

Building Relationships with Indigenous Peoples and Aboriginal Communities: What the Duty to Consult and Accommodate means for Ontario Planners

Preface

The following learning module was developed from the work of Carolyn King* and David J. Stinson**. They have been collaborating since 2015 to educate land use planners and economic development officers on the necessity of consultation and accommodation. They were asked by the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) to prepare a Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) course for the professional development of its members.

In this Continuous Professional Learning course, we will explore some of the worldviews, perspectives, communities and territories that belong to the First Peoples of this Land. This will provide a context for understanding the meaning of planning in the multi-jurisdictional place we call Canada and role of planners in the Duty to Consult and Accommodate.

In our live presentations, we start with a Welcome from an Elder. Like most meetings in most societies, gatherings of any significance start with a welcome. In the contexts we are studying here, that welcome often consists of a prayer, or ritual, or ceremony. The intention is to clear the mind and open the heart of personal concerns so that the important matters at hand can be dealt with in peace. It is not about the imposition of belief, but rather an invitation to participation. You are free to participate to whatever degree you are comfortable, without prejudice.

**Carolyn is a member and life-long resident of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. She has been an employee of her community, but was also elected as its first female Chief. She has worked tirelessly on behalf of its community & economic development, its public relations, its land-use planning policies & environmental procedures. She has been awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for her support of First Nation history and advancement of the Aboriginal peoples, the recipient of an Eagle Feather from the Council of MCFN in recognition for 20 years of volunteering, and has recently been awarded the ... She is the creator of the Moccasin Identifier Project and is President of the Shared Path Consultation Initiative.*

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Module II – Tips for Building Relationships

Improving the relationship between the First Peoples and new-comers will be based on Friendship, even for municipalities. The “how” part may be more of a mystery, even a source of fear. One’s natural prejudices easily arise in the face of fear. What this module offers as an antidote, is knowledge. The following are some suggestions to increase one’s indigenous knowledge both personally and officially. All of them do not have to be undertaken and certainly not all at once! Our suggestion is to try one or two, that you and the partner community feel comfortable with and as the opportunity presents itself. Then see how it goes! Don’t be discouraged if it doesn’t work out; keep trying until you find something that does.

What I can do personally?

- Enjoy Media and Art that is produced by Native peoples. Watch APTN, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, for its regular programming. Notice “big news” stories in the regular media, then watch APTN’s coverage. Listen to First Nation run radio stations if you have the chance, either through broadcast, cable, or on-line. Attend public art exhibits or watch documentaries that focus on indigenous themes. You do not have to accept the perspective being presented. But you should be prepared to think, to feel, to compare, to contrast, and most of all to learn.
- Attend a cultural festival that is open to the public, such as a pow-wow. Relax; go with no agenda other than enjoying yourself. They have the atmosphere of a county fair; plenty of food and art & crafts for sale. Be respectful when asked, i.e., to stand during the Grand Entrance, to give way for folks wearing full regalia, to applaud the performers.
- “Play golf”... look for opportunities for Chiefs and Mayors to socialise: tournaments, banquets, hobbies, service clubs. It’s easier to deal with issues that come up when you already know someone. The same can apply to consultation liaisons and planners, though a lunch or refreshment may suit their working schedules better.
- Find someone to talk to. Start the consultation process with someone you have met, know, and trust within the community. Contact the First Nation administration via their web site, e-mail, or phone. Then follow the chain of suggestions until you get to the right person.

Which Communities?

The community of concern for municipal officials are those that are the hosts to your municipality. They are the ones upon whose traditional territory your municipality rests. These are layered, based on the history between contact and the era of settlement, resource extraction, and land-clearing. In Southern Ontario, the Huron-Wendat are now extirpated from this landscape, but are still very much interested in the remains of their ancestors. The First Nations that are the closest to you are likely to be the ones that have the most interest in your activities. They will have rights based on Aboriginal interests or Treaties. There are the Métis whose communities are less obvious, and in Ontario, have no specific boundaries. Then there are the urban-Aboriginal populations. They can come from across the country. An example, are the Inuit who live in Ottawa, the largest community outside of Nunavut. On one hand they are guests on the traditional territory of the host community. On the other, they also have Aboriginal rights, even if they do not live within their Treaty or Settlement Agreement areas.

What we can do officially?

- Do your homework: know the name of the community, where it is located, who the current Chief is, what Treaty is hosting your municipality, etc. Use the community's website and the community profiles available from the federal government. It is fine to call to verify information. Do not send generic self-survey forms to be filled out at their leisure.
- Adjust mapping to delineate First Nation Reserve boundaries and Métis Community locations. Include First Nation/Métis Traditional Territories as a base-map underlay, not as additional overlay. List them as Hosts to your municipality.
- Investigate the development of an indigenous-relations office in your Municipality. Develop a formal welcoming protocol that recognizes Treaty area and the traditional peoples of the territory.
- Create street tourism banners that recognize Traditional territory that hosts them.
- When you swear in a new Mayor & Council, request an Elder from a neighbouring community to assist. Remember to not interrupt the Elder during any presentation they may give. Be sure to offer a gift of tobacco for the request and provide an honorarium if appropriate. This is an implicit recognition of the community as your Host.
- If you open your meetings with a prayer, ask clergy of all denominations to take turns doing it, and include Elders on that list. Remember that this is not about the imposition of beliefs, but about opening the heart and clearing of the mind of peripheral issues so that the important matters at hand can be dealt with.
- Invite members of Chief & Council and staff to visit you for such things as Council meetings, Planning meetings, Chamber of Commerce meetings, etc., and on YOUR dime!
- Send a member of Mayor & Council and planner to visit the neighbouring First Nation and Métis community. Get on the Chief & Council agenda, shortly after municipal or community election, and before issues arise. Chat about upcoming planning initiatives, OP reviews, major projects. At least once during the mandate is good; less often is fine after a relationship is established.
- Exchange flags between the municipality & First Nation/Metis community. Do it in a ceremony, ask citizens, community members, and the media to attend, and then fly it!
- Include each other in each other's' parades. In Mission, BC the Pow-wow and county fair is held the same day. There is one parade that both communities participate in. At the end of the street they go their separate ways to the pow-wow grounds and the fairgrounds to open the two events. Later, folks start to visit each other's event. Other public rituals may also be occasions for collaboration such as Remembrance Day, where Native Veterans are honoured or indigenous leaders partake in the ceremonies.
- Engage with the Share Path Consultation Initiative. We can help support formal opportunities for city staff and council to learn from the First Nations and urban indigenous communities, and design strategies to help municipality understand the effects of policy decisions on indigenous communities.
- Commemoration in the form of public plaques can also be appropriate. Remember that the First Nation or Metis community being honoured should be part of the preparation, research and placement. A unique effort in Ontario of a similar type is the Moccasin Identifier Project...

Words of Wisdom... it takes someone who cares enough to do something, ask one more question, get one more perspective, and take action and be a catalyst for making something good happen.