

	<p align="center">BC ELDERS COMMUNICATION CENTER SOCIETY AND BC ELDERS COUNCIL</p> <p>BCECCS 1415 Wewaikum Rd. Campbell River, BC, V9W 5W9 Ph: 250-286-9977 Fax: 250-286-4809 Toll Free: 1-877-738-7288 Email: bcelders@telus.net Website: www.bcelders.com</p>	
<p align="center">BCECCS</p>		<p align="center">BC ELDERS COUNCIL</p>

August 1st, 2015

Dear Elders and Elders Contact People,

Over the last 15 ½ years of my doing the Elders Voice each month for you, I have not personally written anything in it except for short messages on the front page, usually concerning the request for support fees to be paid. But today I am writing everyone with a sense of urgency in regards to the Annual Elders Gathering.

Firstly though, we send our thanks to the host community for their efforts in Saanich for the 2015 event! Anyone who bids and hosts the Gathering deserves a huge round of applause for all of the effort required to host 3000 elders and their support people from all over the province. So thank you all so much for everything you did to honour the elders!

This letter however concerns your Annual Elders Gathering in its entirety, and it is probably the most important letter the Elders Voice has ever carried to you.

As you all know our society, the BCECCS and BC Elders Council had announced for 12 months in your EV newsletter that we would be bidding in Saanich for the 2016 Annual Elders Gathering to be in Campbell River.

What almost none of you know though is that **we did in fact submit a bid** in Saanich for the 2016 40th Annual Elders Gathering, and a small group of Coqualeetza Elders (Sto:lo), who said they are descendents of the original founders of the event 40 years ago, **choose to RULE our bid as invalid and not announce the fact that we had bid to any of you. Which no one, to our knowledge, had ever given them the right to do.**

We would like to thank you for all of the calls and emailed questions about what happened with our bid, did we back out? etc. and this is to **clarify for everyone that we did not back out.**

Now our elder's office started in the fall of 1999, and the BC Elders Council was started a couple of years later and our office is where most, if not all of you get your information on the Gathering in the first place. We have helped and been steadfast supporters of the Gathering for 16 years and we had spent the last year planning/organizing the Gathering to be ready for our bid in Saanich at the 2015th.

Our 3 arena facility in CR was booked and meetings with arena staff had taken place months and months ago. Key people from our Nation, who worked the 2000 Gathering in an outstanding fashion were all on board and available to do it again to share our hospitality with all of the provincial elders.

Our bid included a signed letter from our Chief and Council, a support letter from the Okanagan Nation Elders, a letter signed by 38 elders (to counter a negative list of 11 band members that went around the community here a month before we were to bid). Our letter was also signed by 3 BC Elders Council members representing Nuuchanulth, Squamish and the We Wai Kai Nation, with a letter signed on behalf of the BCECCS/BC Elders Council, and as well, we had 3 members of the CR Indian Band Council there with us.

***The BC Elders Council were also to have their provincial meeting here during the Gathering to revitalize the Council as it has been impossible to access funding to allow the provincial Council to meet the last few years.**

Unfortunately, this group from Sto:lo (Coqualeetza Elders) disallowed our bid. They say it was because we didn't have a BCR (we had a letter of support) then one of the women told me 'we came to Campbell River and your Chief and Council said they didn't want 'it', and neither did your elders.'

All of this based on a visit they conducted here 10 weeks before we had even bid, at a presentation that most of the elders were not invited to, or even aware of. And where our Chief and Council supposedly said they didn't want the event to be in CR and that was absolutely not true. This group also said that all of the funds for the Gathering had to run through a band office, but we are a Society in 'Good Standing' and it had been made clear to them that it was the BCECCS/BC Elders Council bidding, not our Band, though we did have the band's support. Several Societies have bid in the past 40 years of the event, including Friendship Centres.

***As we are a provincial society, we serve all the bands equally, so other group's support for us must count and be added to that of our local band.**

Now we went through a few pains here, as you also all know, sometimes plans for big things in our First Nations communities can lead to inter-personal or even inter-band conflicts among community members. And frankly if you toss in an election or two it can be pretty contentious for awhile. Some forget that one way or another, we are all one family, but they let petty behaviour get the best of them, for reasons only they are clear on in the end, and these behaviours can sometimes result in things being taken away that others are excited about.

What the Coqualeetza Elders said was that there was only one valid bid, and the event was awarded to Williams Lake.

They did not speak to us first, they asked no questions, or to have anything clarified for them, and they had us wait hours to make a presentation (that they said all bidding groups would be required to do) and then they shocked us with their pronouncement of awarding the event without due process. Here we had waited all day and neither we, nor Williams Lake spoke at all.

Now there is absolutely **no** complaint here against Williams Lake or the Hosts in Saanich, none of them did anything wrong, and we will be in Williams Lake next year '**with bells on**' to celebrate the Elders Gathering with their people. But everyone needs to understand, and be informed, if you do not already know, that what happened in Saanich broke with the tradition of **Bidding of the Totem Pole**.

The tradition says...

Each group wishing to host the next Gathering tries to outdo the other groups. Names of hopeful hosts are written on papers. The papers are circulated to everyone in attendance. After marking one location, all papers are collected and counted. Then the successful bidder is announced.

No group, no matter who they are, has the right to decide the next city the Annual Elders Gathering will go to, **that decision is made by all of the registered elder's delegates and no one else**. Furthermore, this disallowing of our bid was done when there were maybe 100 people present in the main arena, instead of ballots being in everybody's registration packages with instructions on when the voting will be taking place.

We were never told about a BCR being required until after the event was awarded to Williams Lake, and frankly no one has a right to required said BCR unless you, the elder's delegates, decide that you want one (or the Society's equivalent) from each bidder. And, we were only told the day before about a required 20 minute presentation that is also not required as part of the Bidding on the Totem Pole document.

One further thing to mention to all of you groups out there that might want to bid for your town. These couple of new societies/groups promote the Gathering as being 4000-5000 people with hosts needing to provide and feed a further 600 volunteers, which is probably what is frightening groups out of bidding.

As most people's town's facilities cannot hold 4000-5000 people it must seem impossible to even think of hosting. We know that at most even after 17 years since we last hosted, that we will be looking at quite similar numbers to July 2000, which was 2700 – 3000 plus 300 volunteers. You don't need the capacity or the budget to feed hundreds more volunteers than you will be able to get or need. And it is quite a difference when planning the budget for food if you need to factor in the 1000-2000 more people that they are saying you will have.

Our Presentation that wasn't allowed to happen:

Our Cultural Coordinator for our bid/event spent the first night and second day preparing a last minute presentation for all of you and she really put her strong efforts into it. She was going to speak about our people here, our desire to share our culture with all of you, and that we all look forward to having you as our honoured guests.

She was going to tell you about the 2 huge bingos at our halls planned for the first night you all arrive, as well as our Casino and the Casino in our neighbouring community of Courtenay which is 20-30 minutes away. As well we were planning to have as many boat tours, land tours, crafting and quality workshops as possible for all of you along with our vendor booths, health screening centre, and raffles and lots of draws. And in CR we have on-reserve shopping at many big stores and 2 First Nations gas stations to help groups save on travel costs for their return trip home.

We had a 27 booth `PAMPER ME` CENTRE with **PAID** technicians that could move 1400 of our beloved elders through during the course of the event to have your hair, manicures, pedicures, make-up, Reiki, foot, scalp, body massages, paraffin wax treatments, palm reading, card reading, photographer, etc. to really pamper all delegates.

And we planned to do all meal services in the one main arena, where you would all have your tables. That you would be served quickly and efficiently in your seats, with even coffee-tea-juice-milk service being brought to your tables to wait on you all hand and foot.

We had well over \$300,000 budgeted for your food enjoyment alone, including great desserts and ice cream treats in the evenings during your 50s 'Young Timers Dance.' All of the food in CR was to have been catered by 3 professional catering companies (that we hired in 2000 for our very successful Gathering). And we had already requisitioned 2 elk, hundreds of sockeye, halibut, prawns, cod and clams for the King and Queen's Traditional Feast to really make it memorable for all of you.

***All food provided to elders should be of the highest quality and variety, as your registration fees were implemented 9 years ago to cover the food costs to feed you all like royalty, which was our plan again this time.**

We have 100 pages of just the 'fine details' for the event, including parking and traffic being completely organized, so it is stress-free for the elders, your workers, and your drivers. So everyone can truly feel like they are on vacation.

As I said, we will be celebrating with Williams Lake next July 2016 with our whole hearts, but we will also be there to bid to have the Annual Elders Gathering in Campbell River for 2017. If possible, it will be even better than we had planned for next year as we will be continuing to work on it, so it will have had more than 3 years of planning gone into it before you hopefully all come here in 2017.

All of this planning will have you, the Elders Delegates of BC, as our complete focus.

We have asked for an apology from the Coqualeetza Elders and a written guarantee that the Bidding on the Totem Pole tradition will be immediately re-instated to ensure that no one takes away YOUR elder's right to vote and decide on your Annual Elders Gathering's next location.

It has been pointed out to this small group that the 'Founders' that they speak of never, ever, tried to take ownership of the event that was held in their territory that 1st year with a few dozen elders in attendance.

And that the elders in BC rightly believe that they are the ones who have kept the Gathering going all these year equally. Whether that be by hosting the event, or attending, or volunteering, or paying the registration fee the last 9 years, and no group has the right to be set above the **thousands** of them, by anyone, in anyway.

If this apology and guarantee of the re-instating of traditions is not forthcoming from them for any reason, we will be gathering BCR/Resolutions of Support from all bands/groups/societies to make YOUR provincial elder's position known to these two small groups. **To reaffirm to them that the ELDERS alone decide where the next Gathering is to be, as in the case of multiple bidders, each delegate casts a vote, and in the case of one sole bidder, the event is awarded to that group by the host.**

It has also been pointed out to this group that the Host for their year has the right of control of the event including the bid/ballot/voting/announcing of the next host community. It is their right and duty to personally conduct and carryout this most important part of the 'passing of the crowns' process and no one else's.

The Host is also responsible for all of the 'decision making' in regards to the Gathering as they are the care-takers of it for their year.

It was wonderful that this new society who named themselves the Annual BC Elders Gathering Society was formed in 2012 to help with the corporate fundraising for the event, no matter where in BC it was to be. However, boundaries need to be respected where control over the planning of the event is concerned as each host is unique and they are 'absolutely in charge' of the Gathering for their year.

A group bids, and if you are successful and win the bid you are awarded the next Gathering, and you then plan the event how your community sees fit. And this needs to be acknowledged as fact where your Gathering is concerned, so no one ever tries to circumvent your authority over your event again by taking away your right to vote.

Thank you all for your time in reading this, I will keep you up-to-date on anything further to do with these matters.

Please make sure that your groups are all informed on what has transpired for everyone's sake.

Sincerely,

Donna Stirling,

BCECCS Coordinator, BC Elders Council Secretary