

**Minutes of the Odanak Public Assembly  
September 26, 2009**

**Glossary of Acronyms**

AFNQL = Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador

INAC = Indian Affairs and Northern Canada

RRAP = Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (PAREL in French)

**Opening Prayer and Words of Welcome**

Raymond Watso opened the assembly with a prayer.

Rick O'Bamsawin gave the words of welcome.

**Financial Statements**

Danny read the highlights of the financial statements.

*Questions and Comments*

**Q1-**What do you do with the surplus?

**A1-**The surplus goes into a consolidated fund and is not returned to the government. This fund has over 1.2 million dollars, which has been accumulated over the past 25 years.

**Q2-**As there is a surplus, how come welfare payments were cut by \$200/month?

**A2-**The community has one of the best social systems around, and people on welfare lived as well as those with jobs. Does the community want to have a welfare system that offers no incentive for people to try to find work? Welfare payments were not cut, simply lowered to the same level as those living elsewhere receive.

Welfare was originally designed to help people who lost their job get by; it was never intended as a replacement for work.

In September 2004, the housing allowance of \$80/month was supposed to be cut, but the Band Council raised it instead. Other areas have abolished theirs already.

There is a welfare program in place that increases your payment if you do volunteer work.

The Band Council is aware that it is hard to find a job in the area, which is why it is focusing on job creation to stimulate the economy and get people back into the workforce.

**Comment 2-**It is hard for those aged 55 and older to find a job. Young people can easily go back to school and get retrained.

**Response 2-**The Band Council will look into developing a better employment program for elders.

There is an increase in the welfare allowance for those aged 55. Because of their age, they have a severe constraint in the employment. It's really hard for them to find work.

**Comment 3-**A lot of wood was cut in the back, behind the Anglican cemetery. There is a rumour that the sand taken from the site cannot be used.

**Response 3-**The rumour is false. The sand from the site will be used for the project on Highway 132. Band Council was faced with two choices: cut down the trees and use the sand at that site or spend \$150,000 on backfill. The sand was taken from that particular spot because new housing projects will eventually be constructed there.

The topsoil was pushed back. It could not be used, as it is full of tree roots. In a few years, these roots will rot, and the soil will become high-grade topsoil. People in the community will be able to use this topsoil for their gardens, it may be used for community projects or it may be sold.

**Q3-**Who will this big building be rented to?

**A3-**One quarter of the building has already been leased. Six other tenants will be occupying the premises soon.

### **Calumet Restaurant**

Information on how much the restaurant cost can now be revealed. The Band Council paid \$340,000 for the building and the business. Fifty percent of this amount came from a government grant. The restaurant equipment was used as collateral to obtain a loan for the remaining half. The restaurant profits will be used to reimburse the loan.

Business at the restaurant is up from 15-17%.

#### *Questions and Comments*

**Q1-**Do you still rent the land on which the restaurant is located and if so, for how much?

**A1-**Yes, it is \$6,800/year. The lease was renewed recently.

### **Culture**

The Cultural Committee only held a handful of meetings over the summer. The online form has been set up. Band members living in and outside of the community have filled it out. The Cultural Committee wants input from band members regarding the development of cultural policy.

On October 3, Turtle Day will be celebrated. A commemorative mass for the Roger's Raid victims will be held and a ceremony will take place at a commemorative plaque, featuring local singers and a speech by the Chief. Afterwards, all participants will go for coffee and bannock. A souvenir will be handed out in honour of this event.

The Cultural Committee hopes this event will become a celebration of Abenaki survival. Invitations will be sent out Monday.

Parks Canada will name Chief Nescambiouit as a figure of national importance on October 12 in a ceremony held at the museum. This Chief was a key leader in the community before it was known as Odanak.

Abenaki language courses are offered on Tuesday nights.

## **Powwow**

The powwow was successful. It made a profit, the first one in years, of about \$1,000. The money cannot be used for next year's event as it will serve to reimburse the debts from last year's powwow.

### *Questions and Comments*

**Q1-**Can I see a copy of the powwow budget?

**A1-**It was supposed to be printed in the newspaper, but it had apparently been dropped. A copy of the budget is available at the Band Office.

## **Question Period**

**Q1-**What happened with the mail outs?

**A1-**Starting this year, band members living outside the community can be candidates for Band Council elections.

The first mail out contained an error (sent on Tuesday), but the mistake was corrected in the second mail out (sent on Saturday). Band members outside the community do not have to be nominated by band members living in the community.

Yves Landry, the elections director, regularly gives updates to the Band Council. He is available to answer band members' questions.

**Q2-**Five homeowners had renovations done. Can we find out whom?

**A2-**Yes. Contact the Band Office.

**Q3-**Was there any favouritism in the allocation of home renovation funding?

**A3-**No, that is untrue.

Funding for minor renovations ended on March 31, 2009. The only funding (grants) available now for renovation comes from RRAP (CMHC allocates this funding) and Renovation program from the Canada's Economic Action Plan Housing allocates funding. Five renovation projects were approved this year in the community by CMHC and INAC.

**Q4-**Can only First Nations lease the commercial properties in the community?

**A4-**No, anyone can.

**Comment 1-**A case is presently before the courts regarding the seizure of homes on reserve. A meeting will be held on October 2 about this issue.

Although mortgages with First Nations are guaranteed by the minister, people must still reimburse their debt. If they do not or cannot, then the Band Council will have to pay, which means the entire community has to pay.

**Q5-**Why was the financial supplement for lawn care for elders cancelled?

**A5-**It was not cancelled, but was added to the amount for snow removal. This funding is not intended to cover the entire cost of an elder's senior lawn care/snow removal services, but only to cover part of the cost.

**Comment 2-**It seems that some elders do not receive adequate homecare.

**Response 2-**To receive home care, an elder must fill out a form. An ergo therapist then assesses the elder's mobility and needs.

In 2008-2009, the Waban-Aki Grand Council billed the Odanak Band Council \$55,000 more than the estimated amount for homecare. This means that federal homecare funding is inadequate. The Band Council was forced to redirect \$55,000 from the healthcare budget into the homecare budget.

INAC has not modified its funding rates since 1986, paying only \$9/hour for homecare services. This funding has not respected cost of living increases. What's more, homecare workers in Quebec are required to have 960 hours of schooling in the field.

There is presently a deficit of 1.3 billion dollars for basic band administration costs across Canada.

The AFNQL did a housing study and determined there is a 1 billion dollar shortfall in the province of Québec, yet the federal government only allocated 200 million dollars per year for two years across the country.

**Q6-**When will the water bills arrive?

**A6-**The water meters were installed in the summer and the water bills will be mailed out in February. The amount a household pays is determined by usage, though this will not apply this year.

The water meters were installed with elders in mind. A person living alone uses a lot less water than a family of four. Consequently, that person's water bill will be less.

A family of four should pay the same amount it is paying now. Only very heavy water users will see their bills increase (fill swimming pool twice a year, water lawn daily, etc.).

Another advantage of using water meters is that it will enable the community to identify when and where a water main is broken.

Having water meters in people's homes will encourage them to change their water consumption habits.

**Q7-**Will Rick's business stop dumping untreated waste water in the sewers?

**A7-**Rick's business had a new treatment system installed at a cost of \$175,000. The problem of the lingering smell has been resolved.

**Comment 3-**Everyone should note the following dates for the upcoming elections:

October 17-Nomination forms available.

October 23-Candidates are presented in Albany, New York. Another date will be set for Sudbury (possibly November 7). November 14, Candidates will be presenting here at the community Center. November 28- Election date.

### **Closing**

The assembly was closed by Rick O'Bamsawin.