

APPLICATION FOR AFOA BEST PRACTICES AWARD SUMAS FIRST NATION

Sumas First Nation is a small community of 320 members, of which 150 live on reserve. We are situated in the Fraser Valley adjacent to Abbotsford and Chilliwack BC. We are part of Sto:Lo Nation and are very honoured to be nominated for this award.

Sumas had identified a few years ago the need for hiring experienced, qualified professionals who had expertise in their designated areas and a GM who had many years of experience in managing First Nations. With the team finally in place, we have been able to move the organization forward by implementing a strategic plan and starting to focus on it.

Sumas has come a long way over the last few years. In the past three years alone, we have established our Economic Development Corporation, are in year 2 of our 5-year strategic plan, established our Financial Administration Law, and are preparing our Comprehensive Community Plan. Here are some examples of the accomplishments we have made.

Accounts Receivable Collection

We established our Property Tax and Property Assessment Laws in 2004. In 2014, we updated the laws to the Fiscal Management Act requirements. At that time, we had almost \$1 million in tax arrears from leaseholders who had never paid their taxes. In 2015 we struck our Property Tax Appeal Board and managed to include 2 members from the Provincial Appeals Board to sit on our Board. We then proceeded with three appeal board hearings. Two of those cases were settled outside of a hearing and one went to the full hearing process, resulting in a precedence setting verdict that is used by BC Assessments today. Near the end of 2015 we collected over \$700,000 in back taxes in one week and today we are proud to say that we are collecting all property taxes on time and we have a more proactive practice in dealing with taxes and leaseholders. Currently, we have a budget of approximately \$250,000 but expect, with development of our lands, it should reach close to \$1,000,000 by 2020.

Government/Band Business relationships

This past September 2017 the Semá:th Declaration was celebrated after two years in the making this is a foundation document affirming that we shall do all in our power to see that the governments of Canada, British America Columbia and United States of America recognize in law and in practice, our aboriginal title and aboriginal rights.

The Nation continues to work on establishing laws relating to land code and related policies addressing Traditional Territory such as the “Semá:th Consultation & Lands Stewardship Policy” and “Lands & Resources Governance Policy”

Relationship building with our neighbors the City of Abbotsford up until 2 years ago, we could barely get the City to acknowledge our existence. After the election in 2014, with the election of a new Mayor, we have developed a much more proactive and positive relationship with the City of Abbotsford and

have had many meetings with the Mayor, council and City staff. In fact, City planning staff have come to Sumas to present their OCP to staff and community as well as to work with our staff on a new Servicing Agreement and get input on other issues facing our community. In October of this year we even worked together to engage in a Community to Community (C2C) Forum which brought together staff and Council from the City of Abbotsford, Sumas First Nation and the Fraser Valley Regional District for a discussion on working together and understanding each other's needs. This was a hugely productive first step in finding ways we can bring our communities together and work toward a common goal. Mayor Braun and Chief Silver are both committed to ensuring that this will happen.

Implementation of a five-year rolling plan

In 2015 we needed to consider how to establish a strategic plan for our future growth and to ensure we were committed to those areas that are important to us. We started by integrating community members, staff and Council in workshops to create a Mission Statement and Values Statement. This was an amazing experience bringing together so many stakeholders and coming to a consensus on what was important to us. After establishing this, Chief & Council got together in a 3-day off-site workshop to expand this into strategic goals for the organization. This process not only provided clarity but also established monitoring and reporting process. This set the tone and direction focusing resources both human and financial, incorporating these priorities into the departmental annual work plans. Not only has this provided clear direction for community development and services it has unified departmental planning process not competing for limited financial resources but to work together to get the best possible outcomes. The one thing we have realized is that we need to stop for a moment and celebrate our successes as we are so focused on moving forward we don't take the time enjoy what we have done. We now have a living, breathing document that with regular updates and reports to community, ensuring that everything is still relevant, that we are all going in the same direction and all rowing together. It has been the driving force in day to day work lives, our focus and our direction.

Implementation of a Specific Claims Settlement Trust

In 2015, after nearly 80 years, Sumas finally came to a settlement agreement with the Federal Government on a specific claim. We subsequently set up a Trust so that future generations would be able to benefit from the proceeds. We implemented an Investment Policy Statement to guide our investments and set up a settlement trust agreement to ensure we are able to use the income generated annually on the Trust for various programs and are now able to leverage our Trust money to help with Economic Development initiatives and other project for the community.

Economic Development

A priority identified early on in the planning process is the need to establish a separate entity to manage and promote economic development opportunities. Established highest and best use plans for the limited land base and continued work on partnership arrangements. The Sumas First Nation recently created an economic development corporation; and are in the process of finalizing and formalizing the

organizational structure, governing documents such as policies, procedures and determining the financial operational needs of the corporation and businesses. Transitioning from an internal departmental function to a separate legal entity has had its challenges requiring substantial time, effort and commitment, however we are fortunate to have an extremely skilled and qualified team working together to make this a successful venture for the Nation.

Implementation of Financial Administration Law

In 2015 we started on the process of getting our Financial Performance Certification and established our Financial Administration Law. We are now working toward completing our Financial Systems Certification. This started by implementing our strategic plan and we are currently working on our 5-year budget process that will coincide with this. This has been a huge undertaking, but one that allows us to focus and prioritize our goals. We have realized we cannot do everything at once and we need to put the “stepping stones” in place to accomplish our goals.

We have recently completed a risk assessment and are in the process of implementing Risk Management Plans for areas identified as risk potentials. Those areas include succession planning, Information Technology and Records Management. These are all very large projects which we are attempting to break down into smaller phases to ensure we can be successful at implementing.

In summary, we are very proud of what Sumas has accomplished over the past few years. As I said above, we sometimes forget to celebrate our accomplishments and being nominated for this honour really made us think about all we have accomplished. It was a proud day when both our bank, Doug Bourque from BMO, and our auditor, Sean Reid, from KPMG, emailed me to recommend that we apply for this award. When we looked at the criteria we realized we could find successes and best practices in almost every area listed, we agreed. Thank you for considering us for the honour.

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