

Shé:kon sewakwé:kon,

As of late, I have been approached by many to run for council. I have been thinking on this quite a bit because I do not seek a title, authority or power and I am more traditionally inclined. I do understand however that the council system is a reality that cannot be ignored and as such, perhaps it's time to try something different in an attempt to change things for the Better. However, no single person can change council but perhaps a group focused on the same goal, ready to put in the hard work required to bridge the gap between our people could spark much needed dialogue required to change things for the better. In such circumstances, I would offer my services and run for a position as a member of council. I'm writing this to see if others would be willing to join in this endeavour not to be a "chief" but to be a member of council working with the people.

As indigenous people and more specifically as Kanien'kehá:ka and Kanehsatakehró:non it often feels like we are constantly under assault from all sides. This can be overwhelming and makes for a situation where we can easily lose our bearings.

I believe that the best way to navigate through such a situation is through proper preparation and the strengthening of our communal position. Unity has always been the strength of the Haudenosaunee and it would be nice to see this surface once again. Unity cannot happen through blind trust of an individual or a small group of individuals but rather through a process where everyone can have an opportunity to engage and participate in the decision making process.

I believe promoting engagement and participation can help break the cycle of discord and disinterest we face. It won't happen by chance however. A lot of effort has to be put into organizing and setting the ground work for a process which will see as many of us as possible participating in the governance of our affairs.

One of the first steps is determining through extensive community canvassing what the roles and responsibilities of the MCK should be and how they should be undertaken. Through this process we could establish clear roles and responsibilities which would direct any future council members as well as a put in place a mechanism to insure accountability.

When I speak of extensive community canvassing, we should no longer be content with ANY process which sees only a small fraction of our people participate. For instance, any "ratification" which is accepted with only 100 votes as being passed should be viewed as not acceptable and members of council should make every reasonable effort to seek further engagement. Together we can workout a process where this becomes a norm and an obligation.

There are many issues in front of us, be it language and culture, sovereignty, lands, environment, housing, security, economic development, cannabis, etc... Regardless of the matter, the focus of the envisioned approach is the explicit requirement for members of council to seek meaningful involvement of the community through all reasonable means. Public forums, small focus groups, family groups, in person, digitally, etc... Carrying the responsibility to ensure the involvement of the people in determining direction and decision making. This can only be possible if our people are fully informed so part of the responsibilities will require informing everyone on all important matters as well as taking measures to ensure understanding. Members of council have a job/certain responsibilities, it does not set them above nor beneath anyone else. We are ALL responsible for our governance. Members of council just have a paid responsibility to facilitate certain aspects of our current process. It is therefore important to ensure that all pertinent knowledge is passed on to everyone equally. Not only an open books policy but actively seeking to inform and gain engagement.

Another hurdle that I believe should be examined is the position of “grand chief” which establishes a hierarchy within council and amongst the people, setting one individual apart and above everyone else. This has been exploited by outside governments for decades. This structure invites vulnerability, discord and opportunities for outside and inside manipulations. I believe we should as a community explore/consider the abolishment of this position in favour of a council with all members of equal standing.

These are some ideas, a general vision, perhaps a starting point toward coming together to determine our direction. If anyone else is interested or if you know someone who would, get together, talk it out and let me know. Perhaps we can make a difference!

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