

TO: MNBC RGC 2

RE: Response to RGC held Sat, Oct 23, 2021

Dear RGC 2 Council Members,

Thank you for the feedback.

The RGC meeting was both enlightening and troubling, and has in many ways given me focus and perception of MNBC political structures. I hope none of you have to sit in that 'hot-seat', in what was arguably a court of predetermined opinion, as in some ways it felt more like a flogging, especially after we have all endured a challenging past couple years.

I do express my dismay, for at the RGC I felt like the well was already poisoned, that this council was already primed to declare Nova unfit for repair, intimating ego and other such motives were our pre-crime. Only one among you seemed to foster clemency. Some of the insinuating and demoralizing comments were unpleasant, to say the least.

I hope I can take this opportunity to shed more light on the previous couple of years, and may provide some insight on how Covid truly effected Nova Métis, its capacity and operations. What happened, happened, and this is not to float a platform of excuse, I hope to appeal to understanding and compassion.

Nova Métis Heritage Association was established in 2003, after the demise of the United Métis Heritage Association, with many members joining the new association. In 2005, Nova Métis signed a charter agreement with MNBC. Ken Fisher, as a founder, was the elected president for much of this time, up to his unexpected death in December of 2017.

Before Ken's passing, the then leadership within MNBC was being challenged by Ken, for acts of mismanagement and poor decisions prior, mostly financial. This caused some divisions, and with Keith Henry forming the competing group of BCMF, supported by Ken, Nova Métis and its members were in the thick of it.

I may be biased by my preview from within Nova at the time (and once bitten, twice shy), re-embracing MNBC after what transpired has been an exercise of small moves to reestablish how MNBC would work with Nova. With this political turbulence, some Nova members chose to remain with Nova, and part ways with MNBC. Nova Métis is certainly a good mix of Métis people, and Nova's directorship has always emphasized its fiduciary responsibility is to all its members.



Nova Métis has been around for a long time, and in that time has taken on members across BC, as Ken, and his wife Joyce, worked tirelessly to promote Métis culture. Nova was an in-person organization. Its placement and office in Whalley, in a shopping mall on King George Hwy, always catered to a continuous stream of regulars looking to share stories across a cup of coffee, or Ken and Joyce helping a family flush out their history. Computers rarely played a role, except for printing documents.

As an aside, Nova Métis has always, with scrutiny, verified the genealogy of our members, from our library of historical documents. Joyce mostly did this work and she was fairly meticulous and built out our member files, establishing family histories, and often remarked about the 'mixing' of family trees. Joyce was not Métis in ancestry, but certainly was in heart. We lost Joyce first, before Ken, in 2017.

After Ken Fishers' passing, I assumed the position of acting president. Back in 2018, I had the first task of stabilizing and recovering Nova from two great losses to Nova's core. Unfortunately, Nova did suffer, as no explicit succession plan had been formalized; Ken always had a productive force of will, and kept things moving. So this did give Nova a new challenge, and we had a determined enough board to weather, pickup, and continue. Into 2018, my father, Ronald Coles, who was a past president of Nova, and also a very active board member and supporter, became ill with cancer, and by December passed away. Another great loss to Nova.

At our next AGM in November of 2018, Keenan McCarthy became Nova Métis' president, and took the reigns from Nov 2018, until our next AGM in Nov 2019. In both 2018 and 2019, we were becoming much more active in the City of Surrey, with highlights of participating in the Fusion Festival, and the 2018 and 2019 NIPD hosted in Holland Park, visited by some 4000 people. Nova Métis also retained a Métis seat on the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC).

Also at this time, we were continuing to reorganize and index all the member files, in working to get them moved into digital tools, and rebuilding contact lists for better communication with our members. At our Nov 2019 AGM, I was elected as president of Nova, and we continued to rebuild our internal structure, and plan our event calendar.

Then the Covid pandemic started to change the world, and 2020 became an interesting year. Thankfully, at this point we had extracted a growing contact list in the computer to conduct a Call-out survey to ask a 300+ subset of our members, how this pandemic was affecting them. Some were glad just for the conversation, and for others we were able to deliver some supplies. Our specific questions helped us get a feel and start to gauge the anticipated needs of our community. Most had a thumbs up attitude and said all's well. From my observation of our history, one aspect does stand out, the Métis Peoples know how to endure.

To further engage with our members, Nova also implemented a series of hand-out events, to supply our members with Covid type tools, and with hope to meet and generally see how our members were doing in-person. We were able to do 8 such events up and into the autumn of 2020.



In the autumn of 2020, things started to change and BC went into lock-down mode.

By Nov 2020, it was decided to delay our 2020 AGM, with hopes, 2021 would reopen, so we could get back to in-person operations, events, and engagement, and to do our delayed 2020 AGM in spring / summer of 2021. This did not transpire as hoped.

From autumn of 2020 to autumn of 2021, this became a very challenging year to transition Nova to a digital workspace, and digital engagement with our members. On top of this, the world of Covid complicated our personal lives, and certainly taxed the motivation of volunteers, to then refocus on core life, family, and work.

Nova Métis had always readily been, and took for granted being, an in-person organization, and we were certainly not ready to be mostly digital in our operations, and this transition definitely taxed Nova. This is to say, how Covid unfortunately came at a time before we were yet fully equipped to bump over this stumbling block, and in ways did overwhelm us and created other stress and burdens.

This then leads us to the RGC on Oct 23, in which the RGC has levied some accusations against Nova Métis, and here I will briefly respond to each. Sadly, some of the accusations are easily false, and seem to be piled-on and motivated to undermine Nova Métis' community value.

I took each accusation as it was summarized in the RGC Minutes, *as below*:

- Lack of participation, helping their community members out during Covid pandemic.

Beginning in spring of 2020, Nova worked to help our community members.

Up and into autumn of 2020, Nova setup monthly events, where we were onsite for 4-5 hours and this setup a consistent meeting point to directly help members to pickup supplies, and get direct feed back on what was needed.

Nova Métis implemented a call-out survey, which reached out to about 300 subset of our members, and what we could do to help. Nova delivered some supplies directly to households.

There is regret here, that Nova Métis was not internally prepared enough for these challenging times, and could not have been more supportive, when called upon.

- Lack of involvement in school boards.

Not sure what involvement is expected here. Nova did have a representative member that had a seat on SD36 school board meetings. After Ken's passing, there was some latent politics at work, and Nova was in time seemingly 'pushed' off the seat.

- Lack of involvement in Women's issues.

Not sure what involvement is expected here. Nova had a Women's Rep up to and through 2019, that was participating in MNBC meetings.

- There is still no notice for an AGM.

Our 2020 AGM, that was normally to happen in November 2020, was delayed due to Covid, with notice, by using the option to delay offered by the Society of BC Registrar, up until November 1, 2021. As Nova always conducted in-person meetings previously, and our bylaws took this for granted, there were certain challenges to work out, like our bylaws having voting "show of hands", and how this would work, and as to how to conduct an AGM meeting, virtually, without violating our bylaws.

These questions and challenges further delayed our 'delayed' 2020 AGM.

Also, it cannot be sidelined, the Covid Response of lock-downs, etc, certainly played a stressing role on the members of board, with family and work issues taking priority.

All these factors led to the decision to not to try to squeeze in an AGM only a few months before our regular AGM schedule in November of 2021.

These decisions have all been posted as Notice on our website.

- Society filings are in arrears

This is false. None of our Society filings have been in arrears.

- Rebuilding has been non-existent

This is an opinion that has no founding, and a bit specious as a pile-on accusation.

Up until Covid lock-downs, and into 2021, Nova was steadily rebuilding our internal infrastructure, and operations, and being increasingly active in the community.

- Many breeches in their Chartered Agreement.

MNBC should delineate these, with findings. MNBC should have also brought these forth, and worked with Nova to build mutual resolution as directed in the agreement. However, it seems MNBC acted with prejudice, by preparing a dissolution resolution in the background, which was only amendment for clemency at the end of the RGC.

- Many complaints to MNBC

As I am well aware from all businesses I have been in, complaints are a normal process of any membership, governance, or political body. Nova Métis would have appreciated these complaints forwarded, and as they occurred, such that possible remedy could have been sought.

- *No contact with members.*

This is false. Nova Métis has been in contact with many of its members, and new applicants, as our volunteer effort was able, throughout.

- *BOD do not sign community acceptance letters for citizens.*

Membership with Nova Métis is a prerequisite for "community acceptance".

Nova's membership process, as fully described for years on our website, requires a submission and verification of a completed application and of the applicants genealogy / ancestry. The Nova board can not sign these directly upon receipt, unless the person is a Nova Métis member. This may be a different process for other chartered communities, which may only have MNBC membership.

- *No funding accepted for 2 years*

This is false. Nova Métis did receive Covid support funding from MNBC in the summer of 2020.

In conclusion,

I find it disheartening, that the way the RGC unfolded, there seemed to be an underlying prejudice, and looking for an opportunity to condemn, as the cudgel was lying in wait, a prepared resolution to dissolve the agreement with a chartered community. Only at the end was this amended, by clemency as fostered by one member, to seek a path of compliance.

However, this sought after compliance was without written expectation, and seems to be held at the whim and opinion of the RGC, thus seemingly setting a bar that may be corrective or punitive.

Nova Métis, as I assume many communities do, rely on the limited effort-hours of our volunteers, the board members included, for our regular tasks and duties.

For Nova, at these times, to then become required to be a health and support provider, for the duration of the pandemic, was truly beyond our scope and capacity of operations.

Nevertheless, we dug in and tried.

I feel it is important to note, our board were not immune to the same challenges, anxiety, and depression others experienced, the pandemic wrought through this time, and our own families, work, and businesses were as effected.

Nova Métis does give every thanks and kudos to those volunteers and communities, for distributing out needed support, during this challenging time that Covid has pushed on us.

Although, it is my opinion, MNBC in requiring this distribution of support be on the communities for the duration of pandemic, was asking a volunteer cohort to do something, MNBC should have organized and transitioned to a cohort of paid staff, and then should have distributed a bulk portion of these needs directly, on a region by region basis. In the uptake, communities filled this need, but then I believe it created a needless burnout.

Hindsight what it is, Nova Métis may have reached out more. We were wary. Political maneuvers of the recent past were still fresh enough, yet new determination in MNBC self governance and leadership seemed to be changing over a new leaf, and we were rebuilding more communication and trust.

I will admit to a candid world, my weakness from this challenging time, was not being aptly skilled at cultivating more volunteers, and recruiting and managing more support people using digital tools, and with limited in-person networking.

I do try to meet my responsibilities and obligations head on, and want to see Nova Métis and the Métis community succeed for our children's sake, come what may.

I hope going forward, Nova Métis will come out of this stronger, for the benefit of the Métis Community as a whole. My desire has always been to build Nova Métis so it may flourish, and succeeded by others, to hold the spirit that Ken and Joyce envisioned, and honour their effort of bringing our Métis culture to greater life.

As one remedy, we may offer, to those affected communities that acted in our stead, please forward a summary of the Nova Métis members that you were able to help, and the associated costs, and we will reimburse as much as we are able.

Sincerely,

Harland Coles,
President
Nova Métis Heritage Association

May our Creator bless and keep you.