

OKANAGAN INDIAN BAND - CITY OF VERNON

BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONS



PATHWAY OVERVIEW

Located in B.C.'s Okanagan Valley, the City of Vernon is a major regional service centre and popular tourist destination. The Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) is one of the eight-member First Nation communities of the Okanagan Nation Alliance whose members stretch across the Okanagan Valley and into the United States. Building on a foundation of partnership stemming from a Community to Community (C2C) forum in 2001, these two partners are now participating in the multi-year First Nation - Municipal Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI) program to improve economic prosperity for both communities through joint community economic development and land use planning. Anticipated key outcomes of this partnership include relationship building, community involvement and engagement, and opportunities to collaborate on land use planning and mutually beneficial community economic development initiatives, including joint tourism projects.

PATHWAY ACTIVITIES

The collaborative pathway activities undertaken by the Okanagan Indian Band and the City of Vernon include the following.



**Protocol and
Communications Agreements**



**Servicing Agreements
and Infrastructure**



**Land Use Planning
and Development**



**Joint Economic
Development Initiatives**



**Shared Tourism
Projects**

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Prior to embarking on the CEDI program, the two communities had previously worked together through a series of Community to Community (C2C) forums starting in 2001. Through these meetings, a Letter of Understanding was signed in 2002, as well as a Protocol Agreement in 2003, both committing the two groups to meeting regularly to discuss potential collaborations between the two communities.

From 2003 to 2016, yearly C2C meetings occurred between the two communities leading to more discussions on topics such as sewage treatment, regional growth management, archaeological and cultural issues, and development

opportunities along a shared waterfront area. In 2016, leaders from Vernon and OKIB discussed the potential around a maintenance agreement that would enable Vernon to provide maintenance, emergency response, and signage along the waterfront shared by residents of both communities.

In these meetings, leaders also discussed the potential for tourism opportunities in developing a trail system between Kelowna, Vernon, and parts of OKIB's reserve lands. That same year, the OKIB joined an interjurisdictional group to ensure trail development did not disrupt title or specific claims to areas proposed for trail development.

While talks between the two partners continued, the time was also characterized by little progress on actions being discussed. This changed in 2017 when OKIB and Vernon were selected as one of nine partnerships in Canada to participate in the CEDI program (see text box). In this program, governing councils and key staff are brought together over three years to establish resilient relationships that support and provide tools to work towards joint land use and economic development plans and initiatives.

OUTCOMES

Since 2017, both communities have participated in bi-annual workshops and monthly working group meetings facilitated by the CEDI program. Monthly working group meetings are guided by a jointly developed Terms of Reference. These meetings allow select 'CEDI Champions' including elected officials and senior staff from both OKIB and Vernon to collaborate and plan the larger Council-to-Council workshops where the identification of collaborative opportunities and steps to moving them forward have been made.

An early CEDI-facilitated workshop helped foster a better understanding of each community's cultures, histories, land use plans and planning processes, infrastructure needs and jurisdictional powers, specifically for a shared waterfront area. Given the importance of the Okanagan Lake waterfront to both communities, the two partners created a special sub-committee tasked with developing a Joint Strategic Plan for waterfront development.

In October 2018, both communities honoured their relationship by signing a Relationship Accord. The event took place on the shores of Okanagan Lake with elected councils from both Vernon and OKIB attending along with OKIB Elders, regional dignitaries, and community members. The ceremonial signing recognized the social, cultural, and economic ties that exist between the communities.



PHOTO: OKIB Chief Byron Louis and former Mayor Akbal Mund signing the Relationship Accord with key staff and elected officials involved in the CEDI process.

To date, one of the core priorities that has emerged from the partnership is taking a collaborative approach to waterfront planning along a portion of land shared by both communities. After an incident at this beach in the summer of 2018, both communities understood the urgent need for greater collaboration to implement a service agreement that would ensure the entire beach is maintained to the same standard as the rest of the city. With the support of CEDI, the sub-committee meets quarterly to address infrastructure challenges and potential solutions, and to identify joint or mutual economic development opportunities at the shared waterfront. As one of the only Okanagan municipalities without any developed waterfront, this area presents a great opportunity for both the City and OKIB to work on plans for future development.



CEDI - A National Joint Community Economic Development Initiative

The First Nations – Municipal Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI) aims to improve the economic prosperity of participating First Nations and adjacent municipalities through joint community economic development planning and initiatives. CEDI is a joint initiative of Cando (Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers) and Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM).

Through the CEDI program, Cando and FCM work with partner communities, consisting of First Nations and adjacent municipalities and often, other regional partners. As well, CEDI works to share lessons learned and stories of success as part of a community of practice with those who are interested in joint First Nation – municipal community economic development.



A December 2018 workshop on potential joint tourism initiatives helped the two communities look deeper into collaboration on parks, trails and signage. In late 2018 and early 2019, each community had an election, which brought some turnover and change in Council. The new Mayor of Vernon, councillors and OKIB councillors were welcomed at both the December 2018 and the June 2019 workshops, including a Council-to-Council dinner. Newly elected officials from both communities have expressed enthusiasm and willingness to continue to move the relationship forward.

As these two communities continue their collaborative work through the CEDI process, their areas of interest for the final stages of the CEDI program involve completing the Joint Strategic Plan for their shared Okanagan Lake waterfront area, exploring joint tourism opportunities with parks, trails, and signage for culturally significant places, as well as increased community involvement in joint economic development initiatives.

As the the OKIB - City of Vernon partnership transitions out of the CEDI program in early 2020, both communities have begun to consider the steps moving forward in order to ensure the partnership continues. Part of this process involves ensuring each community has the capacity to contribute administrative and technical support to the partnership. Another key aspect of successful transition from CEDI is ensuring that the partnership structure remains 'alive' by continually coordinating working group meetings and updating shared agreements: terms of reference, Relationship Accord, etc. Ultimately, it is about nurturing the partnership between their neighbouring communities as they work together to ensure a healthy and prosperous environment for all peoples.

LESSONS LEARNED AND KEYS TO SUCCESS

A core lesson learned in this process is ensuring time is spent on relationship-building which allows for greater understanding and trust. This includes taking the time to learn about one another's cultures, histories, land use plans and planning processes, infrastructure needs and jurisdictional powers. As well, it is important to take the time to learn about each community's social and economic priorities, as these may or may not align. Other lessons and keys to success include:

- ✓ **Create a collaboration framework.** Having a co-designed and mutually agreed upon structure to your partnership can help guide and support the relationship.
- ✓ **Bring the broader community into the work.** This includes regular and frequent updates and press releases to make sure the broader community is up to date on the progress and successes of the partnership and joint initiatives.
- ✓ **Confirm commitments frequently.** Meet frequently and regularly to monitor joint progress, as this supports the continual growth of the trust needed between the partners for long-term collaboration.
- ✓ **Political willingness to start the conversation.** Having elected leaders step up and commit the time, capacity, and energy to starting and maintaining this partnership is essential.
- ✓ **Build trust.** No partnership can work without a significant level of trust built between those involved. Courage, openness, and vulnerability are key to building trust and sharing in a mutually beneficial relationship.
- ✓ **Build internal capacity.** Rather than having facilitators ensure the relationship continues, make sure that administrative and technical support can be provided internally. Ask staff and program managers if they can take on or share some of the extra work needed to continue the relationship.



PHOTO: Signing of the Relationship Accord included a lakeside ceremony where community members, elected officials, OKIB Elders, and regional dignitaries recognized shared ties between these communities.

“We recognize by working together on economic development initiatives in our traditional territory, we will have the opportunity to identify some challenges and create strategies to overcome them. The result of these efforts will strengthen our relationship and the regional economy.”

OKIB Chief Byron Louis

“I am confident that our common goals for local economic development will foster benefits that will extend to many other aspects of community building. The CEDI program is giving us the framework to work together to achieve strong local results.”

Councillor Akbal Mund, City of Vernon

PATHWAYS TO COLLABORATION

Pathways to Collaboration is a joint initiative of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), the Province of British Columbia, and the First Nations Summit with funding from the Indigenous Business & Investment Council (IBIC). The project aims to showcase the growing number of successful economic development collaborations and partnerships between First Nations and local governments, while highlighting lessons learned and key steps to success.

The pathways to collaboration communities take are unique, reflecting the context of the communities involved, and involve different activities. Common pathway activities include protocol and communications agreements; servicing agreements and shared infrastructure projects; collaborative land use planning and development projects; joint economic development initiatives; and shared tourism projects. Like signposts along a pathway, these pathway activities are identified in the case study series.

For more information on the project, please contact the communities profiled, or visit www.ubcm.ca.



Indigenous Business and Investment Council

Sharing Success