

**Minutes of the Odanak Public Assembly
May 30, 2009**

*A number of questions were not recorded because they were not spoken into the microphone.

Glossary of Acronyms

AFNQL = Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador
FNEC = First Nations Education Council
IGS = Indian Government Support
INAC = Indian Affairs and Northern Canada
MAPAQ = ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation
RRAP = Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program
WHO = World Health Organization

Opening Prayer and Words of Welcome

The assembly was opened with a prayer by Mr. Raymond Watso.

Rick O'Bomsawin gave the words of welcome.

Code of Conduct for Meetings

A Code of Conduct for Assemblies was adopted by the Band Council. In the past, certain assemblies became disorderly, with people interrupting one another, making personal attacks, making rambling comments or using this public forum to discuss private affairs. Some people have stopped attending public assemblies because of this.

Anyone who violates the Code of Conduct would be asked to leave the assembly.

Although some felt imposing too many rules was contradictory to the traditional Aboriginal approach, it was pointed out that the Code of Conduct is a modern variant of the talking stick.

Members of the assembly were reminded to speak into the microphone for the benefit of the interpreter and everybody in the attendance.

The Code of Conduct will be published in the next issue of the newspaper and presented at the next general assembly.

Electoral Code

The electoral code working group held three meetings and should be ready to prepare the results of their work by the next general assembly.

Activity Reports

All of the information presented by the various speakers will appear in the annual report in July or August. The annual report will be completed once the auditors have completed their work with the financial statements of the year 2008-2009.

Administration

The Band Council developed and adopted a five-year strategic plan last September. A firm was hired in January 2009 to teach the Council how to prepare such a plan. A human resource consultant has been hired to implement the plan on a day-to-day basis.

Citizenship Code

The background of the process for developing the Citizenship Code was given. A special assembly was held on April 18 to present the Citizenship Code, which has been in effect since February 2009.

Court Case

Five people from Odanak and Wôlinak are contesting the discriminatory nature of the *Indian Act* in Federal Court. Their case will be heard in September or October in Montreal. The five plaintiffs will meet with their lawyer in two weeks to be briefed on the types of questions they should expect from the government's lawyers.

The Band Council is following the MacGyver case in British Columbia, which won in Appeal Court. It is expected that the federal government will appeal this decision to the Supreme Court.

IGS Program Renewal

The five IGS programs are to be renewed this year. Band funding, among other things, is provided under one of these programs.

However, the IGS programs are chronically underfunded. Band Councils across Canada do not have the funding available for modern technology and other increases. In Odanak, mailout costs have jumped now that off-reserve members have the right to vote because they must be kept informed of on-reserve events.

In February, INAC requested First Nations input on the renewal of this program. The AFNQL and the general manager of Band Council and Tribal Council of Quebec met in April to discuss how to increase IGS band council funding. A national advisory committee was struck to develop a plan to lead the federal government to correct the underfunding issue; the Odanak general manager sits on this advisory committee.

Police

The agreement to merge the Odanak and Wôlinak police forces was signed by both communities, the federal government and the provincial government in January 2009.

Buildings and Infrastructure

A review of the various repairs and renovations done in the community was done. This included sewer replacements, soil drainage and work to prepare three lots for upcoming house building projects.

No new RRAP funding obtained for 2008-2009, but the RRAP projects from 2007-2008 were completed.

Stop Cannabis Coalition

The Band Council, nearby non-Native communities and the police force have formed a Stop Cannabis Coalition. The Coalition held an anti-cannabis conference. Proposals were sought from three communication/marketing firms to design the Coalition's logo; people from the communities represented by the Coalition voted for their preferred logo. A press conference was held recently to launch an anti-cannabis campaign.

Land Management

Eighteen lots were transferred over the past year (through inheritance or sale).

The Band Council has been working with Judge Gill to have his lot transferred back to the band. This process should be completed soon.

The Band Council will purchase 2,16 hectares of private Band land next to the Pierreville cemetery for later development.

Dock Demolition

The federal government will soon be demolishing the dock and transferring the land back to the band. The dock is too badly damaged to be repaired. The demolition will be completed this summer. Federal regulations state that the federal government has to remove buildings and structures from land before transferring land back to a band.

Business Development

Two promoters were approached to move their businesses to the community.

The proposed industrial park will be located next to Highway 132.

Registrar

The band's membership remained stable this year: two births, six deaths and four new band members.

Education

Figures on the community's student population (elementary to university) were given.

The four FNEC programs were reviewed. The language and culture courses were suspended due to Monique's illness. The funds allocated for these courses were used to develop the Abenaki-French dictionary.

Income Security

Figures on the number of income security beneficiaries and band members who obtained employment reinsertion assistance and training were given. Total income security expenses will be available in the annual report

Water Meters

Funding received for the water meters to March 30.

A contractor, EPN Gilbert, began installing the meters, but withdrew its services when it realized it would be executing the contract at a loss. A second contractor, Plomberie Arsenault, will be taking over the installation shortly.

The Band Council wishes to penalize the first contractor for breaking the contract: the band will pay for the meters already installed, but not the labour costs.

Questions and Comments

Q1-Will monthly utility expenses rise past \$156/month?

A1-The bills have already been sent out for the year, but the water portion of the bill will be recalculated for next year. This process is similar to the one used for establishing a hydro rate.

The garbage and sewer portions of the bill will not increase, though the water portion will increase for some people and decrease for others.

The water meters will serve to establish normal water usage for a typical family. At present, everyone pays the same for their water, regardless of how much is actually used. The provincial rate is \$2.08 / 1000 gallons.

Q2-Couldn't our rate be based on the rate of surrounding non-Native communities that have had water meters for years? It may be better to have a minimum water allocation per household.

A2-Having a minimum allocation per household can lead to waste. People could decide to use the water even if they don't need it simply because they paid for it.

It is not known if Pierreville is being overcharged for water.

Having water meters will help raise awareness of the amount of water people actually use, which can cut waste.

The water meters will be installed outside homes. Special multi-unit meters are being considered for multi-unit dwellings.

Chief O'Bamsawin pointed out that his gas station and cheese factory use about ten times more water than the \$400 he pays monthly.

Q3-Do other reserves have water meters?

A3-A few urban ones do in British Columbia. Kahnawake has them, too.

Health Program Evaluation

In accordance with the agreement with Health Canada, all health programs were evaluated by an outside assessor. The final report will be presented to the Band Council in mid-June.

Diabetes

Diabetes tests were done. There are many cases of this disease in the community. One of the community nurses only handles diabetes patients. Anyone interested in being tested for diabetes can go to the healthcare centre.

Water Quality Training Video

Phases 1 and 2 of this video project, done in association with Guelph University, have been completed. Phase 3 has begun. Odanak is becoming well-known because of this video.

Medicinal Plant Circle

Medicinal plants are being grown outside the healthcare centre.

Influenza

People were asked to be vigilant about this illness. As a preventive measure, mandatory hand-washing policy has been implemented at the healthcare centre. The Band Council is monitoring the situation and is in contact with the WHO and other health organizations.

Strategic Health Plan

Part of the strategic health plan is to encourage people to be responsible for their health. For example, someone who misses medical appointments for no valid reason will be dropped to the bottom of the list.

Youth Program

The youth program (for youth aged 12-18) has been expanded for people aged 12-30.

Questions and Comments

Q1-Will a specific program be implemented to replace the current one aimed at youth aged 12-18 years?

A1-The youth program will continue, but the method for transmitting the message will change to reach an older clientele as well.

Q2-What activities are being offered to youth now?

A2-Decisions regarding the youth activities to be offered will be made once the evaluation report is finalized and presented to the Band Council in mid-June.

Q3-Is the Band Council responsible for finding a solution to the odours emanating from a certain part of the reserve in the summer?

A3-The Band Council is working with Health Canada to run tests. A hygiene consultant could be called in to find a solution.

MAPAQ Food Handling Certification

The Band Council is working with MAPAQ to have all community food businesses, including the museum cafeteria, obtain MAPAQ food handling certification. Not having this certification cannot be enforced at on-reserve non-Native establishments, but MAPAQ may be contacted to do an inspection if a problem is suspected.

Proof of certification consists of a paper certificate and a sticker for the door.

Police

The achievements for the past year were listed:

-efforts have been made to improve police-community relations

-two self-defence courses were given in Wôlinak; a request was made to give this course in Odanak

-a drinking and driving workshop was held during Family Day, where special glasses and a golf cart were used to show people the effects of driving drunk; this activity will be held again

-the police force, health centres and the Abenaki Grand Council have formed an intercommunity issue table

-in February, a baby seat awareness workshop was held for parents at the childcare centre, as was a prevention activity

-on First Nations Day, 67 children from Odanak and the surrounding communities were bio-identified; this activity will be held in Wôlinak in September 2009 and again every two years to keep the children's photographs updated (a sample bio-identification kit was shown)

Twice as many traffic tickets have been issued since the two police forces merged because there are more patrols. Other road safety activities include radar operations, seat belt checks, off-terrain vehicles and road checks, the latter in association with the provincial police.

No follow-ups were done on the production and sale of illicit substances owing to a lack of personnel. An action plan and more human resources required. Youth gangs are starting to be a problem. The police force is working with its partners to fight organized crime.

The new police cars have arrived. The older cars are being used for other purposes.

The provincial government is looking to have four Aboriginal police forces (merge the remaining 10) to increase efficiency.

Questions and Comments

Comment 1-Congratulations to the police force for its hard work.

Q1-What is the name of the merged police force?

A1-Abenaki Police Force.

Q2-How will the other 6 First Nations be affected by the government's desire to merge the Native police forces across the province?

A2-The 10 police forces will be merged into 4, according to region. This is only at the discussion stage.

Q3-Who is the employer of the police force?

A3-The Band Council of Odanak. Everything is centralized in the community, but Wôlinak is involved in the decision-making.

Museum

An impressive new exhibit opened at the museum last night. Band members were encouraged to see it.

Pow Wow

Volunteers are still being sought for this event, which will take place soon. People were asked to write down their favourite memory of one of the pow wows from the past 50 years. These texts would then be displayed in a special museum exhibit.

Calumet Restaurant

The Band Council has signed an agreement to take over the Calumet restaurant. The process to acquire the restaurant was lengthy and complicated (negotiations, funding, government issues, feasibility studies, etc.). The band will only pay 50% of the purchase cost for the Calumet.

No major changes will follow (no firing of staff, replacing chef, etc.). The previous owners will stay on for a time in the transition phase, and a manager has been hired. The Calumet is

now run by a band-owned corporation. The manager reports to the corporation, which reports to the band. Regular updates will be made available to band members.

Anyone with concerns about this file was asked to contact the Band Council.

Rick O'Bamsawin proposed striking a corporation committee comprising community business people and an elder, preferably with business experience as well. This idea has yet to be discussed by Council, however.

Questions and Comments

Q1-How much did you pay for the Calumet?

A1-The former owners asked that this information not be divulged until next Monday.

Q2-Will band members receive a percentage of the profits?

A2-It would not be feasible to do so. The purpose of creating a band-owned business is to raise money for band programs. Purchasing the Calumet is an investment for the entire community.

Q3-What is the restaurant manager's name?

A3-Rick said his first name is Eric, but could not recall his last name. It will be announced to the band soon.

The new manager was selected from a pool of 8 candidates. He has several years' experience in the restaurant industry. He owned a restaurant for a period of 4 to 5 years. Rick pointed out that the manager will initially be on probation.

Comment 1-It seems like a risky move to buy a restaurant during a recession.

Response 1-The Band Council studied this scenario, among others, and determined that buying the restaurant would still be a profitable venture.

Q4-Someone is going around saying that all the servers will be fired. Is this true?

A4-No. All current staff will retain their jobs. The Calumet is quite successful: it sells 200 pizzas a day. This is possible because of the existing team; replacing them would be illogical. However, the décor might be changed.

Comment 2-It doesn't appear the restaurant will generate enough income to fund several programs.

Response 2-The Calumet's gross annual earnings are about \$2.5 million.

Construction of New Bridge

The government wants to build a bridge for a road entering Pierreville on a small stretch of land (50') that belongs to the band, though the government claims the land in question is government owned.

The Band Council met with the government regarding this land and is refusing to sell it. Council members are concerned about the bridge: the proposed curve to enter Pierreville may be too tight. The home of the elder living near the proposed bridge site could be affected. The Band Council would like to meet with the two nearby communities to discuss this issue soon.

Question Period

Q1-How much did the industrial park land cost?

A1-\$42,000.

Q2-Would it be possible to consult the band regarding decisions instead of just informing people after the fact?

A2-It would not be feasible to vote on every issue in a general assembly. A Band Council is elected to simplify the decision-making process.

Q3-Would it be possible to have a copy of the minutes from the last general assembly reviewed at each successive general assembly?

A3-It would be faster to distribute the minutes prior to the general assembly so people could read them. The transcription of the minutes is available on the Band Council website.

Comment 1-Not many people in the community turn out when volunteers are solicited: only 3 people attended the meeting to form the recreational committee, and 4 for the pow wow volunteer committee.

Q4-Can you tell us more about why the on-reserve gym closed?

A4-Operating the gym would have cost the band about \$460,000. The project was not considered viable by all banks, including First Nations institutions. If the band borrows money to fund a project and defaults on the loan, the band will have to reimburse the government.

Q5-Could observers attend Band Council meetings if they are sworn to secrecy?

A5-No. The Band Council gives out information on matters affecting the band and answers questions. The Band Council must respect private matters.

Closing

The assembly was closed, but was immediately followed by a special assembly on the Citizenship Code.

**Minutes of the Odanak Special Assembly:
Citizenship Code
May 30, 2009**

Words of Welcome

Rick O'Bomsawin gave the words of welcome.

Review of Agenda

The director general reviewed the agenda.

Vote on Proposed Amendment

The members present decided to vote by a show of hands rather than by secret ballot.

The director general explained that the amendment to paragraph 5.6(b) was proposed for Odanak members who left the band prior to the implementation of the Citizenship Code.

The amendment was unanimously approved.

Appeal Committee

The role of the Appeal Committee, under section 7 of the Citizenship Code, was explained.

The members present elected the following three individuals to the Appeal Committee, each to a two-year term: Richard Côté, Michel O'Bamsawin and Manon Hamel.

The names of the members of the Appeal Committee will be published in the newspaper and appear on the Band Council website.

Meeting Adjourned

Following the election of the members of the Appeal Committee, the meeting was adjourned.