

# Policy on open Council meetings

Approved by Council, September 5, 2002

## Preamble

It is the intention of the Gesgapegiag Band Council to be as transparent as possible in running of the day to day affairs of the community, taking into account the need to respect confidentiality on some issues, and to protect strategy on others.

In order to ensure greater transparency in the operations of the Band, the Council wishes to hold regular Band Council meetings that are open to the community. Such a gesture will improve the flow of information between the Council and members of the Band, and will enable community members to become more knowledgeable about the roles and responsibilities of Council members and of administrative staff. It will help increase community participation in the management of Gesgapegiag affairs, and form leaders for tomorrow.

This initiative also responds to a requirement of the Department of Indian Affairs to take steps to ensure greater accountability to the community on behalf of the Band Council.

A different kind of operation:

Obviously, open meetings will tend to be much more formal in nature than those held behind closed doors. An open session calls for politeness in the face of opposition, good listening skills, and taking everyone at face value. Some people will be very shy and timid in such meetings, others will feel very stressed. There will be awkward silences and perhaps some aggressive behaviour. All this can be best handled if Council members and staff involved take the time **to** be well prepared, and enter the meeting with a positive attitude.

When it comes to decision-making, the discussions should be detailed enough to examine all consequences of decisions, and the final decision should be **a firm** one. From time **to** time, the chairperson should summarize discussions for clarity and precision. Procedural rules must be followed carefully. Council members should not be shy about asking for clarification or more details before venturing opinions.

## Timing of Band Council open meetings

As much as possible, open meetings will be held at a time when the majority of community members would be likely to be able to attend, and at a location accessible to all.

## Types of meetings

The Band Council may call three different types of open meetings:

- Annual financial report
- Regular Council meetings
- Information meetings

### **Annual financial report**

Every year in September, the Council will hold an open meeting to present its annual audit to the community and to respond to questions from community members.

Whenever possible, copies of the annual report will be distributed to homes with the notice of the meeting, to give community members a chance to review the information beforehand. The Chief and Council and senior staff of the Band will be present to help answer questions from the members.

### **Regular Council meetings**

Once a month, the Band Council will open one of the regular Council meetings to members of the community. A notice should go out to community members about the time and location at least one week in advance. It is the prerogative of the Chief alone to cancel a meeting that has already been announced to the community.

The agenda of such a meeting will be organized by the Chief, the Director of Operations and the Executive Assistant to ensure that information of a confidential or strategic nature will not be discussed. Confidential information will be issues such as human resources management, cases involving private information about individuals (eg social assistance, housing, membership requests, etc) and other internal matters. Information of a strategic nature will be those involving business opportunities for the Band or for an individual member, political lobbying strategies, etc.

The agenda of open Council meetings should be kept fairly short, with the emphasis on issues that would be interesting and informative for community members. Emphasis will be placed on issues of a communal nature which will help community members develop a better understanding of the political and social issues which Council members have to take into account in their regular work. Besides the title of the issue to be discussed, the agenda should include the objective: eg "Estuary fishing: resolution to approve the signing of the deal with the Quebec government." It is preferable, if possible, to estimate the amount of time each item will take, and include that on the agenda, so that the meeting moves along at a steady pace. Items on the agenda should be placed according to priority, with the most important subjects dealt with first.

A question period will follow at the end of the meeting to allow community members to bring forward issues of concern to them. These question periods may be chaired by an independent animator (like a Parliamentary Speaker) in order to allow all Council members to participate fully in the discussion. The time of such a question period should be announced at the beginning of the meeting.

Senior staff will meet Council before the meeting so that they can fully brief Council on issues on the agenda. It is strongly recommended that Council go over the agenda in detail and foresee questions that might be raised.

### **Information meetings**

**From time to time, the Band Council may choose to hold an information meeting so that community members can be informed of the details of a specific issue, and their general reaction to the issue can be ascertained. A question period is an essential ingredient to any such meeting. The Band Council may ask community members for an informal vote on the issue in question, or may decide to proceed at another time with a formal referendum, following the stipulations laid out in the Indian Act and related statutes and regulations.**

### **Logistical details:**

**A sound system should be set up so that everyone in the room can hear the discussions taking place at the head table.**

**The Council should be seated in a horseshoe pattern so that the community can see the members easily.**

**Question period should be formal and respect rules of procedure. Those wishing to ask questions should raise their hands to be noticed by Council, and the time taken up by any one question should be limited so that everyone who wants to ask a question might have the chance. This time limit should be announced at the beginning of the question period. Members of the community will be cautioned that disrespectful or aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated.**

**A member of the Gesgapegiag Police Department will be on duty at all community meetings.**

**Any points raised by the community members relative to personal cases will be referred to the proper authority for redress. If a question cannot be answered at the meeting, provision will be made to get back to the individual in question with the answer. In the case of a political matter, the Chief will ensure the follow-up; in the case of an administrative matter, the Director of Operations will ensure the follow-up.**

**Members of the press will not be permitted to attend the community meetings.**

