

Magnetawan First Nation Chief and Council now looking to the people to reform its governance

Magnetawan First Nation citizens say "yes" on the Governance Agreement ratification vote which concluded on Saturday, February 27. The results of Magnetawan First Nation's successful ratification vote on the Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement were 54 yes and 20 no, with no spoiled ballots. While the results are unofficial until a 10-day appeal period is over on March 9, 2021, Chief William Diabo and the First Nation Ratification Officer, Jennifer Tagliabracchi, are confident that there are no technical grounds upon which an appeal could successfully put the vote aside.

"We followed the process to the letter, to the best of our ability, and we are confident that come April 2022 which is the planned effective date, our First Nation will be out of the Indian Act and be self-governing in fundamental areas of self-government such as determining our own citizens, deciding our own leadership selection laws, deciding how we will regain our language and cultural traditions, and how we will operate and manage our community," said Chief William Diabo.

"There is a significant increase in funding attached to the Governance Agreement and now we will have the funds to engage our people and take the time to develop our laws and policies together for future generations. This agreement is about the future and what we will leave for the generations to come. This agreement is about the community becoming more united and stronger. It is not about the Chief and Council, it is about we, the people."

Funding for the administration of First Nations has been capped at 2% for decades. Without sufficient, stable funding, most First Nations in Canada have struggled to maintain operations, let alone make progress.

"Now is the time for our people to come forward, get involved, and work together to improve our governance and strengthen our cultural identity as Anishinaabe people. Governance is basically about looking after ourselves, on our own terms. We don't have to rush but we will have to stay the course and keep building one step at a time," added Chief Diabo.

Some benefits to a First Nation citizen will include improved services, inclusion in decision-making such as setting priorities and employment as new positions will need to be created in areas such as communication, community engagement, law and policy development and language acquisition. The funding is a grant which means there is no claw back for unspent funds and the community can decide its own priorities.

The voting period ran throughout the month of February with Magnetawan First Nation citizens voting either online or by mail-in ballots due to the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The vote was a second vote in a ratification process that was in place if a First Nation did not meet the threshold that required 25% plus 1 eligible voters to cast votes with more yes votes than no votes. If 25% plus 1 of eligible voters did not participate, but there were more yes votes

than no votes, a First Nation had the option of holding the second vote where a simple majority of more yes than no votes was required.

Magnetawan First Nation joins 5 other Anishinabek First Nation communities that have ratified the Governance Agreement and are now doing research and assessing what the initial steps will be once Canada ratifies the Agreement by passing legislation and giving the Agreement legal effect.