

Synthesis of Results from Visioning Sessions with the Lheidli T'enneh Community

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Introduction

Over the summer, fall and winter of 2000 and 2001, three visioning sessions were held with the Lheidli T'enneh community. The first session was attended by the Chief, Council and senior personnel, the second session was attended by the members of the Community Treaty Council, and the third session was attended by the Lheidli T'enneh youth.

The purpose of these sessions was to encourage members of the Lheidli T'enneh to begin thinking about how their community had developed in the past, where the community is at the present time, and how the community might develop in the future. At any time in a community, certain aspects of that community are developing in a positive manner or are going well and certain aspects of that community are developing in a negative manner or are not going well. Community planning and development practitioners attempt to enhance the positive and resolve the negative thereby improving the overall quality of community life. Community sustainability practitioners attempt to integrate the economic, social/cultural, and ecological elements of community, which results in the overall improvement of the quality of community life while maintaining a healthy natural world. For without clean air, fresh water, and healthy soil - essentially healthy ecosystems - the life support systems of humans are degraded, or destroyed, and human communities are unable to sustain themselves.

The process used in visioning sessions involves encouraging people, in a non-threatening environment, to express their thoughts and ideas about their communities and to discuss the opportunities and constraints impacting future community development. All thoughts and ideas are considered important, all are recorded, and no judgement is made as to their worth or value in contributing to improving the quality of community life. Judgement stifles creativity and impedes freewheeling thinking needed in visioning sessions. The process of visioning involves presenting all potential ideas and thoughts as important and

open for discussion. The information is then compiled in a report and community leaders can judge the relative merits of each thought and idea, decide which are ranked high and can be implemented.

Four questions were used to focus the discussion: where we now (2000)?; where are we going?; where do we want to be?; and how do we get there? Small breakout groups of four to six individuals were asked to discuss and answer these questions and record these results on flip chart paper. At the end of each break out session, a plenary session was used to allow each group to share their ideas with the larger group. In the youth visioning session, this process took place with the entire group rather than using breakout groups. Each session took approximately one day and was facilitated by Dr. John Curry and Ms. Kathy Lachman.

The flip chart notes were then processed and re-organized into themes that appear as Appendix 1 of this report. The ideas and concepts discussed for each question during the visioning sessions are first presented in a "discussion of ideas" section and are then organized in a "themes evolving from discussion" section. This report ends with "conclusions" and "recommendations for action."

The present state of development of the Lheidli T'enneh

The following information summarizes the results from question one: where are we now (2000)? The purpose of this question was to get participants thinking about the history of their community and thinking about the current positive and negative elements of their community development efforts.

Discussion of Ideas

Participants of the first visioning session identified the following positive and negative elements in the development of their community. They first looked at the past history of their people and culture. They noted that in the past the community shared resources,

embraced a family-based system, and used consensus in their decision-making. Five hundred years ago, the Lheidli T'enneh had a vibrant, self-sustaining economy, trading and networked among other First Nations. In 1793 contact was made with the first European, Alexander McKenzie and in 1807 the Northwest Company established the first European settlement at Fort George. In 1913 the Lheidli T'enneh were relocated from what is presently downtown Prince George and since that time strong Prince George community ties have declined. At the same time, diseases brought by the settlers killed many of the young and elderly. Many Lheidli T'enneh residents feel that with the amendment of the Indian Act in 1927, cultural genocide began. Further disruption to their community occurred with the introduction of residential schools. Residents of the Lheidli T'enneh community participated in local forestry, fishing and hunting activities up until approximately 1970. In the 1970s and 1980s a massive restructuring of the resource-based industries took place with new technology and manufacturing processes being introduced. The result was a significant increase in skills and qualifications required to perform many of the resource-related jobs. The erosion of their traditional culture and the marginalization of the Lheidli T'enneh people from the larger economy has had a significant negative effect on the community. At the same time, a legislatively imposed government system including social welfare programs eroded the traditional governance system and community values.

Residents of the Lheidli T'enneh community feel that there is currently a transition taking place from a system of dependency from the larger community to a system of self-support and self-sufficiency within the traditional membership of the community. In addition, infrastructure development and institution capacity building is taking place.

Members of the first visioning session felt that to continue in this positive process of community development, a number of current initiatives must continue. These include Chunzoolh Forest Products Ltd. (comprised of two separate bodies: a shingle mill and

three forest timber licenses), LTN Contracting, fisheries and wildlife consulting services, agricultural development (hemp production, haying operations, and vegetable gardens), planning for a waste/energy plant) new silviculture businesses, expanded land management and band administration capabilities and a conclusion to the treaty negotiations.

Participants of the second visioning session identified the following positive and negative elements in the development of their community. They organized their ideas into economic, social and environmental elements. They felt that forestry, fishery, and agriculture projects were very positive recent additions to their community economy, which were resulting in significant new job growth. The shingle mill, haying operations, hemp and market gardening activities, although under initial development and still in a high risk stage of the business cycle, were contributing positively to job creation in the community. The expansion of the community administration with staff to support a number of these economic initiatives is resulting in job creation. Although housing is still in short supply, new housing has contributed positively to creating a sense of pride and ownership in the community. Cigarette sales and bingo events are ensuring that money remains within and contributes to community building.

In addition to the positive development elements, a number of negative elements continue to exist. The community is highly concerned about land negotiations and recognizes that until a settlement is reached they will not have control over their resources. Many of the jobs in the community are seasonal in nature in the agriculture, forestry, and silviculture sectors. This results in high unemployment in the winter and can contribute to problems such as drug and alcohol abuse and crime. Fibre shortages, high employee turnover rates, and the lack of management skills impede economic viability of the shingle mill. The lack of management skills, a short growing season, and lack of capitalization impede the economic viability of the agricultural sector. Both enterprises are having a difficult time

finding a market niche for their products. The silviculture sector is also experiencing poor management (late bidding and the lack of crew foremen) and there is a need to purchase equipment to carry our silviculture operations in an effective manner.

The positive social elements of the community include the re-institution of community meetings and gatherings, the development of a newsletter and the evolution of positive role models for the community, particularly the youth. The attempt to restore the Lheidli T'enneh language will contribute in a very positive manner to preserving and reintegrating their traditional culture into community life. The evolution of a community governance system has resulted in an increase in home construction and the creation of a community health system employing a social worker at the community level. Programs have been put in place to enhance education, health, cultural, sports, and entertainment activities. The Community Treaty Council has been created to deal with land negotiations and, in the future, land management processes.

A number of negative social elements continue to plague the development of the Lheidli T'enneh. These include a continuing shortage of housing and jobs, drug and alcohol abuse, the difficulty of transportation due to the community's division by the Fraser River and the distance to community and government services in Prince George. Although structures have been put in place, communication between community members continues to be a problem. Apparently very few members are interested in taking advantage of learning and education opportunities resulting in low youth and elder participation. There is a continuing problem of low self-esteem due to the impacts of residential schools, violence and racism.

Community Treaty Council members identified a number of positive and negative environmental elements that were impacting to the development of their community. Positive elements include fisheries opportunities on the Fraser River and its tributaries,

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forestry on lands transferred to the community through native land negotiations, and wildlife opportunities. Many potable water and sewage problems have been resolved. Air quality has improved substantially over the past several decades and community lands along the Fraser River are of high soil quality and ideal for certain agriculture operations. On the negative side, fishery and wildlife issues continue to plague the community, air pollution continues to be a problem, and poor quality potable water and poorly maintained sewage systems present potential health problems. Poor air quality in the community and the region is the result of mill discharges, car pollutants and road dust.

The Lheidli T'enneh youth see a number of positive and negative elements in their community. On the positive side, the youth have the Youth Treaty Group which allows them to fundraise and finance youth projects and opportunities. On the negative side, there is very little for the youth in the community to do, especially in the evenings and on weekends. They would like opportunities to learn traditional skills and play sports. There is no community gathering space for the youth. The only community facility is the band office, which was originally constructed as a community hall. The use of this facility has changed from a community hall to office space and the youth do not feel welcome there. The community has a youth worker but the youth do not feel like she is helping them achieve many of the projects that they feel they would like to become involved with. Transportation continues to be a major problem for many people in the community and the youth feel a reliable community vehicle is needed to help get people to and from community events and Prince George.

The future state of the Lheidli T'enneh if they proceed on their course

The following information summarizes the results from question two: Where are we going (if nothing changes)? The purpose of this question was to get the Lheidli T'enneh thinking about their present community activities and actions and to analyze whether

these activities and actions would allow them to develop in a positive manner in the future.

The Chief, Council and senior personnel identified forest initiatives with government agencies, the Land Management Act, and control of lands under Band jurisdiction and ownership as some of the positive initiatives that are moving them forward in a positive manner. A number of positive social elements were identified including the reinstatement of their language and the recording of their history through ethnographical studies. Following their present course, the Lheidli T'enneh feel they will be able to establish a high standard of living and quality of life, establish an excellent state of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical wellness, and restore the traditional family unit. Their physical location, ability to adapt, the youthfulness, independence, and stable and forward thinking leadership are positive elements that can assist the Lheidli T'enneh in their future development. With the influx of resources and responsibility, there is an opportunity and a desire to develop the community, protect it from government intervention, to enable all capable Lheidli T'enneh residents to become active members of their community and compete in local, regional, national and international markets. The community has a strong desire to become leaders in sustainable community development. They feel that to accomplish this goal, they must re-establish trust among one another, stop finger pointing, take ownership over activities and projects, and develop critical thinking, listening, reading, and analyzing skills. Positive role models need to be developed within the community to move forward in a proactive manner.

Impediments to positive community growth include a lack of funds to manage natural resources, undertake human resource development and expand economic development activities. Lack of access to the land base and natural resources, and control over their own existence continue to be impediments to growth. There is a movement to overcome many of the negative social elements that have plagued the community in the past. This

includes addressing the "welfare" dependency mind set, physical and mental abuse, problems with the misuse of alcohol and drugs and the disruption of traditional family relationships. As more negative social elements are overcome, an increased level of community pride will evolve. In the area of health, there has been a significant improvement in access to health care resources. Improvements have also taken place in education through better access to pre-school, daycare, and day camps. Various incentives have been put in place such as award days, to recognize achievement in education. Bussing of on-reserve children to Prince George area schools continues to be a problem. Community members feel that an on-reserve school would assist in resolving many of the negative pressures that are present in Prince George area schools. The re-integration of elders and traditional beliefs into the community culture continues and expand a sense of pride and a sense of place within community members.

The construction of community infrastructure has created a strong sense of accomplishment. Facilities such as the band office, new housing and the shingle mill illustrate tangible results from many years of organizing, planning and prioritizing much needed community facilities. In the area of recreation, ball hockey, minor baseball, and slow pitch teams have brought the community together. The youth have been involved with a science camp and youth conferences while the elders have attended provincial elders' gatherings.

Finally, the Lheidli T'enneh Community Treaty Council identified a number of positive and negative economic, social and environmental factors. A common theme running through all the sectors was the importance of self-government and communication. Positive economic factors deemed to be important were the media, new businesses, expansion of current business, the mill, agriculture, silviculture and consistent and sustainable employment. Training and technical positions are deemed important economic considerations. A number of positive social factors are identified as being high

achievers, the media, youth and the elderly and regaining spirituality and culture. Building community is seen as important as the need for housing developments, a new band office, a recreation hall, a day care centre and community nursing station were identified. The Lheidli T'enneh are making headway with environmental issues, using GIS and TUS technologies to enhance land management. Water and sewer problems are seen as slowly improving.

The Lheidli T'enneh saw a number of negative elements continuing into the future. The lack of jobs, lack of education, crime and disease are all economic elements that will continue to impede the progress of the Lheidli T'enneh. Land is an important consideration and the Lheidli T'enneh see the current land base as insufficient to sustain both population growth and commercial endeavors. The non-participation of members is seen as a negative social factor and as well as overcrowded housing conditions and animal control. Soil erosion and fish and wildlife disease and extinction are negative environmental factors identified as continuing into the future.

How the Lheidli T'enneh would like to see their Community develop in the future

The Chief, Council, and senior personnel divided their future into 5, 20 and 100 year planning periods. In the next five years they identified the following important activities that they would like to see happen: a move towards a governance model based on consensus; the establishment of an education system based on community values; the re-establishment of extended family values; and the community resources to support these initiatives. Affordable housing, schools, a recreational/cultural centre, a gas station, a tourism centre, eco-tourism, a mill, business, forestry and were identified as important physical and economic components which would allow them to realize a viable economic future. In five to ten years, the group saw a learning centre, a daycare, a health centre, cultural camps, commercial development, and a strong political system as being attainable goals. In twenty years, the group saw the development of a stronger spiritual

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attachment to the land, more balanced lifestyles, a stronger community ethic, and traditional community values being integrated into the educational system. Additional community elements included a school, a post-secondary training centre, expanded trail system, on reserve policing, and a bridge connecting both sides of the community. Over one hundred years, the group envisioned healthy minds, bodies, and communities. The values of the Lheidli T'enneh would be accepted as values of the larger society and their economy would be based on sustainable use of the land and other resources. The group saw a self-sufficient, sustainable, independent community with an educated and professional work force.

The Lheidli T'enneh Community Treaty Council projected their community 100 years in to the future. The group identified their community as being self-sustainable and self-sufficient. The Lheidli T'enneh would manage their own resources, own and operate their own permanent ventures, provide education and training, and develop their land base. They would obtain the agricultural farm and redevelop it into a community with a gas bar, a recreation centre, a golf course, a casino, a shopping centre, and a residential development containing single family dwellings and townhouses.

The youth envisioned more involvement in decision-making, a more equitable distribution of community wealth, the need for community interests above personal interests, and improved communication within the community as future goals to strive for. The group stressed the need for more jobs for youth in farming, gardening, car and machinery repair, crafts, wood chopping, security work, silviculture and fisheries. The youth also felt a strong commitment to holding traditional events and learning their history and language. They also felt it will be important to encourage their people to move back to the community and to do this, the community would require more buildings including homes, a community hall, a fire hall, a café, and a medical centre. They also identified sporting events as an important component to community building. They felt

sport facilities such as a hockey rink (including equipment); a baseball diamond, a swimming pool, and a basketball court would keep the youth in the community and out of trouble. They also expressed a need for a daycare centre for the small children and felt that a drug and alcohol centre in the community would encourage more people to go seek treatment.

Themes

The three visioning sessions identified and clarified many important economic, social, and environmental development themes. The revitalization of the Lheidli T'enneh traditional culture and language will be an important component in the development process of their community. Relationship building through focusing on the positive present and future, developing accountability to the Lheidli T'enneh community through more people becoming involved in community affairs and business development activities, and encouraging members to move back to their community will assist in creating a functional, viable and vibrant population base. The move to self-governance is seen as a positive step in the evolution of their community. Economic development will ensure that the community is self-sustaining. Job training and developing new skills will allow community members in becoming self-sufficient contributors to their society. Community economic development will focus on forestry, agriculture and wildlife resources.

The physical elements of the community will play an important role in restoring the community. Additional housing will encourage movement and reintegration of dispersed members back into the community and amenities such as stores, a community hall, a fire hall, and a school will encourage people to stay in the community. Care must be taken that the needs of the youth are addressed. Social activities, job training and recreational amenities will assist youth in forming strong social ties to the community.

It must also be recognized that a process is taking place and part of the sustainable community development plan will be defining that process, identifying sequential steps that will move towards the goal of community sustainability and then identifying projects and activities that will achieve these goals. The re-developing of the Lheidli T'enneh culture and the development of a new economy to support that culture is a complex and difficult process and will take many years to achieve. There is always a lack of resources limiting the ability to achieve all community goals. Therefore, an important step in the planning process is to prioritize projects. Another important element will be a need to prioritize progress and then evaluate the effectiveness of community development projects. The Lheidli T'enneh need to be cautious about investing in facilities that may consume a disproportionate amount of community resources; thus limiting future options for development.

Action Community Development Themes or Goals

In summary, the following themes or goals will assist and direct the Lheidli T'enneh in their movement towards community sustainability.

1. In the land negotiation process negotiate for sufficient resources, both land and money, to ensure community sustainability: a land base that will sustain your community in perpetuity.
2. Revitalize the Lheidli T'enneh traditional culture and language.
3. Involve more community members in community affairs and business development activities.
4. Encourage members to move back to the community.
5. Move to self-government.
6. Continue economic development initiatives focussing on forestry, agriculture, and wildlife resources and be entrepreneurial: identifying new economic opportunities, which will sustain the community but not degrade the natural world.
7. Train and develop new skills whereby community members can become self-sufficient contributors to their society and culture.

8. Provide additional housing to encourage movement and reintegration of dispersed members back into the community.
9. Construct amenities such as stores, a community hall, a fire hall, and a school to encourage people to stay in the community.
10. Be particularly cognizant of the needs of the youth and develop strong youth community ties through the provision of social activities, job training, and recreational amenities.
11. Recognize that effective planning and development needs community participation, plans are not static documents but changing processes, and an entrepreneurial spirit is needed to grasp positive changes in society and integrate them into your community.

Conclusion

A great deal of works has been undertaken over the past number of years and these activities and accomplishments are beginning to bear fruit. The current direction of development is contributing to positive economic growth and development for the community. While the last number of years have been very positive, the future growth and development of the Lheidli T'enneh community will depend on the amount of resources, both land and money, that are ultimately provided to the community through the aboriginal land negotiation process. If these resources are limited, the community will have to continue to rely on federal and provincial sources of revenue to sustain the community. If land claim resources are sufficient, the Lheidli T'enneh can move ahead in an independent manner towards community sustainability.