



AANDC Case Study 2: Innovative Building Permit System Empowers Members of the Prince Albert Grand Council

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INNOVATIVE BUILDING PERMIT SYSTEM EMPOWERS MEMBERS OF THE PRINCE ALBERT GRAND COUNCIL

As one of the largest tribal councils in Canada, the Prince Albert Grand Council (est. 1983) represents 12 First Nations across 23 communities in central and northern Saskatchewan. The Prince Albert Grand Council's (PAGC) Housing and Technical Services Department is a leader in the development and adherence to building codes, yet it remains the responsibility of the Chief and Council in each of the 12 First Nations to have the required by-laws in place to ensure homes are built to code and community homes are safe for their members.

Vince Genereaux, Housing Administrator with PAGC's Housing and Technical Services Department explains, "The real challenge is in how spread out the communities we serve are in relation to one another. A huge demand is generated by the over 4,500 homes in the communities. And with sixty percent of the First Nations population in the area living on-reserve, we have to be resourceful in how we deliver on housing needs, planning ahead and learning from experience."

Housing quality therefore matters, and the PAGC Housing and Technical Services team have a strong knowledge of the overcrowding, fire safety, flooding and other environmental factors that affect housing in the area. Housing Services conducts inspections of every home in the community on a three-year rotational cycle, and also provides technical services such as residential building plan reviews, construction and renovation services, as well as training to First Nations Housing Coordinators.

Setting high standards in the design and construction of housing is not new to PAGC Housing Services, as there has been a Plumbing Permit system in place, and a Housing Specifications Manual is maintained providing written requirements for materials, equipment, system standards and workmanship for all housing related services provided by the department.

With the support of Band Chiefs this has created an opportunity for PAGC Housing and Technical Services Department to introduce building-code requirements through a new building permit strategy and training program approved by Tribal Council Resolution in April 2013. In partnership with the First Nations National Building Officers Association (FNNBOA), PAGC is working to develop a Building Permit System, supported by PAGC's 2013 Housing Specification Manual, the 2010 National Building Code of Canada and all applicable Canadian housing code standards.

The PAGC Building Permit System will provide Band Councils with jurisdictional authority for construction liabilities and the assessment of current procedures for building and inspecting homes. It will also support the assessment of current procedures for building homes and will create work templates, inspection, building code and design standards both

for new builds and homes undergoing renovations, improving housing conditions and the move towards homeownership.

Education and training are the cornerstones of the proposed Building Permit System, based on PAGC's belief in empowering all First Nation members to engage in the housing, health and safety needs of their own communities.

As Frank Bighead, Director of PAGC's Housing and Technical Services Department describes, "We believe in involving the people we represent, and education allows our members to take responsibility for the own home maintenance needs."

In partnership with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's workshop series, "Housing Quality Matters", PAGC offers the 'Basic Home Maintenance' course to all residents, along with training on the building permit system, housing specifications, and housing design and construction practices.

With over 4,500 units in PAGC's housing inventory, spread out across northern and remote Saskatchewan, the positive impacts of the Building Permit System will be significant. In fact, since beginning to work toward a Building Permit System, housing specifications have already improved. Updates to furnace efficiency, insulation levels and air-sealing systems around windows and doors have resulted in lower utilities bills, while standardized building code templates have eased the home inspection application process.

Next steps include the development of a professional framework whereby the Chief and Councils can pass the required by-laws to ensure that Housing and Technical Services can carry out their required mandate in partnership with the Bands, with the goal of increasing accountability over the quality of homebuilding. By enforcing building codes, Band Councils will ensure that the homes built in their communities are safe today, as well as for many years to come. This will also assure homeowners that their homes are built with standards and codes that will help to protect their current and future investments in housing.



The **Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA)** is the national voice for the full range of affordable housing and homelessness issues and solutions across Canada. We have over 275 members who collectively house and shelter hundreds of thousands of Canadians, and provide housing support to many more. CHRA provides a home for the housing sector and for all who believe that every Canadian should have a decent, adequate and affordable place to call home.

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