

Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Community to Community Forum
(November 4, 2004 – Pt. Alberni)

Final Report

Overview:

The Community to Community forum was held on November 4, 2004 and was attended by representatives from the Regional District, the City, and the two local First Nations; The Tseshaht and Hupacasath. Approximately twenty people participated. The intention of the Forum was to provide a focused opportunity for dialogue about local issues of concern and interest. The objectives for the session included:

- Building improved communication structures among the four parties
- Exploring ways to enhance cooperation and collaboration on local initiatives
- Creating a better understanding of the different governance systems at work in the community
- Inventing new ways to forge partnerships and build greater solidarity
- Discovering alternative ways to share services, address immediate community infrastructure needs, and consider joint venture opportunities
- Updating each other on current plans and initiatives

The discussions focused on three major themes or topic areas:

- 1. Expanding opportunities to work together and improve government to government relations**
- 2. Infrastructure planning and sharing services**
- 3. Resource planning and utilization**

Each of these issues was discussed in some detail, resulting in consensus decisions being reached about how to address them more intentionally and with greater cooperation. Several 'next steps' were agreed to and a series of action items will be worked on to ensure momentum carries forward and progress is made.

The Issues, Interests and Next Steps:

This section of the report will summarize each of the main issues by describing what they are (participant's views), what's important about them (interests) and what follow-up work will be done to address them (next steps).

1. Working Together and Improving Relations:

There was widespread acknowledgement that relations among the parties are generally positive, cooperative and mutually supportive. In fact, the strength of community relationships in the Valley was considered quite unique and the improvements that have been made in the recent past were also highlighted. Despite this overall atmosphere of cooperation and support, more intentional efforts can still be made to expand opportunities to work together, share services, communicate more openly and forge even stronger relations. The strategic value of solidarity and closer working partnerships was another commonly expressed point of view. Greater cooperation between First Nations and local governments in pursuit of the 'common good' is considered essential for expanded growth and community development. The importance of sharing community plans, communicating about governance visions, and promoting closer working partnerships was widely acknowledged also. Greater education, awareness and familiarity with each other (including how the various 'systems' operate) is another way to foster improved relations and remove barriers and obstacles to cooperating. Enhanced communication (being better informed) is another important step in building closer community relations. Recognition and respect for differences should also inform governing relations, so that conflict can be used as a positive force for change, rather than a crisis which encourages separation and divisiveness in the community.

Several **interests** were expressed in regards to the issue of relationship building and creating a more collaborative working model for the Alberni Valley. These include:

- Desire to improve communication
- Need to expand community education and awareness (building cultural, traditional, and administrative familiarity)
- Hope to create new (innovative) ways to partner, cooperate and support each other
- Concern over public ignorance and misunderstanding about different governing authorities (as well as cultural histories)
- The importance of future oriented, long range visioning
- Hope to demonstrate greater solidarity and unity as a means to improving infrastructure service sharing opportunities
- Need to create more dialogue opportunities for education and planning purposes (treaty dialogues, cultural exchanges and histories, understanding different roles, responsibilities and administrative systems etc.)
- Importance of the First Nations taking a leadership role in providing education, building cultural familiarity and countering public ignorance (sharing information about their history and traditions, including residential schooling)

In order to meet the interests expressed by the parties, the following **next steps** and action items were agreed to:

Designing and Developing a Community Education Forum

It was agreed that an educational, community awareness Forum be designed and developed cooperatively by all parties. The intention is for everyone to participate in a full day information 'show and tell' session intended to familiarize the community with different governance systems, administrative responsibilities and cultural traditions and histories. This orientation workshop would be shared by all four parties and is expected to be held in the New Year, likely in the month of February. Final dates need to be determined. The Forum will require detailed planning and organization, so thought should be given to forming an organizing committee so the parties can work together in creating and designing the session. It was suggested that the Forum be held in a one of the First Nation communities, as a means to promote cultural awareness and community relationship building. It was also mentioned that if the initial session is successful, a follow-up series of sessions could be designed to address other specific themes.

Communication Protocol Development

One of the challenges raised during the meeting was the fact that sometimes when important community events are taking place, some of the parties are unaware and uninformed about them. This can create an awkward situation when one party is aware, and is unsure how they should be communicating to the others. The difficulty is exacerbated when a party feels insulted by being left out or ignored, which can erode trust and strain community relations. Improved communication was seen as the answer to this challenge, with the intent being to build greater community solidarity and enhance the parties' collective political power base. It was agreed that a formal (written) communication protocol would be developed and drafted that details how all parties will inform and make each other aware of community events taking place. The Hupacasath Nation (Chief Judith Sayers) agreed to lead this protocol development effort, and it is expected that volunteers from each government will assist in designing it. The protocol will serve as the guiding document which explains in sufficient detail how the four levels of government will communicate and keep each other informed and aware of high profile community events.

2. Infrastructure Planning and Sharing Services:

The bulk of the discussion about this topic focused on water systems and also touched briefly on other potential service sharing options (e.g. transit). There are both long range and short range (near term) planning priorities that need to be addressed. The importance of addressing immediate community infrastructure needs should be balanced with a long range vision that anticipates future requirements and plans accordingly. The idea of who has ownership of given community resources, and where benefits are directed, was also

raised. The importance of collective planning efforts and exercises to manage long range infrastructure issues is considered essential to creating a unified community plan for the Alberni Valley. Demonstrating support for infrastructure investments in First Nations communities is also considered an important priority. It was agreed that several challenges exist in relation to the provision of water services, both in the short term and long term. In the short term, it appears that purveying water and ensuring acceptable quality (specifically for the Hupacasath Nation) is of utmost importance. In the longer term, new sources will be required to manage growth and development both residential and industrial. Funding is a perpetual challenge, as purveying water to more rural areas is costly, and typically the tax base doesn't support those kinds of expenditures. There are various options available to provide water in areas that fall outside the improvement district. For example the Regional District can set up water service areas, which might also benefit the Hupacasath's Nation's application for an addition to reserves (i.e. might eventually service the addition to reserve with water service area). It is worth noting that there is some reluctance to the idea of having the Regional District take over the water improvement district and manage services (concern over greater taxation, fear of administrative challenges if the RD took over, desire to maintain autonomy, and the importance of maintaining adequate protection and conservation standards).

The Hupacasath Nation identified some immediate challenges with regards to providing water for the Kleekoot reserve, and also described the difficulty of expanding development (building) in the community because of the proximity of the water and sewer lines. The immediate problem with water services at the Kleekoot reserve is mainly about quality, but in the future, quantity (sourcing) will also need to be addressed. Several options were raised to potentially address this set of problems which included:

- Awaiting approval from residents to expand water lines to Bell Road / Stewart Ave. which might then become an eventual source for the Kleekoot reserve.
- Pump and treat water from Sproat Lake to service the reserve.
- Explore partnerships with other water users in the area – BC Parks, developers etc. to negotiate shared levels of service.
- Consider short term quality solutions and obtain advice from the City engineer about how to implement them.

The Tsheshaht Nation identified a challenge with road safety and the volume of logging trucks passing through their community. The noise factor is also problematic and must be addressed. They also expressed a renewed interest in considering transit sharing arrangements if the costs and logistics seem feasible.

Several **interests** were expressed in regards to the issue of infrastructure planning and sharing services. These include:

- Need for long term infrastructure planning
- Desire to cooperate and demonstrate support for infrastructure investments in First Nation's communities
- Importance of addressing short term, immediate infrastructure challenges

- Desire for increased dialogue opportunities to initiate and coordinate long term planning activities
- Hope to explore infrastructure partnerships and joint ventures in other service areas (e.g. transit, the airport etc.)
- Need to secure a long term water source
- Concern over costs and funding arrangements for more rural service users
- Desire to revisit infrastructure needs on an on-going basis
- Need to access appropriate authorities for infrastructure planning activities

In order to meet the interests expressed by the parties, the following **next steps** and action items were agreed to:

Mayor's Breakfast

Increasingly focus the Mayor's regular breakfast meetings on infrastructure issues and challenges, and encourage all parties to attend and raise concerns. This should be accessed as an informal opportunity for dialogue to promote the raising of community issues that require infrastructure planning.

Joint Lobbying Effort – Regional District and Tseshaht First Nation

The Regional District (likely represented by Bob Harper) will work with the Tseshaht First Nation to lobby the Provincial government (Minister of highways) to address road safety concerns and encourage improvements and upgrades.

3. Resource Planning and Utilization:

This topic area touched on a number of resource planning issues including forestry, tourism, parks management, the airport, transit (roads) and off shore oil and gas exploration. It was suggested that potential tourism opportunities might exist that could meaningfully involve all four different governing bodies. There is also a need to cooperate more closely (establish partnerships) to manage parks, protect and conserve the shoreline, and generally manage the local habitat and ensure it is being utilized in sustainable ways. The involvement of First Nations in land management (conservation, protection etc.) is considered an important step in forging stronger working relationships. The City provided a brief update on its community forest application, and it was strongly suggested that they rigorously follow a consultation protocol with the two First Nations (as the proposed location of the community forest is on traditional territory) and ensure that it is initiated early on, and made available on a regular basis. In regards to forestry, the Tseshaht Band is not currently in a position to provide updates on its forestry plans, but will do so as soon as conveniently possible. The issue of the proposed Horn Lake connector also generated a lot of interest. All parties felt that they needed to be meaningfully involved in a consultation process so they could provide input and feedback on developing the roadway. The issue about how to manage the airport was also raised,

but there was insufficient time to make any concrete decisions about it. However, the idea of creating an airport authority was expressed, and the notion of developing a business case to put the land to better use was also mentioned. It was agreed that further discussion needs to take place about this issue.

The main thrust of the discussion concerned the issue of offshore oil and gas exploration, and the decision to lift the moratorium. Everyone acknowledged the critical importance of creating dialogue about this issue. The need to get informed and educated about it was widely shared by all parties with the intent being to have the necessary information and knowledge to eventually make informed decisions. Conducting extensive due diligence and engaging in focused dialogues (get all the different views on the table) about offshore oil and gas exploration is considered a high priority.

Several **interests** were expressed in regards to the issue of resource planning and utilization. These include:

- Need for greater cooperation and coordination of resource planning initiatives
- Desire to involve First Nations more extensively in land management activities
- Hope to develop more effective land use plans for the airport
- Need for expanded dialogue and consultation opportunities on various issues (Horn Lake connector, community forest, oil and gas exploration etc.)
- Importance of getting diverse views heard about local resource planning priorities and expectations
- Need to keep lines of communication open to identify community relevant issues as they arise

In order to meet the interests expressed by the parties, the following **next steps** and action items were agreed to:

Convene an Offshore Oil and Gas Education Forum

All parties will jointly develop a proposal to secure funding to hold the Forum and will work together to organize and plan the event. Various funding sources were identified and the Mayor agreed to follow-up and conduct initial research into obtaining it.

Joint Lobbying Effort - Horn Lake Connector

It was agreed that all parties would support a lobbying effort to encourage consultation about plans for the Horn Lake connector and that Bob Harper would invite the Minister of highways to address all the parties about this issue during his visit to the Chamber of Commerce.

Conclusion:

Most participants voiced satisfaction with the Forum, and were glad for the opportunity to conduct focused discussions about issues of concern and importance. Building on the strong relationship foundation which currently exists among the parties, further work needs to be done to strengthen community relations and improve cooperative governing structures. Collaboration, partnership and support are considered essential in building a more unified front. Education, awareness, and communication are all important mechanisms for building a more cohesive community. The Community to Community Forum represents an important initial step, which therefore suggests follow-up work and highlights the need for more opportunities to meet and engage in detailed conversation about local issues of interest. Maintaining collaborative momentum and ensuring that action items and next steps get implemented is the next challenge. It was repeated on several occasions that more chances should be created to discuss, share ideas, learn about each other's views and become more aware of community aspirations and expectations and find ways to cooperate on fulfilling those.