

Council Meeting Highlights

September 23, 2023

Anniversary Greetings

Prior to starting the meeting, Chief Mitchell acknowledged the Band's anniversary. September 22, 2023 marked 12 years since the formation of Qalipu First Nation.

Charlie's Place

Chief Mitchell reported that the Band had been trying to meet with provincial representatives for some time and this happened a week before the Council meeting.

Chief said that he'd met with Ministers Bernard Davis (Environment and Climate Change) and Elvis Loveless (Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture), along with Ward Councilor Calvin Francis, Justin Hodge, a Land Guardian with the Band, and Piers Evans a Program Director from the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

"It was a very positive meeting. I was left with a strong sense that this place will be designated as an Indigenous-protected conservation area... the ball is in the government's court now. I have a sense of a positive outcome."

Background:

In an email, Glenwood Ward Councilor Skeard provided additional context on the importance of Charlie's Place. Councilor Skeard is from the area, works in this field (District Ecosystem Manager with Fisheries, Forestry and Agrifoods), and sees the importance of this place to the Mi'kmaw people.

- listed and expected to be federally listed rare/threatened birds and lichens.
- unique ecosystem of high moisture due to the SW Gander / NW Gander/Gander Lake that creates healthy growing conditions for fauna and flora
- Special space for members of QFN especially Charlie Francis and his descendants.
- Countless islands, beaches and the like used by Mi'kmaq of the past, present and future.
- Corner Brook Pulp and Paper Mill protection of some of the islands in NW Gander
- Ducks Unlimited protection of the big island in NW Gander
- Some of the tallest, biggest, and oldest aspen in the area
- Some of the biggest and oldest red maple in the area, especially on the deltas of Southwest Gander, the Amazon of the Gander Watershed.
- Some of the biggest and oldest white birch in thickets on the islands of Northwest Gander.
- Protected Public Water Supply Area for Gander, Glenwood, Appleton and countless cottages.

- In between the proposed Home for Nature Protected Area Plan of Stony and Rodney Pond plus Indian Arm Pond
- Significant adventure and Indigenous tourism possibilities

Donation Requests

A donation request was received from the Roti Bay Boat Club in St. Alban's. The club is trying to raise money to repair their marina spillway.

Central Vice Chief Andrew Barker noted that he would like to see a budgeted fund established for requests like these rather than trying to find funds every time a donation request comes in.

It was agreed that an application process could be put in place similar to that of the Community Support Fund.

Staff will prepare suggestions regarding a fund and application process in time for the next meeting of Council.

New Position—Proposal Writer

There was a discussion on the need for a Proposal Writer on staff.

Staff in every department are already writing proposals based on their area of expertise and with knowledge of what the department has the capacity to deliver. A suggestion regarding additional training for those staff proposal writers was met with positive feedback from members of the Council.

Chief Mitchell noted that there are many funds out there that we may be missing out on and mentioned how well some local community bands are doing with their proposals.

Several Councilors agreed that the Band needs a person to focus on proposal writing for Qalipu First Nation as a whole, not with a narrow area of focus.

There may also be the opportunity to work with someone on a contractual basis.

There is not currently a budget to hire a proposal writer.

Glenwood Ward Councilor Frank Skeard noted, "The grant writer piece is something that has been in conversation for way too long. The undertone of it all, these larger new initiatives. The AFSAR project that QENR does every year... the latest ones were the big housing ones. That's where our grant writer needs to be focused. Qalipu First Nation has a lot of capacity but at the same time period, it has a lot of work being done. I think of this as an investment to have a greater chance of having some of these transformational one-offs. You get them for 2-3 years then a new priority comes to be. That's what these people need to focus on. I think it's time."

It was decided that the Executive would talk further about this topic and come back with a briefing note for Council to review.

There is also an upcoming strategic planning session with departmental heads on October 10th and future hiring will be discussed.

Briefing Note: Amendment to QFN Procedures Based on Gender Identification

Exploits Ward Councilor Charlene Combdon provided a briefing note regarding the need to amend policy and procedure documents to reflect gender-inclusive language.

Charlene mentioned one document in particular in which it is stated “The Band Manager, or his/her designate...” and noted that this could easily be made gender inclusive by changing his/her to simply ‘their’.

Staff will review all QFN policies and other documents, both external and internal to the organization, to review language and update to gender-inclusive language.

Motion re: Contract with HR Specialist

Western Vice Chief Jenny Brake motioned to consider and approve consultation with a Human Resources Specialist experienced in Indigenous operations and governance to enhance operational efficiency and further strengthen the bond of trust within our community.

The motion was seconded by Benoit’s Cove Ward Councilor Terri Greene.

The need for a scope of work was discussed as a priority before potentially engaging a specialist. There are several things to be accomplished with the help of such a specialist, such as review and recommendations around governance and HR policies.

It will require a significant budget and staff are looking at opportunities for funding to support the motion.

The motion was carried. The discussion and planning will continue at the next meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee.

Conflict-of-Interest Policy

Chief Mitchell addressed the Conflict-of-Interest Policy and the need for members of Council to share when they have been appointed to serve on boards on behalf of the Band. The policy actually states that the individual needs the written permission of the Chief and Council to accept new appointments, but this has not been strictly adhered to by the Chief and others.

Chief Mitchell brought forward information on two recent appointments and asked for the blessing of Council to continue in service.

1. RCMP Indigenous Advisory Committee

2. Board of Regents with Memorial University

The Council approved these appointments and congratulated Chief Mitchell on being the first Mi'kmaw person to be appointed to the Board of Regents with MUN.

St. George's Ward Councilor Ivan J. White noted his involvement with a Justice Circle with the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary.

Western Vice Chief Jenny Brake noted that she would like to establish a shared folder where summaries can be provided by all members of Council who are serving on boards and committees.

She said, "That way, everyone can be in the know if they choose to be. This provides transparency, inclusion and more communication on what we are involved in."

Members of Council agreed with this suggestion. It would be beneficial to provide short summary reports on meetings attended on behalf of Qalipu First Nation.

It was also noted that the remedies for breaking the Conflict-of-Interest Policy may be too severe and this should be added to the policy review.

Benoit's Cove Ward Councilor Terri Greene commented, "The Mi'kmaw way would not reflect this kind of language."

It would be beneficial to establish a list of any Council members and their placements on external boards as a representative of the Council so that as Council changes each term, we will be able to see vacancies and know to update the position.

Voting Tool

Western Vice Chief Jenny Brake asked to have an electronic voting tool established to eliminate the long email threads when Council is coming to a decision between in-person meetings.

Staff will explore options.

Emergency Preparedness Plan for Qalipu First Nation members and communities

Western Vice Chief Jenny Brake brought forward a motion to have the Band engage in Emergency Planning.

She said, "We need to help people to be prepared for possible emergencies... we need a way to be able to educate people on how to deal with emergencies."

Awareness campaigns, community meetings and workshops were some examples of what this type of education could include.

A sub-committee was established to lead emergency planning for the Band communities. Vice Chief Brake will chair the committee along with Corner Brook Ward Councilor Sherry Dean who chairs the Health and Wellness Standing Committee.

Feaver's Lane Update

This update is in reference to a project to transcribe audio files from a past Traditional Use Study. There will likely be a need to hire someone to do this work as one hour of audio takes about four hours to transcribe and there are many hours of audio.

Community Conversations

The first Community Conversation took place in Port au Port East on September 20, 2023. The event was well-attended and received positively. The next Community Conversation will be at a community in Benoit's Cove in early October.

New Director

Diedre Halbot is the new Director for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Halbot started with the Band on September 11, 2023.

Community Room

The Qalipu Community Room in Corner Brook is being relocated to a space on the ground floor at 1 Church Street to allow for greater accessibility. Some repairs and painting have been completed and staff are working on applying for additional funds to make the space even more accessible and user-friendly.

Breakfast Programs

Ward Councilors were each allotted \$2000 to make donations to support Breakfast Programs at schools in their Wards.

There was a discussion among several members of the Council regarding the need for a funding formula based on the number of schools and number of students within each Ward.

For instance, Exploits Ward Councilor Charlene Combdon has 17 schools in her Ward while Gander Bay Ward Councilor Calvin Francis has 1 school so the total amount to work with may need to be adjusted to support these varying demographics.

Councilors will provide staff with the number of schools, and the number of students in those schools so that a potential funding formula could be explored.

Staff will also reach out to Kids Eat Smart and ask for their input on community needs and how the fund can best be distributed.

It was also suggested that the Band could partner with larger companies who are interested in investing in our children and have them match our donations.

Questions from Band Members in Attendance

Chief Mitchell provided an opportunity for those in attendance to ask questions.

One Band member commented that he has been waiting too long to receive reimbursement on his Medical Travel claim. He noted that all the charges pertaining to the medical travel had been put on his credit card and that interest fees accrued while waiting for reimbursement were costing him extra money.

Corner Brook Ward Councilor Sherry Dean, who chairs the Health and Wellness Committee, noted that claims processing is not all done at the Qalipu office. She said, "Some of the claim is processed at Indigenous Services Canada. We don't handle it all in-house. This can cause additional delays."

Shery explained further, "We are aware of the issue and every time we meet we are asking ourselves how can we deal with this most important problem, and the problem is the amount of time that it takes. We are aware and we are doing everything we can. This gets brought forward in meetings with Indigenous Services Canada as well."

Another Band member asked whether the claim could include a breakdown on what was covered, or not, with their medical travel claim.

She said, "Why is there no breakdown of what you got paid for and what you did not get covered for? There is no breakdown provided with checks that people receive."

Staff will investigate and see if a detailed breakdown can be provided with the benefit.

Finance and Audit Committee Report

Recommendations were received from the auditor following the recent annual audit. Staff noted that there will be a follow-up on these recommendations "to improve our processes to avoid any future issues."

The Band is about 75% complete with merging to a new system, Enterprise Resource Management which will allow band members to submit their claims electronically. This move will likely improve return times on the health claims process.

The Chair of the Finance Committee, Glenwood Ward Councilor Frank Skeard, recently resigned. Council moved to appoint a new Chair.

Corner Brook Ward Councilor Sherry Dean motioned to appoint Benoit's Cove Ward Councilor Terri Greene to the position. This was seconded by Western Vice Chief Jenny Brake. Councilor Greene accepted the appointment, and the motion was carried.

Roundtable

Kinu, not ginu

Central Vice Chief Andrew Barker suggested that the membership portal known as ginu needs to be changed to kinu to reflect the correct spelling of the word.

St. George's Ward Councilor Ivan J. White noted that the spelling isn't incorrect, it's just not based on the Smith-Francis Orthograhpy, the writing system we use.

All agreed that we should use the spelling that is correct with the system in use.

Vice Chief Jenny Brake who chairs the Operations and Communications Standing Committee suggested this could be discussed further during their next meeting.

Zen Den

Corner Brook Ward Councilor Sherry Dean shared that the school board, Western Health and Indigenous representatives from the high school are working together to have a space that always has an adult present that focuses on Indigenous content around wellness and wellbeing. She said, "Anti-drug and alcohol, back to earth, in line with seven sacred teachings."

The Zen Den is set to launch in Corner Brook this week and there is hope that this type of project can be taken up in other schools as well.

Attitude of Gratitude

Western Vice Chief Jenny Brake offered thanks to the staff team, "Thank you to the staff for taking all the inquiries that we have and following up on them. It can be overwhelming. Queries from members looking for school funding etc. And I appreciate Charles taking emails and calls, same with health staff. Kudos to staff and thank you for helping us with that."

Communications Officer

Western Vice Chief Jenny Brake, who chairs the Operations and Communications Standing Committee, noted that she is excited that a new position in communications will soon be filled. The Communications Officer competition closes on September 27.

She said, "I'm excited about the onboarding of an additional person in communications, it's much needed and we are looking forward to it."

Business Award

Exploits Ward Councilor Charlene Combdon noted that the Exploits Chamber of Commerce has reached out to see if Qalipu would again sponsor the \$500 Business Award given annually to a member of QFN

Staff will respond to the inquiry.

North American Indigenous Games (NAIG)

Exploits Ward Councilor Charlene Combon noted that she would like to have a discussion about the allocation of funding for NAIG to cover the next four years. She asked to have this added to the agenda for the next meeting.

Exploits Valley Renewable Energy Corporation (EVREC)

Exploits Ward Councilor Charlene Combon said that wind energy seems to be moving ahead in Central with EVREC and she would like to meet with them to understand the impact on Band members in her area.

Chief Mitchell committed to coordinating a meeting along with other Councilors representing the Central Wards.

National Day of Truth and Reconciliation

Several Ward Councilors talked about plans in their communities to commemorate the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Councilors Jasen Benwah, Hayward Young, Sherry Dean, Charlene Combon and Frank Skeard will host a gathering for a virtual presentation with Elder Lottie Johnson, a Survivor of the Residential School system from Eskasoni First Nation.

Stephenville Office

Stephenville Ward Councilor Hayward Young is happy there is an office at 43 Main Street but noted that he would like to see a larger presence in his Ward. He said, "This area has 9000 members. We need a bigger presence in this area, in Stephenville."

Seniors Navigator

Stephenville Ward Councilor Hayward Young would like to see a position created to better support seniors. He noted that there are instances where seniors really need extra support, such as after the death of a partner and they don't know how to navigate our programs.

Automated Phone System

Councilor Young noted that our automated phone system (the options when a person calls our main line at 709-634-0996) is outdated and has names of staff who are no longer working with the Band.

The Operations and Communications Standing Committee will add this to the agenda of their upcoming meeting.

Congratulations to Senator Judy White

Ward Councilor Ivan J. White acknowledged the recent senate appointment of Qalipu Band member Judy White and offered his congratulations. The Council and members in attendance applauded for the appointment of the new Senator.

Mi'kmaw Identity

Ward Councilor Ivan J. White noted that many people do not understand their Mi'kmaw identity and suggested that further education on the topic should be added to the QFN Strategic Plan under Nation Building.

Funding for the Mi'kmaw Language Program

Chief Mitchell shared that he recently spoke with the Premier about support for language and was referred to Deputy Minister Barnes. Chief noted, "They are wide open to us doing something and asked how much money we are looking for. They want a proposal from us. We have to get together with the cultural tourism group to try to figure out what we need for a language program."

Funding Announcement in Stephenville

Chief Mitchell attended an announcement in Stephenville last week. He said, "About \$3.2 million contribution was committed for the transition house. I'm pleased that there are other organizations doing things that we are not. Maybe the template for this development can be applied to other communities where this is needed. I'm thankful to the groups that are taking the lead on initiatives that people need, like NAWN and Empowering Indigenous Women."

Service Members Agreement Update

Chief Mitchell shared that more than 800 applications were received and that a review of applications has been completed.

Based on his knowledge, Chief Mitchell believes that a high percentage of applicants under the Agreement will be approved for membership and is hopeful that the process can be completed before the end of 2023.

