

Cottage Administration Modernization Project

Overview

The Cottage Administration Modernization Project (CAMP) is a Manitoba government directive led by Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (IRNR). IRNR is responsible for supporting healthy, safe and sustainable Indigenous communities and cottage areas in northern Manitoba, including the management of trust funds on behalf of the cottage areas.

The administration of cottage areas in northern Manitoba is challenging because there are several parallel programs under the jurisdiction of multiple departments. As a result of these challenges, CAMP will address issues such as inequality in taxes/levies, inconsistent service delivery and lack of a compliance mechanism for cottage administration in northern Manitoba.

Our goals are anchored on:

- improving governance;
- streamlining service delivery processes;
- having an efficient and fair cost recovery system; and
- ensuring the cottage program is effective and sustainable for future generations.

Engagement Overview

CAMP provides an opportunity for cottage lot owners, cottage associations and businesses/utilities to help IRNR modernize the administration of cottage areas in northern Manitoba, outside of municipalities and parks.

IRNR provided multiple opportunities for engagement on CAMP, including surveys and town hall meetings with cottage lot owners, cottage associations and businesses/utilities.

Surveys for cottage association and cottage area contact person(s) and cottage owners/lessees were launched in August 2022 and closed in September 2022. IRNR held town hall meetings with 35 recognized cottage areas. These meetings took place in October and November 2022. Seven town halls were held in person; the remaining were held virtually on Zoom.

What We Heard

Goal 1 – Improving Governance

- Improve communication to close gaps and help cottagers:
 - know who to contact at IRNR, how to contact them and what to do if a satisfactory response is not received
 - understand what services IRNR can provide to cottage areas
 - have up-to-date information on the cottage area's trust account
 - know who has been appointed by IRNR to represent the cottage area
 - have face-to-face engagement with IRNR
 - understand they're not part of the rural municipality
- Better explain the Chief Place of Residency Fee, including why the fee is collected and where it goes.
- Develop a cottager's handbook that explains cottage development guidelines, shares general knowledge and includes contact information for IRNR.
- Explore a regionalization model for cottage areas, particularly for those in close proximity.
- Consider a self-governance model that eliminates the current IRNR-administered model.
- Provide support to cottage areas wanting to amalgamate with Northern Affairs Communities or municipalities.

Goal 2 – Streamlining Service Delivery

- Cottagers requested other services, such as cell service, hydro, fire protection and emergency management services.
- Streamline IRNR's procure-to-pay process by:
 - reducing the number of steps in the process
 - using e-transfers rather than cheques
 - shifting to a digital/electronic process that allows invoices to be emailed and processed electronically, instead of requiring paper copies
 - using service orders for service providers
 - allowing cottage associations or contact person to send invoices directly to the person at IRNR that pays the invoice
 - automating the whole process
- Clarify whether an invoice emailed from a vendor to a cottage association is accepted by IRNR as an "original" invoice.
- Allow cottage areas to develop an annual budget and send it to IRNR.
- Give cottage associations the authority to approve monies and be reimbursed by IRNR. Currently, some cottage associations pay out-of-pocket to a vendor. Once the vendor is paid by IRNR (which can take up to four months), the vendor then returns the money to the cottage association.

Goal 3 – Having an Efficient and Fair Cost Recovery System

- Continue using the Fees-in-Lieu of Taxes or Property Tax model.
 - The Fees-in-Lieu of Taxes model is perceived as more flexible than the Property Tax Model because the cottage area can request an increase or decrease in the Northern Affairs Levy to meet service needs.
 - Cottage areas using the Property Tax model found there are disparities in assessments within their cottage subdivision because some cottagers have not developed their cottage lots despite a development timeframe when they purchased their lots. They also expressed disapproval with property taxes being increased due to the Education Tax portion being increased, even though the mill rate for northern Manitoba remained the same.
- Continue to collect the fees or taxes, and then transfer the collected funds to the cottage association to use on services.
- Assume that all cottagers have their Chief Place of Residency at their cottage. Require cottagers who do not permanently live at their cottage to provide evidence that they do not.
- Collection of arrears was identified as problematic by cottagers because unpaid fees or taxes impacts the trust fund balances of the cottage areas and their ability to pay for services.

Goal 4 – Ensuring the cottage program is effective and sustainable for future generations

- More seniors will be moving north as they retire to their cottages.
- Improve access to drinking water and community water distribution systems.
- Conduct open engagement sessions to address environmental, road safety, and other concerns raised by cottagers.
- Provide building guidelines like those provided in Manitoba Park's cottager handbook because a lack of development is affecting drainage, amongst other things.
- Implement desired services, such as emergency services, because not having them impacts insurance coverage.

Next Step

The next step for CAMP is to present recommendations synthesized from our various engagement activities to cottagers, cottage associations and contact person(s) and businesses/utilities. These recommendations will be posted on the EngageMB site.

This information is available in an alternate format on request. Please contact IRNRCottageAdmin@gov.mb.ca.