

# Huu-ay-aht First Nations

**We, the Huu-ay-aht, envision a proud, self-governing and sovereign nation. *lisaak* [greater respect] will guide us as we work together to establish a healthy, prosperous and self-sustaining community where our culture, language, spirituality and economy flourish for the benefit of all Huu-ay-aht.**

## **A View from the Ground: On the HFN Strategic Plan**

On 1 April 2011, the Huu-ay-aht First Nations saw the beginning of an era self-government and self-determination. On the Effective Date of the Maa-nulth Treaty, the Huu-ay-aht First Nations Council passed the laws and policies that would fill the vacuum left by the outgoing law and policy collectively referred to as "the Indian Act." In addition to passing these laws, the government of the day put forward and adopted a strategic plan entitled A Strategic Vision for 2011-14.

Since June of this year, the Huu-ay-aht First Nations has a newly-chosen government that was elected under the HFN Election Act. This new government has been working with the administration and the government to use the tools provided by the Maa-nulth Treaty to strengthen the Huu-ay-aht First Nations and improve the lives of its citizens. In this way, A Strategic Vision for 2011-14 is well-regarded and reflects many of the same values with which it was created. Approximately six months after it has been elected and over eight months since the Effective Date, the new government approaches its task tempered with the realities of operating in the post-treaty era.

When this government sat down for strategic planning, it reviewed the previous government's plan and found that it agreed with most of its aspirations. The difference, perhaps, was in this government's newly-acquired understanding of the realities of scarce resources, the need for development of capital and political infrastructure and ensuring that the treaty is implemented according to the interests of the Huu-ay-aht First Nations.

This government regards the current strategic plan as a fine plan of action for the future, but this government has identified several aspects of government that have not yet been addressed at a strategic level. This document addresses four main topics: (1) Information, (2) Resources, (3) Opportunity and (4) Identity.

## 1. Information

The acquisition and management of timely and accurate information is one of the most important aspects of government. A good decision requires the collection, organization, analysis and communication of information at every step. Only when the government has that level and quality of information available to it can it make the best decisions in any given situation on behalf of the whole community.

In its first few months, the HFN has enjoyed a whole new level of timely and accurate information available to it with the development of a highly-skilled Finance Department. The department has been able to make available regular updates on the status of each department in the HFN administration with an emphasis on the overall budgetary position. With month-to-month updates and more detailed quarterly reports, the government is able to gauge its progress and make changes if necessary to stay on track.

Imagine if the HUU-ay-aht First Nations had the resources available to it so as to provide quarter-by-quarter reports on the progress of not only its personnel but the entire HUU-ay-aht population. Imagine if we were able to ask for a detailed demographic report in order to better address economic, political or social policy. For example, the collection of information on education levels and progress and would allow us to tailor our policies for each year's "cohort" of new students entering the first grade, advancing to or graduating from secondary school or enrolling in some sort of post-secondary institution.

The other major aspect of managing information well is the communication of information coming out of the government to its citizens. We will continue to communicate our intentions as a government as well as communicate the new aspects of the HUU-ay-aht First Nations after treaty.

We have to help our citizens understand how government works under treaty. What rights, privileges and processes exist to help our people make their way in the world. Truly, things are quite different from how they were one, four or ten years ago.

The law matters more than it has in the past. Everything a government does must be backed up by law and policy. The government can no longer overrule or change laws, policies or decisions that are made in good faith through proper channels without following those same proper channels -- even if a law is unpopular or a policy does not address a certain circumstance. Government after the effective date of the treaty is necessarily more accountable and more transparent, but that also has logistical implications. Decisions of government take more time to be made because it must

follow due process every time, and time must be spent implementing those decisions properly before it is realized on the ground.

Without that process in place, decisions of government can often become less centered on what is in the interest of *all* HUU-ay-aht but what is in the interest of *some* HUU-ay-aht. If the process isn't followed, no matter how long it takes or how much work it takes, then we run the risk of institutional flaws such as nepotism. In this way, the law is the law with no exceptions even if they're well-regarded exceptions.

## 2. Resources

To be more specific, the topic of Resources in this document refers more directly to financial resources or simply money. The simple fact is that we do not have unlimited resources and that we stand at the very beginning of a grand journey called the HUU-ay-aht First Nations under the Maa-nulth Treaty. The decisions we make now have a huge effect on where we might end up a generation or more from now. Thus, how we manage our resources now can have an enormous impact on how well-off we are in the future.

Every community has one fundamental challenge: scarcity in a world of finite resources. How do we use our limited resources for the greatest effect? There are two things that we can do as a government: (1) use the money we have wisely and (2) make more money on a continuing basis.

The HUU-ay-aht First Nations were given access to significant sums of money and sources of income as a result of the Maa-nulth Treaty. While no great cure for all of the community's ills, the money available needs to be managed on behalf of everyone for the greatest benefit possible. Under the HFN Constitution, the Financial Administration Act and other HFN laws, the final decision-maker in most cases for public money, revenue and expenditure, is the HUU-ay-aht First Nations Council. This does not mean that the money can be used for anything, however, as the government is set up so that such decisions must be made under law and there is no room for uninformed or rash decisions.

The primary tool for managing the money we have is budgeting. We are constrained by law that demands that we cannot plan to spend more money than we have coming in (we cannot have a planned deficit) unless it says so in the Financial Administration Act. Thus far, the plan since before the Effective Date has been to run a diminishing deficit in our first three years -- mostly to pay off our treaty negotiation loans. Ultimately, though, for all time after that, the government cannot plan to spend more than it has coming in.

The HFN budget is reviewed annually and the government must make many decisions regarding how money will be allocated. Essentially, the government must choose its goals and apply resources to achieve those goals within a government program. Government programs are set up to spend collective resources in a way that the government sees fit. Programs are governed by rules that must be followed to the letter. These rules come in the form of both legislation and regulation. So, the job of government is to set up well-functioning programs to achieve goals and address issues. This can be done by creating new programs and it can be done by reviewing existing ones and making changes if necessary.

When evaluating a program, a good practice is to identify the ideal purpose of that program or service of the government. What is this or that program meant to achieve in the most ideal sense? If we can determine that there are better or less-costly alternatives to current practices, then we are bound to go with those changes. The first step is to review our current operations. The next is to make a decision on where public funds should be going for the greatest effect. The final step is to pass that into law.

Especially now, governments everywhere are faced with the need to find more revenue for the expansion of its programs and services. This government identifies three methods of making more money: (1) operation of HFN-owned businesses, (2) establishing investments for regular income and (3) enacting laws and policies to collect fees and taxes when the time comes in eight or sixteen years after Effective Date.

There is no short term route to making money. In the current economy, even an 8% return on investment is regarded as a very good outcome. Only by building strong businesses can we ensure that they can turn a profit. Taking a long term approach to building wealth is often regarded as the only surefire means of improving the standard of living for individuals, groups or communities such as ours. Thus, we must plan with that long term in mind and live within our means from year to year.

And it is keeping disciplined and "living within our means" that is perhaps the most difficult thing to do. As a government, we are constantly exposed to the pressure of various subsets of the community demanding more in terms of specific programs, services or uses of money. As a government, we could bow to the pressure and spend more money than we're taking in. This is called a deficit, and it's not the same as debt. In government, debt is merely a method of cash management.

It's easy to go into debt as a government. We can go into debt and choose to spend money on all sorts of things to keep us popular and keep us in power, but it will cost the Nation a lot of money and possibly cause the Nation (and its future citizens and governments) to be in financial disorder. When we choose to spend money on a distribution of funds to a certain subset of the community, it necessarily takes away

opportunities from everyone else. Some instances are more widely acceptable than others, but budgetary decisions ultimately need to be determined by the government because it is often only the government that directly pays for bad decisions even if they're popular at the time.

### 3. Opportunity

Though it is important to save money wherever we can, we *must* use the money we have to increase the number of opportunities and improve the quality of opportunities available to our citizens. To do this, we must put capital and legal infrastructure in place to enable economic activity in and around our territory and we must help prepare our people for life in a very competitive economy.

This government will continue to place a primary value on establishing reliable and efficient capital infrastructure such as water, sewer, power, communication and transportation infrastructure. Only when we establish these foundations can we look to achieving approximate equality in our Nation's average standard living when compared to the average of neighbouring communities.

In addition to this, this government must put an equal amount of emphasis on establishing "legal infrastructure" to enable our citizens, businesses and external partners to get active in our local economy. Though this is not as exciting as breaking ground on a new building, establishing straightforward and efficient processes for acquiring a business license, commercial lease, resource tenure or adopting more transparent and helpful hiring practices will prove vital in the creation of real opportunity for our people.

The other aspect of increasing the number of opportunities and improving the quality of opportunities is to place a priority on education and training. In this way, this government wishes to modify the incentives provided to students to not only keep them in school with rewards for attendance but also to reward students' achievements in math, science, language arts, social studies and physical education.

Within the next year, this government will create a policy that will expand the scope of post-secondary education and training funding to include technical schools, the trades and other skills development. Current policies only cover attendance at a University or other Degree-Awarding institution. This does not encompass the opportunities of this job market and economy, let alone the needs of the Huu-ay-aht First Nations for its own organizations and businesses. More diverse skillsets will allow for more diverse choices in jobs and careers for our people.

When our people are more prepared for the competitiveness of the current economy, they're more likely to become self-sufficient and the community can only benefit from that.

## 4. Identity

Finally, this government places an importance on the development of a positive HUU-ay-aht identity through the communication of our common origin, our history and our language. This government will continue to support language recovery efforts such as the Language Nest and the Language Instructor Program being developed alongside local post-secondary institutions.

In addition, this government sees an opportunity for both the Ha'wiih Council and the Na-naniqsu (Grandparents) Society to become more involved in acquiring and organizing the knowledge of past generations and ensuring that it is not only preserved, but made available to our people for future generations to practice.

This government wishes to see our community come together in less formal ways since this seems to be when the most positive experiences seem to occur. As a result, community resources like the recreation capabilities of Anacla Field and the House of HUU-ay-aht will be used to create a deeper sense of community through sport and other activities such as meals, gatherings and cultural practice.

## 5. Conclusions

Whether it be the collection and good use of information to make a good decision or our ability to communicate our aims and methods, whether it be an understanding of just how important it is to use our limited financial resources for the best effect or how we can increase the quantity and quality of opportunity for our people. whether it be the establishment of a positive identity for all HUU-ay-aht or the creation of more informal community structure, this government is committed to improving the lives of its people in the best way it can.

It has been less than a year since we have stepped through the threshold into an era of self-government that demands self-discipline from its government and its citizens. Thus far, we have learned much and have brought our own ideas to the table. In the near future, we hope to share our more detailed ideas with you in more focused ways.

As ever, we work toward a brighter future for all HUU-ay-aht.

*Chuu.*