

## Bigiiweyaan- Youth Engagement on Draft Citizenship Law a Success

On April 17, Teme-Augama Anishnabai Youth gathered at the North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre for an information session on the draft Citizenship Law. It was clear that although few had heard of the Citizenship Law, there was interest in knowing more about it and how it could work for them and the entire Teme-Augama Anishnabai community.

Citizenship Committee Chairperson, Dwayne Becker, highlighted that the theme of the Citizenship Law initiative is about Bigiiweyaan, Coming Home. Teme-Augama Anishnabai Aanike-Ogimaa John Turner explained the difference between deciding for ourselves who is a Teme-Augama Anishnabai Citizen and being under the control of Canada and colonial law.

Teme-Augama Anishnabai Councilor Mary Laronde said that the law was about belonging and identity.

She explained what “ratification” is and that decision-making by a referendum vote is empowering as the people are making the decision, not leadership or any outside authority.

The Youth indicated that more meetings and Youth gatherings that incorporate history, culture, and social activities are important. Facebook is the preferred method for receiving information. Before exams and graduations, the intention is to have a day-long event with all the secondary and post-secondary students at a North Bay venue. A suitable date is to be finalized. There will also be a virtual engagement for Teme-Augama Anishnabai youth from across Turtle Island. The date is to be finalized.

The Youth Engagement showed us what wonderful fresh young minds we have among the Teme-Augama Anishnabai, poised to take leadership in caring for N’dakimenan and her people.



*Chi Miigwetch to Maranda Mathias, Student Support Worker, for helping to make this first Youth event a success!*

## Bigiiweyaan- Honouring the Future at Citizenship Law Information Session April 22, 2023

Citizenship Committee Chair Dwayne Becker gave an opening welcome and remarks. Teme-Augama Anishnabai Councillor Mary Laronde discussed the importance of the Draft Citizenship Law and the essence of being Anishinaabe vs. an Indian. Teme-Augama Aanike Ogimaa John Turner gave an historic overview of Teme-Augama Anishnabai self-governance.

Attendance was low, but discussion was productive as participants brought forward important points such as a cutoff point for Citizenship eligibility and inclusivity. The concept of Citizenship requiring service or obligation to the Nation was expanded on by Temagami First Nation Councillor Douglas McKenzie Jr., who noted that this is a requirement of many nations such as South Korea or Israel. Councillor McKenzie also brought forward the importance of repatriation (or as Councillor Laronde suggested, rematriation), by creating space and opportunity for disconnected citizens to “reintegrate into the tribe”. Councillor McKenzie continued, “This will lead to a stronger and more vigorous nation as the pool of skills and talents expands.”

Aanike Ogimaa John Turner noted in his talk that precolonial governance was based on an Ogimaa, Aanike Ogimaa, and Mazhinawe system, with advisory groups such as Elders, women, or young men participating. Families were represented by their Doodemag or clan.

He explained that the Teme-Augama Anishnabai population may have been as high as 700 people, according to oral history from Donald McKenzie.

*Isabella Becker, Maang Doodem, age 20, offers a Spirit Plate prepared at the Honouring the Future Citizenship Law session. Her Great Grandfather was Raymond Becker.*

This would have required a strong level of organization in governance to ensure fair access to N’dakimenan and her gifts. Despite physical distance from major fur trade routes, it is possible that the Teme-Augama Anishnabai Nation was ravaged by smallpox as in the 1760s as were many Nations in that era. It is suggested that there could have been as little as 70 survivors of the epidemic.

Decolonizing our minds was addressed by Elder Alex Mathias, who spoke of the power of following a sovereign mindset when he returned to live on his ancestral lands. He stood his ground and built his homestead despite threats from Ontario officials that they would remove him. 30 years later, Alex hosts Teme-Augama Anishnabai Citizens and friends at his home.

On being Teme-Augama Anishnabai and decolonizing from the status Indian mindset, Councillor Laronde said, “We are revitalizing who we are through language, ceremony, history, and determining our citizenship. It’s about being Anishinaabe, and not an Indian. The benefit for me is I know who I am, and I know where I came from.”

