

Fort Severn First Nation

GENERAL DELIVERY
FORT SEVERN, ONTARIO P0V 1W0

TEL: (807) 478-2572

FAX: (807) 478-1103

December 7, 2004

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
100 Anemki Drive
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7J 1A5

Attn: Ron Green
Director of Funding Services

Re: Fort Severn Wasaho School

In response to your letter dated November 24th and Robert Howsam's letter dated November 22, 2004. The Chief and Council of Fort Severn First Nation on behalf of its community members intend to meet the requirements for support outlined in the correspondences.

- A: Initiate a tender process to obtain competitive prices to address the life safety/health issues at the temporary classroom locations throughout the community as outlined in the November 2004 report from Keewatin-Aski Ltd. although this will not cover all the life and safety issues for all buildings as per the Final Report for the *Feasibility Study to Retrofit Existing Community Buildings for an Interim School. The Life Safety Report for the Retrofit of Existing Community Buildings for an Interim School* was intended to highlight those retrofit items from the Interim School Report that could be achieved with a tight (4 week) construction time frame in order to allow students to return to the community for school some time in January 2005.
- B: Modify the generic terms of reference for a mould assessment at the existing school facilities. The Terms of Reference is to specify the problems associated with mould and the structural integrity of the school. The terms of reference will be submitted for approval and competitive proposals from an independent assessor will be sought, even though the request for another study just delays a solution to ongoing educational needs of our children.
- C: Initiate a School Feasibility Study as submitted to INAC on November 25, 2004.

FORT SEVERN RESERVE #89
MOST NORTHERLY COMMUNITY IN ONTARIO

Other issues addressed and implied in the letter that we cannot support include:

1. The maximum contribution of \$ 405,000.00 to address the life safety/health issues at the band buildings as identified to be utilized as temporary school facilities. The actual cost of this project may exceed the costs estimated in the Keewatin-Aski report and will only be known after competitive bids are obtained.
2. We cannot support the intention of the Department of Indian Affairs to not assist with other costs required to make the temporary facilities productive and maintainable classroom sites. As these buildings will need to meet our needs for the period it takes to develop and implement a new school project. It is crucial that the buildings be adequately renovated. These renovations/repairs are considered necessary to provide *code compliant education space* in the existing buildings. Is Indian and Northern Affairs Canada prepared to lease these buildings in order for the First Nation to recover any costs expended for the schooling of our children in the interim?

The *Life Safety Phase 1* was never intended to provide complete life-safety compliance, without the completion of *Phase 2*. Nor do the costs listed to achieve *Phase 1* reflect the total value of work required to be performed for Code compliance. Will INAC find a consultant or building authority willing to sign off on the limited renovation work presented in the Life Safety Report, *Phase 1* without the intent to follow through with the full scope of work?

The Canadian Government has committed itself to improvement the quality of education for First Nations children and youth on-reserve. The Minister has specifically articulated this commitment to the gathering of AFN Chiefs in P.E.I. earlier this summer. He reiterated this commitment in response to the Auditor-General criticism of the Department of Indian Affairs. Nevertheless, the Canadian Government has a fiduciary responsibility under Treaty #9 to provide for the education of our people. With the mold infestation in the school and the Department's apparent indifference to their health, safety and quality of education of our children and youth would be unacceptable if this crisis was facing any other group in Canada. There are human costs associated with the Department's approach. Many of our parents have taken their children out of the community to continue their education in other First Nations or in cities such as Thunder Bay or Sioux Lookout. Living down south, even on a temporary basis, deprives our

students of their culture and heritage, especially their traditional language skills. Those parents who have remained in Fort Severn see their children studying in various spaces around the community such as kitchens and living rooms. The Department is not living up to its Treaty obligations to our students, parents or community as a whole.

Our community is extremely concerned by the reluctance of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to document their support for the schedule to construct and commission a new school in Fort Severn by September 2008. The efforts to expedite written support for this schedule is necessary. Previous other issues documented in our September 10, 2004 letter must be addressed by INAC.

Fort Severn First Nation.



Chief Roy Gray

- cc The Honourable Andy Scott, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Bob Howsam, Regional Director General, (Ontario), Indian and Northern Affairs
Phil Fontaine, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations
Charles Fox, Regional Chief, Chiefs of Ontario
Grand Chief Stan Beardy, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
Geordi Kakepetum, Executive Director, Keewatinook Okimakanak
The Honourable Roger Valley, M.P., Kenora Riding
The Honourable Howard Hampton, M.P.P., Kenora Rainy River Riding
Bruce Piercy, Keewatinook Okimakanak
Dan Baxter, INAC Capital Management