



## **Rainy River First Nations** **MANITOU RAPIDS**

### **Membership Code Amendment Proposal:**

### **Member Discussion Sessions Summary May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025**

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#### **Overview:**

This summary of Discussion Sessions that were held on March 18<sup>th</sup>, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, and May 1<sup>st</sup>, regarding a Membership Code Amendment proposal, serves to inform Members as to why people are in or not in favour of the proposed amendments. The aim is to give the Members an idea of what was discussed to make an informed vote on the proposed amendments on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025. This summary is the opinions and thoughts of Members.

#### **Discussion Process:**

These discussions were held to educate the Membership on exactly what these Amendments look like, mean, and to provide a place to ask questions and have discussions surrounding them.

#### **Proposed Amendment One (1)**

To be eligible to apply for Full Membership at RRFN, the applicant needs to have a Rainy River First Nations status number from Indigenous Services Canada. This includes under 18's.

#### **Proposal Reasoning for Amendment 1:**

- *The reason this amendment is being proposed is to protect the lineage of Rainy River First Nations and to uphold the Treaty that was fought for. Funding is received for status individuals only, and thus, if we have Full Members without status who are, through RRFN policy given the same rights as status Members, we will be depleting the resources that RRFN has outside of government funding.*



### ***Members' Thoughts and Concerns from the Discussion Sessions:***

- Some members were concerned that the Nations own source revenues and Trust would be depleted because funding is not received from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) for the Members on our Membership List that do not have status.
- Another concern that some of the Membership expressed was that by having Members on RRFN's Membership List without status, that lineage is not being preserved. The sentiment is that when preserving lineage, you are protecting Rainy River First Nations from assimilating: that eventually there will be no such thing as an Indigenous Member of RRFN.
- Some Members believe that by being a member and not having status, that the Treaty that was fought for in the past and the rights it brought the people of RRFN, is being disregarded.
- It was also expressed by some that the RRFN Land Trust is for status Members only and should not be accessed by people without status.
- Some disagreed with this sentiment saying "RRFN will be stronger with members who have historical ties and devotion to RRFN," stating that it doesn't matter if you marry and have children with a non-indigenous person. If you have historical and familial ties to the Community, then you should have the right to be a member regardless of whether you have status or not. It was expressed that family history should trump status.
- A Member stated that we should be going back at least seven generations, regardless of blood quantum. The general sentiment here was that by making status an eligibility criterion, we are enforcing the policies of the Federal Government and not our own.
- There was discussion that some people may be eligible for status, yet don't feel like they need to be told by the Federal Government that they belong as it is a system that continues to disenfranchise Indigenous people.
- It was expressed that although some believe that status should be an eligibility criterion, that it is not the only criteria that will be looked at. Thus, if ISC adds people to the RRFN list due to new laws and they don't have lineage to the RRFN, that through this Code, they can still be denied Membership.

*Because there are currently people on the RRFN Membership List that have Full Membership yet do not have status, if this amendment is passed, there will be a secondary vote to decide what will happen with these Members. The options to be voted on are:*



### **Proposed Amendment One Point One (1.1)**

1. Remove the Members on the List that have Full Membership who do not have status.
2. Grandfather-in the individuals on the list that do not have status. However, any of their relatives will have to apply for Membership separately and will need to have Status to be able to apply.
3. Give the Members on the Full Membership List that do not have status two (2) years to apply for status. The length of time granted follows the timelines of Indigenous Services Canada to process status applications. If these Members are granted Status after these two (2) years, then they can remain on the Membership List. If not, they will be removed and lose their Full Membership.

### ***Members' Thoughts and Concerns from the Discussion Sessions:***

***(One of these options would only be chosen IF Amendment One is passed- thus the opinions here are from Members who are in favour of Amendment One)***

- **Option One:** Some Members believe that regardless of any legal action that could be taken by people on the current Membership list that are removed from it immediately because they do not have status, that option 1 should still be the way they are removed. The reason given for this is that some believe that without status, they are depleting the resources of the Nation, and this cannot continue for any length of time.
- **Option Two:** It was discussed that by allowing these Members to remain on the list that these non-status Members would be depleting the Nations resources for the rest of their lives when, in these opinions, they don't have the right to them.
- **Option Three:** This option was described as there may be some non-status Members on the list that are eligible for status yet haven't applied for it. However, again it was believed that by leaving these Members on the list, resources will continue being depleted by these individuals who, until they have their application processed, won't know if they have status. To this option it was suggested that if a member is eligible for status that they can apply for it after they have been removed from the list if being a member and protecting RRFN is important to them.



## **Proposed Amendment Two (2)**

**Remove Conditional Membership from the Membership Code and any Conditional Members that are currently on the Membership List.**

### ***Proposal Reasoning for Amendment 2:***

- *The reason this amendment is being proposed is that Conditional Members have no lineage connection to the Community and have the right to vote meaning that laws, policies and elected officials can be determined by potentially non-indigenous people.*

### ***Members' Thoughts and Concerns from the Discussion Sessions:***

- Some Members spoke very strongly against the whole concept of Conditional Members, in particular, that they have the right to vote on polices, laws, referendums, and elected officials.
- There were concerns that by having Conditional Members, RRFN opens itself up to these Members having a majority vote and thus all the laws, policies and Chief and Councils could be solely determined by non-indigenous individuals.
- It was suggested by some that Conditional Membership should be kept, yet the right to vote is taken away and replacing it with new rights, for example, being able to remain in a house once a spouse has passed or accessing some programs and services.
- The other issue that was raised was: if a Conditional Member leaves their spouse, how does RRFN know that this has occurred unless notified?
- A story was told regarding how conditional membership should be determined: the person being considered for this membership type should appeal to the Community at a meeting as to why they would like to be a Conditional Member. Then the Community should decide whether to accept them as one or not. If accepted, the Community would give this person conditions namely that they couldn't vote, use community resources meant for full members, or run for political office.



### **Proposed Amendment Three (3)**

**Adopted Children will not be eligible for Full Membership.**

#### **Proposal Reasoning for Amendment 3:**

- *The reason this amendment is being proposed is that, although the adopted person is part of the Members family, they do not have lineage to Rainy River First Nations and thus should not receive Membership.*

#### **Members' Thoughts and Concerns from the Discussion Sessions:**

- Issues of infertility were discussed. It was stated by some that if they can't have children and choose to adopt, then that child should have the right to be a member as they have a parent who is a Full Member of RRFN.
- It was raised that if you, as a full member, had a child that was biologically yours and they received full membership, then this should be the same for an adopted child too: stating the adopted child is just as much a part of the family as a biological child. Not giving them membership would make them feel inferior to their siblings thereby alienating them and making them feel as though they are not a true part of the family.
- Some Members argue that if adopted children are not able to become Full Members, then they lose out on the traditions, culture, language and values that one has access to by being a member and any rights that full members have again, making the adopted child feel othered.
- Other Members stated that if you want to adopt a child, for whatever reason, that you as a parent are responsible for making them feel part of the family they were adopted into, regardless of whether they have RRFN Membership.
- It was stated that nobody is discounting the adopted child, however their lineage is not with RRFN, but somewhere else: that they should be encouraged to seek their own lineage.
- Some Members stated that you do not have to be a member of RRFN to access its culture, traditions, language, and values: that the responsibility of imparting this to an adopted child is the responsibility of the adopted parent/s to involve them in the Community and teach them these things.



- It was stated that historically and currently, family members, adopted or not, are not excluded from being part of the Community: they can participate in events, traditions, cultural practices, the language, yet they do not have the lineage to be made a full member.
- Some raised the point that there should be an age limit on adoption i.e.: adopted children under the age of 18 should be eligible to become full members, but not adults over this age.
- It was stated that children adopted into families of full members may only know what it means to be part of RRFN through their adopted family and experiences with them: that it is not correct to deny a child Membership to a Community that they feel they belong to.
- Some expressed that even if adopted children are accepted in the Community, that they will always feel othered as they do not have the same sense of belonging as full members would.
- It was suggested that if the adopted child is indigenous, then they should be registered at the Nation that they were born into as that is where their lineage is. From there, they can be transferred.
- The argument was made that due to trauma experienced, that associating with their birth Nation is not an option as this resurfaces this trauma. Instead, it was expressed that they be full members at RRFN as that is where they have ties- regardless of lineage.
- The concern that non-indigenous adopted children could receive Full Membership was raised. The reason this was raised was (as in the case of Buffalo Point that was quoted) as a Full Member, this non-indigenous adopted individual could become a leader for the Nation. Thus, there is potential that the leaders of the Nation would be non-indigenous which some Members believe is not acceptable.
- It was stated that this would be going against the intent of the Code: preserving and protecting the culture, language, traditions and lineage of the Nation.

#### **Proposed Amendment Four (4)**

When applications are approved and the applicant over 18 becomes a Full Member, there will no longer be a Probationary Period of any length of time for the Member to access to all programs and services offered by RRFN.



#### **Proposal Reasoning for Amendment 4:**

*The reason this amendment is being proposed is that if someone has been accepted as a Full Member, then it does not seem right that they do not have access to all that Full Members have the right to immediately.*

#### **Members' Thoughts and Concerns from the Discussion Sessions:**

- Some Members agree that there should be no probationary period for people over the age of 18 who are eligible for Full Membership as they should have full access to everything being a member of RRFN entails, immediately.
- If someone disagrees with a person getting Full Membership, they will be able to appeal this membership regardless of whether there is a probation period or not.
- There was also a discussion on removing this probationary period because some people who are eligible for and have already applied for Membership have not had their applications processed, in some cases, for years. Thus, the probationary period would extend the wait to become a Full Member and all this entails.
- Other Members believe that the probationary period should be extended or remain at 2 years: that if someone wants to be a part of RRFN that they can wait for the program and services that they can access as full members and rather take whatever the length the probationary period is to prove that they want to be part of the Nation.
- Some believe that the probationary period should be used for the person to honor the preamble of this code by demonstrating that their intent in becoming a member is to protect the community by honoring its traditions, language, culture and lineage.
- It was suggested that in the probationary period, a person should take this time to prove they are complying with section 68 of the Membership Code which states:

68. All Members of the Band have the responsibility to:

- (a) Honour the traditional teachings and the customs of RRFNs;
- b) Honour and comply with the codes, laws and regulations of RRFNs;
- c) Contribute to the preservation, resurgence and advancement of the cultural, political, spiritual, intellectual and linguistic traditions of RRFNs;
- d) Respect and take care of the children of RRFNs, and of the individuals, the land and the water within the traditional territory of RRFNs; and



(e) Maintain active ties with, and good relations within, the community of RRFNs.

- Some Members stated that learning the language and being involved at the level above is challenging when they do not live on Community: that not being raised on the reserve, or not currently living on the reserve was not necessarily their choice. For example, it was stated that some past Members were removed from the reserve when they were young, and them and their families could not come home. The sentiment stated here was that: just because people can't be in the Community or afford to come to the Community to ensure this part of the Code is upheld, doesn't mean that they don't have the inherent right to become Full Members.

**Conclusion:**

There were many other points made and discussed about the Membership Code and possible future amendments that have arisen in people's minds as they go through this process of learning about the Membership Code and these proposed amendments. However, the ones summarized here are the ones pertaining to why people would be in favour or not in favour of the proposed amendments that are to be voted on, on May 7, 2025.

***If you would like to schedule a meeting- virtual, telephone or in person- with the Policy and Communications Analyst Lauren Hyatt to discuss the Amendment proposal further, feel free to contact [lauren.hyatt@manitourapids.ca](mailto:lauren.hyatt@manitourapids.ca) to set up a time or ask a question via email or call at 807-482-2479 ext. 214.***