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For immediate release

First Antigonish Tri-Council Conversation Takes Place Between the County, Paqtnkek, and the Town

Antigonish, N.S. – On June 26, 2023, council members and staff from the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation, and the Town of Antigonish met to discuss their past, present, and future.

“Collaboration is key to regional development,” says Owen McCarron, Warden for the Municipality of the County of Antigonish. “Building on our relationships and having this meeting was a huge step in achieving that collaboration.”

The meeting began with an overview of the history between the three entities and the progress that has been made on strengthening the relationship between Paqtnkek and the County over the past few years.

This meeting was the product of a partnership between the County and Paqtnkek that formally began with the support of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Council for Advancement of Native Development Officers. The partnerships progressed to the signing of the Friendship and Peace Accord or the Anku'kamkewey Accord on May 5, 2018. The Anku'kamkewey Accord is based on peace and friendship. The document is a commitment to collaborate and support one another as neighbours on community economic and social development.

While developing and since signing the Anku'kamkewey, Paqtnkek and the municipality have partnered on multiple initiatives, including low carbon communities, and the co-hosting of Anku'kamkewey: Stronger Together, A First Nation-Municipal Regional Economic Development Forum in May 2019. The Forum was held in Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation and had over 75 representatives from across Nova Scotia, including 30 from Mi'kmaw communities, 31 from municipalities, and 18 from other organizations.

During the Forum, inspiring conversations took place and First-Nation-municipal economic development initiatives were identified such as building a more flexible labour pool, creating more solar energy projects, and creating more cultural and eco-tourism opportunities.

“The Forum was a great success and I think we were on our way to actioning some of opportunities identified but then unfortunately COVID reached Nova Scotia and priorities had to shift. Projects, like for example, a tourism strategy, were put on hold,” explains Warden McCarron. “We want to get back on track and take a regional approach to achieving our priorities.”

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The Town was supportive of all initiatives during the early days of the County and Paqtnkek building their relationship and now is the time for all three entities to come together and explore how to be stronger together. This is one of the collective steps in acting on the Call to Action in Truth and Reconciliation.

“We sincerely want to do more for our three communities. We can be more than land recognitions and raising of flags,” says Laurie Boucher, Mayor the Town of Antigonish. “We want to have more dialogue, to work together, and expand our relationships.”

To better work together, there first must be an understanding of the priorities of the three councils. The Warden, Chief, and Mayor each provided a summary of their council’s current initiatives. This provided an opportunity to identify priorities that overlap which could be developed together.

“Being in a room together allows us to learn about our current priorities so we have an idea on what everyone is working on to better understand each other,” says Cory Julian, Chief for Paqtnkek Mi’kmaw Nation. “Paqtnkek has grown so much over the past few years. Our community wants to expand our partnerships, including strengthening our relationships with our neighbours, the County and the Town.”

Throughout the meeting, particular themes were identified including housing, development of the labour force, tourism, emergency management coordination, green energy, and community economic development. There was also a resounding overarching theme that by learning and working together, the entire community is strengthened and succeeds.

“Once we were in the same room, it didn’t take long to realize that challenges one council faces are not much different from the others,” adds Chief Julian. “For example, we know climate change impacts us more than ever before with water shortages and severe storms. Simple actions like joint training opportunities for members of our emergency management organizations is a win for our communities.”

Moving forward, representatives from the three councils and staff agreed to establish working groups based on some of the common themes identified during the meeting.

“The objectives of this meeting were to get to know one another and to evaluate the shared assets we have, and find areas in which we can partner to better utilize those assets,” explains the Mayor.

“I look at how far we have come to improve the lives our of residents and look forward to what comes next,” says Chief Julian.

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