

Bancroft Times – February 16, 2006

Algonquins Hold Information Meeting

by Barry Hendry

On February 1, the Algonquin Negotiation Representatives (ANR) met at the Sword Motor Inn, for a regular session before holding one of three information meetings for members of the Algonquin community.

Principal Negotiator Robert (Bob) Potts, welcomed over 50 people to the first information session since the ANRs were elected last May and thanked Ada Tinney, for the opening prayer. He described the meeting as "private", meant for those of Algonquin descent whom he hoped would comment openly and with confidentiality.

At this point The Bancroft Times was politely asked, and agreed, to leave the meeting. Potts offered to comment to the newspaper on February 3.

Soon after this date, Potts said, "I think it was extremely well attended. I think there were about 100 people there and I was pleased that all 16 ANRs were there so it was open and people could ask specific questions of them."

Potts said the ANRS have been able to meet monthly since the May elections.

"We have a huge amount of work to do in consultations with the communities. Each ANR wants to get feedback from their communities. They have started the process of reviewing the past work and creating a working binder of those matters, so that gives us a walking start into the negotiations. We hope to have an agreement in principle by May, 2008."

"We have started the process and in the future the ANRs will have to have a technical advisory group (TAG), of professionals to help with land use planning initiatives. That would probably include an accountant, an economist and a planner. We would issue a request for proposal for that group."

Potts said the province, under its negotiator Brian Crane, has started its working group of municipalities which are intending to meet quarterly. He said he had attended one of their meetings to inform them of the progress of the ANRs.

Information gleaned from the Blaney McMurtry Law Firm Web site, where Potts is a partner, and from his January 24 letter to the Algonquins, indicates there has been steady progress in the negotiations. In his opening remarks on February 1, he repeated the fact that both the federal and provincial governments have "formally indicated their willingness to participate in the negotiations with a view to resolving all outstanding Algonquin claims in Ontario, and the objective of signing an Agreement in Principle (AIP) for that purpose within two years."

Since the election, or acclamation of the nine ANRs, they have met regularly and by September 26, 2005, had completed the "Terms of Reference for Algonquin Negotiation Representatives," which will govern the conduct of their meetings, and outlines their duties as they prepare to enter the negotiations of the treaty. The complete document is available on <http://www.blaney.com/algonquin.htm> and there is a toll free information line: 1-877-287-4570.

Also completed was the establishment of a trust account or vehicle to accept and manage the government funding for these negotiations in an efficient and transparent manner.

A key responsibility of the ANRs is outlined in the mandate portion of the Terms of Reference: "Shall have the responsibility of meaningful consulting with, and taking direction from each of their respective communities... and to provide direction and instructions to the principle negotiator with respect to the negotiations."

Further, they are required to: "Evaluate positions and strategies predating November 16, 2001, (when the last round of negotiations stalled) and develop additional positions and strategies for the Algonquins in the negotiations and, in particular, review all position and discussion papers and land identification maps developed previously for the negotiations."

On this duty, Potts said in his letter, "the ANRs have also compiled and begun reviewing working binders of materials that had been previously prepared during prior negotiations. Our hope is that through this process we will be able to avoid needless duplication and delay."

The ANRs represent the communities of Bancroft, Whitney, Mattawa/North Bay, Sharbot Lake, Greater Golden Lake, Antoine, Ottawa, Ardoch and Bonnechere. The negotiating team also includes the Chief of Pikwakanagan and its council.

There will be similar information meetings held in Pembroke, on March 2, at the Royal Canadian Legion, 202 Pembroke St., and on March 23, at the Makwa Centre, Pikwakanagan First Nation.