



ATIKAMEKSHENG
ANISHNAWBEK

Aanii Kina Wiya,

It has been a pleasure and an honour to serve as Gimaa for Atikameksheng for the last two years. I look back and see the incredible amount of work that we have accomplished as a Council and I am so thankful to have worked with such a dedicated group of people. It wasn't always easy, and we didn't always agree but we held respect for each other and always maintained our commitment to do what we thought was best for our community. I have such deep respect for each of the Councillors that I have served with and will always be proud of the work that we did together. I truly believe that at the heart of every decision we made, was for the benefit of our community.

I also know that none of this work would have happened without a dedicated team of people behind us in our administration. None of the ideas that Council brought forward would have ever seen the light of day without our staff to carry it out. When I first took office, Directors, who were already over-worked were trying to function as a management team but much of their work was suffering and there was no coordinated front without a (Chief Executive Officer) CEO to lead the way. In addition, some of the central services, like our finances, were operating unchecked and we suffered the consequences of this. Our Finance Department was so dysfunctional that we had to bring in an external team to try to trace what had happened in order to meet our reporting requirements. Unfortunately, we also found theft and this charge is still being pursued through the criminal justice system.

In addition, despite best efforts by staff, communication to the community was sporadic and only happened when necessary and as a result the community was suspicious about what work was happening. While I know all of our problems have not disappeared, we have made great strides and I am happy to report this is no longer the case. Our Communications has vastly improved and we now have monthly newsletters, social media sites and a member's only portal where we live stream band meetings and post band minutes. We also have a new process whereby community members are asked to update their own contact information on our website through the Member's Portal.



We have also turned our Finance Department around and built a strong team of professionals and we are now in a position to know exactly what is happening with our finances and can forecast and plan based on priorities as a government should be doing. We have a finance committee that operates according to our Financial Administration Law and they regularly report to the Directors and to Council.

One of the best decisions our Council made, was to hire Brendan Huston as our CEO. He has worked tirelessly for our community and it is through his dedication and long hours that these good practices have been put in place and are now being followed. However, I know he didn't do this alone. I want to thank him and his team for all of their hard work and dedication to our community. It wasn't an easy job but somehow, we turned this ship around and we did this together!

As a result of having a strong administrative government, we can and should continue to separate the work between political and administrative functions. Council should be setting the direction, but they should not be interfering in how this work gets carried out unless there is just cause to interfere. This separation between political and administrative functions also means that the only employees of Council are currently the CEO and the Executive Assistant to the Political Office. In our current structure, all other employees report to the CEO. In separating our political and administrative functions, our government can grow and flourish and Council can focus on our political front and their roles as leaders. I believe we now have a good, strong and stable bureaucracy that needs to be supported. Under a 4-year term as specified in our new election code, we are well on our way!

I want to thank each and every person who works for Atikameksheng for all that you do for our community. It is this team of people that work day after day to help make our community a better place. Without you, we would not be able to carry out our plans and our dreams would never be realized.

And to save the best for last, none of this would ever be possible without the support and love of our community to guide and direct us forward. The success highlighted in these pages is really attributed to all of you and our successes should be shared equally because we have all had a role in moving us forward.

Miigwech Atikameksheng and I can't wait to see what the next 4 years brings!

Final Report on the Governance Planning System

JUNE 2018 TO JUNE 2020

Introduction

Every newly elected Chief and Council stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before them. All the hard work and all the achievements of the past are inherited as a foundation to build upon. But, problems and challenges can also be inherited.

Following is a summary of what newly elected Chief Valerie Richer and Councillors Rubina Nebenionquit, Harvey Petahtegoose, Jennifer Petahtegoose, Carla Petahtegoose, Monica Homer and Leslie MacNeil faced.

1. FINANCES

The finances of the Nation were in total disarray. There was no Chief Financial Officer in place. The reconciliation of financial records against bank statements had not been kept up to date for almost a year. As a result, it was impossible to know if all bills had been paid in a timely manner or if funds owed had been received. A detailed financial audit that took some months and cost the First Nation significant funds was required to re-establish accurate financial records and to even grasp the current financial status of the community. It was eventually discovered that roughly \$80,000 in cash could not be accounted for. The First Nation hired MNP LLP to complete a forensic audit which led to criminal charges.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP GAP

The previous administration had eliminated the position of Director of Operations. There had

actually been no senior administrative leadership pulling the whole system together for some time. Instead, four separate department managers met as a leadership team from time to time, but each was immersed in his or her own silo of work. No one was focusing on the big picture. So essentially, the system as a whole was not being managed. One consequence of this was the financial collapse described above.

3. LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLANNING GAP

There had been a Comprehensive Community Plan some seven years previous, but it was never updated. There was no current overarching strategic plan for community development and nation building, and no plans to include our relatives living off reserve in that process.

Introduction

4. LOW STAFF MORALE

Staff had been subjected to routine political interference in administration and programming, and as a result there was a legacy of mistrust between staff and political leadership that had to be overcome.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN GOVERNANCE

Community members were seldom invited to be active participants in key governance and decision-making processes.

6. SERIOUS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES AT THE GRASSROOTS

Grassroots community members were experiencing serious social and economic issues related to poverty and the need for healing and wellness, and there were no systematic initiatives in place geared to bringing change to these conditions.

7. LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY

We needed more systemic programming and resources in place to support the strengthening of our Anishnawbe language, culture and identity. We had a few people working and volunteering in this area but more support was needed if our goal was to keep the language and culture strong.

What did all of this mean? The financial and administrative disarray which greeted the new Chief and Council meant that they had to spend a great deal of time, energy and money during their first year in office just getting the system back to a state of functionality; putting new staff in place to provide administrative leadership and financial oversight; and establishing codes, policies and procedures to ensure that Atikameksheng Anishnawbek governance, administration and programs could never be compromised again.

Following are highlights of how the Chief and Council addressed and overcame the challenges faced at the beginning of their term, and went on to achieve many significant accomplishments.

Strengthened Administrative Functioning

1. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

An urgent priority of the Chief and Council was to restore the Nation's finances to proper order and effective management. With the records cleaned up and the human resources of this department strengthened, the Finance Department has become a strong backbone of the organization. In addition, a Finance and Audit Committee was established as required as part of our Finance and Administration Law.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Another important early step in this term was bringing on a highly competent Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to provide overall oversight and leadership to Band operations and support the department directors to be able to focus on their portfolios within an integrated administrative system.

3. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT

Both Chief and Council and administration (the CEO, Department Directors, Program Managers and other staff) recognize how important it is

to avoid political interference in the day-to-day operations of the Band. This means that it became Chief and Council's policy to focus on their governance role of providing a strong legislative and policy framework within which administration can work effectively.

4. MOVING TOWARD BLOCK FUNDING

Atikameksheng is in the process of securing 10-year block funding from the Federal Government. This means the Nation will be able to reduce its administrative workload and to better plan for its infrastructure development and other funding priorities. This is because it will not have to making yearly applications for government support for some of its core operations and expenses.

5. COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLANNING

As stated above, it was time to renew the Nation's Comprehensive Community Plan, which had been developed in 2013. As a result, in May 2019, Chief and Council initiated a very participatory community planning process that drew on the input of the members living in the reserve community as well as population centres such as Sudbury and Toronto. The process began with a series of consultation sessions that asked members to reflect on the current realities of life for the community's children, youth, women, men, seniors/elders

Strengthened Administrative Functioning

and the social, economic, political and spiritual/ cultural life of the community. Stories were also told about what life was like in the past in all of these dimensions, and the lessons from that past for moving forward in a good way. The participants of these consultations were also asked to identify the goals that they felt were most important for bringing wellbeing and prosperity to the Nation and its people. This rich input was documented in the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek Community Story in November 2019.

The next step was to develop a set of goals and strategies based on this community input as well as further in-depth consultation with Chief and Council and Band staff. The Atikameksheng Comprehensive Community Plan (March 2020) has seven chapters: 1) Recovering Language, Historical Memory, and Cultural Foundations; 2) Health and Wellness; 3) Social and Community Development; 4) Prosperity Development; 5) Lands and Environmental Stewardship; 6) Life-long Learning; and 7) Infrastructure Development and Management. The Atikameksheng Anishnawbek Band Departments and Programs are now basing their workplans on the CCP to ensure that its goals and strategies will be systematically pursued in the months and years to come.



Achieving Governance Milestones

1. GOVERNANCE PLANNING

In March 2019, Chief and Council met to develop a strategic plan that identified key priorities, set goals for the remainder of their term, and charted a path for the future. In doing so, they drew on community consultation sessions held in September and October 2018. This GPS (Governance Planning Session) has provided a framework that allowed the work of Chief and Council to advance steadily and systematically for the rest of their term.

2. ELECTION CODE

An important achievement has been the ongoing development and ratification of the Nation's Election Code, a process which began in 2015. The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs has signed off on our new Code, and one of the changes that it brings is that it gets us out of the Indian Act for our elections and the next term for Chief and Council will be four years rather than two.

3. OTHER LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY INITIATIVES

- a. A tobacco policy has been developed and implemented that ensures that the quota system is being applied in a more equitable and transparent manner and that the Nation as a whole will benefit in at least some small way from this retail activity in the community.
- b. A draft cannabis law has been developed that is aimed at ensuring fairness for entrepreneurs wanting to

pursue this business while protecting the safety of the community.

- c. Significant progress is being made on revising, developing and implementing a full suite of plans and codes related to sustainable land use and environmental protection.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BETTER COMMUNICATION

Chief and Council have consistently worked hard to ensure that community members have many opportunities and avenues for participating in the important decisions that are being made. For example, the Nation's new website includes a Members Portal that provides access to internal documents and allows members to express their views, regardless of where they live. As well, the ongoing work on new legislation and policies always includes member consultation opportunities, both during face-to-face meetings but also through online media.

Band meetings are now being streamed so that all members, regardless of where they live, can access these proceedings on line. Chief and Council are committed to improving their engagement with all Atikameksheng Anishnawbek members and are working hard to find the best ways to make this possible.

The Band now also has a staff member dedicated to improving communication between political leadership and Band administration and the membership. A working communication plan has been developed. The website, newsletter updates, and professional social media sites have all contributed to a big improvement in communication.

Infrastructure Development

1. CHILD AND YOUTH CENTRE

A very exciting development is that funds have been secured to break ground on a new (6,000 sq. ft.) child and youth centre, that will include the day care that the community has been waiting for.

2. ELDERS LODGE

An Elders needs assessment and a feasibility study for an Elders Lodge have been completed.

3. RINK RENOVATIONS

Although these renovations will not be completed during the term of this Chief and Council, the current budget has allocated resources for this work which will soon be able to be undertaken.

4. BUSINESS PARK BYPASS ROAD

This major infrastructure project has been approved for \$4.7 million in contributions between the federal and provincial government and will create a bypass road for access to the business park and areas beyond our townsite. This road will help protect community safety while at the same time creating additional flexibility to community response measure during an emergency.

5. NEW HOUSING

Funding has been secured for 6 new homes.

6. DECOMMISSIONING THE DUMP

Funding has been secured for this project.



Community Wellness Strategy

A heartfelt concern of the current Chief and Council has been the alarming level of addictions and other mental health issues that too many members of the community are facing. A special concern is the wellbeing of the community's children and youth who may not have all the support they need.

For this reason, all the Band staff working on community and family wellness were brought together with their colleagues from regional agencies that also work with our people—Nogdawindamin, Niigaaniin and Maamwesying—to develop a community Wellness Strategy designed to bring real hope and change for people struggling with wellness issues in their lives. This Wellness Strategy has been launched and will be continually refined as everyone involved learns together about how better to support the healing and wellbeing of community members.



Own-Source Revenue (OSR)

Own-source income is money coming to the First Nation from its business ventures and agreements, royalties, lease and rental revenue, trust fund returns, and other sources of revenue apart from government transfer payments. For any First Nation to exercise its sovereignty, it must achieve at least some degree of “fiscal sovereignty”; that is, to acquire revenue that it can utilize for its own purposes without any government or any other outside control or interference. Aside from money received in land claim settlements, many First Nations are also earning revenue from royalties and agreements struck with resource extraction companies and other businesses operating in their traditional territories. It is now with our grasp to gradually develop our own-source income sector to the point where revenue from that sector will one day equal or exceed revenues from government funding.

Atikameksheng did not have an OSR strategy or policy in 2018 when this Chief and Council took office. Since then, our economic development capacity has been significantly increased and streamlined to enable us to pursue own-source income opportunities, and significant work has been done in terms of developing the legal and organizational mechanisms that will make it possible for us to manage and grow our own revenues. Developing this capacity is a little like planting a garden. First the soil has to be prepared. Then, when conditions are right, the garden has to be planted and carefully tended as young seedlings become full-fledged plants that produce fruits. A lot of the groundwork has been done and seeds have been planted. But there is still more work to do in this important area.



COVID-19 Response

Everything changed in March 2020 with the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic.

Literally overnight, Chief and Council, as well as administration and staff, had to pivot from business as usual to managing what is arguably the most life-altering crisis we have ever seen as a human family. Following are a few highlights of the actions taken by Chief and Council, administration, and staff to protect our citizens from the virus and the social and economic impacts that the pandemic is having on everyone.

- The immediate establishment of a COVID-19 management task force that meets 2-3 a week to review continually changing circumstances and to direct response actions
- Continually relaying public health messages that encourage community members to self-isolate, practice social distancing, and observe all the other public health guidelines for safe functioning during the pandemic such as handwashing, wearing gloves, wearing masks, and avoiding touching your face
- Ensuring that our citizens have the help they need to apply for financial benefits offered by the Federal Government during this time.
- We set up an email and phone number for on and off reserve community members to call for assistance.
- Ordering the closure of all community businesses, public buildings and a shutdown of all Band office operations, forcing Chief and Council as well as all Band employees to begin working from home
- Conducting weekly phone calls to find out how every family is doing in order to meet any possible needs and emergencies
- Establishing a border and closing our doors to all outside visitors in order to protect our community members
- Providing the community with twice-weekly updates from Chief, Council and administration

COVID-19 Response

- Ensuring that all Band employees are actually still providing services despite working from home and finding that every single program is fully operational
- Establishing an emergency COVID-19 isolation and quarantine centre in the community hall, so that individuals who must quarantine for 14 days have someplace to go if they live in homes that cannot accommodate that kind of isolation.
- Establishing the Miijim (emergency food bank) program in the library building, and ensuring that every family gets a food box delivery every week
- Encouraging staff and community volunteers to rise to new levels of service in supporting our community members, including activities that bring laughter and joy, as well as hope and inspiration to our hearts and minds
- Planning for the gradual reopening of the community, including establishing regulations, protocols and inspection systems, and working to reorganize the physical spaces we need to use so that everyone remains safe

All of this work, on top of carrying on regular governance and administration functions such as ensuring that our upcoming election can actually take place, has put a huge burden on political and administrative leadership and on our staff, all of whom are working practically around-the-clock to serve our community and keep us all safe.

Our Thanks

Chief and Council want to express our heartfelt gratitude and our admiration for the outstanding work of our CEO, our program Directors and staff, and our Elders who have advised and supported us all the way on this two-year journey. The accomplishments of this term are the result of a huge team effort. Thank you.