



LLRIB passes BCR supporting the establishment of an Indigenous self-administered police service for Prince Albert Grand Council



Ron Merasty Photo

LLRIB signs BCR approving the creation of a PAGC Police Service. Front row, l-r: Gladys Christiansen (Executive Director), Elder Bella Sanderson, Elder Angelique Ratt, Elder Abel Charles, Elder Leonard Halkett, Senator Noland Henderson, Elder Sarah Ballantyne. Back row, l-r: Elder Rodney Hegland, Councillor Dean Roberts (La Ronge), Councillor Korrie Ratt (Sucker River), Councillor Keith Mirasty (Little Red River), Councillor Sam Roberts (La Ronge), Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, Councillor Ann Ratt (La Ronge), Councillor Cora Roberts-Ballantyne (Stanley Mission), Councillor Nora McLeod-Charles (Stanley Mission), Councillor Charlene Venne (La Ronge), Councillor Linda Charles (Stanley Mission), and David Sanderson (Moose Lake).

By Ron Merasty

On May 26, David Sanderson, Prince Albert Grand Council's (PAGC) Public Safety Implementation Advisor, and Senator Noland Henderson, met with Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB) chief, council and elders. The meeting was held at Dakota Dunes Resort at Whitecap Dakota Nation, south of Saskatoon.

Sanderson, a retired First Nation RCMP officer with 33 years' service, and Henderson were there to, hopefully, persuade LLRIB to pass a Band Council Resolution (BCR) supporting, in principle, the creation of an Indigenous self-administered police service for PAGC communities.

Sanderson, a member of Mosakahiken (Moose Lake) Cree Nation, located southeast of The Pas, explained how such a police service will be established.

He referenced a 253-page PAGC study that details how the regional police model will be built. He explained how much it would cost, where they would build, the number of police officers needed, where and how they were going to start, and how long it would take. It is a planned 10-year process with April 1, 2026, the start of year one.

The study, he said, was searching for "long-term policing solutions" for PAGC communities. That study engaged community members, did data analysis and examined best policing practices across Canada from successful and thriving Indigenous police services.

Current policing services are not meeting community expectations, Sanderson said, citing findings

from the study. "This is what we've heard. There's: no police service that's 24/7 coverage; increased safety risk across all regions; communities that call for a culturally grounded accountable policing. People want change is what we heard. People want a say in their policing, people want engagement, people want visibility, people want proactive policing."

Instead, he said, the RCMP "are reactive, limited visibility and relationship building," and provide "delayed response time, especially in north and remote communities."

The reason RCMP may be mainly reactive is that they are experiencing chronic officer shortages. Sanderson said there is high officer turnover, providing the example that the average length of service in communities like Buffalo Narrows and La Loche is 3 years, the average police experience there. "They just don't have the bodies to go there, so, all the calls are reactive, limited visibility and relationship building."

In an example of delayed response time, Sanderson, citing statistics provided by the RCMP, said the Carrot River detachment averages 50 minutes to respond to calls from Red Earth. For LLRIB in La Ronge, the average time was anywhere from 15-20 minutes, noting that LLRIB Chief Tammy Cook-Searson has a good relationship with the local RCMP detachment.

Senator Noland Henderson, himself a former RCMP officer, said that they had been to Red Earth Cree Nation just the day before and that Chief Zachary Whitecap had told them, 'No, it's not 50 minutes,

sometimes it's two hours. Sometimes it's two days."

"There's a desire for a community-based proactive policing," Sanderson said. "They want a proactive policing. They want visibility. They want to build a relationship, cultural awareness, engagement, local traditions, languages. Community members want officers who are familiar and engage with their communities."

He cited the major contributors to crime: substance abuse, drug trafficking, bootlegging, vandalism, and violence, often caused by gangs, that all nations are dealing with those issues, that there is a high crime rate, that the use of "meth is an epidemic right now all over," that "it's hurting our communities," and that there is "a significant increase for calls for service and police."

Sanderson provided a grim statistic that "in Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (PBCN) alone the crime rate went up 76% within five years."

Turning to the costs of establishing such a police service, he said the study shows what infrastructure (buildings) and vehicles they have, providing an attention-grabbing statistic that to "outfit one police officer is \$310,000. That's how much it costs to outfit one police officer."

Saying that the study "had to take that in account" and needed to provide cost estimates, the report "details how we're going to build it, what steps we have to do to build it, where do we start from here."

The study was as thorough as possible, "because the government's going to come back and say, how much, why do you need this much

money?"

"We have to change the way we do the policing," Sanderson said, informing that as of May 26 six out of 12 PAGC nations had already signed and passed the BCR being proposed to LLRIB, that two more "were in the queue, and I'm hoping if we can get your support today, we'll have nine."

Sanderson talked about other existing Indigenous police services, saying PAGC has heard presentations from: Nishnawbe Aski Police Service (NAPS), which covers the greater portion of northern Ontario; Manitoba First Nations Police Service (MFNPS); and Tsuut'ina Police Service (TPS) from Alberta.

NAPS polices 34 First Nation communities, and close to 50,000 people, Sanderson said, with "the same geographics as our northern Saskatchewan," that they have close to 400 employees and have "a fly-in, drive-in kind of (policing) model."

NAPS officers travel to the communities, police there for 10 days and do a rotation. In Manitoba the MFNPS has 210 police officers in the communities they serve, including in (relatively) nearby Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN).

At Tsuut'ina, located on the southwest outskirts of Calgary, 13 TPS officers are funded by their on-reserve casino.

A PAGC police service will need board governance, Sanderson said, to be built by PAGC leadership, with a board chair, suggesting board representatives from all PAGC sectors: Woodland, Athabasca, Plains Cree, and Swampy Cree.

Continued on page 4

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

They would have the task to create the police service leadership and organizational structure, effective supervision and distribution responsibilities, enable effective operations of the regional police service. It would need people, training and operational capabilities, infrastructure and technology, need to build buildings, secure funding and resource management, community engagement and trust.

Key would be “sufficient funding to meet the needs of participating nations while maximizing efficiency through shared resources. So, its funding is going to be the biggest issue here. We need money to build this police service.”

Critical to building leadership would be hiring a police chief. An executive director will be needed.

Someone asked a question about jurisdiction – who would have responsibilities where, exactly?

“We just do the nation. All we do is police the nation itself. They’ll (RCMP) police everything outside of the nation,” Sanderson said. Anything happening outside the reserve, like on the lake, or on the provincial highway outside reserve land, would be the RCMP’s jurisdiction, “because that’s the only way the funding’s set up right now is they’ll only provide funding for policing the nation.”

And, if a crime begins outside the reserve and the criminal runs to the reserve? Sanderson answered that there will be a memorandum of understand-



Senator Noland Henderson, left, answering a question from a Lac La Ronge member.

Ron Merasty Photo

ing (MOU) created between the two police services, “that the RCMP and our police service will work together to combat that crime together because it’s another layer of policing.”

Sanderson explained that the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and NAPS, “work together closely.” The same goes at OCN where the MFNPS works on the reserve and the RCMP work in the Town of The Pas. “So, they have to work together. It’s (an MOU) you have to do, right? So, that means that the RCMP can assist on reserve.”

The Saskatchewan Marshals Service, similarly, he said, are “just another layer of policing. That’s what the marshals are,” that that service

executes between 10 and 20,000 warrants in the province, among some of their duties.

In another question regarding stand-offs between offenders and police, Sanderson said, that, yes, the RCMP would provide support.

One of the LLRIB contingent asked about whether there would be the creation of a crime reduction unit or a drug unit, and a tactical force.

Sanderson said, “We need a drug unit, a crime reduction team – that’s our goal to eventually have all those supports as well. And that’s why we’ll have that regional hub in La Ronge, is that because they can work out of that office, and support all that for the other communities in that whole area.”

He addressed the human resources requirements: 310 officers to police PAGC itself, and 255 support staff. In building a police service, “you’ll have control, investigations, mental health and youth supports, dispatch, administration, IT, training.”

MFNPS, Sanderson said, have “their own (police recruit) training centre, their own training program. So, they train their own police officers, they have their own computer software, they have their own vehicles,” and their own mandate. Both operate on one-year budgets but only NAPS is considered an “essential service.”

The PAGC Indigenous police service envisions having the headquarters in Prince Albert and a sub-headquarters in La Ronge. Both will be hubs (explained below).

La Ronge will have a “fly-in drive-in model where the police will come in for 10 days, work, provide them a place to stay, do their 10 shifts, and then another rotation of members come in.” However, the officers could also have the option to choose to live in the community.

There are four staffing models that the study identified. They are the: Regional Hub Zone Model; Fly-in/Remote Model; Road Access Model; and the Community Safety Officer (CSO) Model.

La Ronge fit would fit in under a regional hub zone model, Sanderson said.

“Our goal is to have three working (officers) per community at every given time. You’ll have police officers, working every day in Lac La Ronge on the First Nation itself, somebody on shift all the time.

It could be 3 in Lac La Ronge, 3 in Sucker River, 3 in Hall Lake, and 3 in Grandmother’s Bay.” They’ll be driving to those communities out of Lac La Ronge (where they’ll have new housing provided). Each shift will have 12 officers in those four communities.

Stanley Mission, a larger community, will have their own detachment, Sanderson said.

In Hall Lake, smaller community, the CSOs will work with the police when they’re available, and they will build a detachment there.

After further discussion and questions Chief Cook-Searson, at length, asked to review the proposed BCR, to which Sanderson said that once all PAGC First Nations sign on, “We can start negotiating with the province for money and the funding and then get this work going. Once we start negotiating, we’ll probably ask for one negotiator from Lac La Ronge to join us in the negotiations.”

Sanderson read the BCR, supporting the creation and participation of a PAGC First Nations Police Service, committing to “ensuring the health, safety, security, and wellbeing of its members through adequate, effective, and culturally responsive police services that reflect the First Nations values and community priorities.”

The BCR further stated that (La Ronge), “relies on their inherent rights and jurisdiction to create law, enshrined in Canadian law with the signing of Treaty 6, asserting our rights and principles of law and inherent right to self-determination and inherent right to adopt measures to address public health and safety crises facing our communities.”

And further down the BCR states: “The Chief and Council of Lac La Ronge Indian Band wish to formally express their support for transitioning from a RCMP Police Service to our participation in the First Nations Police Service...”

The BCR passed with 10 in favour, no abstentions and no opposition.

Thus far, Black Lake Denesuline First Nation, Wahpeton Dakota Nation, Montreal Lake Cree Nation, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Hatchet Lake Denesuline First Nation, PBCN, and, now LLRIB, have signed similar BCRs, making it seven. All PAGC First Nations must sign a similarly worded BCR before the deadline of the fall annual assembly.

A 100% Indian-Owned Brokerage Company in Operation since 1987



First Nations

Insurance Services Limited Partnership

400 - 255 34th Street West
Prince Albert, SK

Phone

306-763-4712

Toll Free

1-800-667-4712

Fax

306-763-3255

Saskatoon Location:

94-335 Packham Avenue

Saskatoon, SK

S7N 4S1

Phone: 306-668-5605

Group Life and Health Benefits

Group Pensions

Employee and Family Assistance Program

*Providing Superior Financial Services
to All Nations and their Employees*

Future Protection Today

E-Mail: admin@fnislpc.ca

Visit us on the Internet at: www.fnislpc.ca