



PRESS RELEASE



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Community Pilot Project to Address Housing Needs in Grand Rapids Area

OTTAWA, Ontario, November 21, 2005 — The Honourable Joe Fontana, Minister of Labour and Housing, the Honourable Christine Melnick, Manitoba Minister of Family Services and Housing, Mayor Robert Buck and Grand Rapids Chief Ovide Mercredi announced today a unique partnership between the Government of Canada, the Government of Manitoba, the community of Grand Rapids, and the Grand Rapids First Nation to help meet local current and future housing needs.

This unique partnership brings together the federal and Manitoba governments, and the Grand Rapids community to develop a community-driven, comprehensive actionable plan to address the current and future housing situation both on and off reserve.

"A partnership such as this one demonstrates the Government of Canada's commitment to developing long term sustainable solutions to Aboriginal housing," said Minister Fontana. "This is the type of transformative initiative that is being considered through the upcoming First Minister's meeting on Aboriginal issues."

"This is a made-in-Manitoba model that respects Aboriginal people and their visions for their community," noted Minister Melnick. "It is a model of cooperation between Aboriginal communities, the federal government and the province."

The pilot will go beyond just examining the existing housing stock. It will create a longer term vision, which includes skills training and capacity building to ensure that community members can participate in the ongoing development and maintenance of their housing.

"This pilot project clearly demonstrates how federal, provincial, and First Nations governments can innovatively and effectively work together to meet the housing needs of all First Nations citizens both on and away from their reserves," stated Chief Phil Fontaine. This is an important step in an ongoing process of collaboration."

"I applaud both the federal and provincial ministers for their commitment to find better ways to providing desperately needed housing in Grand Rapids," said Grand Rapids Chief Ovide Mercredi. "Our approach will also bring the best technologies available to deal with constant moisture from the lake and river, run-away mold and energy efficiency. We want our homes to be safe, cut energy costs and to stand the test of time."

The pilot project plan will aim to identify ways to develop housing in a sustainable manner, using housing designs and construction methods that are energy efficient and appropriate for the micro-climate of the community. The pilot project could serve as a model for other northern and remote communities. Progress will be documented and communicated to others.

"We look at this as an opportunity and a challenge; we look forward to the challenge of working together in a cooperative way to improve the quality of life in the community of Grand Rapids," added Grand Rapids Mayor Robert

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Buck.

The partnership was formalized with the signing of a Letter of Understanding.

Grand Rapids First Nation is located on the east and south banks of the Saskatchewan River, immediately across from the community of Grand Rapids, approximately 400 kilometres north of Winnipeg.

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