

DITIDAHT/PACHEEDAHT - PROPOSED PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE DITIDAHT NATION AND LADYSMITH

DEVELOPING CAPACITY FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT

The Ditidaht nation is centered at Nitinat 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 Nitinat Lake. The nearest urban centres are Port Alberni or Lake Cowichan, which are equally accessible via logging roads 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 is now beginning to look like a treaty is possible by the year 2000. 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 the spring of 1998 the Ditidaht First Nations advertised broadly in Western Canada for the services of an experienced and professional local government administrator to help them develop their own system of government and to help them develop their own people for the jobs involved.

Amongst the many applications they received, was a proposal by the Town of Ladysmith that they work with the Ditidaht to meet the challenge of self-government. Late in 1998 Ladysmith and Ditidaht reached agreement in principle to enter into a contract for that purpose.

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 a system of government. It is a very limited and highly controlled process that prevents First Nation people from taking control 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.

The agreement with Ladysmith will accomplish a number of objectives.

1. Ladysmith will make their professional and administrative staff available to help the Ditihaht in their transition, to help to create proper government structure, systems and procedures.
2. Employees experienced in local government will work with the Ditihaht in the development and implementation of policies and procedures for responsible and accountable government.
3. Ladysmith will help the Ditihaht 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 to university or college courses.
5. Ladysmith Administration staff will spend time with Band members at Nitinaht on an ongoing basis. Ladysmith will help them establish a work plan and schedule that will enable the Ditihaht to have an initial level of self-government in operation within three years.

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

1. First, it will mean that band members must start right now to change how they handle Band Administration duties and evolve to real self-government.
2. Band members will continue to do the things they do now but they will start to do them in the way that other responsible and accountable governments operate.
3. Ditihaht 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 co-operation with government and industry. Students will have both study and career-related work programs in their school year.
6. It 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.

Ladysmith and the Ditidaht are embarking on this venture since it appears to be a natural partnership. The project has only moved beyond the inception stage but holds promise to be used as a template wherever first nations aspire to self-government.