

**Important Message from C. Roy Petit
Councillor i/c of Public Works & Housing
Beardy - Okemasis Willow Cree Nation #96 & #97**

The Public Works & Housing programs (PW&H) are two of the most important programs in our community; they are also two of the least understood.

I am putting this information together in order to try and assist our members in familiarizing themselves with these programs; I hope that this will provide a clearer understanding about which each of these programs provides to our community.

“Please take time to read this; it is of vital importance to our future.”

PW&H at a Glance:

Population on reserve: Estimated at 1,500 with many transient members;

Population off reserve: Estimated 1,800 with many transient members;

Homes on reserve: 326 Band Homes - from 5-40 years old;

Buildings: Band Office, Arena, *Elementary and High Schools*, Day Care, Rec. Center, Senior’s Hall, RCMP Station, Justice Building, Fire Hall, Water

Treatment Plant, Old Band Office, Heavy Equipment Storage, 5 Pump Houses;

Equipment: 3 Trucks, Grader, Loader, Back-hoe, Skid steer, *7 Busses...*;

Roads: approximately 150Km of roadways including driveways & entryways;

Employees: Director - Public Works & Housing, PW&H Clerk, General Maintenance Worker +Casual(s), Water Treatment Plant Operator +Casual, Heavy Equipment Operator +Casual(s), (2)On-call Electrician(s), (2)Casual Building Custodians, (3) Sanitation Services Contracts, (2) Water Contractors, (4) *Custodians/Schools*, (1) *Maintenance/Schools*.

Sitting Bull: “Let us put our minds together and see what future we will make for our children”

Yearly Funding – Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)

Operations & Maintenance \$1,016,770/yr deposited to our account monthly at \$85,000/mo. This amount is designated to the entire operation of the bands infrastructure, and includes salaries, contracts, equipment maintenance supplies, all insurance, fuel costs, all building maintenance including utilities, power & energy, phone, oil/propane, all maintenance to water, sewer and/or electrical, road maintenance, any other emergencies that may arise in the community pertaining to operations.

NOTE: \$511, 834.00 of the total O&M dollars received goes directly into our school budgets for use in their operations; this leaves the overall band O&M budget at only \$504,936.00/yr. or \$42,078/mo.

How this funding is calculated:

AANDC will compare an R.M. or community of equal to the size of our First Nation (same number of buildings, homes, population, machinery, infrastructure, employees, etc.), based on these numbers they calculate how much that R.M./community should receive in provincial funding and taxes collected, to operate – whatever that amount is, we as a Band receive **20%** of that total to put towards our overall operations and maintenance.

It has always been an expectation that the **80% shortfall** in funding would come from the Band itself; there was a unanimous decision to apply and collect the **user fee** was passed at a General Band Meeting; in order to address the shortfall in funding a user fee in the amount of \$100/mo. has to be applied to every household in order for the band to be able to carry out the scope of work that needs to be done within our community this fee has to be fully implemented and carried on into each successive Administration.

It is important that the membership understand that there is no budget allocation within the O&M dollars that is, or can be designated to renovations of any band homes, these dollars are strictly designated to our community's infrastructure costs.

Band Based Capital

\$691,915/yr is designated to this program and is distributed monthly based on submissions for work completed. BBC dollars are allotted to items such as major/minor/emergency renovations (*non-section95 only*), band building renovations/upgrades, driveways, insurance, equipment usage, and project management and administration fee.

Note: Not all of these dollars come to the Band; suppliers get paid directly through submissions made for material.

The BBC portion of the AANDC funding is currently under third party and is being managed by SAL Engineering, a project management firm. We must work with SAL and our AANDC designate to decide how we will expend these dollars.

Before dollars are released under this portion of funding a plan must be submitted prior to year end showing the types of projects you are planning to undertake for the coming year. During this first year we designated a large portion of these dollars to minor and emergency renovations, other amounts were designated to band building renovations, sewer and water restoration, minor fire hall renovations, insurance, a portion goes to Project Management, and a portion to Administration which is generally used to cover the Director Public Works & Housing position. Once projects have been completed, we submit invoices, etc. to the project managers and they release the money to the band or supplier of material. We are coming to the end of the fiscal year and are on task to utilize all of these dollars. There is definitely no shortage of work to be done and we will continue for as long as those dollars allow.

It is important to note that any AANDC dollars not used are generally taken back by AANDC and are not added to the following year's budget. Also, failure to follow through with regular reporting halts funding, so we must be diligent in following through on these processes to ensure that there are no halts to services that the PW&H programs offer to the community.

If you are in need of renovations please forward a letter to our office listing your request(s), your house number, and any contact information – your name will be added to the list that we currently have going. ***Please understand that there are 326 Band Homes and we are trying to address as much as we can, when we can – be patient, be kind, thank you.***

Other Funding AANDC

Separate from our regular funding agreement dollars, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) also assists with identified larger infrastructure items in the community, these are called **Major Projects**. Currently there are three (3) Major Projects that are underway in the community – the first is the flood/road rehabilitation and repair project, the second is the drainage ditch project (*planning stage*), and the third is the school rehabilitation and repair project. These projects will be ongoing throughout the year with the remaining dollars designated to each. For the coming year a new project has been submitted: the Water Treatment Plant rehabilitation and repair project.

Housing

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) is a federal loan organization; our rating with CMHC along with our ability to secure a **Ministerial Loan Guarantee** from AANDC is what allows First Nation Communities to build Housing on Reserve. CMHC does not provide regular funding to the Band. Under the CMHC loan agreements we currently have **9 active phases** called ‘**Section95 Housing**’; under the 9 phases we have **64 Housing Units** that are all being occupied.

Prior to the designation of a Section95 Home to an individual or family, a tenancy agreement is signed by the Band Member and the Band, this agreement outlines the responsibilities of both parties, and identifies the rental rate which is meant to cover the cost of the mortgage taken out for that particular phase.

Rent payments received from the Section95 Housing Units covers the mortgage that the band has taken in order to have these units built. As we make these mortgage payments, CMHC provides us with a subsidy which is often times almost equal to what we pay out – this subsidy goes into required separate bank accounts called ‘**Replacement and Operating Reserve Accounts**’. The collection of rent allows our housing program immediate access to the dollars needed to address any renovation issue(s) that may arise for these 64 units and a structured program makes us eligible for more housing in the future.

**Separate from the 64 Section95 Housing Units, there are 30 Section10 Houses that were meant to be under similar agreements, these mortgages have been paid for by the Band almost since they were built.*

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For many First Nation Communities it has been a practice to have the Section 95 house assigned to an SA client, which ensured that the rent would be covered under that program – AANDC has made it very clear that they will not allow this to continue, and will not be paying any of these rents if EVERYONE is not paying their fair share.

Example: One (1) Tenant receiving Social Assistance
 One (1) Tenant Employed
 One (1) Tenant receiving Provincial Training Allowance (PTA)

 Rent/Mortgage Portion = \$345/mo.
\$345 divided into 3 = \$115/mo. per 3 individuals living in household.

** It is important to mention that this formula also applies to all utilities for the unit, as well as fuel costs (oil/propane).*

Other Programs CMHC

CMHC also provides program dollars that anyone can apply to each year for renovation projects for homes, these initiatives are called the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) and the Home Adaptation for Seniors (HASI) – please check out their Web Page for a detailed description of these programs.

RRAP can be applied to as regular or disabled; this program provides renovation dollars for any non-section 95 home on the reserve up to an amount of \$1,600 – a Band can apply for as many as they want, but are generally designated an amount based on their membership on reserve.

Accessing these dollars is a long drawn out process: step 1 make the application, step 2 call an inspector to come out and review the needs identified and add, or take away from the list, step 3 a tender must be sent out (contractors bid on the work) step 4 hopefully we can get the dollars in time to get the work completed before the deadline(s).

HASI meant to assist seniors – the amount of this grant is \$3,500; application and approval as the above described RRAP.

In Closing

Our community is at an important crossroads, either we change the way we conduct ourselves, or we continue to dig ourselves deeper into a hole that we will never be able to get out of.

Under Housing, the fact of the matter is this: if we don't get our rental program in order there is no money going into the Operating Reserve Account (ORA), therefore there is no money for renovation or repairs of any kind – for any of the 64 section95 units. BBC, RRAP and HASI dollars can only be used for renovations to band homes, not under the Section95 agreements.

Currently, all rents/mortgages (*including 30 Section10Units*) are coming from the Band budget at a rate of around **\$384,000/Yr**. According to our history with the rental program, we haven't collected rent for at least the past 7 years. If you consider this in terms of dollars: $7\text{yrs} \times \$384,000/\text{yr} = \$2,688,000.00$. By our own inaction, we are all contributing to our own debt. More importantly we will not be eligible for any new housing in the near or distant future.

As for Public Works, based on our current portion of the budget allotment received from AANDC used for the Operations & Maintenance of our communities entire infrastructure (\$505,000.00/yr), we are expected to provide Maintenance Services for all of these items: *Water Treatment Plant, Water Hauling, Sewer, Garbage, Roads, All Band Buildings, and Emergency Home Maintenance items for up to 300+ homes in our community*. If we do not implement the user fee, we will continue to suffer with substandard services in all of these areas. The money required to carry out these regular maintenance services for the Health & Safety of our community is just not there.

We are a proud 'Independent Band' doing the best we can with whatever we have. Unlike the very few other Bands out there who are sitting on Oil & Gas, Diamonds, Forest, Gravel, or anything that could bring us into self-sufficiency we rely on whatever is provided to us, by an outdated, one sided system. We must take it upon ourselves to change our situation – no one is coming to save us.

Thank you for your time,
C. Roy Petit
Councillor i/c Public Works & Housing