

CAPACITY INITIATIVE

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BACKGROUND

As everyone in local Government knows we are much more business oriented today, than we have been in the past. The ongoing process of downloading and grant cutting has forced us to question how and even why we perform certain services. What we have learned is we should only take on what can stand the public scrutiny tests with deliverables of quality, efficiency, and accountability.

There has been a strong tradition of contracting local government services, typically to other local governments. Regional Districts often supply planners, building inspectors/bylaw enforcement officers and the like to smaller municipalities within their region because it makes good business sense. Many communities cannot attract or hold certain professionals and can only obtain those services by partnering or contracting with adjoining communities to secure what is needed.

Local governments have also been supplying hard services to First Nations for decades. The most common being fire/rescue, water, sewer, and policing. This will undoubtedly continue, however I believe the trend is moving away from simply procuring a service to a longer range vision. Initially, the focus must be targeted to ensuring a quality service is provided to the community. This is shifting to a desire to have their own community members provide the services required of local government. First Nations will seek out partners that can provide or recognize this desire.

The legacy that our federal system of government has left with First Nations makes them hesitant in dealing with all levels of government. Fortunately, this is tempered by First Nations history with adjoining local governments which has often been fruitful simply because it has been based on business principles. They were not forced to take the service and if they didn't like the service they could provide their own. Additionally, local governments were not like Ottawa, if there were problems you could actually sit down

with someone in short order and, many times, work out a mutually satisfactory resolution on the issue at hand.

The Ditidaht nation is centered at Nitinaht Lake on the West Coast of Vancouver Island adjoining the Pacific Rim West Coast Trail. Present day population is about 350 of which less than half live at the village on Nitinaht Lake. The nearest urban centres are Port Alberni (north) or Lake Cowichan (east), which are equally accessible via logging road approximately 50 kms away.

The Ditidaht people are at Stage 4 of the Treaty process and continue to make progress on Agreement-in-Principle negotiations and it was hoped that a treaty might be possible by the year 2000. They recognize if they are to manage their own affairs and govern themselves without the influence of the Department of Indian Affairs, they must have people and systems in place that are capable of carrying out the business of government in a competent and professional manner.

In 1998 the Ditidaht widely advertised for an experienced local government administrator to take on the CAO for the Village. The previous individuals who held that position had a variety of skill sets but the Ditidaht were looking for someone who could assist them in the transition from governance under the Indian Act to self governance post-treaty. A number of their existing staff had good potential but needed additional resources to deal with the host of issues the Band was facing on a variety of fronts.

After consulting the Mayor I responded with a proposal to assist the Band by offering managers in Ladysmith as trainers and mentors to the Band where particular efforts were needed.

Establishing a relationship was crucial to advancing discussions on this partnership. When Ladysmith initially put forward the proposal to provide some management services and training opportunities many meetings took place at the staff level to get the necessary assurances and understanding prior to elevating the discussions to the broader political level.

It was clear that the Ditidaht sought a long term relationship given that the transition to self governance would be lengthy, and that considerable efforts would take place just to establish a workable rapport. The Town gave that commitment.

ISSUES

Driving the need to develop capacity post treaty were the following underlying issues:

1. In preparation for the development and operation of self-government under Treaty the Ditidaht must start right now to develop their own people to do the work involved in managing their own affairs.
2. In order to operate Ditidaht Government, they need trained and experienced people, and they must have a proper government structure and proper government systems in place.
- 3 The system of Band Administration that operates now is not considered a system of government. It is a very limited and highly controlled process that prevents First Nation people from taking control and responsibility of their own affairs and their own economy.
4. The Ditidaht must start right now to change from a Band Administration into a form of government that the Ditidaht can actually work with as they phase in the Treaty.

OBJECTIVES

The agreement with Ladysmith sought to accomplish a number of objectives.

1. Ladysmith will make their professional and administrative staff available to help the Ditidaht in their transition, to assist in the creating of a standard government structure, systems and procedures.
2. Employees experienced in local government will work with the Ditidaht in the development and implementation of policies and procedures for responsible and accountable government.
3. Ladysmith will help the Ditidaht to identify their human resource needs and the related training opportunities for their Members in the fields of government administration, finance, public works,

community and social services, recreation, land use planning, and so forth.

4. Training will be provided in the form of supervised practical experience in addition Ladysmith would assist in identifying postsecondary courses that would compliment practical experience.
5. Ladysmith Administration staff will spend time with Band members at Nitinaht and in Ladysmith on an ongoing basis. Ladysmith will help them establish a work plan and schedule that will enable the Ditidaht to move towards self-government.

CHANGES

The decision to embark on this course of action will result in a number of changes:

1. Initially, it will mean that band members must start right now to change how they handle Band Administration duties and evolve to effective self-government.
2. Band members will continue to do the things they do now but they will start to do them in a standardized manner, similar to other levels of government.
3. Ditidaht Band Council will develop operational policies in consultation with the Membership and, once approved, Band Council will expect both administrative staff and the Membership to comply with them.
4. There will be opportunities for Members who have the interest and the background to handle some of the jobs, and who are prepared to make the commitment necessary to move into formal and systematic training programs.
5. It will mean that Members, and particularly students, who are interested in a career in First Nation government, to move into educational "career streaming" programs. It is hoped to do this in cooperation with government and industry. Students will have both study and career-related work programs in their school year.

6. This process will open the door to members who already have developed skills and experience to work in government services roles, and bring their training and experience to a higher standard, if necessary.

To start those changes involves discussing why the change, what are the benefits, and how the change will take place.

The fundamental post treaty issue is that the Ditidaht as a people will be responsible for their own affairs once they have proven capacity. While this is extremely desirable, the responsibility is enormous, and there must be the institutions in place to support these new found responsibilities.

IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENT

The work plan to date has concentrated on policy work, a strategic plan, and acting as a resource to link the village with skill sets not available within the community. What work and priority setting for that work is determined by Ditidaht managers and their Council in consultation with myself.

The partnership with the Ditidaht has expanded to bring the Pacheedaht Village on line to partake in ongoing workshops to articulate a community vision and values, and policies. The Pacheedaht are related to the Ditidaht people and are neighbours. These two communities are negotiating a treaty at a common table. Including the Pacheedaht is an important endorsement of the benefits that have been achieved with the Ditidaht over the last 2 years.

The policy work done initially was not endorsed by the broader community because there was not enough grassroots involvement. Workshops are now held to reach deeper into the organization with the hope that the ultimate product has more ownership.

An example of bringing outside skills is the recent information meeting that has a goal of forming a parent advisory committee (PAC). One does not exist now in the Village although the community has a first class day care and expects to replace the existing elementary school in 2002/3. Two PAC members from Ladysmith shared their knowledge and experiences with Ditidaht parents.

Initial work has focused on Ladysmith personnel visiting the Village however Ditidaht staff are spending time in Ladysmith to experience our systems and procedures first-hand. Given the smaller nature of their community an operational problem of adequate backfilling provides some scheduling obstacles.

While the relationship has myself as the point individual to date, there has been an effort to diversify and offer more specific expertise within the compliment of managers in Ladysmith. As of Spring 2001, our Finance Director, Development Services Manager, Public Works Director and Fire Chief have been involved in one initiative or another.

My role is to link Ladysmith people with an appropriate issue or individual. I must also balance the needs of Ladysmith as a community and corporation to ensure that we act as a resource not an overall provider of a service. Our clear focus is service to our community first and foremost with an aim to offer support to the Ditidaht organization where possible. This requires some scheduling, but has not proven insurmountable.

Although Ladysmith Council supports this initiative, the interaction with the Ditidaht has rested primarily with staff. To date Ladysmith has been able to provide support and resources to Ditidaht without an appreciable drop in service to Ladysmith.

I believe what made this partnership achievable was by concentrating on what is possible, not on why it might not work. In Ladysmith, we have a management team that is open to new possibilities and challenges. Complimenting staff is a progressive Council that has a regional perspective rather than an insular approach. The same can be said for Ditidaht's Council and managers.

EVALUATION:

While the project is over 2 years old the majority of the work still lies ahead. Yes, we have established a basic working relationship. Yes, Ladysmith has made some contributions in developing skills, policies, and systems.

The Ditidaht have not signed a treaty despite huge efforts, with offers being made in 2000 and rejected. Many challenges remain due to their relative isolation and limited employment opportunities. Meaningful and manageable policies are a "work in progress". Open, transparent, and accountable government will take time.

Some of the more important principles that have guided this project to date have been:

- Patience and perseverance will always pay dividends
- Knowing where you want to end up but accepting that there may be a variety of ways to get there
- Different communities may have different values and other ways of problem solving: what counts are the results.

What is perhaps the most meaningful is recognizing that local governments possess the ability to work in a more integrated and productive fashion with first nation neighbours, now and increasingly so in the future.