

Summary Report

Forum of All Councils 2023

Capital Regional District | Prepared by the CRD's First Nations Relations Division



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Chief Abraham Pelkey and Chair Plant

BACKGROUND

Territorial Acknowledgement

The CRD conducts its business within the traditional territories of many First Nations, including but not limited to BOKÉCEN (Pauquachin), MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat), P'a:chi:da?ahť (Pacheedaht), Spune'luxutth (Penelakut), Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay), Songhees, STÁUTW (Tsawout), T'Sou-ke, WJOLÉŁP (Tsartlip), WSIKEM (Tseycum), and x^wsepsəm (Esquimalt), all of whom have a long-standing relationship with the land and waters from time immemorial that continues to this day.

CRD Commitment to Reconciliation

The CRD Board's [Statement of Reconciliation](#) focuses on self-determination, shared prosperity, and relationship with the land and water. The CRD Board's Special Task Force on First Nations Relations, established in 2015, released a [Final Report 2018](#). The Board approved eight recommendations from the Task Force that aimed to build government-to-government relationships between the CRD and First Nations governments. One of the recommendations was a commitment to host an annual Forum of All Councils to bring First Nations and Local Governments together to discuss issues of importance.

Forum of All Councils

The previous Forum of All Councils concluded with suggestions for future Forums, including focusing on actions, roles, responsibilities, and resources, policy discussions, networking opportunities, field trips to First Nation reserves, frequent and shorter meetings, and centring Indigenous voices. This feedback was taken into consideration when planning the 2023 Forum.

In addition, the CRD's First Nations Relations Division made efforts to engage First Nations on their preferred content, structure, and timing of the Forum. Some input was received before the Forum that was incorporated into planning the event, and additional feedback has since been received that will inform future gatherings.

The Forum of All Councils also supports the implementation of the CRD's [2023-2026 Board Priorities](#), which include initiatives to support building strong relationships with First Nations based on trust and mutual respect, partnerships and working together on shared goals.

This 2023 Forum of All Councils Summary Report was prepared by the CRD's First Nations Relations Division.

FORUM OF ALL COUNCILS SUMMARY

Run of the Day

The 2023 Forum of All Councils was held on Saturday, October 14th at the [Songhees Wellness Centre](#) on the Traditional Territory of the ləkʷəŋən peoples, **Songhees** and **xw̓sepsəm** (Esquimalt) Nations. The 2023 Forum of All Councils theme was **First Nations Self-Determination in Relation to Local Governments**. The agenda was designed to allow maximum sharing from those local First Nations who could attend.

Traditional Speaker Ivy Seward, a member of the **WJŌŁEŁP** (Tsartlip) First Nation who is also a ləkʷəŋən language teacher for the Songhees Nation, opened the day on behalf of the CRD. A traditional speaker is asked by the host family, in this case, the CRD, to open the floor for the excellent work done that day. Ivy welcomed participants in the ləkʷəŋən language and offered her best wishes for relationship building. Throughout the morning, Ivy invited speakers, supported the gifting protocols, and offered her reflections on what was being shared.

Eugene Sam from the Songhees Nation offered an opening prayer and a song, and then the Ləkʷəŋən Traditional Dancers took the floor to share their songs and dances. Chair Plant offered a CRD welcome and introduced the local governments in the room. The Chair thanked the First Nations present for participating and spoke about the importance of building a deeper understanding of Indigenous self-determination and how local governments can co-create new ways of working with First Nations on a respectful government-to-government basis.

During the First Nations Roundtable, First Nations shared their perspectives and priorities regarding Indigenous self-determination in working with local governments. The key themes are summarized below.

Guest speakers KWAŠT-en-ayu (Maynard Harry) and Stewart Alsgard spoke about their experiences developing [the Tla'amin Nation – City of Powell River Community Accord](#).



Chair Plant and Ivy Seward



Eugene Sam, ləkʷəŋən Traditional Dancers



Chief Ron Sam, Songhees Nation



KWAŠT-en-ayu and Stewart Alsgard, Guest Speakers

Run of the Day *(continued)*

Throughout the day, gifts of blankets and honoraria were offered to recognize the work being done. In addition, all participants were gifted a tote bag and a water bottle and were invited to take home K'exmin seeds as an offering to each of the participants to honour the work being done and to acknowledge their collective role in contributing to a healthier region, and an abundant, resilient future.

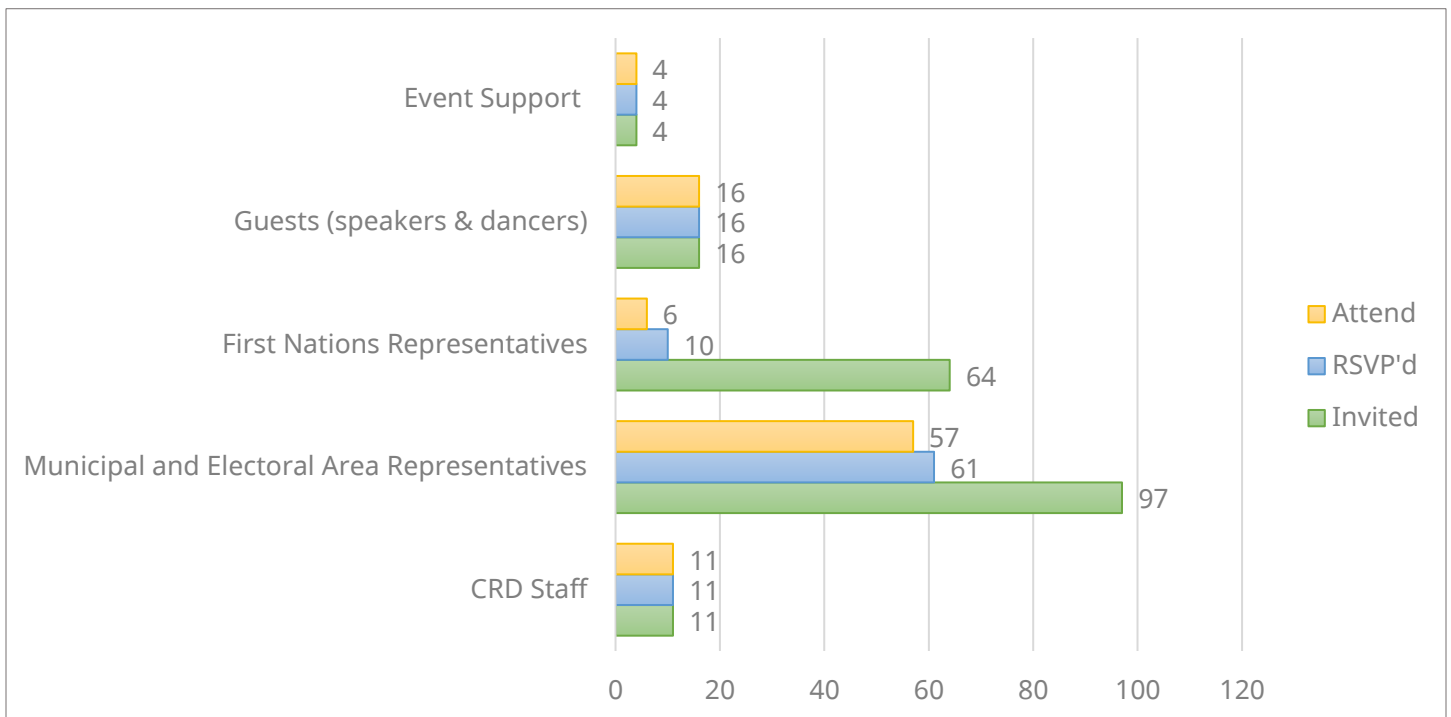
Sharing food is an essential component of relationship building, and participants enjoyed a delicious breakfast and lunch provided by Songhees Catering. Two Worlds Consulting provided event facilitation and notetaking.

Participants were asked to complete a feedback questionnaire to provide input for future events and relationship building. A summary of the feedback is provided below.

Participation

The Forum of All Councils intends to bring together leadership from First Nations, the Capital Regional District Board of Directors, and Municipalities with the support of Capital Regional District staff, guest speakers and other support personnel. **One hundred ninety-two** people were invited, **one hundred and two** RSVP'd yes, and **ninety-two** attended the event.

Participants included elected leadership from Songhees Nation and STÁUTW (T sawout) First Nation, City of Colwood, City of Langford, City of Victoria, District of Central Saanich, District of Highlands, District of Metchosin, District of North Saanich, District of Oak Bay, District of Saanich, District of Sooke, Town of Sidney, Town of View Royal, Township of Esquimalt, the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area, and the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area. Staff from the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council also attended.



First Nations Roundtable: Themes Heard

Water Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beach pollution, primarily from agricultural land, water runoff, and pollution, poses future food security issues and requires effective water management within municipalities. ▪ Municipalities need to ensure beaches are clean enough to support harvesting.
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First Nations have limited capacity, which impedes the ability to participate in every engagement request. ▪ Inundated with a high volume of requests, e.g., requests to one Nation from 6 municipalities plus provincial and federal governments. ▪ Thirty days for reviewing is not enough. ▪ Suggest a job swap between local government and First Nations staff to understand capacity issues better.
Communication & Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective communication and collaboration with Nations, particularly in land and water issues, require community accords and having a voice at the table. ▪ Create a table so there is a suitable pathway for working together. ▪ We have a responsibility to the land and water to protect it. Our land and lives matter. We want to be good neighbours but must be on a level playing field. ▪ There is a huge responsibility to work with Nations and care for the land and water. We need to have our voices in the conversation. ▪ For decades, we have advocated for dialogue between local governments and First Nations. ▪ We must fight so much for so little. ▪ Letters are not an adequate form of communication. Need active, not passive, consultation. Make a concerted effort to include Nations during a process instead of after. ▪ Hold a Forum on regional issues, with Nations meeting first rather than with municipalities. ▪ Form an Indigenous land stewardship commission with the CRD regarding park acquisition. ▪ Hold regular forums to discuss issues and the good things.
Access to Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People need to respect the privacy of Indigenous people when they are using the land for harvesting or spiritual or cultural uses. ▪ Municipalities need to consider new approaches to land acquisition to avoid court challenges. ▪ Land back is crucial for First Nations people. ▪ Our people need land for hunting, harvesting, gathering, and firewood. ▪ Exclusive parkland affects harvesting. Consider exclusive areas for First Nations. ▪ Co-management regimes are needed for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas. ▪ Consider an Indigenous land trust.

First Nations Roundtable: Themes Heard *(continued)*

<p>Reconciliation Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reconciliation is everyone’s work and cannot be solely driven by Nations. Reconciliation is about unity and collective work for a better future. ▪ Reconciliation is realizing we are all here together and we can work together in a good way. ▪ The elders say things have not changed in 30 years and don’t see change coming. There needs to be more than land acknowledgements; there needs to be action. ▪ The City of Victoria has shown progress in reconciliation efforts. ▪ The CRD is listening regarding archaeology. This should have happened a long time ago.
<p>Self-Determination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The lack of large industry in this region means fewer opportunities to tap into to support our Nation. There are wealthy houses, but governments are reluctant to tap this. ▪ How do you become self-determining without land or economy? ▪ First Nations are good for the economy. CRD and municipalities should support nations in obtaining land back and treaties, as it can benefit the economy.
<p>Bureaucracy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indigenous names mean something to us. The bureaucracy involved in renaming is a barrier to making change happen. ▪ There are many hoops to jump through to grow at the same rate as municipalities. It feels like we are being left behind and left out. ▪ The Local Government Act impacts the ability to have impact benefit agreements. ▪ Need to cut red tape and create mechanisms for action. ▪ The Additions to the Reserve process can take over 15 years.
<p>Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rapid state of development is hard on our Nations. Archaeological sites being disturbed. ▪ Nations are on the outside looking in and need to be involved more. ▪ The rapid pace of development is pushing Nations to go farther and farther away to access land for harvesting and other uses. ▪ What is the vision? Is it forever growth? The goal of reducing waste at the Hartland landfill conflicts with increasing development. ▪ The growth of municipalities is the death of our culture.

Guest Speakers

Guest speakers KWASt-en-ayu (Maynard Harry) and Stewart Alsgard ('Qoqoq') shared their experiences building relationships between the Tla'amin Nation and the City of Powell River, which led to the development of [the Powell River & Tla'amin Nation Community Accord](#).

KWASt-en-ayu is a citizen of the Tla'amin Nation, Founder of Indigenous Insight, and Partner of Mighty Raven Technology. KWASt-en-ayu received his ancestral name from his Elders on May 10, 2003, immediately before the signing of the historic Sliammon First Nation – City of Powell River 'Community Accord'. KWASt-en-ayu has been elected as his Nation's Chief Councillor and councillor. Maynard brings 27+ years of practical knowledge and experience from direct exposure to Canada's Indian Act Indian Reserve System and being of a family directly impacted by Canada's Indian Residential School System. Maynard understands his nation's culture, history, territory, land, and resources from working with his elders, negotiators, and traditional land and resource use experts. Maynard is active in the following areas: small business and economic development, intergovernmental relationship building, reconciliation, leadership/governance/decision-making, Aboriginal rights, and title. KWASt-en-ayu's reconciliation work has been recognized on a regional level by the City of Powell River with a Freedom of the City (2008), nationally Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal (2013) by Canada's Governor General Johnson.

Stewart Alsgard ('Qoqoq') is a UBC graduate, secondary level teacher, domestic and international; Graduate of the National Defence College of Canada; Retired naval Captain; Officer of the Order of Military Merit (OMM); UBC Senate (Order in Council); UBC Faculty of Medicine (community member admissions committee); Provincial Coroner (1990-2005); Former Mayor, City of Powell River (1999 -2011); Signatory to 2003 and 2018 Tla'amin Nation – City of Powell River Community Accord; 2004 Protocol Agreement on Economic Development and Cultural Heritage Resource Protection; Queen's Silver and Diamond Jubilee Medal; 2004 Bestowed with Honorary ancestral name ('Qoqoq' meaning 'Snow Owl'), Tla'amin Nation; and Volunteer guide, Townsite Heritage Society.

Highlights from Their Talk

- Stories and examples of relationship building behind the development and evolution of [the Powell River & Tla'amin Nation Community Accord](#), a living document that outlines a process and principles for how the two governments work together.
- The need for fearlessness and creativity in relationship building.
- The importance of 'living agreements' between municipalities and First Nations.
- Involving youth participation in decision-making.
- Relationship building can require the courage to make unpopular decisions.
- The ongoing negative impacts of colonization and intergenerational trauma cannot be separated from the importance of relationship building.
- Municipalities must recognize they are on land taken from First Nations and that their growth has ongoing impacts on First Nations.
- Truth and acknowledgement of unearned privileges must come before reconciliation.
- Importance of education and the need to reinvent and rethink systems.
- That bureaucracy can have harmful impacts on reconciliation efforts.
- Moving beyond land acknowledgements to action.
- The Indian Act and Indian reserve lands do not define First Nations people, and have limited economic opportunities because of them.
- There are opportunities for municipalities to drive reconciliation efforts and learn from past mistakes.

FEEDBACK

Before and after the event, in meetings with First Nations, the First Nations Relations Division solicited feedback and suggestions about the Forum of All Councils. This included discussions with representatives from P'a:chi:da?ah̓t (Pacheedaht) First Nation, Songhees Nation, T'Sou-ke Nation, x̓w̓seps̓əm (Esquimalt) Nation, Sc'ianew First Nation, and the W̓SÁNEĆ Leadership Council.

The Forum of All Councils participants were asked to fill out a feedback questionnaire about expectations, takeaways, successful aspects, suggestions for improvement, learning opportunities, and recommendations for facilitating relationship-building and networking between First Nations and local governments.

Feedback Summary

<p>Learnings & Takeaways</p>	<p>Get more involved to grow relationships. Beyond words, actions are essential. Awareness of the complexity of referrals and the capacity of the Nations and that land is essential to self-determination and collaboration. Be open. Take responsibility. Recognize white privilege.</p> <p>Awareness of the frustration of First Nations that governance/policies are used as barriers to progress and that there is still much work to do. They are learning about their priorities from First Nations leadership. Be present, be involved where you can, and be invited by the community.</p>
<p>Forum Content</p>	<p>Many participants appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from local First Nations about their challenges and priorities related to self-determination. Nations expressed frustration at being repeated the same thing for decades. Local government representatives shared that what they heard provides helpful guidance. When local government representatives sat with First Nations, meaningful and collaborative discussions were held on relevant problems and potential resolutions.</p> <p>Many participants also mentioned that hearing the stories and experiences of the guest speakers was a highlight of the day. A few participants found the speakers challenging and irrelevant to the current-day context of Indigenous relations. Many participants found the speakers' direct and frank approach to speaking their truth refreshing and inspirational. Given the sensitive and complex nature of the discussion, more could have been done to prepare the audience in advance and debrief afterwards.</p> <p>Appreciations were also given for the cultural sharing, the connections, the conversations, and the opportunity to share a terrific meal.</p>

Feedback Summary *(continued)*

<p>Forum Structure</p>	<p>Many participants expressed disappointment with the low turnout from First Nations. First Nations representatives acknowledged the importance of this type of forum. They noted the low attendance due to cultural commitments, harvesting season, losses in the community, recent elections, other events, and overall capacity. They suggested continuing to hold forums and that Nations would come when they could.</p> <p>Recommendations included more table discussion, mingling, and facilitated problem-solving as a region; facilitated discussion on significant issues facing the region to learn from each other on new ways of looking at problems, which helps overcome misinformation and constraints; sharing of best practices and tangible results; more speakers, including local presenters; collect questions from Nations and local government representatives in advance; more time for questions; encourage First Nations and municipalities to sit together; fewer participants; have a different First Nation host each year; organize a First Nation’s caucus to meet in advance of the Forum and support conversations with local governments; include higher levels of government to elevate the importance of the gathering; inviting staff; having more of a conference-style agenda; include opportunity for social connections; and instead of a forum, focus on tangible on-the-ground reconciliation actions rather than talking.</p>
<p>Suggestions for Future Learning Opportunities and Relationship Building</p>	<p>Participants suggested knowledge sharing and learning opportunities on numerous topics, including climate change, food security, conflict resolution related to agricultural needs and traditional harvesting, a review of the CRD Task Force recommendations and progress to date, a KAIROS blanket exercise for elected leaders, the Moosehide project, tools or guidance to bridge the gap between colonial and First Nations governance models, a presentation on CRD initiatives and current priorities, wastewater, emergency management planning, building codes, opportunities for reflection, consideration of how to start making change, understanding government legislation constraints and opportunities and recent legal changes, and learning more from a First Nations roundtable.</p> <p>Recommendations for how the CRD might facilitate relationship building between First Nations and local governments included: continuing to hold an annual Forum, perhaps hosted by each local government in turn; quarterly meetings between First Nations and local governments; discuss more specific topics; facilitate land back to First Nations; implement an Indigenous land and water stewardship commission; address carrying capacity of the lands and waters in the region; more joint learning sessions; find a way to acknowledge our wrongs, make right where we can and move forward together; CRD lead a process with First Nations and local governments to propose approaches that address the capacity required for relationship building; host meals where there is no agenda other than meeting and mingling; informal time together that includes staff on all sides; try out job sharing and secondments; engage with Nations prior to land acquisition; seats for First Nations on the Board; provide standing opportunities for Indigenous leadership to share stories at the Board and committees and all gatherings; support Tribal Journeys; and create a forum where issues vital to First Nations can be discussed and meaningful work accomplished.</p>