

Operations of Central Council of Tlingit-Haida Explained

By JOHN BORBRIDGE, JR.

The general or regional governing body of the Tlingit and Haida Indians is the Central Council. Initially, an informal organization created for the purpose of keeping abreast of developments in the claims case which the tribes prosecuted in the Court of Claims, it was recognized and constituted an official organ for their self-governance by an act of Congress approved in 1965.

The Act required the Council to prepare and submit for approval to the Secretary of the Interior a set of rules for the election of delegates to the council designed to insure that it would be representative and democratic. In accordance with the act, the council formulated and submitted a comprehensive set of rules which was approved by the secretary. These rules of election, together with the constitution drafted and adopted by the Central Council, are the principal organic documents of the Tlingit and Haida regional organization.

The Central Council grew out of the original land claims efforts of the Alaska Native Brotherhood when it was determined that the Alaska Native Brotherhood could not legally represent the Tlingit and Haida people in the court of claims as plaintiffs. It was noted that the membership of the Alaska Native Brotherhood included, as it does now, non-natives and formal membership was restricted to those who had complied with the Alaska Native Brotherhood constitutional requirement to pay dues. It was to the credit of the oldest Native organization in the state that it voluntarily chose to create the Central Council, which organization now democratically and autonomously represents all Tlingit and Haidas. Membership in the Council is attained by virtue of being of Tlingit or Haida descent.

The rules of election among other things, designate the communities entitled to elect delegates to the Central Council (there are 19 communities at the time), and prescribe the terms of delegates, the qualifications of electors, the formula for community representation, and the duties of local election officials. They also prescribe procedures for the nomination of candidates, for the registration of voters, for the conduct of elections, and for the casting of absentee ballots.

The constitution provides that the Central Council shall be the general governing body of the Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska and that, agreeable to the laws and regulations of the United States, it shall have, among others, the powers to acquire and dispose of property; to enter into contracts; to borrow and raise money; to employ lawyers and other persons to render professional, and technical services; to authorize the use and expenditure of funds belonging to the Tlingit and Haida Indians; to consult and advise persons and entities, public and private, concerning matters affecting their interests; and to authorize and provide for the organization and subordinate entities to perform governmental and proprietary functions.

TLINGIT AND HAIDA FINANCIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The scope and complexity of responsibilities that will result from the passage of land claims

legislation will require ability by the natives to make increasingly sophisticated business judgments. The need to balance investment, profit-making and revenue-generating activities with cash-flow programs designed to improve the quality of life is clear.

The Central Council has, over the past year, been assembling a financial advisory committee that will offer assistance based on its impressive business experience to the Council relative to the feasibility of financial institutions, long and short-range investment opportunities and other financial activities.

Mr. Robert Lewis, chairman of the executive board of Perkin-Elmer Corp., is serving as chairman of the Council's committee. Mr. Lawrence Toal, vice president of Chase-Manhattan Bank, is a member of the committee which spent a week in Alaska in August for the purpose of meeting with the Central Council planning staff, Governor Egan industry leaders and southeast community representatives.

Current discussions are focusing on the basic need to skillfully leverage available funds by development of financial institutions which will better enable the council to meet the NEEDS of the Tlingit and Haida constituency. The Central Council recently chartered an economic development corporation by virtue of the authority vested in it as a tribal governing body.

OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Partially funded through a grant from the economic development administration, the Central Council's planning efforts are under the direction of Richard Stitt who supervises a staff of three—University of Washington graduate and accountant George See, San Francisco state graduate and systems analyst Jim Adenso and Fort Lewis College graduate and local government and housing specialist Robert Loescher.

Part-time subject-area specialists will also be hired from among the Tlingit and Haidas to assist in the development of detailed programs in education and skill training, care of the elderly, housing and construction, community development, commercial and industrial development, and in the creation and operation of financial institutions. In addition, a Tlingit or Haida in each community will function on a part-time basis as both expeditor and coordinator of local planning activities and as the community's liaison channel to the Central Council's planning office.

Collectively, the planners will require detailed knowledge of appropriate federal grant and loan programs; expertise in project development, including preparation of applications for assistance; and the ability to perform (at least in a preliminary manner) technical, financial and commercial feasibility evaluations of proposed facilities and businesses.

The office is currently gathering and assembling basic data for the purpose of developing community and regional profiles. Four communities are receiving assistance in the preparation of their overall economic development plans. Guidelines for the implementation of the community development section of the Council's "six-point statement of plans" are being developed. The staff is currently developing

schedules and instructional materials for a training session to be conducted for Tlingit and Haida community planners. The staff is also assisting in community project developments such as the Hyaburg Smokery and the Kake Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall restoration.

The Native land claims bill presented by the Senate-House Conference Committee makes various types of planning necessary. For example, it requires the formulation of village plans before a village is eligible to receive money for purposes other than planning from the Alaska Native Fund. But even if the final legislation were silent on the subject of planning the need for it would be no less intense. It is relative to this area that the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska has been addressing itself—in anticipation of such accelerated planning demands and needs.

There is no question that once the initial planning phase is completed, the creation of more economic opportunities and jobs will result from these efforts.

VIDEO TAPE COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

The Tlingit and Haida video communications network, originally funded by a \$100,000 Ford Foundation grant, is now installed and in operation in sixteen southeast Alaska communities. As stipulated in the proposal originally developed by the council and the education broadcasting commission, trained operators and television equipment that will enable each community to both play and record its own tapes is now in place. A small studio in Juneau is fully equipped and in operation.

The next step in the development of this program will be to fully integrate the network into the Central Council's information system. With the resolution of the Native land claims there will be an immediate priority need to fully inform the Tlingit and Haida of their rights and obligations under the terms of the legislation that finally passes.

The network is viewed as a two-way informational system. The Council's executive offices will supply vital information on such subjects as land claims, health, education, housing, employment, legal services, cultural heritage, etc. Each community may tape background material to support its inquiries and may also tape agency or government replies.

Plans have been developed in cooperation with the Otology and Audiography units at Mt. Edgecumbe to produce a series of three one-half hour tapes which will inform viewers concerning the ear, hearing, diseases of the ear and methods of improving hearing in damaged ears. Over nine hours of tapes of the Kake Potlatch ceremonies, dancing and raising of the world's tallest totem pole are being edited for later distribution.

In the field of housing developments, the Tlingit and Haida office of development planning is working with the Alaska State Housing Authority to develop a 160 unit turnkey III-subsidized homeownership homes at Hoonah (35), Angoon (30), Klawock (30), Hyaburg (20) and Saxman (25).

Design, construction and occupancy of the new homes is anticipated during the 1972 calendar year. Under the terms of the contract signed by the Cen-



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tral Council and the Alaska State Housing Authority planner Robert Loescher was assigned to

work with ASHA as a consultant on a part-time basis.

PROGRAM FOR THE TLINGIT AND HAIDA ELDERLY

The Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska has two priorities—the care of its special (elderly) people and the education and skill training of its youth and adults.

Under the provisions of its priority action program the council voted to make \$250 worth of goods and services available to eligible Tlingit and Haidas who reached the age of 65 on July 1, 1971. This program has been especially rewarding to those privileged to share the appreciation and happiness of the recipients, some of whom satisfied life-time needs with

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