Band Council meeting held in October 2013. Previous editions included comprehensive overviews of the strategic plan and program plans for the year, and can be referenced again as background to this report.

Agnutmaqan will help keep you as Band Members informed and will enable you to engage in the ongoing discussions of your Band Council.

Pronunciation: *a-gê-nu-dê-ma-hgan*

Meanings: story; news; report; message; discussion

CHECKING AND REFLECTING

The third quarterly council meeting of the QMFNB was held over two days in Gander on October 25th and 26th. There were the regular reports and discussions, and taking care of business as each portfolio holder presented updates on each of the operational plans, noting where any adjustments were provided since June.

It was also a good time to take a serious look at how the Qalipu Mi'kmaq Band Council works. Being more than half way through the first year of the newly elected Chief and Councilors, Council spent considerable time reviewing the Strategic Plan and the Governance Model to make sure the organization was on track and the course corrected where required. QMFNB held its first Annual General Assembly on October 26, 2014 at the Albatross Hotel in Gander, NL. For a link to the first annual report click [here](#).

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

The council meeting started with a review of financial reports. The reports prove that close attention is being paid to getting maximum funding and managing expenditures, and insuring that Qalipu members are obtaining as much support as possible. With the full support of the Finance Committee, the management team was diligent in getting the most out of funds provided by government and through projects. They invested in analyzing taxation and found rebates. Some adjustments were made to program budgets related to the formation of the QMFNB which are not being funded through the Indian Act.

This is the first full base line budget for the Band, as in 2012-13 there was only a partial budget between elections and the end of the fiscal year. The discussions showed how the planning and budgeting will continue to be adjusted as the operation of the new band council continues to change, and as services and programs grow.

Council heard how there is constant demand on education funding. The budget for tuition contributions, books and allowances exceeded the projection by about 7%, however the budget was balanced with recovering and reassigning monies from clients who defaulted on, or did not use the allowances they were provided under the Post-Secondary Education program. Weighing the cost of collection and recovery, Council was informed that internal collections were more effective than using third party agencies to recover unused funds. Included were some readjustments on prior agreements made under the Federation of Newfoundland Indians.

There were no issues with the non-insured health benefits program, which still requires members be registered with the Indian Registrar.

Council members continued to learn about the intricacy of financial management for the Band. There were detailed discussions and explanations of many figures in the financial statements, from consolidating revenue to revising allotments for employment insurance, staff vacancies, and allocation of salaries and travel.

Council understands the need for scrutiny and responsible financial management, this is not something that is new to QMFN. Council was satisfied with the detailed, considerate cost control, financial management, in that no expenses are approved or costs covered without a program or known source of funds in place to cover them. Audits and receivables were confirmed to be in appropriate standings, and it was noted how the federal funding agency was quick to approve funding requests after their scrutiny and satisfaction that Qalipu is implementing sound financial management. Council was pleased that the Financial Committee and staff have detailed information ready for analysis and are always available to answer their questions. Council acknowledged their hard work in establishing new and improved systems and reports.

Council members agreed to review all portfolio reports and financial statements in advance to ensure Band Council meetings would focus on major points of interest, updates and issues that required their approval. Council members were encouraged to forward any concerns and questions to the CEO as they arose to be clarified and addressed prior to the next Band Council meeting.

INVESTING WITH CARE

Council knows that to sustain operations and create opportunity, Qalipu has to earn income from safe investments in profit making enterprises. Council wants community support initiatives for employment and income support that are very important to members; however at the same time realizing that it is expensive to offer. Creating wealth is done through economic development and the Qalipu Development Corporation (QDC) is tasked with this initiative. Taking care of communities and members is done through community initiatives projects and programs.

The Qalipu Development Corporation is a separate entity with its own board of directors, and is focused on developing only profitable enterprises. Council oversees and provides direction but final decisions are with the board of QDC. Work continues since last spring on refining the parameters, guidelines and equity participation levels for QDC investment. Before they are finalized, Council spent some time discussing ways to ensure there is fairness, accountability and transparency in how QDC manages investments.

Council directed that care be taken to support Qalipu members and avoid any unfair competition, while still encouraging high quality and profitable businesses offering products and services demanded by customers. Staff will check Ginu database to provide QDC with information about member related business and interests in a reasonable geographic area. Council also directed the Cultural Foundation committee to provide advice on factoring appropriate cultural and spiritual considerations in investment decisions.

Council spent some time discussing potential conflict of interest for themselves, staff and others in close connection to the Band and the Development Corporation. Council took the position that if the knowledge of an opportunity was gained from someone's role as a Councilor or their work as an employee or contractor, it would be considered conflict of interest. It also took the position that the perception of a Councilor, or employee or contractor partnering with the Band or a subsidiary of the Band could also be considered unethical. Council will continue to focus on using best practices and learning how other organizations and governing bodies set policies on conflict of interest.

As demand and interest continues to grow, operations and staffing of QDC will be enhanced with continued training and experienced professional guidance in financial analysis, procurement and planning. Discussions are ongoing as well about moving Mi'kmaq Commercial Fisheries (MCF) assets, e.g. boats under QDC, but leaving fishing and licenses with the Band.

Previous recommendations, and these Council discussions will be factored in the final investment strategy to be presented at a future meeting. There will be serious consideration and policies developed to address cultural and spiritual context, risk tolerance, fairness in competition, as well as making sure there is thorough analysis and assessment and best efforts to avoid known conflict of interest possibilities. Council will continue to receive updates and provide any direction that is in the best interest of Qalipu members.

TAKING THE RIGHT PATH – THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Council dedicates a lot of time reviewing the QMFN Strategic Plan. While only one year into the three year long term plan which was developed with the interim council prior to the election, Council is determined to make sure it stays on track however realizing that some adjustments needs to be made from time to time. The initial plan was developed after much consultation, including surveys, community meetings and interviews, and will continue to be evaluated.

[Click here to view the Strategic Plan,](#)

The Strategic plan has a number of objectives in eleven key areas and work continues on meeting those immediate, medium and long term objectives and goals. Council intends for this Plan to help steer the Band, and knows it will evolve as the Band matures. As a new organization, much of the work in the early phases was focused on the first election and setting up departments, programs and operations, budgets and staffing. As the band enters its second year, the organization is becoming established and meeting its immediate goals. Council had a session to review and adjust the strategic plan, its deadlines and specific actions, and incorporated feedback received from Councilors, members and staff. Chaired by a Council member, the review of the strategic plan will continue.

Council reinforced again the need for the plan to provide certainty, clarity and care in investing in economic development while at the same time taking care of communities and members.

The plan's portfolio holder system, with a Councilor taking the lead in areas such as finance, culture, health and social, training and post-secondary, will continue to evolve. As Councilors carry on with their learning and gain experience, there is a commitment to pay attention to major issues, trends and changes, and monitor how programs operate throughout the year.

Councilors also talked about establishing protocols for procurement, establishing a business development centre, improving ways to increase and track member feedback, and evaluating programs such as ASETS and Post-Secondary Education programs.

In discussing health and wellness, the importance of supporting a culture of general wellness was emphasized. There is value in spending time helping members access their federally funded benefits, but Council directed that additional resources be assigned to finding new funding to develop programs to improve awareness and activities leading to improved overall health and wellness of Qalipu members.

Celebrating and living the Qalipu Mi'kmaq culture and heritage is a priority for Council. While finding resources to build programs and support Mi'kmaq cultural activities is a challenge, work continues on creating a cultural foundation.

The strategic plan includes setting objectives for how the band operates. Financial plans include moving to multi-year budgets and activity plans when multi-year contribution agreements are made with government agencies. Human resources planning is proceeding with a focus meeting international standards i.e. ISO:9000, with priorities such as standardized electronic records. Communications planning includes focusing on keeping members informed, providing information in an easy to read and find format, training staff and Council, and presenting QMFN as a professional and caring organization.

Considerable attention was paid to making sure action is taken to develop positive and appropriate relations with major project resource and industrial developers and governments at all levels, and especially other aboriginal organizations in the province and Atlantic Canada. That includes exploring ways to advance Qalipu members' rights to traditional fishing rights and communal fisheries, knowing there has to be a balance between conservation, recreation and commercial success.

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES ON MAJOR PROJECTS

Councillors discussed the Band's position on relationships with developers of proposed projects. Chief Sheppard explained that letters of intent or memorandums of understanding with any developer are not endorsements of the project. They are meant to learn about the proposed development, the industry and its processes, as well as to examine any critical issues. Most importantly they help establish and prepare for opportunities for QMFNB and Qalipu members, opportunities that could include employment, training or business when a project is approved and it meets all federal and provincial regulations.

Councilors agreed they need to remain neutral and avoid being influenced by sensational or misinformed reports. Council members realize the potential of being misunderstood and getting caught up in publicity generated by protests, especially when such events are not always directly related. The protests about fracking that were tied to the Black Spruce Exploration plans for drilling was an example.

Council will be diligent in ensuring projects meet or exceed industry standards, and legislation. Council will seek independent and balanced advice and information, and ask for presentations about impacts and benefits. It will ask for critical analysis and make sure information is presented in a context that is relevant to members. Council wants to ensure each of its Councilors management and staff have solid evidence that Qalipu members will not be negatively impacted. It will also post information on the Qalipu website with links to sources of information about proposed projects and to any letters of intent and MOUs.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Council is determined to ensure QMFN is managed in an accountable and professional manner. It will pay careful attention to role and responsibilities, and to behaviors and rights of members, employees and Councilors. It will insist on using best practice and highest standards of operation. It will be thorough and responsible in assigning and managing authority and how decisions are made.

In the past year, much work has been done on establishing the best way to govern QMFNB, including learning from other aboriginal, municipal and government models. This is Qalipu's first elected council. The first annual general assembly will demonstrate access and accountability. Knowing there will be challenges and expecting the need for changes, Council reviewed the current governance model in detail. Councilors asked probing questions and described various situations that tested how Councilors should act.

Councilors are experiencing the challenges of how to keep governance and operations separate. They took the time to review again the governance model that had been developed last year. Band Council members know their primary role is to represent Qalipu members' interest in how QMFN is managed. As Councilors their responsibility is to hire the Chief Operating Officer, direct and approve high level operational goals and policies, make major decisions and oversee management and operations. They leave the CEO to be responsible for running all operations and directing the management team, in line with Council's direction, and for keeping Chief and Council educated and informed about results and performance. The CEO and management team makes informed recommendations about goals and policies, and in line with the strategic plan and vision, seek Council's direction.

Some of the issues and situations Councilors used to understand their roles were how to help a student receive funding, how to help a member receive health benefits, or how to find employment or support a business. They realized and confirmed that their role is to bring the issue or refer the Qalipu member to the attention of the management team to handle. If Councilors believe there are larger issues, serious demands or complaints from members, they can bring it to Council, and have Council ask for explanations and direct the management team to review and make recommendations.

Councilors become engaged in observing operations and how decisions are made through their roles as committee chairs and committee members. They get closer to the details and see how the staff and management teams do their work, and see how thorough the process is being implemented. This keeps them in a position to keep other Councilors informed. Again Councilors know their role is to direct and make sure policies and procedures are being followed, but they admit how hard it is to keep the lines of authority clear. They recognized the challenge to separate the politics of governance and demands for action from their members from the delivery of services at the operations level. They appreciate the

potential for bias and agreed there has to be checks and balances, as well as rules for when and how Councilors can contact management and staff directly.

Council spent considerable time examining the assignment of Councilors to the various committees and boards. They recommended some adjustments to make sure there is consistency and clarity, especially where Portfolio holders are on the boards of Qalipu Corporations, and where Qalipu members are appointed to Boards. There was agreement that as work evolves and projects grow, Council will pay close attention to all areas that involve Councilors in decision making and responsibility for directing operations.

MOVING AHEAD

Chief Sheppard and Councilors were satisfied that the hard work of this new Council continues to build on the work of the Qalipu interim council, management and employees. The Council joined him in expressing confidence and satisfaction with the work of staff, management and professional advisors in continuing to build and refine the strategies and policies for Council to implement.

The next meeting of the council was scheduled for January 18, 2014.