

Minutes Virtual meeting of August 22 and 23, 2023

In attendance: Lance Haymond, AFNQL
Guy Latouche, AFNQL
Pierre Bélanger, CMHC
Ina Wielinga, CMHC
Jean-François Samuel, CMHC
Oumar Ba, ISC (FNIHB)

Bruce Labrador, ISC
Johanne Verville, ISC
André Dansereau, ISC
Nathalie Spénard, ISC

Guests Point 6 - Infrastructure modernization: ISC (national team): Jessica Gordon, Shawn Nicholson, Adam Rhyndress, Aline Neves. Pascal Dubé (ISC) and Orlando Carstoi (ISC, FNIHB) attend the presentation.

Facilitator: Johanne Verville; **Editor:** Nathalie Spénard

FNIHB = First Nations and Inuit Health Branch

Part 1 – Tuesday, August 22 – 1PM to 4PM

1. Word of welcome and introduction

Johanne Verville welcomes everyone. Oumar Ba is back as FNIHB representative.

2. Agenda Review and Approval, Varia (ISC)

The agenda is approved with the addition to the varia of an item on four exploratory discussion sessions that ISC wishes to conduct in the fall of 2023. With everyone's agreement, the item will be taken up following the presentation on infrastructure modernization, scheduled for August 23, 1 p.m.

By the way, B. Labrador thanks everyone for agreeing to allocate a time slot on the agenda for the infrastructure modernization presentation. He informs that Pascal Dubé (ISC) and Orlando Carstoi (ISC-FNIHB) will attend this presentation.

3. Actions follow-up (May 17, 2023 meeting)


The actions have been reviewed and updated.

4. National and Regional Environments

Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL)

Homelessness

A hybrid dialogue session on the First Nations National Action Plan on Homelessness, hosted by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), is scheduled for September 12, 2023. This will be an opportunity to review the draft Action Plan, provide input and identify alternative solutions, partnership opportunities and resources needed to help First Nations people (FNs), regardless of where they live.

 *In the case of projects aimed at building shelters to help alleviate homelessness, we also need to address the operation of these shelters, which needs to be a complete and seamless process (P. Bélanger).*

Correctional Service Canada (CSC) is interested in this issue, and the relevance of including it in the discussions could be evaluated. (I. Wielinga)

Strengthening skills and capabilities

The First Nations Adult Education School Council (FNAES), the main partner in the Skills and Capabilities Axis of the Action Plan, has informed us that the Housing Manager Training Program is under review. Modules on

radon and crisis management will be added to the training curriculum. In addition, an apprentice-inspector training program is being prepared, and a recruitment campaign for the first cohort will be launched this fall.



A. Dansereau points out that the focus is now on training local First Nations inspectors, rather than apprentice inspectors.

Former students of the program, if interested, could potentially benefit from the new training that will be offered. The approach is currently under discussion between FNAES and the ministère de l'Éducation of Quebec. (G. Latouche, A. Dansereau.).

Transfer of responsibilities

The Chiefs-in-Assembly entrusted the regional organizations under their authority - the AFNQL's regional commissions and organizations (RCO) - with a mandate to conduct an in-depth analysis of the risks and benefits of devolution in all areas of interest, drawing on the work already carried out in collaboration with community and organization representatives as part of the health and social services governance process. The RCO held a "lac-à-l'épaule" and a work plan is currently being developed. The results of this work will be presented to the AFNQL Chiefs for adoption, so that they can make informed decisions in the future about the viability of proceeding with such transfers on a community, nation and/or regional basis.

New regulations for First Nations drinking water and wastewater developed

On July 21, 2023, ISC tabled a new version of legislation on drinking water, wastewater and related infrastructure on First Nations lands, similar to the previous version. Several important points remain to be addressed:

- the inherent right to self-government over water sources on FN lands;
- a commitment to provide adequate funding;
- a commitment to create and fund a FN water commission;
- minimum national water and wastewater standards;
- agreements on transboundary water sources;
- strengthened immunity provisions, linking standards and funding framework.

The Grand Chiefs and AFN Chiefs remain committed to ensuring that these elements are incorporated as soon as the legislation comes into force.

The region was challenged from the outset to stay on top of the issue. An AFNQL letter to Minister Hadju clearly indicates the gaps. No legislation will be effective if there isn't sufficient funding. This is a key element. Operators' liability must also be protected.



Given that the Quebec Region is in a good situation with regard to drinking water and boil water advisories, this brings limits to the availability of water funds for the Region. Continued investment in water, and particularly wastewater, is essential, and it is hoped that this new legislation will frame and respond to these needs. (B. Labrador).

Yānonhchia' Initiative

Chief Haymond talks about his involvement in this project and outlines its main features. Briefly, the initiative aims to develop an indigenous-designed, led and managed institutional solution for accessing capital markets for indigenous housing, thereby promoting access to private home ownership and mortgage solutions for FN members.

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)

General housing situation

With inflationary pressures persisting, interest rates rising, and financing and construction costs on the rise, home ownership is becoming less affordable in Canada. The situation is not much better for rental housing. More people who can't afford to buy remain renters, while high immigration targets continue to drive demand for rental housing.

Cabinet changes

The Honourable Sean Fraser has been appointed Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities. He is the new Minister responsible for CMHC and Infrastructure Canada. This follows the latest announcement calling on Infrastructure Canada (INFC) to take further steps to support the Minister of CMHC by strengthening housing policy and program capacity. The mandate letter will be circulated to members as soon as it is available. The

Honourable Sean Fraser was first elected Member of Parliament for Central Nova in 2015. He previously served as Minister of Immigration. He is originally from Nova Scotia.

Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF)

In light of the challenges associated with this initiative, the application deadline has been extended from Friday, August 18 to Friday, September 29 for small rural, northern and Indigenous communities that have submitted provisional applications through the CMHC portal. As of August 16, CMHC had received 4 applications from Quebec's indigenous communities.

Canada Greener Affordable Housing (CGAH) program

Overall, this program is ambitious and better suited to multi-dwelling units. On-reserve popularity is mixed for the moment. In the first application window, only one indigenous organization in Quebec submitted an application. A second window will open this fall (September 15 to December 15). We are working with a number of communities on opportunities.

Urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing (URN)

An initial report was produced following the Montreal meeting last March. In response to comments received, an update of the report is planned for the near future. The September 12 housing meeting will provide an opportunity for wider dissemination of results and next steps.

Indigenous Shelter and Transitional Housing Initiative

It is still possible to submit an application under this initiative. Normally, the window for receiving applications is the end of March 2024, to allow construction to take place over the following two years (end: March 2026). For the moment, the active files in Quebec are in urban areas. Since the initiative began, a total of 33 projects have been approved across the country.

Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI)

The announcements were made at the beginning of July. Applications exceeded \$5G. In total, projects from 6 Quebec communities have been approved. We are exploring options for the files that were not selected. Note that 2 off-reserve indigenous projects were also supported.

Regular Program - Section 95

The 2023-2024 allocation was strongly impacted by the increase in the interest rate, the increase in construction costs and the 20% decrease in the budget. In total, 12 eligible not self-governing communities received an allowance, and 50% of these communities received an allowance of 2 or more units. A total of 31 units were allocated (22 to not self-governing communities and 9 self-governing communities). The deadline to apply is October 14, 2023.

CMHC has taken steps to regularize several outstanding files. A total of 36 files had been identified, for 101 units, for which no advance had been made 18 months after their approval. Of these, 9 files (32 units) were resolved, 3 were cancelled and 24 were in progress or completed. Only 4 files are pending for the Ministerial Loan Guarantee.

Notes:

- In recent years, even before the pandemic, files have accumulated significantly. For about a year now, CMHC has been working actively, and in collaboration with the communities, to regularize the backlog, both at the renovation level and at the section 95 level. Given the scale of housing needs, new commitments must be delivered in a timely manner and adapted to different contexts. Consequently, more rigorous follow-ups will be carried out from now on for the delivery of the files engaged.
- In the context of the pandemic, CMHC had ceased the practice of suspending subsidies under the Section 95 program. This practice has been reactivated.

Skills training for Indigenous communities

This initiative was managed by a dedicated capacity-building team independent of the team delivering the housing programs. Of the \$1.86 million budget envelope, Quebec obtained \$216k.

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)

FNIHB:

Human Resources News

Since July 31, 2023, Martine Tanguay has joined the FNIHB management team as Regional Executive Director for the Quebec Region. Ms. Tanguay is from Trois-Pistoles, located in the M'ikmaq and Maliseet territories in Quebec.

Forest fires

In response to wildfire emergencies, public and environmental health and communicable disease control and management team, in collaboration with W8banaki (formerly Grand Conseil de la Nation Waban Aki) provided support to communities to establish clean air community shelters and provide respite during the wildfires. Field visits with W8banaki were conducted in three communities: Atikamekw d'Opitciwan, Nation Anishnabe du Lac Simon and Kitchisakik.

Regional Operations:

Human Resources News


Caroline Garon has been confirmed as Regional Director General (RDG) and Nathalie Turgeon as Associate RDG. Gérard Raharolahy is the Director of Lands and Economic Development, formerly of Ms. Turgeon. Share the sad news of the sudden death of Pascal Héon, who was a manager in the education sector, who died in July 2023 in the tragedy of Rivière Éternité.

Forest Fire Update

The magnitude of the Quebec wildfires in 2023 is historic, impacting Indigenous communities in northern Quebec. Fortunately, there is currently no loss of life or material, despite economic impacts, for example to outfitters, which have seen their traffic decrease. At the time of writing, fires remain active, including fire 602, which forced the evacuation of the vulnerable population of the Cree community of Wemindji, hosted by the community of Chisasibi.

The involvement of the many partners is to be highlighted to support efforts at all levels within the impacted FNs. To name a few: W8banaki, SOPFEU, the Red Cross, the Cree Health Board and the *Ministère de la Sécurité publique du Québec*.

As an emergency financial assistance measure, ISC, through the Emergency Management Assistance Program, provided affected communities with an advance of \$1,500 per primary residence evacuated. The processing of claims and the follow-up of this advance is already underway and will continue in the coming months.

 *In light of the ongoing wildfire situation in the Cree communities, CMHC has currently suspended some internal administrative procedures and has relaxed some deadlines. (P. Bélanger)
Even if the wildfire situation diminishes, operations could be disrupted for several months. For example, at the level of procurement or labour availability. Invitation to keep informed. (P. Bélanger). (P. Bélanger)*

Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) Program Audit: Emergency measures and Housing

With regard to emergency measures, the audit exercise took place over a few months, which resulted in a report with recommendations, the main ones being: Work with FNs on better financial planning for the Risk Preparedness and Mitigation components; update emergency management plans at the community level; establish emergency coordinator positions; ensure better coordination with the Government of Quebec, as well as project planning involving structural mitigation measures. The majority of these recommendations are being implemented in the region.

On infrastructure and housing, the fiscal year covers the period from 2019 to 2023. FNIHB and CMHC are involved. Information gathering is still ongoing and a report to Parliament is scheduled for March 2024. There is no particular issue to highlight in the current process.

Housing Update

Regional housing funding for the years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 has been confirmed. It represents \$53.8 million and \$60.9 million respectively, or 9.4% of the national envelope (comparable to previous years). Note

that the National Office maintains a separate reserve of \$6M/year for capacity building projects and for the issue of housing reform.

A national meeting of the housing sector, involving all regional and national staff involved in this issue, is being prepared for this fall. Although the agenda is not currently available, topics related to the transition to housing management plans or infrastructure modernization will certainly be addressed.

Temporary Housing Guidelines

In response to the exacerbation of requests for financial support by communities for the acquisition of temporary housing (construction trailer style), ISC wanted to define and frame its scope of intervention since it is a type of accommodation whose lack of sustainability is demonstrated.

The various ISC sectors involved now have access to an internal regional guideline that oversees this type of funding. A presentation by André Dansereau is on the agenda.

This guideline was written in the spirit of encouraging communities to better plan their needs and consider sustainable housing solutions, such as permanent housing with prefabricated modules. This option was favoured by the Algonquins of Barriere Lake community in its application for funding for temporary housing for 6 prefabricated units to house homeless families. This project is underway, although slowed down by some issues.

Terms of reference for the Infrastructure Joint Fund (IJF)

The IJF was established in 2017 in partnership with ABSCAN. The use of the IJF is growing and the results are conclusive. Thus, terms of reference have been drafted, which frame the process, the modalities, the roles and responsibilities. A presentation by André Dansereau is on the agenda.

Exploratory discussion sessions with FNs

The region is involved in the organization of four exploratory discussion sessions with FNs, to be held in an ambitious schedule of December 2023. They relate to (a) drinking water and wastewater legislation; (b) the protocol for centralized drinking water systems; (c) infrastructure modernization; and (d) federal tendering policy. See point 8 of this document for a proposal for each session.

Child and family file

Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Order 41 (CHRT41) contains provisions for ISC to fund the purchase and construction of capital assets for the provision of First Nations child and family services or for the provision of services under Jordan's Principle. For child and family services, 32 projects were submitted, totalling \$24M. These projects are of all kinds, such as youth centers, housing for professionals associated with the child-family file, spaces for administrative offices or family homes. For Jordan's Principle, 12 projects were submitted this year, for a total of \$30M. Of these projects, 2 were ineligible, 4 were cancelled at the request of the community and 6 are under analysis.

Elimination of the Default Management Policy

Three communities were under this policy. With the abolition of the policy comes the abolition of funding, which was often used to hire an expert resource. Transition plans are being prepared for affected communities.



Implementing transition plans is a good idea because it could lead to good practices, such as the voluntary hiring of a co-manager, even if a community is not in a mandatory co-management status. (G. Latouche)

Fire Hall Upgrade Projects

Two communities, the Atikamekw of Wemotaci and the Pekuakamiulnuatsh First Nation, received confirmation of funding for the construction of fire hall that meet new provincial standards.

5. Infrastructure Joint Fund Presentation

André Dansereau presents the regional approach, structure and overview of operations of the Infrastructure Joint Fund (IJF), in place since 2017 and implemented in partnership with ABSCAN.


Main objectives of the IJF:

1. Support the Government of Canada's commitments to the Regional Housing and Infrastructure Strategy.

2. Enable the centralization and combination of various funding sources to optimize financial assistance.
3. Link funding to the project implementation cycle by providing continuous and timely access to funding sources.

Terms of reference have been drawn up, framing the process, definitions, general terms and conditions, as well as roles and responsibilities. These are complemented by accountability and management frameworks, which define the specific terms and conditions for each IJF activity or component. These frameworks are malleable and evolving, and will enable the IJF to integrate new contributors, new sources of funding or to oversee new activities.

The following activities are currently integrated into the IJF: residential infrastructure extension; schools; housing (lot servicing projects and construction of the Housing Initiative); and ABSCAN's self-guaranteed loan capital initiative (*Initiative de mise de fonds en auto-garantie de prêt (IMFAP)*).

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 - *Once final approval has been obtained, the terms of reference will be translated and shared with RTHC members.*
 - *ISC funds injected into the IJF are tied to planning, so they don't sit idle and accumulate. So, the more we have access to community planning, the more regionally we'll be able to better support needs with continuous and timely access to the funding source.*
 - *A good number of representations were made to various sectors of ISC-National, who questioned but also praised such an approach. This approach could eventually be replicated, via our partner ABSCAN, who is working with similar organizations to assess the possibilities of setting up similar funds in other regions.*
 - *With a view to eventual takeover, it would of course be desirable for other contributors to provide the IJF with new sources of funding (by developing their own accountability and management framework). The Department would support these initiatives, but is not the instigator of finding new contributors.*

Meeting Part 1 adjourns at 4:05 p.m.

Part 2 – Wednesday, August 23 – 1PM to 3:45PM

Introduction

Johanne Verville opens the second part of the meeting, reviewing the highlights of Part 1 and presenting the agenda for Part 2.

6. Presentation on Modernizing First Nations infrastructures

Presentation by ISC-National team : Jessica Gordon, Shawn Nicholson, Adam Rhyndress et Aline Neves.

ISC is working in a dialogue approach with FN partners through the development of a strategy to modernize ISC's infrastructure programs. The purpose of the presentation is to outline ideas, methods and approaches that could help modernize. The comments and opinions of FN partners on these approaches gathered in the various representations to come will influence the way in which the dossier is approached.

In summary, the exploratory ideas and approaches are :

- **Policies and programs:** aligning compartmentalized programs to facilitate alternative approaches to infrastructure investment that enable progress towards a predictable, sustainable, sufficient and flexible funding stream for communities.
- **Financial tools:** explore monetization, asset lifecycle management and other flexible financial tools.
- **Single point of contact** for infrastructure financing.

Next steps: ISC-national aims to continue discussions on infrastructure modernization with FN partners and in the region. One-day sessions will be organized in the fall. It is hoped that these discussions will be completed by December.

A discussion period follows the presentation, allowing ISC-national to gather visions, positions, ideas, opinions and questions on the various approaches presented. In summary, members expressed their views on the importance of :

- link any initiative to reform, modernize and transfer services, with **upstream, sufficient, predictable and recurring funding to the communities (not based on current funding envelopes)**. In this regard, Chief Haymond specifically raises the question of whether this initiative will be linked to an increase in the regular budget allocated to FNs.
- **not to lose sight of the target, which is to reduce infrastructure gaps with concrete means with which FNs can adhere and prosper.** Whatever means are used, FNs will need to be accompanied and supported in the transition, to achieve results.
- **consider the results of what has been done** to date in various pilot projects across the country;
- **make sure we understand the particularities of each community**, and consider that they are not all at the same place on the housing continuum;
- **initiate and pursue dialogue with federal authorities involved in FN infrastructure**, to facilitate linkages, partnerships and the creation of funding levers.



After the departure of the guests, it was suggested to the coordinating members that the RTHC-Operational committee could offer its availability to ISC-national for more technical information or discussions, or to provide information on the realities on the ground in Quebec communities. No objections from the coordinating members, but it was recommended that the RTHC-Operational committee only provide support after the discussion sessions to be held with the FNs.

7. Exploratory discussion sessions to be held in autumn 2023

Four exploratory discussion sessions are to be held this fall to address the following topics, and the forums and clientele for each need to be determined. It was agreed that:

- Water and wastewater legislation:** no session to be held, an AFNQL letter has been sent to Minister Hadju.
- Protocol for centralized drinking water systems:** to be discussed with tribal councils and Water circuit riders.
- Infrastructure modernization:** the Chiefs' Meeting agenda for September 27 and 28 is full, but it is proposed that Chief Haymond bring the subject to the meeting, if the opportunity arises, to mention that he attended a presentation on the subject and that it would be relevant for this subject to be brought to the Chiefs' Table. In this way, the AFNQL could potentially help organize a special virtual meeting.
- Federal tendering policy:** to be discussed with tribal councils and technical staff.

8. Presentation of Temporary Housing Guidelines

André Dansereau presents the internal guideline developed for priority or emergency temporary housing. Temporary housing is defined as housing required to meet an immediate priority need. It is distinct from temporary housing required for regular needs.

The main objectives are :

- To enable ISC-Quebec Region to adopt a harmonized, uniform approach among the various internal stakeholders (Infrastructure Branch, Educational Partnerships Branch and FNIHB) when processing requests from FN communities for this type of housing.
- Temporarily ensure the health and safety of on-reserve housing occupants until a permanent solution is found.

Essentially, the guidelines make it possible to a) specify the conditions of eligibility for financial assistance for temporary or emergency housing, b) specify the typology of eligible housing, and c) specify eligible and ineligible expenses.

9. Content of the AFNQL Housing Regional meeting 2023

The meeting is already well planned. Since a two-step format, with a virtual first part followed by a face-to-face meeting, yielded positive results in 2022, the format will be replicated in 2023.

Information component (virtual): half-day September 12, 2023:

- Update by the three partners (60 minutes: 10-15 minutes per partner + question period)
- AFNQL report "20 years later" (AFNQL) = set the stage for November meeting (30 minutes)
- U.R.N. strategy (CMHC) (60 minutes)
- Announcement of November meeting

Logistics: Invitation sent. Facilitation: FNAESC; Simultaneous translation booked and note-taking confirmed.



- *For consideration: Appropriateness of inviting a representative of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada for an update on housing, given the confirmed participation of Cree communities at the meeting. (N. Spénard).*
- *Under the heading AFNQL Report "20 Years Later", it might also be relevant to look at the new challenges that are emerging (e.g., in terms of private property), which are not the same as they were 20 years ago (J.-F. Samuel).*

Face-to-face: November 21: AFNQL + November 22: CoPH meeting

Preliminary content :

- Center of expertise in financial literacy and housing (launch)
- Workshop: Climate change and FN housing (FNQLSDI)
- Community Housing Transformation Centre (CTLC)
- Findings and workshop on persistent and emerging housing issues: AFNQL "20 Years Later" report
- Graduation of cohort #6 of the AEC in housing management
- Testimonials by First Nations (possibly during the CoPH day)

Logistics: Convocation to follow after September 12. Location: Château Bonne Entente, Quebec City; Facilitation: FNAESC for both 2 days; simultaneous translation reserved and note-taking confirmed.



- *Chief Haymond suggests adding a slot to the agenda where he will present the Yānonhchia' Initiative.*
- *Validate whether the presence of partners is desired for the CoPH day, or whether the "in-camera" format is envisaged.*
- *For November 21, suggestion to include a kiosk space in the lobby to allow communities to come and discuss with partners ISC and CMHC (N. Spénard).*
- *In the First Nations testimonials, suggest a testimonial on Youth Internships (J.-F. Samuel). Consider whether it would be interesting to have this testimonial at the opening of cohort #6's graduation (J. Verville).*
- *For your information, the possibility of a meeting between FNQLEDCL-ABSCAN and Circuit riders in housing is being explored for November 23. The aim would be to exchange ideas on linking services and support measures for housing agents (A. Dansereau).*

10. Next issue of Indigenous Housing Connection and survey

The next edition of the newsletter is currently being prepared for publication by the end of October 2023. CMHC would take advantage of the Regional housing meeting in November to conduct a survey on the newsletter, in order to confirm whether efforts are well targeted and whether the newsletter meets the expectations of the target audience. The results of the survey will be presented at the Winter 2024 RTHC meeting.

Preliminary content of the October 2023 newsletter:

- RTHC annual report.
- CMHC: Section 95 allocations and renovations + reminder of current programs.
- ISC: Housing update
- Success story: Youth Internships - Testimony of Danielle St-Onge
- Partners' Corner: Capsule from the Financial Literacy Center (to be confirmed)
- AFNQL regional meeting: summary of September meeting and reminder for November meeting



- *Suggestion to add a box in the newsletter announcing the survey. (J.-F. Samuel)*

11. Next meeting : Dates and Format

The next meeting will be coordinated by CMHC.

Possibly in late January/early February 2024, in a two virtual half-day format.

It was agreed that the RTHC-Operational committee would discuss and make a proposal for a choice of dates, considering upcoming events and the scope of the topics to be covered.

The meeting adjourned at 3.45pm.