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Fort William hosts first Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement Open House

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By Rick Garrick

FORT WILLIAM FIRST NATION — Fort William citizens appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement* during a November 2 open house presentation by Martin Bayer, negotiator for the proposed *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement*.

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ent covers four
ing areas for
: Nations that
vote it in, so what I
heard today from the
people that were here
is that there's definitely
some areas where
they need more
understanding of,"
says Fort William
Councillor Michele
Solomon. "They want
to know what the long-
term implications are
of this for our community."



Martin Bayer, chief negotiator for the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement*, shared information about the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement* during an Open House on Nov. 2 at the Fort William First Nation Community Centre.

Solomon says the open house participants also spoke about the need to encourage more citizens to attend the information sessions.

"So we need to get more people out to hear the information," Solomon says. "We probably need to get this [information] into [their] homes so that they can gather some of the information and then come back to another information session."

The proposed *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement* is an agreement between the Anishinabek Nation, on behalf of its 40 member First Nations, and Canada that recognizes the power of the First Nations that ratify the Agreement to pass their own election laws, citizenship laws, language and culture laws and financial administration type laws.

"It's been [about] 25 years since they began negotiating self-government," says Fort William Councillor Phil Pelletier. "I think it is important for First Nations people to understand what we're trying to do. We live under the *Indian Act*, and we find it holds us back. With this Governance Agreement, it is just a small step going forward where we can start enacting our own laws. Right now, our hands are tied on most issues, and it is just a good way going forward."



Bayer says he was “especially happy with the questions and comments” that were shared by participants at the open house, which was held at the Fort William First Nation Community Centre.

“That feedback is real important to us,” Bayer says. “It was really important when people were sharing concerns about making sure a lot more of this information can get out to other people who were not here this morning. So there will be a lot of opportunities to do that — this was just the first session.”

One of the concerns brought up during the open house was the requirement for First Nations to have a **constitution** before they can ratify the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement*. Fort William currently does not have a constitution.

“On the constitution piece, I think there is lots of time to engage with the people on what a constitution could look like because now the templates for those are not complicated,” Bayer says. “I think they are pretty straight forward, pretty strong. The real challenge is how do we engage with the people so the people understand not just what is in the Governance Agreement, but especially more importantly, what is in their constitution when they vote on that as well.”

The **vote** on the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement* is scheduled for Feb. 1-29, 2020.

“We have a 25 per cent plus one voter participation threshold,” Bayer says, noting that voters need to be 18 years old or older, by the end of the voting period. “And if it’s a 50 per cent plus one that vote in favour, then the Agreement is ratified. So you can vote in person; for those who don’t live in the community, you can also vote by mail-in ballot or even easier, you can just vote online.”

Additional information on the Agreement is available online: governancevote.ca. For any questions, please call the toll-free number: 1-833-297-9850.

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